

TALKS TO YOUNG PEOPLE
of any age

ON

THE BOOK OF THE
PROPHET ISAIAH

BY

W. H. KNOX

(Made and Printed in Great Britain)



AGENT :—

G. F. VALLANCE,

Ambassador Office, BARKINGSIDE, Essex



S. P. BOOKMAN,

32, Water Lane, Ilford, Essex

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My Dear Boys and Girls,

A friend wrote to me asking me to write upon Isaiah. Though my friend is getting old, he still considers himself amongst the boys and girls. Think of the effect of this request upon a boy who knows much less than he even thinks he does! But I have one advantage that boys and girls will like. I know nothing of Hebrew: I tried to read a book, many years ago, that was given me by a friend. The author's name was Delitzsch. I think it must be a wonderful book for university professors, but it was of very little use to me, for, when he made a quotation, and they were very numerous, he quoted in the language in which it was written. I am unable to read these languages. I wish I could, for it

must be a wonderful privilege to be a real scholar, but perhaps, then, I should be too deep and profound for those to whom I am writing. I have discovered this, that writers or speakers, in a large measure, just suit a particular class, and that God can use all. I write this because if any of my readers can, please read his book instead of mine, for the well-informed whom I have met speak most highly of it.

However, I am encouraged by the thought that if God blesses, the instrument does not count. Like other books I have written, I have no intention of attempting any sort of introduction, one reason being that I am not qualified for it, and another that I have a very fresh memory of the times I have been wearied by the introduction before coming to the real subject of the book.

CHAPTER I.

VV. 1-9. The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.

“Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth, for the Lord hath spoken: I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master’s crib: *but* Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider. Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evil-doers, children that deal corruptly: they have forsaken the Lord, they have despised the Holy One of Israel, they are estranged *and gone backward*. Why will ye be still stricken, that ye revolt more and more? the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; *but* wounds, and bruises, and festering sores; they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with oil. Your country is desolate; your cities are burned with fire; your land, strangers devour it in your presence, and it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers. And the daughter of Zion is left as a booth in a vineyard, as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city. Except the Lord of hosts had left

unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, we should have been like unto Gomorrah."

We see that this is called a vision of Isaiah. These visions appear to have been dreams, Daniel vii. 1, or trances, Numbers xxiv. 4. There Balaam is said to have his eyes open.

These visions, we are told, concerned Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah. We shall come to these kings as we journey through the book. The first, Uzziah, became king at the age of sixteen years and reigned fifty-two years. He did what was right in God's eyes, he was strengthened, he was a great warrior, he conquered Philistia and Arabia, he was successful in agriculture, he became elated and sought to offer incense. Azariah, the priest, and eighty other priests withstood him. In the act, he was struck with leprosy, and in consequence he had to live in solitude, whilst Jotham acted for him.

V. 2. "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth, for the Lord (Jehovah) hath spoken." In Ephesians iii. 10, God is said to shew to the Spiritual Intelligences in the heavenlies, His many-coloured (manifold) wisdom by His dealings with the Church. Here the prophet calls on the heavens to hear. This is a question of the ingratitude of God's people. What can the Intelligences above think as they in these days, see the lightness and frivolity of many who name the name of Christ, and as they think of our blessings and the measure of our thanklessness. Then the earth is appealed to. As long as it is

not personal, even the world has some very strong things to say, concerning ungrateful children.

“For the Lord hath spoken.” We are told that by searching, God cannot be found. I must say I know of nothing that is confirmed more than this. No mathematics, *i.e.*, pure reason, can find God, nor can science, *i.e.*, experiment. But God has broken the silence. God has spoken and millions know it is true. He speaks here. Listen! What does He say? “I have nourished (made great) children and they have rebelled against me.” What a terrible picture this is. Even in human affairs, self-will, and a spirit of independency, seem to be the root troubles. However learned or brilliant men may be, it is brought out here, that man’s intelligence, apart from God, has not the value of an animal’s instinct. “The ox knoweth his owner and weareth the yoke, an ass by nature has great liberty” (Job xxxix. 5), but by training he knows his master’s crib. Israel, God’s chosen nation, neither knows nor considers. What is the result?

V. 4. A dreadful moral state, full of sin, and, alas! blindness as to their condition, goes with it. Sin always separates from God. “If I regard iniquity in my heart the Lord will not hear me.”

VV. 5 and 6 give a national, moral and spiritual picture of a nation as God sees it. As we proceed with the book we shall see that their sin-blinded eyes do not see this.

When we come to V. 7, we see that this is not wholly true until Zedekiah's reign, so that this gives the first chapter the character of a summary being used by way of introduction, to convey moral truths of the first importance.

V. 8. A picture of desolation and isolation around Jerusalem, but not entirely depopulated.

V. 9. Here comes God's sovereign grace in view of His promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God has a small remnant. What a privilege, to be one of the few!

VV. 10-17. "Hear the word of the Lord, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah. To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to trample my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; new moon and sabbath, the calling of assemblies,—I cannot away with iniquity and the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you; yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood. Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil: learn to do well; seek judgement, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow."

V. 10. There could have been nothing worse than to call these proud Jews by the names of the peoples whom God had destroyed for their great wickedness, Sodom and Gomorrah.

V. 11. Here we get the most essential thing God requires, *i.e.*, Reality. Religious services are of no value unless our life corresponds. Unless the real thing is there, all the sacred ordinances, full of wonderful teaching, become an offence to God. God cannot bear iniquity and the solemn meeting. There must ever be wrong motives in connection with these meetings, in fact, V. 14 says that these meetings become iniquity and their prayers God will not hear. How solemn is all this.

V. 16. Here follow directions as to how these people were to get right with God. First, "Wash you." The act of turning to God, on the ground of the efficacy of the blood. Second, "Make you clean." This is the daily cleansing by the Word. Third, "Put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes." There must be practical righteousness, if we are to walk with God. Here comes an inkling to us, of a principle to guide us in all practical things. We must first cease to do that which we see to be wrong, even if we do not know the right, for then, by ceasing to do what we see to be evil, we have morally placed ourselves in a condition in which we can learn to do well, which any boy or girl can easily see is impossible whilst we are going on with that which is evil. Then we have to seek judgment. Justice, if I may so put it, is God's basic virtue, and it certainly should be

ours. Nothing can be right unless we seek to be just, but this does not shut out generosity, for we are told to relieve the oppressed, or, as the margin puts it, set right the oppressor; to take up the cause of the fatherless and the widows, which reminds us of James, who was led to write that true religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the widows and orphans in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world. We can be quite sure that as an individual, or as an assembly, we are far from right unless we are seeing to the comfort and happiness of the distressed to the extent of our ability.

VV. 18-20. "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land: but if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it."

V. 18. What a wonderful God we have, who now speaks as a man. How anxious He is to save and to pardon. The ungodly, and even some sorts of Christians, have the absurd notion that the God of the New Testament is grander and purer than the God of the Old Testament, and that not so grand or so fine as what they think God ought to be. I can only see the one God, who wants us to love Him with all our strength, and hates all injustice and cruelty one to another.

Here God says: "Come, let us reason to-

gether." Though this is expressed in few words, we can see this call to reason together is to lead up to the redemption story, for it brings out the possibility of the perfect cleansing of our sins. The figures used are of the things most difficult to deal with. Though our sins are as scarlet, or red like crimson, God can make us as white as snow or as wool.

When I was a little boy my parents, who were in the boot and shoe line, used different kinds of flannel for lining slippers. The cuttings used to be sold, but, before they were, I was put to pick out all the scarlet and crimson ones, as the dealers would pay nothing for them. At the age of fourteen, I became an apprentice to a book-binder. When the edges of the books were cut by machine I had to pick out any shavings that were of any kind of red, as they could get next to nothing for the shavings if there were any red ones. These paper shavings were to be remade into paper. I asked what became of the red ones and was told that they went to make red blotting paper. This is over fifty years ago, and things may be different now.

We are clearly taught that however deep-dyed our sins may be, God can make us as white as snow. All Scripture goes to show that this can only be done by His precious blood.

VV. 19 and 20. "If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land: but if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it." Here we get, as far as I can find, the last offer God makes to keep His people in

the land. How very solemn is this, the last offer, and refused. To those who reject the offer of a greater salvation than that of the land, that of their soul, there will surely be a last offer and it may be this.

VV. 21-23. "How is the faithful city become an harlot! she that was full of judgement! righteousness lodged in her, but now murderers. Thy silver is become dross, thy wine mixed with water. Thy princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves; every one loveth gifts, and followeth after rewards: they judge not the fatherless, neither doth the cause of the widow come unto them."

VV. 21-23. How? This is a most interesting question to ask oneself. Here is this city that was full of judgement and righteousness, now full of murderers. We now get several ways brought before us as to how this unhappy condition came to be. First, "Thy silver is become dross." This could not be literally true, and, were it possible, could easily be dealt with, so we look to its figurative meaning. Silver is a figure of redemption. As we see, so frequently, so the writer sees, that the beginning and root of the trouble is to lose our faith in the atonement. Whatever our theories may leave us with, it is simply dross, a strong word but quite true. Second, "Thy wine mixed with water." Wine is a figure which points to joy. With our loss of the redemption story our wine must be diluted with water, and cannot satisfy. There is nothing that can fill us with joy like the certainty that our sins are dealt with.

Third, "Thy princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves." This is a very interesting statement bringing it down to modern times. One cannot think that princes would want to associate with burglars and pick-pockets, but, as I read my Bible, I know that God is no respecter of persons, and that He certainly has an awkward way of calling a spade a spade. Being only a boy, I find it is very difficult to define accurately. I said, "What is a thief?" I thought I quite knew what a thief is, but I could not certainly, in these days, think princes would be companions to such, so I turned to my dictionary, and I quote it: "One who steals or takes unlawfully what is not his own." I believe God goes very much farther than the dictionary. Take one illustration. I believe, after reading newspapers for so long a time, that it is very possible to get up a scheme quite in accordance with the law, by which thousands will lose their money. Those who think of these schemes may perhaps be the thieves of whom princes are the companions.

"Every one loveth gifts, and followeth after rewards: they judge not the fatherless, neither doth the cause of the widow come unto them." Here we see that covetousness has entered their hearts. The New Testament calls this idolatry. Instead of God being the satisfying portion of our hearts, it is His gifts to us, material blessing, which count more. The getting of these things for self breaks the fundamental idea of the Christian walk, *i.e.*, a life of self-denial. Money, to express it briefly, is a good servant, but a bad master. When is it a servant? When

it helps to brighten some weary heart or hearts. When is it a master? When it is used for self-indulgence.

My dear boys and girls, we may not be able to understand very much, but let us see to it that we are not led astray here, and that we see, further, that it is not only an absence of greed which is necessary, but to be givers. The widow and orphans have claims, but we would not limit it, for the whole field of human helplessness is before us.

VV. 24-31. "Therefore saith the Lord, the Lord of hosts, the mighty One of Israel, Ah, I will ease me of mine adversaries, and avenge me of mine enemies : and I will turn my hand upon thee, and thoroughly purge away thy dross, and will take away all thy tin : and I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counsellors as at the beginning : afterward thou shalt be called The city of righteousness, the faithful city. Zion shall be redeemed with judgement, and her converts with righteousness. But the destruction of the transgressors and the sinners shall be together, and they that forsake the Lord shall be consumed. For they shall be ashamed of the oaks which ye have desired, and ye shall be confounded for the gardens that ye have chosen. For ye shall be as an oak whose leaf fadeth, and as a garden that hath no water. And the strong shall be as tow, and his work as a spark ; and they shall both burn together, and none shall quench them."

V. 24. Here is a picture that reveals to us the fact that our sins are said to weary God. He

said He would EASE Himself by punishing them. In Deut. xxviii. 63, He is said to REJOICE. In Ezekiel v. 13, He is said to be COMFORTED.

V. 25. Tells us that God will bless Israel but some may miss it. In the present time God is calling out a people for His name. He will do it, but only by accepting Christ as your Saviour will the reader be included.

V. 26. God's promise is that He will deal with judges and counsellors, and restore them. As far as I can see, the question of upright judges, politically, is of the utmost importance. It is here that when these fail, a country swiftly becomes demoralised. God will see that the judges will be just, and He will remove this sort of calamity by giving us pure magistrates. The result will be that Jerusalem will be called The City of Righteousness. The Psalmist says (Psalm xix.), "The judgements of the Lord are true and righteous altogether, more to be desired are they than gold, sweeter than the honey." The Gospel saves all that believe, but it is only God's judgements that can put the entire earth right. This, however, will come before us later.

VV. 29-31. This is not very clear to me, but I understand it to mean, that in that bright day they will be ashamed of the sources of strength (oaks or terebinths) they have been desirous of. They will be ashamed of their past conduct and will rejoice in the judgements that made the change.

CHAPTER II.

VV. 1-4. "The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

And it shall come to pass in the latter days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many peoples shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And he shall judge between the nations, and shall reprove many peoples: and 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 any more."

In the first verse we read, "The word that Isaiah, the son of Amoz, saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem." As we glance down the chapter, what a thrill it gives us. This is just like our blessed God. He knows the declensions of His people, and the terrible trial their moral and spiritual condition must be to His dear servant, Isaiah, and so, from time to time he directs his mind from his tremendous and trying task, to the end God is seeking to bring in. We must be sure to keep in our minds that it is expressly

declared that all these things have been written for our learning. As we read these things what a joy it is to us to see the patience and long-suffering of our God, and to remember that He is just the same to-day, and that the Holy Ghost delights to direct our hearts and minds, whilst we are down here, to the riches of Christ and the glories of our inheritance.

V. 2. "And it shall come to pass, in the latter days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills : and all nations shall flow unto it."

Here is the great hope of the Jewish nation. This is clearly a millennial picture. The mountain of the Lord's house is brought before our notice. Taking this literally, we are taught elsewhere that when the Lord's feet touch Olivet, it will be split asunder by an earthquake. Many things happen amongst which, is an exceeding high mountain, north of Jerusalem, which, when the land is to be divided amongst them, will be an oblation to the Lord (Ezek. xlv.). "His house will be built upon the northern part," etc. So we see that in the millennium that will be the centre of worship for the whole earth. Figuratively, mountains are great governments, and in those days the house of the Lord will be the predominant factor in government, and the people will be taught His ways and walk in His paths. Rome, in a carnal way, has sought to do this, but, alas ! with what unhappy results. But when the righteous Judge shall come, peace, concord and liberty will reign. I think, dear

boys and girls, that if you have pictured this scene in your minds, you will agree with me, what an inspiration it must have given, and will give, in the tribulation, to every godly Jew. Our Lord (John xiv.) sought to comfort His sorrowing disciples by directing their thoughts to their heavenly home, and we see, as we read John's, Peter's and Paul's writings, how they followed in His steps. I am sure we shall all agree that it is the blessed hope that sustains us here, and that nothing else can.

V. 3. Here we have a delightful peep into the future, and see something of the happy result of all this. "And many peoples shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord." Their desire is to know His ways and walk in these paths.

V. 4. It is this that makes the future so bright. We shall have done with man's government, with its ever-changing laws, and party strife, for He shall judge, and that between nations. It will not require a league of nations to keep the peace. He will decide between the peoples (margin) and the result will be no more war. Blessed God and Father, how the hearts of Thy people cry out, "How long, Lord?" When we have peace on the earth, it will be because He rules. This is the only hope for the world. Many things have value, education, science, etc., but they cannot touch the sore of the world. The only one thing that can, in the absence of Christ, is the Gospel, and alas! the world will not have it. I was once talking to a gentleman, soon after the war, who said that we

wanted more education. I replied, "Sir, education will not do it." He said, "What will?" I said, "As a lad you had tutors?" "Yes," was the reply. "Then a public school education?" "Yes." "And then either Oxford or Cambridge?" "Yes," came the reply. "I went to Oxford." "Sir, could any one have had a better education than you have had?" "No," was the reply. "Could every one in England hope to equal yours?" "No." "If education would do it, all the students at Oxford would be angels, and they are not, sir." He laughed heartily and said, "No, they are not all angels, but what will do it?" I pointed to our little meeting-house and said, "Do you see that red-brick building, sir?" "Yes," was the reply. "About three hundred of us meet there, sit on our chairs, sing our hymns and offer our prayer, and do not want what another man has got." I can see, after a life-time's experience, that there are very many in very comfortable circumstances who yet have come from the poorest. One generation, and the work would be done, but, alas! only a few are attracted to the ONLY source of joy and comfort. But even if all had the Gospel it would not equal this.

V. 4. HE HIMSELF WILL BE HERE. We shall have all the advantages the Gospel will give, but He has power. There will be perfect justice for all. He will not allow war, or any other evil practice. He will control the weather, the ground, etc.

VV. 5-22. "O house of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk in the light of the Lord. For thou hast

forsaken thy people the house of Jacob, because they be filled *with customs* from the east, and *are* soothsayers like the Philistines, and they strike hands with the children of strangers. Their land also is full of silver and gold, neither is there any end of their treasures; their land also is full of horses, neither is there any end of their chariots. Their land also is full of idols; they worship the work of their own hands, that which their own fingers have made. And the mean man is bowed down, and the great man is brought low: therefore forgive them not. Enter into the rock, and hide thee in the dust, from before the terror of the Lord, and from the glory of his majesty. The lofty looks of man shall be brought low, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day. For there shall be a day of the Lord of hosts upon all that is proud and haughty, and upon all that is lifted up; and it shall be brought low: and upon all the cedars of Lebanon, that are high and lifted up, and upon all the oaks of Bashan; and upon all the high mountains, and upon all the hills that are lifted up; and upon every lofty tower, and upon every fenced wall; and upon all the ships of Tarshish, and upon all pleasant imagery. And the loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be brought low: and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day. And the idols shall utterly pass away. And men shall go into the caves of the rocks, and into the holes of the earth, from before the terror of the Lord, and from the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake mightily the earth. In that day a man shall cast away his idols of silver, and

his idols of gold, which they made for him to worship, to the moles and to the bats; to go into the caverns of the rocks, and into the clefts of the ragged rocks, from before the terror of the Lord, and from the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake mightily the earth. Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils: for wherein is he to be accounted of?"

V. 5. Here, indeed, is a wonderful word of exhortation: "Come ye and let us walk in the light of the Lord." This is the path of safety and joy. The light of the Lord is the doctrine He has taught us in His Word. To walk immorally is against sound doctrine, and contrary to a living faith. But note the blessedness of this invitation. It is to those who have forsaken His house, and, alas! instead of walking in the light of the Lord, they have walked after the manner and customs of the world and have valued what the world valued, with the result that they are forsaken.

V. 7. The natural man has all he can desire, but has no thought for God. Material blessing is the be-all and end-all of his life, but, alas! for him, God will not be overlooked.

V. 8. These are probably household gods. Uzziah and Jotham were worshippers of the true God and, though idolatry was not publicly practised, yet the high places were not removed.

V. 9. This verse shows us that none can escape, either small or great, learned or simple, all are involved.

V. 10 reads like a bit of sarcastic advice to look to their safety. "Enter into the rock and hide thee in the dust, from before the terror of the Lord." My dear boys and girls, it will be well if we stop here a little time.

The character of God demands that sin must be dealt with. We ask if anything can be done to avoid or avert the danger. As we ponder over this the only reply we can make is that nothing can be done. There can be nothing but certain judgement if we are contrary to Him. Man may be as learned, as haughty, or as lofty as he pleases, he will be brought low, none shall escape. What a joy to remember that God has a day, when all wrong things will be righted. Men now, and in times past, have derided this, and say, "Where is the promise of His coming?"

V. 13. What excites the loftiness of man is here detailed. The cedars of Lebanon, *i.e.*, the aristocrats; the Oaks of Bashan, *i.e.*, famous or strong men; high mountains, *i.e.*, governments; hills that are lifted up, *i.e.*, lesser governments, as councils, etc.; every lofty tower and every fenced wall, *i.e.*, military; ships of Tarshish, *i.e.*, commerce; pleasant imagery, *i.e.*, art. All shall be brought low. "And the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day." All these will find they have sought a refuge in lies, and this day discovers it to them. How terrible is the following up of this thought. We see, in V. 20, that "a man shall cast away his idols," etc. What a dreadful experience is before those who reject the Lord, to feel that that in which one has rested (and in some measure or manner all MUST stay

themselves on something) is gone, and that there is nothing firm to rest upon. Though this is ever true when one sees the mistake made, what terror will be theirs, at the glory of His majesty, when God ariseth to shake mightily the earth.

V. 22. Here we get one of the most important factors in this trouble. It is man who has occupied us, and not God. Boys and girls, never mind who it is, let us see that God is the object of our thoughts, and remember that emperors, kings, popes, bishops, presidents, are all creatures. Obey the Word: "Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils; for wherein is he to be accounted of?" It is really ridiculous to put man in any degree beyond the position God has assigned, to positions of trust and service. But, alas! men in all ages have been men worshippers or men pleasers.



CHAPTER III.

VV. 1-5. "For, behold, the Lord, the Lord of hosts, doth take away from Jerusalem and from Judah stay and staff, the whole stay of bread, and the whole stay of water; the mighty man, and the man of war; the judge, and the prophet, and the diviner, and the ancient; the captain of fifty, and the honourable man, and the counsellor, and the cunning artificer, and the skilful enchanter. And I will give children to be their princes, and babes shall rule over them. And the people shall be oppressed, every one by another, and every one by his neighbour: the child shall behave himself proudly against the ancient and the base against the honourable."

In this chapter we get a most excellent reason why we should cease from man. For what can man do when the Lord of hosts is against him? Whatever strength he may possess, or thinks he possesses, he cannot rely with safety upon it. For the stay of bread and water, the rule of the mighty and the skilful men of all classes will fail, and they will, as R.V. margin, be ruled childishly.

V. 5. Here, when taken up with man, we see the action upon the community, for they shall be oppressed every one of another, and every one by his neighbour.

What a dreadful state of things sin ever leads up to! In any dispensation, God ever intends His people to love one another, pray for one another, exhort one another, etc., etc., till we regard ourselves as a one-another-society.

Sin can only produce social rottenness. It is a grand thing to be ruled by just and wise laws, but we must ever remember that a people, in the long run, cannot be governed above its moral character. Boys and girls, we have all sorts of *nostrums* for putting this world right, but let us distrust all, unless they aim at putting ourselves right, for the basis of all good government is righteousness. We are told that righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people. This dreadful state of things may come about not by deliberate intent, but by walking in the path of pleasure instead of duty. Amongst the signs of this is, when youth is insolent to the aged, and when the ignoble are against those that are in a high position.

VV. 6-8. "When a man shall take hold of his brother in the house of his father, *saying*, Thou hast clothing, be thou our ruler, and let this ruin be under thy hand : in that day shall he lift up *his voice*, saying, I will not be an healer ; for in my house is neither bread nor clothing : ye shall not make me ruler of the people. For Jerusalem is ruined, and Judah is fallen : because their tongue and their doings are against the Lord, to provoke the eyes of his glory."

V. 6. Such is the result of calamity that they clutch at a straw. Should one seem better clothed or superior in any way, they will want

to make him a ruler, but he will not have it. He disclaims against it, he is not better off, he will not be a ruler, etc. He knows he would not be safe, he would simply become a target. Boys and girls, it is very important that we should be clear upon this. Though I quite see the value of good laws, yet the trend of the politicians seems to aim at making the nation depend on the Parliament making everything desirable for them, instead of encouraging industry, thrift, self-reliance, etc., etc. One or two things seem very clear to me. One is, that a business man cannot extend his business unless he employs more men and women. I read of Mr. Ford, of motor-car fame, who employs 150,000 people in the neighbourhood of Detroit. Having been an employer, and having made many others, my friends, I am fully assured that employers get discouraged by government interference, and by ever-changing laws. A business man wants to know where he is, and that laws are stable, before he has the courage or desire to embark on further enterprise. Business men, as a whole, do not want helping; they want to be left alone, and a stable government. When I have seen, over and over again, men whom I have known simply drop their push, I have many times said, "Oh for the laws of the Medes and Persians, that change not!"

VV. 9-15. "The shew of their countenance doth witness against them; and they declare their sin as Sodom, they hide it not. Woe unto their soul! for they have rewarded evil unto themselves. Say ye of the righteous, that it

shall be well with him : for they shall eat the fruit of their doings. Woe unto the wicked ! *it shall be ill with him* : for the reward of his hands shall be given him. As for my people, children are their oppressors, and women rule over them. O my people, they which lead thee cause thee to err, and destroy the way of thy paths. The Lord standeth up to plead, and standeth to judge the peoples. The Lord will enter into judgement with the elders of his people, and the princes thereof : It is ye that have eaten up the vineyard ; the spoil of the poor is in your houses : what mean ye that ye crush my people, and grind the face of the poor ? saith the Lord, the Lord of hosts."

V. 9. "The shew of their countenance doth witness against them," or, as the margin says, "their respecting of persons," the result being that they have done evil unto themselves.

In V. 14 we read, "The Lord will enter into judgement with the elders of His people, and the princes thereof." Note the Lord's charge against them, "It is ye that have eaten up the vineyard, the spoil of the poor is in your houses : what mean ye that ye crush my people, and grind the face of the poor ? saith the Lord, the Lord of Hosts."

Here is another stopping-place, boys and girls. It is the ever-recurring question as to the disposal of wealth. Here God says ye have eaten up my vineyard. The plaint is here that the poor have not had their share of the fruit. That is a question that must ever be settled. To me it really means that the worker must be fairly paid. We

might ask ourselves, "How do the elders and the princes bring this about?" As far as we can see, the majority come by their money honestly. Many of the merchant and manufacturing princes have a turnover of millions of pounds yearly. We can easily see that if they got a profit of only one per cent., which is indeed a trifling profit, that would mean £10,000 cash for each million. We can see that for politicians to alter this, would make it impossible for the great captains of industry to do business. It would be a terrible disaster, and would throw the poor into hopeless poverty: I was very much struck in reading James v. 4. "Behold the hire of the labourers, who mowed your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud?" That this is in the passive voice. As we look around we see that God has given great gifts to men like Messrs. Ford and Rockefeller in business, Napoleon and Nelson in military and naval affairs, Edison and Marconi in invention, so that whatever these gifted men touch, they succeed in, whereas others have scarcely enough wit to make two ends meet. We come therefore to this conclusion, that it is quite right to develop one's gift to the utmost, but to use it for selfish ends is, to use God's words, to keep the right of the poor back by fraud. All gifts are given for service. This does not, I think, touch the question of poverty brought about by improvidence, thriftlessness, laziness, etc., providing the trouble falls on the culprits they are only reaping what they have sown. There is one comfort. However rich a man is, God has so arranged things that he cannot really get more than his share in the

things that matter. He cannot breathe more air, or eat, drink, or sleep better than a labourer. I have seen the labourer troubled as to how he is to pay his way. I have seen the rich man worried far more, as to how to get a safe investment with a reasonable interest, till I have come to the conclusion that the rich have more anxiety than the poor, but if they act according to God's mind, it is a pleasure to earn it, and if they use it wisely, it is a pleasure to part with it.

V.V. 16-24. "Moreover the Lord said, Because the daughters of Zion are haughty, and walk with stretched forth necks and wanton eyes, walking and mincing as they go, and making a tinkling with their feet: therefore the Lord will smite with a scab the crown of the head of the daughters of Zion, and the Lord will lay bare their secret parts. In that day the Lord will take away the bravery of their anklets, and the cauls, and the crescents; the pendants, and the bracelets, and the mufflers; the headtires, and the ankle chains, and the sashes, and the perfume boxes, and the amulets; the rings, and the nose jewels; the festival robes, and the mantles, and the shawls, and the satchels; the hand mirrors, and the fine linen, and the turbans, and the veils. And it shall come to pass, that instead of sweet spices there shall be rottenness; and instead of a girdle a rope; and instead of well set hair baldness; and instead of a stomacher a girding of sackcloth: branding instead of beauty."

We get here a detailed and very graphic picture of the fashionable woman of that day.

Like her modern sisters, she is haughty and makes every effort to draw attention to herself. Her root trouble is, that she thinks she is a person of importance. We know that it is humility that God delights in, so we can see here what God thinks of her. He intends to deal with this sort. Notice carefully, boys and girls, that God sees how we act, how we look, how we walk, etc. Further, He knows what we wear, and why. The Apostles have warned the sisters against this very thing. Alas! how much the warning is needed to-day.

VV. 25, 26. "Thy men shall fall by the sword, and thy mighty in the war. And her gates shall lament and mourn; and she shall be desolate and sit upon the ground."

In VV. 25 and 26 the men are dealt with. So terrible will be the number of men who fall in war, that seven women will ask a man to marry them, not to maintain them, but to take away their reproach.



CHAPTER IV.

V. 1. "And seven women shall take hold of one man in that day, saying, We will eat our own bread, and wear our own apparel : only let us be called by thy name ; take thou away our reproach."

V. 1. How necessary for this poor sin-stricken world that One should come, whose right it is to reign. He will do it so efficiently that these troubles they will not see. What a sense of relief we get as the Holy Ghost directs the attention of Isaiah to that Blessed One, whom it is ever a delight to meditate upon.

VV. 2-6. "In that day shall the branch of the Lord be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land shall be excellent and comely for them that are escaped of Israel. And it shall come to pass, that he that is left in Zion, and he that remaineth in Jerusalem, shall be called holy, even every one that is written among the living in Jerusalem : when the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and shall have purged the blood of Jerusalem from the midst thereof, by the spirit of judgement, and by the spirit of burning. And the Lord will create over the whole habitation of mount Zion, and over her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night :

for over all the glory *shall be spread* a canopy. And there shall be a pavilion for a shadow in the day-time from the heat, and for a refuge and for a covert from storm and from rain.”

V. 2. We have here Christ brought before us as the Branch, the margin says, ‘shoot’ or ‘sprout.’ Here He is the Branch of the Lord (Jehovah). This reminds us of the Gospel of John. It is the Immanuel character of Christ. Though I am writing to boys and girls, I feel that it will be well to dwell on the fact that the Holy Ghost calls our attention to Christ as the Branch, in four different ways, according to the presentation of Christ in each Gospel, I shall simply point out the fact so that all Christian boys and girls can read it for themselves. In Jeremiah xxiii. 5 and Jeremiah xxxiii. 15, we get the Branch of David, the King revealed as King of kings and Lord of lords. This reminds us of the Gospel of Matthew. In Zechariah we get the Branch, the Servant. This reminds us of the Gospel of Mark, which deals with the Messiah’s humiliation and obedience unto death. In Zechariah vi. 12, we get, “Behold the man whose name is the Branch,” which reminds us of the Gospel of Luke. This is His character as Son of Man, etc. What we have here, in chapter iv., is their appreciation of Him, their personal delight in Him. This gives tone to the character. The fruit is said to be excellent or majestic, which gives the thought that it is too good for them. It is said to be comely. Surely this is true now of our inheritance if we delight in Him.

V. 3. "And it shall come to pass, that he that is left in Zion, and he that remaineth in Jerusalem, shall be called holy."

We can be quite sure they will not be called holy unless it is a fact. This, in every dispensation, is God's purpose in salvation, even to "every one that is written among the living in Jerusalem." This is an Old Testament way of expressing, "As many as were ordained to eternal life."

V. 4. Here we see that Jerusalem is to be purged by the spirit of judgement and the spirit of burning. When one thinks of the wickedness and misery of the world, how we shall welcome a renewed earth, even though brought about by these judgements! As we read of God's dire judgements in the Book of Revelation, we realise what a wonderful earth it will be when the last judgement is passed, which will be after the millennium. The following verses are about the millennium. Bit by bit, as we proceed with this book, we shall gradually get to see some wonderful things about that blessed state.

V. 5. "The Lord will create over every dwelling-place (R.V. m.) and over her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day and the shining of a flaming fire by night." This, undoubtedly, is the Shekinah glory. As we read the pilgrimage of the Children of Israel from Egypt, we see that the pillar was for protection. No enemy could pass through that cloud. It was also a guide, for the Lord led the way. Now here, they are at home. In the best sense of the word, the Jews will be at home. We find that Shekinah

glory, that has protected them during the journey, is now a covering, and, as the (R.V. m.) puts it, "over every dwelling." Is not this a lovely picture? It is true, it is solemn. It is a beatific beginning of the millennium. Blessed God and Father, as we read of the call of Abraham, and of all the varied experiences of the nation of which he was the father, of all Thy patience and longsuffering, and of their rebellion and wickedness, it fills our hearts with joy to see such a happy termination to their dispensation. In the name of Him who at this time sits on the throne of David, we thank Thee.

"For over all the glory shall be spread a canopy. And there shall be a pavilion for a shadow in the day time from the heat, and for a refuge and for a covert from storm and from rain." This is one of the many places where I envy those who can read Hebrew, I should really like to enter into this. A dear friend, now with the Lord, thought it was the New Jerusalem, in the heavens, but this is said to come down out of heaven after the millennium. Rev. xxi. We can see in the canopy and pavilion, protection from the heat, and a protection and a refuge and covert from storm and rain. We can be sure, even to those who, like myself, cannot say what this really is; that it will be suitable for those things we have stated. After looking to the Holy Ghost for help, it is clear to me that the Shekinah over every dwelling was God Himself. These figures, the canopy and the pavilion, are figures of Christ Himself, who is all they require.

CHAPTER V.

VV. 1-7. "Let me sing for my well-beloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard. My well-beloved had a vineyard in a very fruitful hill: and he made a trench about it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also hewed out a winepress therein: and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes. And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard. What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes? And now go to; I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard: I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; I will break down the fence thereof, and it shall be trodden down: and I will lay it waste; it shall not be pruned nor hoed; but there shall come up briars and thorns: I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant: and he looked for judgement, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry."

We now come to a chapter in which we really feel there is much that is far beyond us, boys and girls. Yet I do know this, that if we are really interested the Holy Ghost will lead us on, however simple we may be, to a knowledge beyond our expectations. What has helped me is Deut. iv., and I would advise every boy and girl to read that prayerfully, and then this chapter. Also read Psalm lxxx. 8-end, Matthew xxi. 33, and any other Scripture that deals with the Vine. When you have done this you may be able to understand how startled these Jews were. They had been taught, and rightly so, that they, as a nation, were God's choice Vine. But they had failed. In John xv., the Lord said, "I AM THE TRUE VINE." Their feelings must have been such that they are easier to feel than to describe.

In Deut. iv., we read that God gave them the land. He gave them His Word. The nations would admire and respect them, if they had the wisdom to keep His Word. He would bless them in the city and in the field, in the store and in the basket, etc. In Deut. iii. 22, God undertook to fight for them.

With these things in our minds, let us turn to chapter v. 1. "Let me sing for my well beloved a song of my Beloved touching his vineyard in a very fruitful hill." The expression gives to me the sense that Jehovah sings, but it is a very short song. The wild grapes appear to cut it short. We can thank God that the song the Saviour sings in the midst of the church, Hebrews ii. 12, A.V., will never be cut short. All His purposes stand. We are clearly taught

that it was well situated. Exodus xv. 17 clearly shows the fruitful hill to be Canaan occupied by Israel. Clearing out the stones thereof is the clearing of Canaan of its former inhabitants. The choice vine is Judah, see v. 7, the tower is Jerusalem, the royal city, see Micah iv. 8. The winepress is the temple. Psalm xxxvi. 8 and 9, and Psalm xliii., show that the heavenly pleasures satisfy the thirst of the soul. Jeremiah xii. 10 shows the old, old story. It is the shepherds that have trodden underfoot the vineyard.

V. 3. The Lord asks the men of Judah to judge "betwixt me and my vineyard. What could have been done more to my vineyard that I have not done in it?" After having done all God naturally looked for grapes, but it only brought forth wild grapes. This is very important to us all. This vineyard brought forth grapes, but they were wild grapes. It was the quality that was wrong. The vineyard was useless to Him, He destroyed it. We now come to our own position. What has God done for us? He has given us His only-begotten Son, and what response has God had? It is just as it was with Judah. God had a remnant. He has much the same response now.

VV. 8-17. "Woe unto them that join house to house, that lay field to field, till there be no room, and ye be made to dwell alone in the midst of the land! In mine ears *saith* the Lord of hosts, Of a truth many houses shall be desolate, even great and fair, without inhabitant. For ten acres of vineyard shall yield one bath, and a homer of seed shall yield *but* an ephah.

Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink; that tarry late into the night, till wine inflame them! And the harp and the lute, the tabret and the pipe, and wine, are *in* their feasts: but they regard not the work of the Lord, neither have they considered the operation of his hands. Therefore my people are gone into captivity, for lack of knowledge: and their honourable men are famished, and their multitude are parched with thirst. Therefore hell hath enlarged her desire, and opened her mouth without measure: and their glory, and their multitude, and their pomp, and he that rejoiceth among them, descend *into it*. And the mean man is bowed down, and the great man is humbled, and the eyes of the lofty are humbled: but the Lord of hosts is exalted in judgement, and God the Holy One is sanctified in righteousness. Then shall the lambs feed as in their pasture, and the waste places of the fat ones shall wanderers eat."

We are told here, in the pronouncement of six woes, what brought it about. Truly the Bible is up to date. First there is GREED. Other troubles there may be, but this one, this constant joining house to house, field to field, or investment to investment is here still. God dealt with it. Then DRINK AND MUSIC—Self-indulgence to an extreme point. Music, grand gift as it is, is for praise, not for self-indulgence. Into captivity they are gone, for lack of knowledge. What can we say to these things? We have the complete canon of Scripture, they simply did not believe.

VV. 18-24. "Woe unto them that draw iniquity with cords of vanity, and sin as it were with a cart rope : that say, Let him make speed, let him hasten his work, that we may see it : and let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw nigh and come, that we may know it !

Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil ; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness ; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter !

Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight !

Woe unto them that are mighty to drink wine, and men of strength to mingle strong drink : which justify the wicked for a reward, and take away the righteousness of the righteous from him ! Therefore as the tongue of fire devoureth the stubble, and as the dry grass sinketh down in the flame, so their root shall be as rottenness, and their blossom shall go up as dust : because they have rejected the law of the Lord of hosts, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel."

V. 18. This woe, is because they draw "iniquity with cords of vanity and sin with a cart rope." We can always be sure that every expression means something, and it is well to remember this, for we are likely to let the less obvious slide in our reading. It is good practice (of course not when writing a book), to ponder over these expressions and figures. We may not get there, but we shall get somewhere, and that is better than nowhere. 'Somewhere' comes from effort, 'nowhere' from indifference.

We must depend on the Holy Ghost to get us there. They "draw iniquity with cords of vanity." This appears to be the very last thing they think they are doing. Satan appealing to the vanity of their mind, if it is correct to call it mind, leads them on to think they are clever or smart, and that these goody-goody people are milksops "And sin as it were with a cart rope :" This suggests that such is the accumulation of their sin, that it must have a strong rope to get it along.

V. 19. "That say, Let Him make speed, let Him hasten His work that we may see it." How dreadful is this! The scoffers of this time, as they ever do, turn the facts of sacred history, or prophetic utterance, into ridicule.

Here we see that when woe is pronounced, they reply, "Let Him make speed and hasten His work." In Jer. xvii. 15, the scoffers say, "Where is the word of the Lord? let it come now." Amos said to the same sort, V. 18, "Woe unto you that desire the day of the Lord! Wherefore would ye have the day of the Lord? it is darkness and not light." In Mal. ii. 17, we read, "Where is the God of judgement?" The Apostle Peter says that in the last days they will say, "Where is the promise of His coming?" Alas, woe for them, they will know it too well. Read Rev. vi. 15-17. It will be a different tone then.

V. 20. This woe is for those who are overturning the moral foundations. With what fearful haste is this tendency growing in modern times.

V. 21. This woe is for the very clever people, those who are wiser than what is written. But their wisdom is in their own sight; to the renewed mind it is absolute folly.

V. 22. This woe is for those given to strong drink and those given to bribery. This latter is, as we read in V. 24, the root trouble. They have despised the word of the Holy One of Israel.

VV. 25-30. "Therefore is the anger of the Lord kindled against his people, and he hath stretched forth his hand against them, and hath smitten them, and the hills did tremble, and their carcasses were as refuse in the midst of the streets. For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still. And he will lift up an ensign to the nations from far, and will hiss for them from the end of the earth : and, behold, they shall come with speed swiftly : none shall be weary nor stumble among them ; none shall slumber nor sleep ; neither shall the girdle of their loins be loosed, nor the latchet of their shoes be broken : whose arrows are sharp, and all their bows bent ; their horses' hoofs shall be counted like flint, and their wheels like a whirlwind : their roaring shall be like a lion, they shall roar like young lions : yea, they shall roar, and lay hold of the prey, and carry it away safe, and there shall be none to deliver. And they shall roar against them in that day like the roaring of the sea : and if one look unto the land, behold darkness *and* distress, and the light is darkened in the clouds thereof."

V. 25. "THEREFORE is the anger of the Lord kindled against His people." Many complain

of a God that punishes. What else can a people expect, or what else can we desire, for a people that have given themselves to wickedness. I know of many good and kind people who, when they have read the newspapers, heard of the verdict against criminals, have been filled with indignation. I am with those whose sympathy is with the victim. We are further told, "His hand is stretched out still." He will continue to strive till His purposes are accomplished.



CHAPTER VI.

VV. 1-6. "In the year that king Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim : each one had six wings ; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts : the whole earth is full of his glory. And the foundations of the thresholds were moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke. Then said I, Woe is me ! for I am undone ; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips : for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts. Then flew one of the seraphim unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar :"

We now come to a very wonderful chapter indeed. I want the boys and girls to remember that my object is to interest them in the Scripture, and should it please the Lord to bless my efforts, so that you are really interested, you will find that the Holy Ghost will lead you from truth to truth, and I trust that you will go on to know more than I have got to know.

V. 1 tells us that Isaiah had a vision "in the year King Uzziah died." What a wonderful year this was. The kingdom was strong and rich. But from the time he died, with but little variation, the kingdom declined till it was carried away.

I have read that Jerome says that the year Uzziah died, Romulus, the founder of Rome, was born. How significant is this if it is true. Isaiah said, "I saw the Lord." I have heard that the Jews believed that it was because he said, "I saw the Lord," that he was sawn asunder in Manasseh's reign.

We see that he "saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple."

Though, at present, it does seem to me that whichever way this is read the lessons are alike. I have met those who think this temple is on earth, and some of these are familiar with their Bible. It will be wise, therefore, till you are assured, boys and girls, to suspend your judgment. Personally it is more acceptable to me, to consider that this temple is in heaven. Psalm xi. 3 and 4, "If the foundations be destroyed what can the righteous do. The Lord is in His holy temple, the Lord His throne is in heaven." Rev. xv. 5, and several Scriptures, show this clearly. It does say that in the New Jerusalem he saw no temple there, though he does not say there was not one. The New Jerusalem came down out of heaven. God has a temple in heaven, that is clear, but in the New Jerusalem the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the

temple thereof. That, I am inclined to think, would be the temple in heaven.

Isaiah does not describe the Lord, but says, "Above Him stood the Seraphim." As far as I can trace, the Seraphim stand for holiness above the throne, the Cherubim for holiness under the throne. These Seraphim had six wings. I think, dear boys and girls, we want to observe these Seraphim closely. NOTE their behaviour in God's presence. If it becomes such mighty creatures, to be filled with reverence, humility, and obedience, how much more should we. One third of his wings hid God from his eyes, as though he were not worthy to look upon God. The second third was to hide his feet, as though he were not worthy to be seen by God. The last third was for obedience. Blessed God and Father, we can clearly see that however mighty Thy creatures may be, or to whatever dispensation Thy saints belong, it is essential to get a spirit of reverence, humility and obedience. May the Holy Ghost not be hindered by us, in forming these three virtues in us.

V. 3. "And one cried unto another." We can see that they did not cry all at once, but in response. There is no definite statement as to how, but they said, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts." I do not think that in a general way the Jews would see from this the Triune God, though I believe individually some got an inkling of this great truth. With the revelation the Holy Ghost gives us in the New Testament, the Old is unfolded in a way that perhaps they never saw.

“The whole earth is full of His glory.” How God makes everything to work in for His own. In modern times, when we have the wireless, the telephone, and a hundred other new things, though we do not think much of their theories, yet the facts they have discovered are most illuminating. The Apostle John heard and saw everything on earth, in heaven, and under the earth. We have not got there yet, but I must admit I never thought to see so much as I have, till I get home.

V. 4. “At the voice of Him that cried,” *i.e.*, at each cry, the foundations of the threshold were moved, and the house filled with smoke. This is very interesting, but exceedingly solemn. It is a vision of His glory. Read John xii. 41. He has a vision of the Seraphs praising God with pure lips, and at once comes a sense of his own lost condition. Note this fact, boys and girls.

V. 6. A Seraph flew to him, with a live coal which he had taken off the altar with tongs. Even a Seraph’s hands could not touch the vessels or sacrifices consecrated to God. I think this V. 7 clearly shows that the Seraph is a messenger of mercy, whereas a cherub, Ezek. x. 6 and 7, is a messenger of judgement. Here we would do well to pause. We have seen Isaiah thinking he was lost and undone. He, through the Seraph’s action, now sees that his iniquity is taken away, and his sin purged, so that when he hears the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” he says promptly, “Here am I, send me.” How important it is for us, even on the ground of service,

quite apart from other weighty reasons, that we should ever have large views of the efficacy and cleansing power of the blood.

VV. 7-13. "And he touched my mouth with it, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged. And I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then I said, Here am I; send me. And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and turn again, and be healed. Then said I, Lord, how long? And he answered, Until cities be waste without inhabitant, and houses without man, and the land become utterly waste, and the Lord have removed men far away, and the forsaken places be many in the midst of the land. And if there be yet a tenth in it, it shall again be eaten up: as a terebinth, and as an oak, whose stock remaineth, when they are felled; so the holy seed is the stock thereof."

Further, it is, "Who will go for us." All talk about the plural of dignity here may satisfy some, but it does not the writer.

In V. 9 comes the message to "this people," not "my people." God knows that His Gospel is a message of life unto life or death unto death. We must remember that the prophet is said to do what will happen. See Jer. i. 10; xxxi. 8; Hos. vi. 5; Ezek. xliii. 3.

V. II. With what pleasure we read the prophet's question, "Lord, how long?" The prophet knew his Bible. He knew that God could not be untrue to His promises, and so could not cast Israel off for ever.



CHAPTER VII.

VV. 1, 2. "And it came to pass in the days of Ahaz the son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, king of Judah, that Rezin the king of Syria, and Pekah the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, went up to Jerusalem to war against it; but could not prevail against it. And it was told the house of David, saying, Syria is confederate with Ephraim. And his heart was moved, and the heart of his people, as the trees of the forest are moved with the wind."

We have now come to Ahaz, the son of Jotham. In the previous chapter we see that the event was in the year that King Uzziah died. Jotham was twenty-five years old when his father died, and he reigned for sixteen years after, so that sixteen years or more have passed by since chapter vi. Jotham, his father, is, as far as I can trace, the only King of Judah that God has revealed nothing against. His example was holy, his reign prosperous. How strange, yet common, it is that a good, holy man should have such a bad son. Ahaz came to the throne at the age of twenty. He gave himself up to gross idolatry, sacrificed his own children, and abandoned himself to iniquity. Remembering these things, how wonderful it is that God seeks to win him. The

result is that trouble soon comes. Satan does not miss an opportunity. It does seem strange that nothing teaches some people. This man lived for self, and nothing clouds the judgement more than that, and makes us an easy prey of the enemy. If I am judging correctly, Satan gets up a plot to throw the descendant of David off the throne. What a triumph this would be against God, if anything happened contrary to what God has foretold! It is wonderful that Satan can, with his traps, snares and gins, catch all sorts of people. As his object is to overthrow the King of Judah, he starts with the King of Israel. David, so to speak, had, in the days of Rehoboam, lost ten tribes, Jeroboam being the instrument used. What a melancholy line of bad kings Israel had! How they debased the worship of Jehovah. Their great difficulty lay in the temple, as the centre of worship, being at Jerusalem. One can easily see that this must have been a continual thorn in the side of a King of Israel.

V. 1. Here we see that Pekah, King of Israel, joins with Rezin, King of Syria, to go up against Jerusalem. What a dreadful thing for Israel, to join a confederacy with the ungodly, and for the express purpose of destroying Judah and putting the son of Tabeel on the throne. This Pekah was a usurper. His name means "open-eyed" or "watchfulness." He captures the throne of Israel, and whoever this son of Tabeel may be, it is probably the throne of Judah Pekah is after. How ridiculous are the meanings of these names, unless the owner of

the name is at one with God. The older I get, not being very learned, but honestly trying to see things for myself, the more I see that the value of these names depends upon whom we serve, or, in other words, upon who is our master. He turns to Syria, and this Rezin, whose name means "stable, firm, or dominion" (but, being Satan's puppet, he is anything but that), finds that his position soon becomes not firm but shaky. He loses his dominion, yea, his life also.

We read that they could not prevail against it, but II Kings xvi., and II Chron. xxviii., show us what tremendous losses Judah suffered, and had it not been for a little brotherly feeling on the part of Israel it would have been much worse. See II Chron. xxviii. 13-15. I think to understand this part of Isaiah, it would be well for every boy and girl to get well acquainted with II Kings xvi. and II Chron. xiii., which both deal with Ahaz. It is very interesting reading.

The news comes to the house of David of the confederacy between Syria and Ephraim. "His heart was moved and the heart of his people, as the trees of the forest are moved with the wind."

The terrible calamity that this meant, as we see after reading the Scriptures mentioned, explains this fear. But, alas! he does not suffer alone; his people are involved with him. He turns, as we have seen, to Assyria, a more powerful country than the other two combined.

VV. 3-9. "Then said the Lord unto Isaiah, Go forth now to meet Ahaz, thou, and Shear-jashub thy son, at the end of the conduit of the

upper pool, in the high way of the fuller's field; and say unto him, Take heed, and be quiet; fear not, neither let thine heart be faint, because of these two tails of smoking firebrands, for the fierce anger of Rezin and Syria, and of the son of Remaliah. Because Syria hath counselled evil against thee, Ephraim *also*, and the son of Remaliah, saying, Let us go up against Judah, and vex it, and let us make a breach therein for us, and set up a king in the midst of it, even the son of Tabeel: thus saith the Lord God, It shall not stand, neither shall it come to pass. For the head of Syria is Damascus, and the head of Damascus is Rezin: and within threescore and five years shall Ephraim be broken in pieces, that it be not a people: and the head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is Remaliah's son. If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established."

V. 9. Here we see a wonderful example of God's patience with His people. God certainly does give a man every opportunity. The Lord told Isaiah to take his son, Shear-jashub, and go to meet Ahaz. The fact that the Lord sent Shear-jashub, and that he, with Isaiah's other children, were to be signs, makes it necessary to look at these three men. Ahaz means "the possessor of," or "he holds." He was the son of Jotham, which means "the Lord is upright or perfect." Jotham will adorn his name, and had Ahaz walked in the path of obedience he would have found his name true. Isaiah means "Jehovah's salvation," and Shear-jashub means "a remnant shall return," an intimation that

the punishment will come but that mercy follows. We, however, find that the message for the present is, that he was to take heed. Wise advice this is to all, even to all the boys and girls who read this. His troubles, like our own perhaps, may have come about through heedlessness. "Be quiet," we are told. "In quietness and confidence" shall be our strength. "Fear not, neither let thine heart be faint." This needed trust in the Lord, and courage. Ahaz had neither, but the Lord sends assurance that "these two tails of smoking firebrands" are not firebrands as Ahaz evidently thought them to be. The Lord saw the whole drift of Satan's snare, and said that Rezin and Pekah had said, "Let us go up against Judah and vex it, and let us make a breach therein for us, and set up a king in the midst of it, even the son of Tabeel. Thus saith the Lord God. It shall not stand, neither shall it come to pass." Then comes the assurance that in sixty-five years Israel would cease to be a nation. This came to pass in stages. Then comes the solemn warning. "If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established."

We are not told whether he replied. The invisible help of Jehovah and the remote fall of Ephraim did not appeal to him. What, perhaps, may have been a secret at the time, his appeal to the King of Assyria, with perhaps his treaty with Assyria in his pocket, was far more in his line than the promises of Jehovah. I am afraid, boys and girls, bad as Ahaz undoubtedly was, that many of us at the present day would rather put our trust in man that we can see, than in the precious promises that we cannot.

VV. 10-17. "And the Lord spake again unto Ahaz, saying, Ask thee a sign of the Lord thy God; ask it either in the depth, or in the height above. But Ahaz said, I will not ask, neither will I tempt the Lord. And he said, Hear ye now, O house of David; is it a small thing for you to weary men, that ye will weary my God also? Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. Butter and honey shall he eat, when he knoweth to refuse the evil, and choose the good. For before the child shall know to refuse the evil, and choose the good, the land whose two kings thou abhorrest shall be forsaken. The Lord shall bring upon thee, and upon thy people, and upon thy father's house, days that have not come, from the day that Ephraim departed from Judah; *even* the king of Assyria."

V. 10. Here we see that God, in grace, does not give this unhappy man up. Ahaz is told to ask for a sign either in the depth or in the height above. But Ahaz said, "I will not ask, neither will I tempt the Lord." This may appear to be humility at first, but we soon see it is not. We can never be presumptuous in believing God's Word. Faith in His Word is the truest humility. How often have I heard people say, when asked if they are saved, "I hope to be, but I should not be so presumptuous as to say I am." Yet God's Word says distinctly, "Verily, verily I say unto you, he that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come

into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life." John v. 24. I think any boy or girl will readily see that we honour God by believing what He tells us.

The Lord replies to Ahaz by addressing the house of David. "Is it a small thing for you to weary men, that you will weary my God also? Therefore the Lord Himself shall give you a sign." Then comes that wonderful promise of the incarnation.

There can be no question that its primary fulfilment was to Ahaz and the danger that threatened him. Isaiah tells that a maiden or virgin shall conceive, and that before the child can discern between right and wrong, the danger will have passed, *i.e.*, in about twelve months.

There can be no doubt that its larger and more literal account in the New Testament points to a Messianic fulfilment. Luke ii. 10-12. What a depth He descended to, from the height of glory to the Cross! I often wonder if, when at home with the Lord, we shall ever be able to plumb these depths to which He descended. I do know that the older I get, the deeper they are to me. With what joy, however, we realise the height to which He has ascended, as our Advocate and High Priest in the heavens.

V. 16. shows that this treaty has the effect that he hired Assyria for. In about twelve months these kings will be forsaken. But, alas for him, his plans for deliverance will bring a greater trouble on his own country.

VV. 18-25. "And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall hiss for the fly that is in

the uttermost part of the rivers of Egypt, and for the bee that is in the land of Assyria. And they shall come, and shall rest all of them in the desolate valleys, and in the holes of the rocks, and upon all thorns, and upon all pastures.

In that day shall the Lord shave with a razor that is hired, *which is* in the parts beyond the River, *even* with the king of Assyria, the head and the hair of the feet : and it shall also consume the beard.

And it shall come to pass in that day, that a man shall nourish a young cow, and two sheep ; and it shall come to pass, for the abundance of milk that they shall give he shall eat butter : for butter and honey shall every one eat that is left in the midst of the land.

And it shall come to pass in that day, that every place, where there were a thousand vines at a thousand silverlings, shall even be for briers and thorns. With arrows and with bow shall one come thither ; because all the land shall be briers and thorns. And all the hills that were digged with the mattock, thou shalt not come thither for fear of briers and thorns, but it shall be for the sending forth of oxen, and for the treading of sheep.”

V. 18 says the Lord shall hiss for the fly of Egypt and the bee of Assyria. Constantly in the Bible the Lord is said *to do*, what he *permits*. This is a very interesting study, and I hope to take it up in the book of Job.

V. 19 gives an idea of the extent of the invasion.

V. 20. Here we see that the power he had hired to deal with Ephraim and Syria, turns and shaves himself. It may be very wise to hire a razor, if one's own self uses the razor, but Ahaz found what many a man has found, that the plans he adopted became the very means of disaster to himself. He is shaved, the head, and the hair of his feet. "And it shall also consume the beard." I think this means, to Ahaz, who was a Jew, that it would be attended with great indignity, which it certainly was.

In VV. 21 and 22 we see that agriculture will be impossible. There will be just a little grazing, but there will be abundance on account of the few inhabitants.

VV. 23-25 make this very clear. "Every place where there were a thousand vines at a thousand silverlings (very valuable) shall even be for briers and thorns."



CHAPTER VIII.

VV. 1-8. "And the Lord said unto me, Take thee a great tablet, and write upon it with the pen of a man, For Maher-shalal-hash-baz; and I will take unto me faithful witnesses to record, Uriah the priest, and Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah. And I went unto the prophetess; and she conceived, and bare a son. Then said the Lord unto me, Call his name Maher-shalal-hash-baz. For before the child shall have knowledge to cry, My father, and, My mother, the riches of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria shall be carried away before the king of Assyria.

And the Lord spake unto me yet again, saying, Forasmuch as this people hath refused the waters of Shiloah that go softly, and rejoice in Rezin and Remaliah's son; now therefore, behold, the Lord bringeth up upon them the waters of the River, strong and many, *even* the king of Assyria and all his glory: and he shall come up over all his channels, and go over all his banks: and he shall sweep onward into Judah; he shall overflow and pass through; he shall reach even to the neck; and the stretching out of his wings shall fill the breadth of thy land, O Immanuel."

As we read the story in Kings and Chronicles we gather that whilst waiting for the fulfilment of the promise concerning the child, things were getting worse; loss after loss was taking place. Here we find God, in His grace, giving a further confirmation, apparently to give it greater weight. He calls witnesses—Uriah, elsewhere called Urijah, the priest who helped the king in connection with making an altar similar to that which the king had admired in Damascus, also Zechariah, who possibly was the king's father-in-law. The Lord tells Isaiah to write on a great tablet, "Maher-shalal-hash-baz." This was to be the name of a child that Isaiah was to have. It means "the spoil speedeth, the prey hasteth." R.V. M. This, in the midst of the great trouble Judah was having from Ephraim and Syria indicated that the time when Assyria should spoil them was not far distant, for before the child could say "father" and "mother" these two countries would be over-run by the Assyrians.

In V. 6 the prophet apparently refers to the whole of Israel. The ten tribes refused the House of David and sought an alliance with Syria, whereas both could have enjoyed the slow gentle-flowing Shiloah. (This is a little rivulet that runs into the pool of Siloam.) Instead, therefore, the Lord brings upon them the mighty river Euphrates, *i.e.*, Assyria. "And he shall come up over all his channels and go over all his banks," evidently Israel, and "He shall sweep onward into Judah, he shall reach even to the neck."

So, to use the figure, Israel is drowned, and Judah nearly so. The next expression, which some connect with the child of vii. 14, might suggest that the child was given as a pledge that the land should be safe from the threatened invasion, because God would be with the nation to protect and defend it. But, as the land is introduced as "Thy land, O Immanuel," my inclination is to think that God is looking on to the larger meaning, and it would suggest to me, clearly, that the land could not be utterly wasted because the Messiah must come.

VV. 9-15. "Make an uproar, O ye peoples, and ye shall be broken in pieces; and give ear, all ye of far countries: gird yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces; gird yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces. Take counsel together, and it shall be brought to nought; speak the word, and it shall not stand: for God is with us. For the Lord spake thus to me with a strong hand, and instructed me that I should not walk in the way of this people, saying, Say ye not, A confederacy, concerning all whereof this people shall say, A confederacy; neither fear ye their fear, nor be in dread *thereof*. The Lord of hosts, him shall ye sanctify; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. And he shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel, for a gin and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many shall stumble thereon, and fall, and be broken, and be snared, and be taken."

V. 9. "Associate yourselves, O ye people," A.V., or "peoples," R.V. "Gird yourselves and

ye shall be broken in pieces. Take counsel together and it shall be brought to nought. Speak the word, and it shall not stand." What a cheering message this should have been to God's people, and to those who had faith it no doubt was. But, alas! how few have faith. This, possibly, goes beyond Ephraim and Syria, and is a challenge to all peoples. They may make confederacies, take counsel, gird themselves for war, but it will avail nothing, the reason being Immanuel (God is with us). Blessed God and Father, Thou knowest how fearful Thy people have proved themselves to be, whether Thine ancient people, or Thy Church, or ourselves individually, but we do pray Thee that we may ever realise Thy presence with us. Amen.

V. 11. Here we get very wholesome instructions. "For the Lord spake to me with a strong hand," *i.e.*, in a powerful way, "that I should not walk in the way of this people." How solemn this is! Ahaz was actually making, or had made, a confederacy with Assyria. The natural men may have to depend upon each other, whereas God's people would have no fear of any enemy, if they feared God. What a wonderful verse is this, V. 13. "The Lord of hosts, Him shall ye sanctify; and let Him be your fear, and let Him be your dread." Here we see God's people in a dreadful danger on account of this confederacy, yet their history should have taught them that God is the Lord of hosts, *i.e.*, armies.

In V. 14 we are further told, "And He shall be for a sanctuary." What a powerful inspiration this should have been to Judah. They possessed

the Psalms. Take just one expression. Psalm xxvii. 3, "Though an host should encamp against me, my heart will not fear." xxvii. 5, "In the secret of His tabernacle He shall hide me." These are two of very many similar scriptures. The man who uttered this knew what war was, and he knew what it meant to be in the sanctuary. What a dreadful contrast his unworthy descendant Ahaz makes. Blessed God and Father, may the writer and the reader ever make Thee our sanctuary. May we ever find, in Thy presence, that freedom from terror, let it come in whatever shape it may. And not only so, but give each a deep "peace like a river."

This invitation was made to God's people three thousand years ago. It has been the privilege of God's people to make God their sanctuary, their refuge. Without doubt many a saint has entered into this in a wonderful way, but many are painfully conscious that they have allowed their fears and desires to lead them away from their true rest. We can, however, look forward with joy for in what I think is the dispensation of fulness of times, "The Almighty and the Lamb are the temple." What a temple. What a future! May it be ours now.

We realise, blessed God, that many who have named Thy name find Thee a stone of stumbling, a rock of offence, because they have not made Thee their sanctuary.

VV. 16-18. "Bind thou up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples. And I will wait for the Lord, that hideth his face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for him. Behold, I and

the children whom the Lord hath given me are signs and for wonders in Israel from the Lord of hosts, which dwelleth in mount Zion.”

V. 16. This appears to me to be a prayer of Isaiah to Jehovah. “Bind thou up the testimony and seal the law among my disciples.” It would be all over with Israel unless a remnant of believers should be preserved, and all over with this remnant, if the Word of God, which was the ground of their life, should be allowed to slip from their hearts.

Whilst offering the prayer and looking for its fulfilment, he waits upon Jehovah. A time of judgement had now commenced and would last a long time, but the Word of God was the pledge of Israel’s continuance in the midst of it, and of the renewal of Israel’s glory afterwards. The prophet would, therefore, hope for the grace which was now hidden behind the wrath.

VV. 19-22. “And when they shall say unto you, Seek unto them that have familiar spirits and unto the wizards, that chirp and that mutter : should not a people seek unto their God? on behalf of the living *should they seek* unto the dead? To the law and to the testimony ! if they speak not according to this word, surely there is no morning for them. And they shall pass through it, hardly bestead and hungry : and it shall come to pass that, when they shall be hungry, they shall fret themselves, and curse by their king and by their God, and turn their faces upward : and they shall look unto the earth, and behold, distress and darkness, the gloom of

anguish; and into thick darkness *they shall be driven away.*”

V. 19. The times were exceedingly dark. Trouble and forebodings were on every hand, and there was no inclination to seek the Lord. So they were to be invited to turn to the wizards, or, as we should call them to-day, the spiritists. How modern is this! But I understand that in modern times it is with spirit-rappings, whereas then it was with chirping and muttering. I know some think this suggests ventriloquism, which I have no doubt has played and does play an important part in this. I, personally, have no doubt that the great bulk of it is trickery and the rest demonism. The messages are worthless. I have often thought that in circumstances like these how helpless the natural man is. He may be a great scientist, and his word on his science perhaps the weightiest, but apart from his science he is as helpless as the rest. What a pointed question is this. “Should not a people seek unto their God? on behalf of the living should they seek unto the dead?” What can be more solid than this? Can any right mind wish to act contrary to the mind of his God? To turn to the dead is to ask for trouble, for any child of God knows they are simply deceived by demons to the extent that spiritism is a fact.

What shall we do, boys and girls? V. 20 says, “To the law and to the testimony.” Here is something we can rest upon, whatever form our perplexities, sorrows, and trials take. As an old boy, I can truthfully say I know no better course than to turn to this testimony, for if they

do not so speak, the Book says, "surely there is no morning for them" (no hope). How solemn is this!

V. 21. We see here what those who turned to wizards and idols found. The Assyrian trouble meant hunger and desperate conditions, and every bitter experience only meant an outburst of impotent anger. They would curse their King and their God, R. V. M., *i. e.*, idol. They would find no relief in any direction. If they looked upwards, or earthwards, they would see nothing but thick darkness and anguish.

CHAPTER IX.

VV. 1-7. "But there shall be no gloom to her that was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time hath he made it glorious, by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the nations. The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light : they that dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined. Thou hast multiplied the nation, thou hast increased their joy : they joy before thee according to the joy in harvest, as men rejoice when they divide the spoil. For the yoke of his burden, and the staff of his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, thou hast broken as in the day of Midian. For all the armour of the armed man in the tumult, and the garments rolled in blood, shall even be for burning, for fuel of fire. For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given ; and the government shall be upon his shoulder : and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to establish it, and to uphold it with judgement and with righteousness from

henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts shall perform this.”

Here is a promise that the calamity would not be so great as it had been in former times, as when Tiglath Pileser took Ijon, Gilead, and Naphtali. II Kings xv. 29. I Chron. v. 26.

V. 2. Matthew iv. 13-16 clearly claims that when Christ came into Capernaum this Scripture was fulfilled and was true of Christ at His first coming. But it appears to me that the deep darkness could only, in its fullest sense, be the Apostasy. The description of the joy of the people, and the triumph of His rule, demands the second coming of our Lord. Truly all dispensations will rejoice in that day, so we can, with full hearts, say, Blessed be God for ever thinking of us, that we also may rejoice in this great light.

V. 6. “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulder: and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father (*i.e.*, Hebrew “The Father of Eternity”), Prince of Peace.”

I was once told by one that did not believe in the Deity of Christ that these are titles that the Lord will have later on. I asked, “Are you inferring that the Lord will have titles that are not true?” I had no reply. How could a creature be the Mighty God, and the Father of Eternity? To apply this to a creature is to one boy, at all events, absurd. It really must want a very learned man to be able to do so.

V. 7. "Of the increase of His government and of peace there shall be no end, and upon the throne of David and upon His Kingdom, to establish it, and to uphold it with judgement and with righteousness henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts shall perform this."

We see this clearly shows that He will sit upon the throne of David, for it says "His government." Other scriptures give us other phases, but we can wait till we come to them. There can be no mistake as to the blessed result to all. Look at any country one wishes to select. Read its history carefully, and you can readily see that man cannot govern or rule well. As just an old boy I think it is because government is a moral question, whereas man has to make it a legal question, and till the Lord comes I cannot see how man can do anything else.

VV. 8-12. "The Lord sent a word into Jacob, and it hath lighted upon Israel. And all the people shall know, *even* Ephraim and the inhabitant of Samaria, that say in pride and in stoutness of heart, The bricks are fallen, but we will build with hewn stone: the sycomores are cut down, but we will change them into cedars. Therefore the Lord shall set up on high against him the adversaries of Rezin, and shall stir up his enemies; the Syrians before, and the Philistines behind; and they shall devour Israel with open mouth. For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still."

What a wonderful book the Bible is! What a difficult creature man is to teach! He does seem hopeless. How up-to-date this Book is, to be sure!

Here we read that the Lord sends a word to Jacob. Though to the whole house, yet at present, more particularly to Israel, a word of trial, trouble, and ruin. This has come upon them. Instead of turning to God, they simply say, in their pride and boasting, in the reconstruction, that they have built with brick but that in future they will have stone. Instead of sycamores they will have cedars. I suppose every boy and girl likes nice things. I know I do. We should prefer stone to brick and cedars to sycamores, but we must remember that these people are financially bankrupt, yet in the reconstruction, without the means, what will they not have? I remember Dr. Smiles, writing in one of his books, said something like the following, "If every man would see to his own reformation, how very easily we could reform the nation." About five thousand years after, our own nation plunged into the most terrible war I have ever heard of. Though on the winning side, we emerged from it with thousands of millions of pounds of debt. It is hardly finished when we hear of having no more C.3. men, for this place is to be a place fit for heroes. It is a most desirable end to attain, and should have the first attention of the nation, but, being only a boy, I really cannot see how these ends are to be attained, if the capital of the country is squandered to such an extent that our industries have to be financed with foreign money. I can see that, if, as Dr. Smiles says, *each* man does his part, and not only the individual who has means, such a desirable object may be attained, but, if it cannot, it does seem clear that all the same every person should

seek individually to do his bit to bring about that which is undoubtedly the very elements of the Christian faith.

VV. 13-17. "Yet the people hath not turned unto him that smote them, neither have they sought the Lord of hosts. Therefore the Lord will cut off from Israel head and tail, palm-branch and rush, in one day. The ancient and the honourable man, he is the head; and the prophet that teacheth lies, he is the tail. For they that lead this people cause them to err; and they that are led of them are destroyed. Therefore the Lord shall not rejoice over their young men, neither shall he have compassion on their fatherless and widows: for every one is profane and an evil-doer. and every mouth speaketh folly. For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still."

V. 12. Suppose that we make up our minds that we shall ignore these things. That is what Israel did here, to find that they had incurred the just displeasure of God, as this verse clearly shows.

As we have said before, that which happens in Scripture is frequently said to be God *doing* it, and in a measure there is truth in the statement. There is the directive will of God which there is no withstanding. But there is also the permissive will of God, and what dreadful things God does permit. It is clearly taught that punishment follows in His way and time, but, though punished, if they have not turned to Him that smote them, further trouble or punishment is to follow.

V. 15. "The Ancient or Elder and the honourable man, he is the head, and the prophet that teacheth lies, he is the tail. For they that lead this people cause them to err; and they that are led of them are destroyed" (or, Hebrew, swallowed up).

Being human, all are liable to make mistakes, but how essential it is to all, especially those who take the lead, that truth should be the object of every one, not personal or party advantage, or even victory. Here again we have no faith to think that this will be general, till the Lord comes, but, individually, we can do our part.

VV. 18-21. "For wickedness burneth as the fire; it devoureth the briers and thorns: yea, it kindleth in the thickets of the forest, and they roll upward in thick clouds of smoke. Through the wrath of the Lord of hosts is the land burnt up: the people also are as the fuel of fire; no man spareth his brother. And one shall snatch on the right hand, and be hungry; and he shall eat on the left hand, and they shall not be satisfied: they shall eat every man the flesh of his own arm: Manasseh, Ephraim; and Ephraim, Manasseh: and they together shall be against Judah. For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still."

Here we have a picture of a forest, and outside it is just what is so very usual—bushes or scrub. This is burned first and extends to the thickets of the forest. We seem to think that this may mean that the wicked individuals are dealt with first, or it may mean that it starts amongst the

lower classes, as they are called, and extends to the higher.

The burning is described as a dreadful state of anarchy when all natural ties are broken down ; brother is against brother ; man is against his own kindred, and tribe against tribe. We cannot help wondering what is it all for, but we do not wonder that God is angry.

CHAPTER X.

V. I. "Woe unto them that decree unrighteous decrees, and to the writers that write perverseness : to turn aside the needy from judgment and to take away the right of the poor of my people, that widows may be their spoil, and that they make the fatherless their prey ! and **WHAT** will ye do in the day of visitation, and in the desolation which shall come from far ? to **WHOM** will ye flee for help ? and **WHERE** will ye leave your glory ?"

Alas ! it seems incredible, but it is true, the histories of all nations prove it, that unrighteous decrees are common. Whoever is the victim of them, God is angry, but when the burden falls upon those who are weak and feeble, this is abhorrent to God. Political expediency appears to be the predominant factor in modern times. God has made it clear that laws must be righteous laws. If there be any other motive, party or personal advantage, it will bring certain judgement. We may be sure that God has an interest in every nation, and judgement is so certain that three very pertinent questions are put to them, for they shall in no wise escape the anger of God.

Boys and girls, I sometimes think that simple folk (as we readily admit we are) are protected against danger that some learned people have to face; to put it briefly, just because we are what we are. If these things are wrong nationally, they must be wrong for the individual. As boys and girls we are each bound to see that all things we do must be right. Here we see that it is not only those who make the laws, but also those who uphold them, and more particularly in writing, who are held responsible. Let us all face these questions carefully, and may the Holy Ghost apply the truths where there is a need.

1st. "WHAT will ye do in the day of visitation?" Here this nation, in their day of visitation, will be deported, but all, in some shape or form, will be dealt with.

2nd. "TO WHOM will ye flee for help?" This is solemn. Think upon it. The only one who would or could help has to judge you.

3rd. "WHERE will ye leave your glory?" All the advantages that we expected or hoped to get, whether nationally or individually, are without a place to preserve them. Everything is lost.

V. 5. "Ho, Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, the staff in whose hand is mine indignation." There can be no doubt that the Assyrian here is the nation that we have been reading about, and that God does use one nation to chastise another, perhaps not so bad as themselves. But God's judgements will be directed against all, so that we have Tiglath Pileser primarily in the

Assyrian, and the profane nation is probably Babylon. Further development would surely include Sennacherib and Antiochus Epiphanes. But with verse 12 before us, though its primary meaning would probably be, "When I have done all that I intended to do" (verse 11), surely the fullest construction refers to the time of the end, when, after dealing with all the enemies, beginning with the Antichrist at Jerusalem, Christ finally deals with the King of the North, whose armies are between Jerusalem and the sea. Then I can see that the Lord will punish (or visit upon) the stout heart of the King of Assyria, when He hath performed His WHOLE work upon Mount Zion and upon Jerusalem, and that is not yet.

V. 13. As I have read the story of the time of the end, I cannot but see that the most formidable opponent the Antichrist has is the King of the North. He, like all these who have exalted themselves, has been used of God as an instrument to carry out His purposes, and he, not prudent as he thinks he is, takes the credit to himself and says "I have done it."

V. 15 clearly shows that he is but an instrument. "Shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth therewith? Shall the saw magnify itself against him that shaketh it?"

I think we can all see, can we not, the great difference between a bond-servant of the Lord and the bond-servant of Satan. The bond-servant of Christ has, for his great object, to magnify his Master, so that boasting is excluded, whereas the bond-servant of Satan seeks to

magnify himself, hence the need of boasting. Personally I think that does not really do it, though they appear to think so. After a long life I feel quite sure we read each other fairly correctly. It is ourselves that we are astray with. Hence the need so often expressed, "O to see ourselves as others see us."

VV. 16-19. "Therefore shall the Lord, the Lord of Hosts, send among his fat ones leanness and under (or instead of) his glory there shall be kindled a burning like the burning of fire." This great Assyrian power is used of God to be an instrument to chastise them. But they boasted, and this brought punishment to them. It is the direct judgement of God upon them, for it says, "The light of Israel shall be for a fire, and His Holy One for a flame, and it shall burn and devour his thorns and briers in one day." What they, in their inflated idea, thought was a forest, God views as thorns and briers and consumes them. How true this was of Sennacherib, and yet it will prove true in a fuller sense of the King of the North. God has, right throughout His Word, expressed, in a most unmistakable manner, His abhorrence of boasting and pride, and has crowned it all by coming down in the form of a man, to set us an example of lowliness, *i.e.*, humility, which has never been equalled. Praise God however that His people have in some measure reflected Him in their lives, and I am sure the Holy Ghost will do the same for us. The Apostle Paul reminded the saints by saying that whatever we have, it has been received. We would all admit this, but our

words and our manner often reveal that we do take the credit to ourselves. The Apostle James says we should say that if the Lord will, we will do this, etc.

VV. 20-23. This paragraph may take in the restoration in the time of Ezra, yet the language here is so full that it clearly looks on to the time of the end. We find this is a method God is continually using in the Scripture. He ever keeps the end in view, and it is a very important habit for us to acquire or develop. What can cheer a believer more than when he arrives at Elim, *i.e.*, a green spot in the desert, to let his mind go on to the Paradise of God, the end of his pilgrim journey? What can be more wholesome for us, when walking a path down here, let the secular purpose be what it may, than to look on to the end, and consider the end thereof.

VV. 24-27. "Therefore thus saith the Lord, the Lord of Hosts, O my people that dwellest in Zion, be not afraid of the Assyrian: though he smite thee with the rod, and lift up his staff against thee, after the manner of Egypt." I think, dear boys and girls, that this will bear much pondering over. I have no doubt this had a literal meaning at the time, a message sent to encourage those who lived or dwelt at Zion. Zion was their hope, etc.; this great trouble was in passing. For us to get our portion out of this Scripture I think we must take it spiritually. Zion was the site of the gracious presence of God, and of that sovereignty that had been declared imperishable. During the time of trouble such as this, nothing could sustain the

soul, but a deep conviction that God is King. Even so with us believers of to-day. We are certainly in a scene that is really hostile to every lover of God's Word. The more ecclesiastical a church is, the more it discourages the free reading of God's Word. The Governments of many places, such as Russia, are bent on destroying it, and perhaps the worst is that its enemies have entered our pulpits and seek to undermine it. But if we set our minds and affections on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of the majesty on high, it calms us, because we know He rules, and though He allows all these things there is a limit, and the whole world will see it. Here God gives His people the assurance that though he, *i.e.*, the Assyrian, is now smiting with his rod, "the Lord of Hosts shall stir up against him a scourge, as in the slaughter of Midian at the rock of Oreb": How true this became we shall see later on.

VV. 28-32. This is a Scripture that I cannot talk to anyone about, for I have nothing I can say. After pondering it over, and looking to the Lord, the only thing I can suggest, and it seems very likely, is that it is describing the advance of the Assyrian army. These towns would be familiar to them all, and as one after another is named, so their heart would sink as the enemy came nearer and nearer, till ultimately the enemy shakes his hand at the house (margin) of Zion, the Hill of Jerusalem. In chapter viii. 7, 8, we saw that as for Israel the river overflowed the banks, *i.e.*, carried them away; of Judah it says, they shall pass through.

and he shall reach even to the neck. How true this became! Assyria might shake its hand at Jerusalem, but it was not for them to take Jerusalem. God had this work for Babylon.

In VV. 33 and 34 God assures them that though these people may seem to be a forest to them. He speaks of them as thorns and briers. What a comfort it is to us, is it not, to know that forests, or thorns and briers, are both easily dealt with by our God? Here God, in verse 34, says He will lop off the boughs with terror. How true this became with Sennacherib! They were lopped off to such an extent that the last expression, in verse 34, "He shall fall by a mighty one," which we know to be Babylon, was made possible for Babylon because God lopped off Assyria's boughs. Blessed God and Father, amidst all the terrible things that happen on this sin-stricken earth owing to the covetousness, love of power and callousness of heart exercised by those that dwell on this earth, we, Thy children, do thank Thee, that through Thy precious Word Thou hast shown us that Thou knowest how to make all things work together for good to them that love Thee, and we quite believe there can be no real hope for this world till He comes to reign, whose right it is. But we also see that there are those in this world sincerely desirous of bringing about a better state of things, and we pray Thee, give to them the greatest measure of success that is possible in these last days. We know the worst phase cannot be till Thy people are caught up, for which we thank Thee, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

CHAPTER XI.

Here again our blessed God manifests His tenderest consideration for His distressed children. How persistent our blessed God and Father is, in bringing His ultimate purpose before the heart and mind of His distressed children. I have heard people speaking derisively of prophecy, even those that name the name of Christ. I know of nothing more practical. It is true that according to our growth our views and interpretations differ. I cannot see but that this must necessarily be so, whilst we are different in powers and capacities, but we all have the substance.

Take the case before us. Here is the most powerful country in the world. It has just carried the ten tribes away, and has captured one after another of their own towns. It is now shaking its hand at the house of Zion, just outside. I ask any of my readers what, under such dire circumstances, would be the most helpful thing to those who still had a heart for God. I say, unhesitatingly, a vision of Christ. This our God now gives to them.

We have seen how the Assyrian power was likened to a forest. Here God introduces us to a shoot out of a stump. As we have walked through the forest we have seen trees cut down, and as we have looked at one, we see just fresh

shoots springing out of the stump. It is a wonderful picture of an ancient family fallen into decay. When our Lord was born the family of David was obscure and poor, but this shoot develops into a branch and (God says) "shall bear fruit." I believe this is the promise that cheered the remnant as it does us. God has such big thoughts. We are told that as "the heavens are higher than the earth so are my thoughts higher than your thoughts." And this is so, so we, too, may allow our thoughts to take the biggest possible range as to what this word "fruit" covers here. As we read of the fruit that comes from this branch, we wonder if eternity will be long enough to disclose it.

V. 2. We see that the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, and shall manifest Himself in three pairs. (This reminds us of Titus ii. 11). The first pair is for *the intellectual life*. The Spirit of Wisdom, *i.e.*, the power to discern the nature of things through their appearance. The Spirit of Understanding, *i.e.*, the power of discerning the difference between things in their appearance. The second pair is for *the practical life*. The Spirit of Counsel, *i.e.*, The gift of forming right conclusions. The Spirit of Might, *i.e.*, The ability to carry them out.

The third pair is Godward. The Spirit of Knowledge, *i.e.*, based upon the fellowship of love. The Spirit of the fear of the Lord, *i.e.*, fear absorbed in reverence.

But note, ponder, pray. His delight was that which made God His object, and this made Him, as the margin puts it, "quick of under-

standing," the Hebrew "scent." What a wonderful thing is this, perfectly expressed in our Saviour! As we shall see. His scent was so keen that He had no need of eyes or ears. You will remember that I said note, ponder, pray, Why pray? The Saviour said, "If thine eye be single thy body shall be full of light." In other words, if He fills our vision, our scent will be also keen to the extent that He does actually fill our vision.

What a blessed day it will be for this earth when He is here! Man can but judge at present in an imperfect way. Frequently judges have been no better than the man to be judged, but this Judge is Holy. He is Wisdom. "But with righteousness shall He judge the poor and reprove with equity for the meek." Alas! How the poor are robbed. I think, as I read the papers, of the continual flow of charities spreading over centuries. There ought to be enough, and I wonder where it goes. Alas! How the meek are imposed upon! But they will not be then, and the best of it is that all this will be done in righteousness. "And He shall smite the earth with the rod of His mouth," *i.e.*, the Word of God, see Rev. xix., "and with the breath of His lips shall He slay the wicked." (The Septuagint has "ungodly one.") See II Thess. ii. 7. Here, in verses 6, 7 and 8, which we delight to read, we get a delightful picture, probably more or less figurative, of the blessed state of things that will exist when Christ reigns.

V. 9. "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of

the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." Here, boys and girls, we have come to another Elim, *i.e.*, a green spot. Did you note why they shall not hurt? The reason is because of the extent of the knowledge of the Lord. Ponder over it well. We are sure to come to the conclusion that every blessing comes to us according to the knowledge of the Lord we have. Every believer will agree what a blessed thing it is to know God, but we must follow on to know. "This is life eternal to know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent."

V. 10. "And it shall come to pass in that day, that the root of Jesse." We see that there are three things said to result from this root or branch. The first is here. The Gentiles shall be brought under His reign, and not only so, but He will be the rallying ground. "Unto Him shall the nations seek." The result will be glory.

VV. 11-16. Carefully read these verses. It would take too much space to write them down. Having read them, there are two or three things I note. "The Lord shall set His hand again the second time," so this could not be the return from Babylon, which at this time was yet future. The whole of what is said here demands a yet future date. Take two or three points. Here we see Israel and Judah one, with no jealousies to mar them. Also we note that there is the restoration of His scattered people, and, further, the destruction of the enemies of the children of God.

CHAPTER XII.

Whoever divided this book into chapters gave us here a short one of six verses. It does seem to me that they had a sound spiritual instinct, or, to put it as we have recently done, their scent was very keen, for really it is an immense chapter. Being but a boy, I can say but little of what should be said, but I am comforted by the thought that the Holy Ghost can make much out of little. Probably scores of illustrations of this could be found. Take one in the Old Testament, "The widow's cruse of oil." One from the New Testament, the "five barley loaves and two small fishes." "In that day," namely, the one we have just read about, the day of the final restoration of God's Ancient People. "Thou shalt say." This expression (used in Rev. iv. and v.) means, I think, the purport of their song. When that great, first deliverance of God's people took place at the Red Sea they sang, Miriam leading. This final deliverance of the same people I believe is in song. Also that scene in heaven, Rev. iv. and v., is in song.

"I will give thanks unto Thee, O Lord." What a grand state to be brought to! I believe all will agree with me that when we, even now, are rendering sincere, heartfelt praise, heaven is begun, down here. As I read this chapter, and

note their joy and the occasion of it, I cannot but see this, that there was no period in their history but that this joy might have been theirs. As I have said elsewhere that moral and spiritual truths must be true of every dispensation, so we can be sure that we, at the present time, ought to be full of joy, for what I have read in the Word, and the joy I have seen in God's saints under the most painful circumstances, leads me to conclude that the command to "rejoice in the Lord always, again I say rejoice" is possible in Him, and the failure to do so is due to a waning appreciation of Christ.

We note that the first thought in their song of thanksgiving was that their conduct had brought God's anger upon them. But it is now turned away, and the Lord has comforted them. We can readily enter into this joy of theirs, for we have all had, and we have all entered into, this joy, especially as we bring to mind God's plan and gift to make it possible.

"Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid; for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and song; and He is become my salvation." I have noted that wherever we are told to behold, *i.e.*, to hold with a look, the wisest thing to do is to do it, for something is coming to make it worth while. The first thing to note is "God is my salvation." Only four words, but each one worthy, in the fullest sense of the word, for our constant meditation. If we have really got this completely, we have got everything. What a dreadful state of heart we must have if we are not satisfied with the sufficiency of God, and turn to man. Those who

are, find that God is indeed our satisfying portion, and it is with great pleasure we find He "is." I like the personal touch to this. "My." As far as we are concerned this gives it its charm, and without it nothing, to me, can avail. "Salvation." What an immense field this does cover. To apprehend that we are saved, and to know what ground this covers, how safe this makes us! Then to remember we are "being saved." Think of the joyful surprises we get as circumstances develop, and also as our experience of God increases. To know that we "shall be saved." This is so immense that it includes all we have in God. Well, it is nice to know that as eternity rolls along so will this word Salvation become a bigger word to us.

V. 2. Hence, being fully assured on this great truth, we can trust. We must be very clear upon this, for it opens our eyes to the truth if we are. We may be quite sure that if fear is in our heart, we are not trusting, for the two can never dwell together. David said, "At what time I am afraid, I will trust." I am afraid it would be impossible to do it, but it certainly would be wise to attempt it. If we are really trusting, it would be impossible to be afraid, for we have entered into what is meant by "God is my salvation." "For the Lord Jehovah is my strength and song and He is become my salvation." "He is our strength." This gives us solid satisfaction, for we have long ago and constantly learned how weak and helpless we are. When we read that it was when we were helpless and without strength that Christ

died for the ungodly, it makes the heart thrill, because we have discovered that He is the source of strength. In fact, we can go further, and say, with all boldness and confidence, that He alone is the source of strength, there is none else. It naturally follows that He is our song. We cannot know God in any degree before we speedily discover that He alone is the proper object of praise, and as we get to know Him this becomes so clear to us that other songs seem very poor, flat and insipid. Further, I know not how you feel in the matter, dear reader, but though I admit there are many beautiful subjective hymns, and realise that Christ died and lives to work a subjective work in us, *i.e.*, to form Himself in us, through the Holy Ghost, yet the older I get, I find it is the objective hymns that meet the cravings of my soul best of all, for to sing about Him is indeed to make Him my song.

Then we realise that not only "God is my Salvation," hence I am secure, but that we have a larger daily experience and understand more perfectly that we are being saved. We are finding, day by day, what a Saviour we have found, hence we can and do enter heartily into verse 3, because we know, in a deeper, fuller way, that we shall be saved. "Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of Salvation." This is the natural sequence; it must naturally follow. It would be impossible, having got so far with our God, to draw the water, with moans and groans. Moans and groans are the portion of the backslider. As he is living under the sun, so of course he gets a melancholy dyspeptic view of things, and concludes that all is vanity

and vexation of spirit. What is the water that here we are said to draw? This word "water" is without question used in the Scripture figuratively for the Holy Ghost, and also for the Word of God. Here, to one boy at least, after what he has read, it seems that it is used for a deepening and enlarging knowledge of God, which, as we know, is "Eternal Life." What are the wells? Note, these are said to be wells of salvation, so that we see two things. First, it is not a well. There must be two or more. Looking at Salvation in the way we have, we can see there are many more. First, I would put the written word of God. Then, without making any distinction,—each one can do that to his own liking—there is the secret life with God. There is the worship meeting. There are the gatherings with the children of God. There are all descriptions of active service, and, not least, a heart of compassion, practically expressed for the poor, feeble and afflicted. Then, note that we are said to *draw*, not take or drink. This suggests to me that we must mean business. We must intend to have it, and take some trouble to get it. It is an evidence that we are thirsting after righteousness, and with joy we remember the promise of the Lord: "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled."

V. 4. "And in that day shall ye say, Give thanks unto the Lord, call upon (margin, proclaim) His name, declare His doings among the peoples, make mention that His name is exalted." They shall say it in that day. Alas!

they have not always done it, in their day down here. As these Scriptures are written for our learning, it will be very interesting, also profitable, to note what they are to say, so that we, in our present dispensation, may be worthy, when we get home and the Lord has accomplished His purposes concerning us. Would it not have been more to their credit, and have pleased God better, if they had done it down here? As far as we Christians are concerned, I cannot personally see how we can ever give a testimony in heaven. During the Millennium, I can see the Jews can, but for us, the present is our only time. It is true we are said to do it in Rev. xix., when we come out of heaven, but even there it is clear that we can only do it then to the extent that we do it now.

Thankfulness to the Lord is first. Unless it is seen and known how thankful we are, our messages lose their power. Then follows that we are to proclaim His name, to declare . . . and make mention. . . It is very clear that the Jews are to publish abroad during the Millennium the good news. It is equally clear in Scripture that there was no time in their history but what this was their duty and privilege. It is as clear as a sunbeam that we are to do the same now. I want it to be quite clear that I love the brethren. I am never so happy as when with them. There are those that would not care to have fellowship with me, and there are those that receive me into loving full fellowship. As far as my experience goes I know no others, among all those who name the name of Christ, who have such a love for the Lord, and who, in their daily lives, delight to

have fellowship in prayer, and conversation about the things of Christ. But there are MANY habits and customs the brethren have that I am sure interfere with, nay, even drive away, those whom God is beginning to bring away from where they are by showing them a way more in accord with His mind, as revealed in His Word. I met a man in an Assembly a few days back, whom I knew to be with those who were different in many things (not doctrine). I said, "Hullo, you here?" His reply was, "Mr. Knox, I am learning to distinguish between principle and prejudice." The first thing that I would lovingly ask you to be very careful about is that no custom you may adopt be made essential, unless it is so made in Scripture. We are not to be selfish. It is our duty and responsibility not only to proclaim the truth, but also to act that we may not drive others away. I will take one example. In London and its suburbs, it is the custom of the churches to have a service at 11 a.m. and 6.30 p.m. Does not common sense tell us that the services that are peculiar to the Assembly should be held at a time that does not interfere with our plain duty of winning others? Seeing this, we arranged our Breaking of Bread at 10 a.m. At 11 a.m. we have a service to believers, and see that a brother takes that service who not only knows the truth but is one to whom the Lord has given the gift to impart the truth. What really is happening is this. We have what are called the Nonconformist and the State Church. Something happens. That sends some adrift. In the one a new vicar is more ritualistic or worldly than they are prepared to accept. In

the other the new parson is more modern or worldly. I have known many look into the brethren meetings for the Breaking of Bread, and think they are intruding, or do not like a meeting that they are not accustomed to, and therefore do not understand, so they drift and frequently find a home in the anti-Christian bodies. We are responsible for this. At our own place we have a fellowship of from two hundred to two hundred and fifty. Whenever I have examined this question, I find that two-thirds of our members, or those in fellowship, have been caught by the 11 a.m. meeting. During twenty-four years, circumstances have compelled some to leave the neighbourhood, but most, if not all, are still with brethren in different parts of the country. Let us look at the other side. I know of no leakage amongst the brethren so great as that at the 11 o'clock worship meeting. It is with sorrow of heart that I see the young people not finding a meeting on Sunday morning they can go to, not definitely having accepted Christ as their Saviour. Even many that have, cannot enter into the meeting. They drift away, and often their parents, to keep in touch with their children, reluctantly go also. Now comes the question, Why do they do it? There is no Scripture in it. I know those who claim that night-time is the correct time. I may offend many, but faithful are the wounds of a friend. I have observed as carefully as I possibly can, and my judgement is that they do not care to alter their home arrangements. My reader may think I have got away from Isaiah xii. The value to me of Isaiah xii. on this point

of *making Him known* is that it is a present-day point of importance.

V. 5. "Sing unto the Lord : for He hath done excellent things : Let this be known to all the earth."

We can see, can we not, the reason that makes us sing, and till we do see something of the excellency of our God, I cannot see anything solid to sing about. The best incentive I know to make us keep on singing is to get in the habit of counting the excellent things that are to be found in what the Lord is doing and also in what He has done. It is very important that we get clear definite thoughts about these. "Cry aloud and shout, thou inhabitant of Zion : for great is the Holy One of Israel in the midst of thee." This undoubtedly is a picture of the Millennium, *i.e.*, Christ is at Zion. The inhabitants of Zion, realising His presence, and the greatness of the power of the Holy One of Israel, can cry aloud and shout. We undoubtedly will when we get home, but, boys and girls, if we ponder over this, and realise that we are in the body of which Christ is the Head, and that as we realise His greatness, so we too shall be inclined to cry aloud and shout now.



CHAPTER XIII.

We come to parts of the Bible that we generally leave to those whom we consider mighty in the Scripture. I know quite a number of boys and girls who will not believe that God leaves us out anywhere. We have for years met together and talked about these things. The girls listened, the boys talked. The girls, may the Lord bless them, were keen enough, and had plenty to talk about after the meetings, and when we met them. What finer sight can one see on this earth than that of boys and girls together whose theme of conversation is the Word?

“The burden of Babylon which Isaiah the son of Amos did see.” “What does burden mean?” asks one. “Oh,” said another, “a burden is something that is painful to bear.” As we had read this chapter first it could easily be seen that it certainly would carry that thought. But it suggests another, that of a ship carrying cargo, so many tons burden, *i.e.*, to trade with. We can see, with a little pondering, that our trade with God, if we may so speak, consists of our use of the trials, troubles, successes, etc., we have to bear. Another discovers that the margin says “oracle.” We have read in ancient times that when in trouble or perplexity they consulted the oracle, and waited for the judgement or verdict. One boy certainly thinks there is very

much of this in these burdens. As we ponder over these things, what a comfort it is to get another evidence, that the past, present and future are alike to our God, for this vision is seen before Babylon had come to supreme power. The Assyrian was in power. Further, here, God, even before Babylon comes to power, tells us its history right unto the end, so His people can be sustained when the troubles are on. But let us never forget that this could never have happened but for the failure of His people. It is as clear as a sunbeam to one boy, that this dreadful story of Russia could never have happened if the Church, instead of getting wonderful cathedrals, and amassing untold wealth, much of it being used for pomp, display and luxury, had fulfilled its obligations. What a difference it would make in England if the Church, each individual, had denied himself and lived for others. There can be no question that our first duty is to meet our own obligations, but it is never a duty to be selfish.

V. 2. This book is such a big one that we must be brief. "Set up an ensign." This is a call to battle. To lift up the ensign: the voice of command: the beckoning or waving of the hand. And what follows?

V. 3. "I have commanded my consecrated ones, sanctified ones" (*i.e.*, set apart for the purpose). Here it is the Medes and Persians. Not that they had God in their minds, though unconsciously they were carrying out His plans.

V. 4. The command is quickly executed,

verse 5, the great army is already coming down the mountains.

V. 6. Primarily, no doubt, it has in view the day that the Lord will inflict His vengeance. But one cannot but feel, remembering the general use of this expression, "The day of the Lord is at hand," that God, as so general with Him, is looking on to the end whilst dealing with things about to come to pass.

V. 7. As I read this verse, "Therefore shall all hands be feeble, and every heart of man shall melt," there can be no question that the night that Belshazzar was slain, though it is future here, must have been a terrible time, and that if God has not brought these about by His direct will, He has by His permissive will. Though believing the statement has its complete fulfilment at the end, yet the late war shows us that the wrath of man is a terrible thing. The one thing that impresses me about the late great war is that though I know a great many who went through it, yet none seem to care to talk about it. As one said to me, it was so dreadful that one does not care to talk about it.

V. 10. As one reads, "For the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light," etc., our minds take us on to the great day of the Lord. We know that much of the language is figurative, and is used to express all sources of light that light up the minds of a nation. They are brought down. This is very apparent when we read Revelation. The overthrow of Babylon was so great that it must have destroyed these things.

V. II. "And I will punish the world for their evil, and the wicked for iniquity: and I will cause the arrogancy of the proud to cease, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible." I do not know Hebrew, but the word "world" here shows us that God has the last day of the Lord in mind. It is true that in all overthrows this is true on the losing side. The last great war has put down many kings, etc., and has humbled the pride of many, but it does seem to me that when man carries out the plan, as the event that is being brought before us is, *i.e.*, the destruction of Babylon by the Medes, verse 17, the victors get an accession of pride, etc. But when the last day of the Lord comes, in a very true sense, as we shall see later, it is God's judgements that are on the earth, and then the inhabitants of the earth will learn righteousness. What a joy to contemplate, that there will be a time when there will be no arrogancy or haughtiness! There is a peculiarity about these things that I have noticed. I have had no personal acquaintance with what are known as the great. I have spent my life with those in lowly circumstances. When it comes to the great, my knowledge is based upon what I read or hear, and if what I hear is true, they are not, or were not, all proud, etc., and though the other class have, as far as one can see, no excuse for it, yet I have met many that are proud, and some who are even haughty. If I have understood God at all, these sins are very obnoxious to Him. He is opposed to them. The Lord, though the Creator, was the lowliest Man this world has seen or ever will see. Now, dear reader, these sins feed and flourish on so little.

Let us see, by God's grace, that our own hearts are right in this matter. It is a real delight to meet a lowly person. I know many, thank God. I think their secret is that they walk with Him.

Now we come to verse 19. "And Babylon, the glory of Kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldeans' pride, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation, neither shall the Arabian pitch his tent there," etc., etc.

Remembering that I am writing to boys and girls, they will not mind if I point out to them what all the learned, I feel sure, know, and that is that we have come to a verse that, unless we are right here, we can never hope to get a correct view of the future, which is a wonderful privilege God gives to His friends. When it comes to moral and spiritual truths, they are obvious to all. We must not hurry, but we must get clear. We read Babylon will never be inhabited. Does this mean the Babylon that was in the past, or is there a future Babylon that this expression finds its absolute fulfilment?

The history of the past Babylon has in a large measure fulfilled this description, so that one can understand those who think it will never be built again. However, think for yourself, and trust the Holy Ghost. Should I be spared to get to Rev. xviii., when writing on that book I hope to make it clear that I think here God has the end in view, and that Babylon will be rebuilt, and when destroyed will fulfil completely all it says here, of which this Babylon is such a wonderful picture.

CHAPTER XIV.

This brings out the fact that Babylon's fall is that Jacob might rise. As we read the story we would say that the victory of the Medes and Persians over Babylon brought about the wonderful story of the return of Judah to Jerusalem. Not that that is really what we have here, but the final return is here.

V. 1. "For the Lord will have compassion on Jacob, and will yet choose Israel, and set them in their own land: and the stranger shall join himself with them, and they shall cleave to the house of Jacob."

V. 2. "And the house of Israel shall possess them in the land of the Lord for servants, and for handmaids: and they shall take them captive, whose captives they were: and they shall rule over their oppressors."

We can see in these verses that God is ever mindful of His promises. God ever intended His people Israel to be Imperial. They have marred their testimony through disobedience, and failed, but God's purposes will stand. This appears to me to be quite future. Jacob appears to refer to Judah, but God has the whole house of Israel in mind, Judah taking the reigning place, because the Lord will be reigning and He

is of Judah. The stranger will be only too glad to cleave to them, and all the peoples will vie with each other to restore them and will be glad to serve them. It makes an immense difference when the peoples see that the Lord is with His people. Blessed time!

We can look at this spiritually also. The other is grand, but this, I think, is lovely. "The Lord will have compassion on Jacob," *i.e.*, the supplanter, the schemer, the natural man, because He has set His love upon him. "And He will yet choose Israel," the one who will and can wrestle with Him and prevail. One can see that it is the Israel character that makes the nations so glad to help and obey them.

What a lesson for us, in our own dispensation! It is true that we shall receive mercy and goodness from our God, but when we prevail with Him, in prayer, we shall attract the stranger to us, and command him in many senses of the word.

V. 3. We now come to a most important section, which requires one who is greatly advanced in the things of God to deal with. But God can bless, and as one tells of what he has, or thinks he has, we shall pray that God may use it.

In reading the history of Satan, in the Word, it is very clear to me that he is the greatest creature God has created. He was known as Lucifer, the Day Star and the Son of the Morning. He was perfect in wisdom and beauty. He is spoken of as the covering cherub. He was placed in Eden and was the god or ruler of this

world, etc. Since his fall, as far as I know, he is said to have entered two men: the one was Judas Iscariot, and the other, who is to be the Man of Sin, yet to be manifest. On account of this, some have thought the Man of Sin will be Judas Iscariot resurrected. I have listened to such, but I have had no evidence. As we pass along, if the Lord will, we shall come across the Man of Sin in many books.

I write thus, for, as we piece the story together, we get to see how the Lord, to whom past, present and future are alike, speaks of him in such a manner that we must learn to discriminate. Further, when speaking of the Man of Sin, we also have to judge whether it is Satan in the man, or the man himself that God is alluding to. Personally I think we must all get this for ourselves. I cannot think another's experience can help us, but if we keep cool and do not hurry, trusting the Holy Ghost, we shall all learn, I feel sure, to the extent that we walk with God.

“And it shall come to pass in the day that the Lord shall give thee rest from thy sorrow and from thy trouble, and from the hard service wherein thou wast made to serve.”

This is clearly future. When Judah returned from Babylon there was nothing like this. Ezra and Nehemiah tell us a different story. So we see here that though God is speaking of the first return His mind ever directs us on to the end.

“That thou shalt take up this parable against the King of Babylon.”

Who is this King of Babylon? It cannot be

Nebuchadnezzar : his empire had passed away on the first return. Further, I am of the opinion that Nebuchadnezzar became a converted man, and I am expecting to hear a marvellous story from him. Personally I think it is the Man of Sin, who at this time will be indwelt by Satan. In Rev. xvii. we read of a Babylon. This, I believe, is the great Harlot, a spiritual thing, but in a bad sense, what we know and speak of as Apostate Christendom. In chapter xviii. I believe it is the commercial capital of the Man of Sin, a literal city, in a word, Babylon rebuilt, and it is this referred to in chapter xiii. 19. He has many titles, as most monarchs of large empires do have. Here this brings us to Rev. xviii. and xix. From verses 4-6 one gets a description of the dreadful state of things which will be brought to an end when Christ comes.

V. 7. "The whole earth is at rest and is quiet : they break forth into singing, yea, the fir trees rejoice at Thee, and the cedars of Lebanon." What a blessed state ! What joy it will be to enter into this state of things. When He makes peace, it will be different from the Pax Augusta that Augustus, Emperor of Rome, established. This peace went through the Roman Empire. It was this Emperor who issued a decree that all the world should be taxed, and the Prince of Peace was born (see Harmsworth Encyclopædia). It is wonderful how God brings things to pass. The fir and the cedars rejoicing are figures of the better class of the people. About this casting of the Man of Sin into the lake, it is said in II Thess. ii. 8 that he is brought to nought by the

manifestation of His (Christ's) coming, but in sheol it is just the reverse. Earth is quiet. Sheol is in an uproar. We are told that sheol means the grave. So it does, frequently, but it really means in its use, the grave and all beyond it. No one can read "the grave" only, here. What a dread and yet a wonderful scene! As we read Revelation we can see better what Isaiah is referring to. There is the Beast, *i.e.*, the Antichrist, Devil-possessed, and the false prophet cast into the Lake of Fire, and Satan shut up in the pit, till after the Millennium, when he is cast into the Lake of Fire where the Beast and false prophet are. What it must mean when Satan is cast down to the Abyss, with all his boasting and power! Here is the Prophet's description of his reception. "Hell (sheol) from beneath is moved for thee, to meet thee at thy coming: it stirreth up the dead (margin, shades) for thee, even all the chief ones of the earth." Satan clearly was the head of the revolt of the wicked spirits. He has led man astray ever since. They have their eyes opened to the horror of their position, and now he finds his place with his victims, if I may so put it. And remember he is not king of hell—that is a Miltonic description, not a Scriptural one. "Art thou also become weak as we? Art thou become like unto us? Thy pomp is brought down to sheol." We are told the angels excel in strength. As far as those that are lost, that is past. "How art thou fallen from heaven, O day star, son of the morning!" With the verses that follow we can see the sin which laid Satan low. "Thou saidst in thine heart, 'I will ascend

into heaven; I will exalt my throne above the stars of God. I will ascend above the heights of the clouds: I will be like the Most High.'” With other Scriptures, I have no doubt that we see Lucifer, the bright and shining one, perfect in wisdom and beauty, sought to ascend above all, and sought at least to be like the Most High, *i.e.*, the Lord Jesus, who has ever been the One to declare the Father, and is God manifest. As I have pondered over Scriptures which appeal to me, and that speak of this world, between Genesis i. 1 and Genesis i. 2, there are hints or suggestions of a system perhaps not altogether unlike that which we are familiar with. But the following verses rather point me on to the Man of Sin that Satan indwells, and we are distinctly told about this man that he “sitteth in the temple of God, setting himself forth as God.” II Thess. ii. 4.

I have often thought that Satan, perfect in wisdom, separated from God, simply becomes subtle, and nothing seems to teach him, for he is ever seeking to become as God. This has ever been his most formidable snare to entrap men, beginning with Adam and Eve.

V. 15 may have had some reference to the great revolt in the times past, but our information is more certain of the Antichrist who is but the dupe of Satan and indwelt by him. ❖

V. 16. “They that see thee shall narrowly look upon thee, they shall consider thee, saying, Is this the man that made the earth to tremble, that did shake Kingdoms, etc.” This man who set

himself as God, and above all that is worshipped, when cast down to sheol, is discovered to be nothing formidable after all. So ordinary does he seem that the lost spirits in sheol are astonished. I have heard it said that "No man is a hero to his own valet." I think this gives the idea here. It seems sad to think that the natural man is incapable of learning the lesson that we are bond-servants. Any powers or gifts entrusted to us are not given to turn our head and make us think we are superior beings, but to enable us to live more useful lives. Even we who have been born again, if we live under the sun, get entangled in this spirit of vain-glory. Blessed God and Father, help us, who are Thine, constantly to realise the importance of the word of the Master. "Without Me ye can do nothing." What a different world this would be if every one who is really a Christian walked according to that word of the prophet Micah. "What is required of thee, O man, but to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God."

V. 19. "But thou art cast forth away from thy sepulchre like an abominable branch." As we read verses 18-24 it appears that the predominant thought is that even the pomp that is usual to kings when buried, is denied him, and there is no future for his family, which is so highly valued by kings.

We now come to verses 24-27, which is just an allusion, but it alludes in such a way that my mind goes to each expression dealing with the Assyrian. It does seem to me, that as boys and girls, we must try to get what the expression

“the North” means, for when I have listened to learned people in debate, I could see that even some of them were not agreed as to the definition of this term. Palestine, or perhaps more exactly, Judah, of which Jerusalem is the capital, is the point or spot on this earth. If we look at a map we see Babylon would be East, slightly North-East; Assyria also East, but more North-East than Babylon. But the fact is, we notice a large desert between them and Judah, so that the people of both these countries would have to travel along the Euphrates and get to Haran and enter Palestine from the North, so that when the North is mentioned, Scripture, I think, always gives a clear indication of the place it is dealing with. A word or two concerning how one boy has pieced it together may help others to see what and how I see it. Babylon, *i.e.*, Babel, was founded by NIMROD, the mighty hunter before the Lord (note, not a shepherd). One cannot fail to see that he became mighty. Then Scripture is practically silent until we come to these times of Isaiah, and we see Assyria, the most powerful nation. Babylon runs it close and soon overthrows it, and later, when the Man of Sin is dominating, known, I believe, as the King in Daniel, his most formidable foe is the King of the North, which Isaiah speaks of as the Assyrian. I have a map of the Ancient World, and I see those nations that composed Assyria have in our days migrated North and now occupy the Russias and Germany. A series of maps makes this clear, and Scripture speaks of the uttermost parts of the North. There is the King of the South, but it will not help to bring him in here. These three really are in

deadly strife for Jerusalem, when the Lord comes to Olivet. As I have said, the King (*i.e.*, the Antichrist head of the Roman Empire) holds Babylon for his commercial capital. Then later, after the Millennium, we read of Gog and Magog (Ezekiel xxxviii. and xxxix. ; Revelation xx. 8). I believe these are one event. I have listened to the various times that some have put Ezekiel xxviii. and xxix., and, as I have repeatedly said, I may (God forbid) have come to a wrong conclusion, but I still recommend every one to do his own thinking. God cannot possibly want us to be any other than honest, not seeking to prove what we want, but to see what the Word teaches. The stand I take is to trust the Holy Ghost as alone the Teacher. He may use men to help, but He is the only one we can rely on. Then there are two personal habits which I think invaluable. The ancient Greek philosophers, so I am told by the learned, used to tell their students to take their portions out of Quintillian's bottle. The bottle held a lot, but it had such a narrow neck they could only get a little at a time. Then I say let your theology (excuse the word) grow, as our friendships ought to grow. Don't rush and make a friend, let friendship grow. So with these great truths, reading the Word, meditating and conversing with the Holy Ghost will gradually form our minds, and it is surprising what He can do, even with boys and girls. Remember that I do not think anyone, whether a scientist, a business man, or anything else, can ever hope to achieve success, if he makes it a task. He must love what he is occupied with, if anything of value is to be gained. I must say there

is very little that anyone really understands, but we must love to study the works of God and especially the Word of God which is our greatest treasure.

V. 25. The only time I know of where the Assyrian, the King of the North, is broken in the land and "upon my mountains tread him under foot" etc., is in Ezekiel xxviii. and xxix. which I have said I think identical with Revelation xx. 7. Although in Revelation it shows us that Gog and Magog (The Russians are the centre) includes the four corners of the earth. However, the Lord may allow me later to talk to you about this great event.

VV. 28-32. This burden, or oracle, or as it is put in Jeremiah, "concerning."

"In the year that King Ahaz died." As we read these words we cannot but remember chapter vi. 1. "In the year that King Uzziah died." What a difference! Apart from Uzziah's sacriligious act when, as we have seen, God smote him with leprosy, Uzziah appears to have been next to David, the greatest warrior and successful in many ways. He died and left the kingdom rich and powerful. Jotham, his son, ably followed him, and not one fault is recorded of him. He, of the Kings of Judah, is alone in this. Ahaz, his son, comes to the throne, lives a life that is full of self-will and distrust of God. I cannot for the moment think of anyone that (if I may use the term) God took so much trouble with to keep him in the right path. Speaking in a human way it must have been a real pleasure to God to see the

better state of things amongst His people, to see them so much stronger. One can in some measure (to prevent the catastrophe that must inevitably come through a life like that of Ahaz) understand why God made that most astounding offer to give him a sign in the heights above or the depths beneath in order to give him trust and confidence in God. Alas, nothing can succeed with such men. Do we not see it in our own day? Even amongst the ordinary folk that we have to do with who, like Ahaz, have had every advantage in their sphere and yet live a life of self-will, when trouble comes their habits are so confirmed that none can help them, and those who, from a sense of Christian duty, attempt it, only find the money wasted and no result to cheer them for making the attempt. Frequently they simply reap a crop of slander, brought about by the one who has been helped, when he finds no more help is to come.

V. 29. Rejoice not, O Philistia, because the rod that smote thee is broken :” This refers to the Sceptre of David which had formerly kept them under, but now through the self-will of Ahaz is quite unable to do it. The Syro-Ephraim war with Ahaz had so weakened Judah that with joy the Philistines waged war and captured six cities. “For out of the Serpent’s root shall come forth a basilisk or adder.” This refers to Hezekiah, see 2 Kings xviii. 8. The Davidic kingdom of the immediate future, “And his fruit shall be a fiery flying serpent.” This appears to point figuratively to the Messianic Kingdom which is Davidic, and to peace and safety for the Davidic kingdom, but “I will kill

thy root with famine, and thy remnant shall be slain."

In V. 31. "Howl, O gate, cry, O city: thou art melted away, O Philistia, all of thee:" When the Assyrian passes through it is not only the ten tribes that are taken but it is all over with Philistia. "What then shall one answer the messengers of the nation" *i.e.*, Judah, when they see the ten tribes gone, the Philistines gone, their own land gone, and the Assyrians shaking the hand at the house of Zion? We can quite imagine the anxiety of the messengers of Judah, as they inquire as to their fate. What answer shall be given to these no doubt anxious messengers? Note "That the Lord hath founded Zion, and in her shall the afflicted of His people take refuge." Ahaz by his conduct may bring disaster, but faith can see that God's purposes will stand.

My dear boys and girls, I trust the Lord has helped us with these prophetic messages. If so, what joy is ours, for though we can see the dreadful sins of God's ancient people that brought what should and would have been an imperial people to ruin, yet we see that God's purposes shall stand. So we, in our dispensation, see the Church of Christ rent and torn asunder and see that the same sins, are more or less, to be found amongst God's people of to-day. But we remember the Apostle Peter had it revealed to him that Christ is the Son of the Living God, and it is on this rock the Church is founded so that the gates of hell shall never prevail against it.

CHAPTER XV.

The burden of Moab.

V. 1. "For in a night Ar of Moab is laid waste and brought to nought; for in a night Kir of Moab is laid waste and brought to nought."

When writing about Jeremiah we saw that he also prophesied against Moab. It would require more space than I can give to take up these prophecies in detail. We can but take a hasty glance at them. We must, however, begin at the origin of Moab, and run through its history as unfolded in the Bible. We see that Saul, the first King, punished them for their conduct to Israel. David prevailed against them. As we read their history we see that there was no friendship for Judah. As far as I can see, when Ahaz appealed to Assyria for help, Assyria not only captured Israel and Syria, but also the northern part of Moab. This forced the Moabites back to their old position on the river Arnon in Moab. I think it is held that it is at this point that Isaiah takes up his prophecy against Moab. He foretells of sudden destruction. In a night Ar of Moab, *i.e.*, the chief city of Moab, is destroyed, and not only so, but its great rock-fortress also. I have read that whenever Moab was over-run by enemies, this Kir of Moab was never conquered, as now predicted.

My impression is that this relates to a time now past. Whether it has a fuller meaning in the future I do not know. The prophet declares sudden destruction. Few things can demoralise a people more than this, hence we read

V. 2. "He is gone up to Bayith," *i.e.*, the Temple of their god Chemosh.

Jerome says an image of Chemosh was at Nebo and the foundations of the temple were discovered at Medeba. In the year 1868 a stone was found at Dibon in Moab, which was a part of a monument by the King to his god Chemoth. Two thousand seven hundred years pass away, and the stone is discovered, which is a witness to the truth of the history of the Bible.

This stone is considered invaluable, and I trust all my readers will get to know all that can be known about it.

The King Mesha has inscribed on it boastful words. God has shown that all man's boastings are vain, whereas God has protected His people to this day.

We can imagine the weeping and terror as they proceeded to the Temple of Chemosh. Verses 3 and 4 give us a picture of the terror of the mighty men, though the picture is perhaps not so strong as in Jer. xlvi. 41.

Verse 5. "My heart crieth out for Moab; her nobles flee unto Zoar," etc.

What a picture of the heart of Isaiah, even for the enemies of the Lord's people! I cannot but think that this is ever an indication as to whether we have the spirit of the Lord or not. We know

His heart was full of compassion. Isaiah here reflects Him. The little maid had compassion for Naaman.

ap. In chapter xvi. verse 1, "Send ye the lambs for the ruler of the land from Sela which is towards the wilderness, unto the mount of the daughter of Zion." It appears to be clear that the tribute imposed by King Ahab on Mesha King of Moab is quite out of the question, considering the terrible position of Samaria itself, Moab can see they will find they need the protection of Judah, so that under the protection of Judah, Moab, so to speak, will not be seen. Hence the command to send the lambs unto Mount Zion.

V. 2. "For it shall be that, as wandering birds, as a scattered nest, so shall the daughters of Moab be at the fords of Arnon."

This river ran through the centre of Moab. I am inclined to think that with the Assyrian conquering in the North, this position would give them readier access into Judah.

VV. 3-5. "Give counsel, execute judgement; make thy shadow as the night in the midst of noonday, hide the outcasts; bewray not the wanderer. Let mine outcasts dwell with thee; as for Moab, be thou a covert to him from the face of the spoiler; for the extortioner is brought to nought; spoiling ceaseth, the oppressors are consumed out of the land. And a throne shall be established in mercy, and one shall sit thereon in truth, in the tent of David; judging and seeking judgement, and swift to do righteousness."

Here is an appeal by Moab unto Judah, so that under the shadow of Judah Moab will not be seen, as we have just said. We may ask what has produced this desire by Moab. We are told that the extortioner, *i.e.*, Sennacherib, has been brought to nought, and as a consequence, Hezekiah sits firmly on the throne of David. Though in a measure verse 5 was partially fulfilled in the reign of Hezekiah, I have to admit that to get a satisfactory view of this verse, we must look forward to the time of the end.

When I do this I see the extortioner is the Man of Sin. The Messiah is come. He will sit on the throne of David, etc.

V. 6. "We have heard of the pride of Moab, that he is very proud; even of his arrogancy, and his pride, and his wrath; his boastings are nought. Therefore Moab shall howl for Moab, every one shall howl." There are those who hold that the pride of Moab would not allow her to submit herself to Judah; others state just the reverse. They say she had been proud, but that her sufferings had brought her to the condition described in verses 4 and 5. As far as I can see, both are right. Verse 5 is clearly Messianic, Moab will then be brought to seek protection under the tent of David, whereas verse 6 to the end deals with the position then, *i.e.*, at the time of Isaiah, and the following disaster is now historical. The pride of Moab is humbled, her glory is brought into contempt, and all this within three years of the date of this prophecy. See verse 14.

CHAPTER XVII.

The burden of Damascus.

We remember, in reading chapter vii. how Israel made a covenant with Syria to go up against Judah. We saw how Ahaz, to counteract it, made one with Assyria, a nation stronger than Syria and Israel combined. Now we are to see what God declares as to Damascus, the capital of Syria.

VV. 1-3. "The burden of Damascus. Behold, Damascus is taken away from being a city, and it shall be a ruinous heap. The cities of Aroer are forsaken: they shall be for flocks, which shall lie down, and none shall make them afraid. The fortress also shall cease from Ephraim, and the Kingdom from Damascus, and the remnant of Syria; they shall be as the glory of the children of Israel, saith the Lord of hosts."

Here we have a very solemn lesson as far as Israel is concerned. They became confederate with a stranger and became as a stranger. We can never break down the wall of separation and escape trouble. "Come out from among them" is indeed a wise thing to do. Israel gets involved in the trouble with her confederate.

Aroer is the land East of Jordan, and it belonged to Reuben and Gad. We are reminded in verses 4-8 that though Israel was by her folly

involved with Syria yet the Lord has made them to differ.

“And it shall come to pass in that day, that the glory of Jacob shall be made thin, and the fatness of his flesh shall wax lean.” This is indeed what Israel found to be her portion. This statement which became so true for Israel contains a general principle. It is not confined to any dispensation or to any person. What mistakes many of God’s people make by getting into all sorts of struggles that we cannot go to the Lord about. This is the reason for so many unfruitful lives.

V. 5. “And it shall be as when the harvest man gathereth the standing corn, and his arm reapeth the ears; yea it shall be as when one reapeth ears in the valley of Rephaim. YET there shall be left therein gleanings, as the shaking of an olive tree, two or three berries in the top of the uttermost bough, four or five in the outmost branches of a fruitful tree, saith the Lord God of Israel.”

In putting this verse down you will note I have put “YET” in capital letters. It is not so in the text, because, I suppose, God takes it as a matter of course that He should keep His promises, but it gave me such a thrill that I had to emphasise it. What a picture! Israel deserved the worst, and certainly they were badly punished. Yet there will be a few ears, there will be a few berries. These are ears and berries for Him. Why this graciousness on the part of God to His people? The reason is that He must. If there had not been some ears and some

berries to whom God could be gracious, how would it be possible for God to keep His promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? Is it not enough to make us shout Hallelujah at the top of our voices, that we have such a faithful God?

Notice the wonderful way God brings the blessing about. I do not see that we in the Christian or Church dispensation, have, as to our conduct, much to boast about. We see a positive side and a negative side. Take first the positive.

V. 7. "In that day shall a man look to his Maker, and his eyes shall have respect to the Holy One of Israel."

To put this briefly, we can see that our only hope is to look to our Maker. A stedfast glance at Him soon reveals to us a Redeemer. How beautifully this is developed in Rev. iv. There the scene is filled with songs to the Creator, speedily followed (in Rev. v.) to the Redeemer. When a man is occupied with man he gets entangled with man's religion, but when God becomes his portion, we get a list of the things he will not look at.

V. 8. "And he shall not look to the altars, the work of his hands, neither shall he have respect to that which his fingers have made, either the Asherim, or the sun-images."

After the positive side, one does not find any comfort at looking at the things we are told that when occupied with God, he will not look at, so we will pass on, and note as a warning what happened when he was occupied with these things.

V. 9. "In that day shall his strong cities be as the forsaken places in the wood on the mountain-top, which were forsaken from before the children of Israel: and it shall be a desolation. For thou hast forgotten the God of thy salvation, and hast not been mindful of the rock of thy strength: therefore thou plantest pleasant plants and setteth it with strange slips; in the day of thy planting thou hedgest it in, and in the morning thou makest thy seed to blossom, but the harvest fleeth away in the day of grief and desperate sorrow."

In verse 9 we are told that Israel's strong places would become as Syria's. The reason, verse 10 tells us, is that they had forgotten the God of their salvation and had become occupied with their church. How common is this in our own times! They planted pleasant plants, *i.e.*, they cultivated all sorts of sensual accompaniments to their worship, and set it with strange slips. On inquiry to-day, we find that most of the things introduced into the church have come from heathen worship. If we turn to Amos vii. 13 we read "But prophecy not again any more at Bethel, for it is the King's chapel, and it is the King's court."

None knew better than Amos the state of Israel, though he was a herdsman of Tekoa (in Judah) yet he went to minister to Israel. Here we see that Israel established a State church. The King had a very important voice in the matter, just as to-day in the Prayer-Book which they have compiled quite on their own authority, we see that the questions have to be settled by the King *via* Parliament. They could not rely

on a "Thus saith the Lord," for away would go prayer-books, etc., etc.

The solemn part to all these innovations is that they may make the seed to blossom in the morning, *i.e.*, early, but in the day of grief and desperate sorrow there is no harvest.

Blessed God and Father, may the Holy Ghost Whom Thou hast given to dwell within us, ever keep our minds stayed upon Thee and our hearts trusting in Thee, then we shall have that perfect peace that Thou hast intended us to have.

V. 12. "Ah the uproar of many peoples, which roar like the roaring of the seas; and the rushing of nations, that rush like the rushing of mighty waters! The nations shall rush, like the rushing of many waters: but He shall rebuke them, and they shall flee far off, and shall be chased as the chaff of the mountain before the wind, and like the whirling dust before the storm. At eventide behold terror: and before the morning they are not. This is the portion of them that spoil us, and the lot of them that rob us."

V. 12 gives us an impressive picture: here we get a brief description of the Assyrian overrunning the land. With but little thinking we can realise how terrible must the position of Israel have been, when overrun by the Assyrian. Truly in the time of their desperate sorrow, there was no harvest for them. What a joy to realise what a powerful God we have! He has but to speak the word of rebuke, and we see the power that to man was irresistible. They become as chaff before Him.

V. 14 tells us it is no light thing to spoil or rob God's people. The wheels of God grind slowly sometimes. The enemy are not always blown apart as chaff, but they grind surely, as history testifies. This is done down here, but there is the judgement-day also.



CHAPTER XVIII.

“Ah, the land of the rustling of wings, which is beyond the rivers of Ethiopia; that sendeth ambassadors by the sea, even in vessels of papyrus upon the waters, saying, Go, ye swift messengers, to a nation tall and smooth, to a people terrible from their beginning onward; a nation that meeteth out and treadeth down, whose land the rivers divide! All ye inhabitants of the world, and ye dwellers on the earth, when an ensign is lifted up on the mountains, see ye, and when the trumpet is blown, hear ye. For thus saith the Lord unto me, I will be still, and I will behold in my dwelling place; like clear heat in sunshine, like a cloud of dew in the heat of the harvest. For after the harvest, when the blossom is over, and the flower becometh a ripening grape, he shall cut off the sprigs with pruning-hooks, and the spreading branches shall he take away and cut down. They shall be left together unto the ravenous birds of the mountains, and to the beasts of the earth; and the ravenous birds shall summer upon them, and all the beasts of the earth shall winter upon them. In that time shall a present be brought unto the Lord of hosts of a people tall and smooth, and from a people terrible from their beginning onward; a nation that meeteth out and treadeth down, whose land the rivers divide, to the place

of the name of the Lord of hosts, the mount Zion.”

This for me is a very difficult chapter to understand, and I can only warn my readers not to accept hastily that which I say in connection with this chapter. I have read chapter xxxvii., and when I come to that I trust to be able to speak with more confidence then. Also I have read II Chron. xxxii. 23, and the best I can make of it is as follows—I shall put it briefly : I believe this land is Ethiopia which, according to encyclopædias, was a very strong and formidable power. At one time this would include Egypt and the various tribes dividing Ethiopia proper. These people were much disturbed by the progress of the Assyrians, as every mile brought them a mile nearer. When the destruction of Sennacherib’s army took place, they must have been greatly relieved, and hastened to show their joy to Hezekiah by sending a present, which alas, became a snare to Hezekiah.



CHAPTER XIX.

The burden of Egypt.

To save space I do not propose to write this chapter, as I have no confidence in any detailed exposition I have read; but I think that this is clear. We saw in chapter xvii. 12 the Assyrian power with the nations subject to it, striking terror into the heart of Judah. We have seen that Judah, not having a strong confidence in Jehovah, when opposed to Assyria and later to Babylon, turns to Egypt for help, and the reverse. Isaiah, to turn the people to stay upon God, gives this prophecy as to Egypt.

He said: "Behold the Lord rideth upon a swift cloud and cometh unto Egypt." In other words, the power you are turning to for help will speedily be subject to all sorts of troubles, the first being that the heart of Egypt will melt and their idols shall be moved. A terrible state of civil war will come about.

V. 2. "I will stir up the Egyptians against the Egyptians, and they shall fight every one against his brother, and every one against his neighbour; city against city, and kingdom against kingdom. And the spirit of Egypt will be made void in the midst of it."

We then see as a result of this confusion that they will turn to spiritism.

We can readily see that a land so weakened soon loses its position as a nation, and becomes subject to others. So we read in verse 4, "And I will give over the Egyptians into the hand of a cruel Lord and a fierce King shall reign over them." How true this became! It lasted over a considerable period, though the King was not always the same. Egypt in its turn has been ruled by the Assyrian, Persian, Greek, Roman, Turk, etc. And so we find the troubles right down to verse 15. Then we note a change in the construction of the chapter.

In verses 16, 18, 19, 23, and 24 we find the expression "In that day." Though I think that there has been a partial fulfilment of these things, "in that day" directs my thoughts to the end. To me the end of the Jewish dispensation means the last week (see Daniel ix.) *i.e.*, seven years. The Jewish nation historically (from the Word) was broken off after the 69th week, when the Messiah was cut off, *i.e.*, crucified. At Pentecost the Church, as we understand it, was formed. In I Thess. iv. we see it is caught up with the dead in Christ. This is the only way I can read this at present. So, when the Church has gone, and the Lord takes up with His ancient people, we shall see.

V. 16. "In that day shall Egypt be like unto women; and it shall tremble and fear because of the shaking of the hand of the Lord of hosts, which He shaketh over it." As we have read in other scriptures, how at this time the opposing

principal forces are the Antichrist, the King of the North (the Russians, etc.) and the King of the South (Egypt, etc.) so we get this description of Egypt. We know they all want Jerusalem, hence we read in verse 17, "And the land of Judah shall become a terror unto Egypt; everyone to whom mention is made thereof shall be afraid, because of the purpose of the Lord of hosts, which he purposeth against it."

V. 18. "In that day there shall be five cities in the land of Egypt, that speak the language of Canaan and swear to the Lord of hosts; one shall be called the city of destruction (M. the Sun). The Septuagint has, "the city of righteousness."

This is very interesting. We see that in "that day" there shall be five cities in the land of Egypt that speak the language of Canaan. This I understand to be (Zeph. iii. 9) "a pure language," *i.e.*, the sacred language used in the worship of Jehovah. This is confirmed by the fact that they "swear to the Lord of hosts." The next expression is a little puzzling, "One shall be called the city of destruction" (M. the sun).

I think if we carefully read Jeremiah xliii. and xliv. we shall get a little help. We remember that in spite of Jeremiah's entreaties the Israelites would flee into Egypt, and continued in a very strong way their idolatrous practices. We know how Nebuchadnezzar followed them, set up his throne at Tahpanhes, and as we see in chapter xliii. 13, destroyed the obelisks at Bethshemesh, *i.e.*, The house of the sun. Counting this, and four in chapter xliv. i. we see that in their rebel-

lion against God, they actually settled in five cities.

Now we see here the marvellous grace of God. Isaiah says in "that day" which I can only understand to be the last seven years or week, or, as we say, during the great tribulation, God says Judah will be in the very same part of Egypt, *i.e.*, will establish themselves in probably the same five cities or places. They will worship not idols, but the true God in an acceptable way. One of these cities is called the city of destruction. I can quite understand, in the time of Jacob's troubles, these five cities in Egypt being dwelt in by godly Jews whose worship is acceptable to God. This would call to mind the history of the rebellious ones in Jeremiah's time. They would naturally think of that which took place in the city of the sun, and find great comfort in calling it the city of destruction. What a blessed result do these in Isaiah have! We shall see this in verses 19, 20. "In that day shall there be an altar to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt; and a pillar at the border thereof to the Lord. And it shall be for a sign and for a witness unto the Lord of hosts in the land of Egypt; for they shall cry unto the Lord because of the oppressors, and He shall send them a Saviour, and a defender, and He shall deliver them."

This scripture is very interesting. We have read that there was a temple built to Jehovah, and in getting permission of the King of Egypt this verse 19 was quoted in favour of it. However true this may have been, what we are reading of is in "that day." We also know that when

Mahomet captured Egypt about A.D. 640, there were not only many Christian places, but Jewish places also.

We can see, though admitting historically, that there has been more than one partial fulfilment of this. For myself I can only see that the Lord here is directing our minds to the time of the end. The Church has gone. God is taking up with His nation again, and probably, owing to the intensity of the persecution of His people in Palestine, we find some in Egypt. Amidst all the trouble in Egypt an altar to the Lord is raised up, and a pillar erected which will be "for a sign and a witness to the Lord of hosts in the land of Egypt."

We read that they will cry unto the Lord because of the severity of the oppression. "And He shall send them a Saviour and a defender, and He shall deliver them." When the Lord comes to Olivet, it must be for them a wonderful rapture, perhaps as great as the rapture when He comes in the air for the dead in Christ and for the saints that are alive and remain.

How grand it is to note the result of their faithful testimonies. V. 21. "And the Lord shall make Himself known (M) to Egypt, and the Egyptians shall know the Lord in that day: yea, they shall worship with sacrifice and oblation, and shall vow a vow unto the Lord, and shall perform it. And the Lord shall smite Egypt, smiting and healing; and they shall return unto the Lord, and He shall be entreated of them, and shall heal them."

We here see another example of God's marvellous grace. Egypt allows these five cities to

be in her midst. The altar is erected in their midst, and the pillar is there as a witness. God in return calls out a people for His name. So God is known in Egypt, and the Egyptians shall know the Lord in that day: yea, they shall worship with sacrifice, etc. It is obvious that these, like the Jews, are brought to the Jewish position. Though God smites them, as He will ever correct, yet we read that He heals them.

V. 23. "In that day shall there be a highway out of Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian shall come into Egypt, and the Egyptians into Assyria: and the Egyptians shall worship with the Assyrians.

V. 24. "In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth: for that the Lord of hosts hath blessed them, saying, Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands and Israel mine inheritance."

How wonderful and desirable is all this! A highway is made connecting these two countries that have only known hostility to each other. In chapter xxxv. this is called the highway of holiness. These nations are now both worshippers of Jehovah, and worship together in their most holy faith.

Israel, which has hitherto been overrun by both, is now a third with these two. Egypt and Assyria take names which were once Israel's, though Israel keeps the most prominent, "Israel mine inheritance." These three, bound together in their holy faith, become "a blessing in the

midst of the earth'' and so Israel attains to the destiny originally intended for her, to be a blessing to the whole earth. God will never give up His directive will, and His heart takes the whole world in. All this comes about through God's judgements being on the earth. At present God is showing favour to the wicked, hence the world has set its face to do evil. This is very sad, for I am sure if the Gospel were really accepted all evils brought about by sin would be gone.



CHAPTER XX.

V. 1. "In the year that Tartan (Assyrian commander-in-chief) came unto Ashdod, when Sargon the king of Assyria sent him and he fought against Ashdod and took it."

I believe this to be the only place where Sargon is mentioned, but by tablets, etc. discovered, I understand that he is the father of Sennacherib. (Read II Kings xviii.) It appears that it really took some time to take Ashdod. Shalmanezar started to take Samaria, and he died in front of Samaria. Sargon got the army on his side and usurped the throne.

V. 2. "At that time the Lord spake by Isaiah the son of Amoz, saying, Go and loose the sackcloth from off thy loins, and put thy shoe from off thy foot. And he did so, walking naked and barefoot.

V. 3. "And the Lord said, Like as my servant Isaiah hath walked naked and barefoot three years for a sign and a wonder upon Egypt and Ethiopia."

What pains God took through His prophet to prevent His people turning to man in their time of trouble. Assyria is troubling them, so they turn to Egypt. God commands Isaiah to do this as a sign. It was a degradation, so I understand, for Easterns to take off their outer garment. I

remember, when in Morocco, seeing people as poor as people could be, yet noted that however dirty their garments might be they carefully covered their body.

For three years Isaiah was walking in this way, as a warning to his people.

V. 4. "So shall the King of Assyria lead away the captives of Egypt, and the exiles of Ethiopia, young and old, naked and barefoot, and with buttocks uncovered, to the shame of Egypt."

As foreshadowed by the sign of Isaiah, these people were taken away in a far worse condition than Isaiah was in. What Isaiah was directed to do, therefore, was opposed to custom, not to moral decency. They, however, had to bear the full shame. Note the effect upon Judah, who had been relying on the help of Egypt and Ethiopia.

V. 5. "And they shall be dismayed and ashamed, because of Ethiopia their expectation, and of Egypt their glory. And the inhabitant of this compound shall say in that day, Behold, such is our expectation, whither we fled for help to be delivered from the king of Assyria; and we, how shall we escape?"

This is a very solemn question. "How shall we escape?" My dear boys and girls, Jeremiah tells us, "Cursed is the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord." Ethiopia had been their expectation and Egypt their glory. When they see the sorrow and disaster, not to mention the disgrace on those on whom they rested, they can but say, "Behold, such is our expectation,

whither we be fled for help to be delivered from the king of Assyria.”

Dear reader, let us search our hearts, and ascertain what it is we are resting upon. We can see that whether nationally or individually, we are told to “be strong and trust in the Lord.”



CHAPTER XXI.

This chapter contains in verses 1-10 a prophecy which the context clearly shows to be about Babylon. Jeremiah li. should be read in connection with this. Jeremiah would have Isaiah's prophecy and would doubtless be familiar with it.

V. 1. "The burden of the wilderness of the sea."

Babylon was built on land reclaimed from the overflowing of the river Euphrates: when the tides rose, it was as though Babylon rested upon an inland sea. I have read that in Assyrian tablets Merodach-Baladan, King of Babylon, was styled the King of the sea.

"As whirlwinds in the South sweep through, it cometh from the wilderness, from a terrible land." We see by that which follows to verse 10 that we have a pictorial description of the invasion by Elamites, Persians, and the Medes. I have read that Cyrus commenced his attacks by getting to the south-east side and attacking it from there.

As we read these verses and meditate upon them, we can hardly imagine a worse state of things than a city captured in war. All history confirms this. Generally it lets loose the bad that is in man.

We are not told definitely what the "It" is that cometh from the wilderness. The terrible land appears to be Media and Persia. We must remember that Isaiah wrote these things varying from one hundred to two hundred years before they happened.

V. 2. "A grievous vision is declared unto me; the treacherous dealer dealeth treacherously, and the spoiler spoileth."

As we read this through, it appears to me to be what Isaiah saw to be characteristic of Babylon in her treatment of his people. Hence, he exhorts in the prophecy, "Go up, O Elam; besiege, O Media: all the sighing thereof have I made to cease." We have only to read Daniel, Ezekiel, etc., to see how terrible the rule of Babylon was. It was a terrible night in its history when the Medes and Persians captured it. I have heard from my school-days that Babylon was so fortified that, humanly speaking, there was no possibility of its capture. I have read that it had a store of food enough to last twenty years. So we can quite understand the behaviour of Belshazzar when, with the enemy surrounding the city, he can go in for his licentious festivities, and feel secure. As the prophet foretells the scene, he writes in

V. 3. "Therefore are my loins filled with anguish; pangs have taken hold on me, as the pangs of a woman in her travail, I am pained so that I cannot hear: I am dismayed so that I cannot see."

V. 4. "My heart panteth, horror hath affrighted me, the twilight that I desired hath been turned into trembling unto me."

Remembering that Judah is to be in Babylon, as he contemplates this, we understand how he would feel. Naturally, in times of trial, one looks to the night (here, twilight) to get rest, but the prophet sees it is at night the enemy captures the place. Here he evidently foresees Belteshazzar's feast.

V. 5. "They prepare the table, they set the watch, (or spread the carpets, *i.e.*, covers) they drink; rise up, ye princes, anoint the shield. For thus hath the Lord said unto me, Go, set a watchman: let him declare what he seeth."

How serious is this! For over a hundred years all these things were foretold by the servant of God. If they had but attended to the prophet and set the watchman and saw that he was listened to, and what he said attended to, what a different story the world's history would have been! I remember now about sixty years ago being told at school that Darius, seeing it was impossible to capture the place by assault, conceived the idea of diverting the river and so walking under the gates along the river-bed into the city. Yet here was the king of Babylon with the principal men of Judah under him, and their prophets who would have been glad to do their duty to the king, but he, like most all down the ages, regarded such things as nonsense. As far as this king was concerned, he lost his life that night.

V. 7. "And when he seeth a troop, horsemen in pairs, a troop of asses, a troop of camels, he shall hearken diligently with much heed, and he cried as a lion; O Lord, I stand continually upon the watch-tower in the day-time, and am set in my ward whole nights, and behold, here cometh a troop of men, horsemen in pairs. And he answered and said, Babylon is fallen, is fallen; and all the graven images of her gods are broken unto the ground. O thou my threshing, and the corn of my floor; that which I have heard from the Lord of hosts the God of Israel have I declared unto you."

Here the prophet is the watchman and he sees practically cavalry on the march. He does not appear to see to which army they belonged, so figuratively he gave the impatient murmur of the lion, and said, "O Lord, I stand continually on the watch-tower, etc." He gets a further vision, and the answer comes, "Babylon is fallen, is fallen." His mind turns instinctively to Israel, who alone could be considered as corn, but can give no further message beyond the statement that he had declared that which he heard from the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel. This suggests that God's purpose in allowing this is to separate the wheat from the husks, and uses Babylon as the threshing floor.

V. 11. "The burden of Dumah."

"One called unto me out of Seir, Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night? The watchman said, The morning cometh; and also the night; if ye will inquire, inquire ye; turn ye, come."

The meaning of Dumah is silence. We note it is directed against Edom. What a dreadful callous history was that of Edom, *i.e.*, Esau! To enter into this, read especially Obadiah, then Jeremiah xlix. and Malachi i. One can quite understand that at the end of the history, God says, "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." We see that whatever they may do, God has intended to bring her down to the silence of desolation. This story here clearly teaches us that God will never allow persistent unkindness to go on without dealing with it. We note how gracious God is. There was salvation for Edom, as there was for Israel. The watchman says, if you are anxious about the matter and wish to inquire, "Inquire ye." Then, if they turn, *i.e.*, repent, they are exhorted to "come." So that we see Salvation depends on Repentance, called here, "the morning." We all, Edom included, may come into the morning or else the night will overtake us.

V. 13. "The burden upon Arabia."

"In the forest in Arabia shall ye lodge, O ye travelling companies of Dedanites. Unto him that was thirsty they brought water; the inhabitants of the land of Tema did meet the fugitives with their bread. For they fled away from the swords, from the drawn sword, and from the bent bow, and from the grievousness of war. For thus hath the Lord said unto me, Within a year, according to the year of an hireling, and all the glory of Kedar shall fail: and the residue of the number of archers, the mighty men of the

children of Kedar, shall be few : for the Lord, the God of Israel, hath spoken it.”

We have here without question, the descendants of Ishmael. The Assyrian conquests are now affecting these Arabians. In the margin we see bound up with this word the thought of evening, just as we have seen with Edom. She was passing into the night of desolation. These Arabians are said to be evening. These lived in tents and wandered about trading, particularly with the Dedanites. They would trade between Arabia and Tyre, no doubt to the mutual profit of each country interested. The exhortation to them was that they were to lodge in the forest or wilderness. The roads they usually travelled by had become exceeding dangerous by reason of Assyrian soldiers who were on the look-out to destroy by the sword. The people of Tema, who probably received them with Eastern hospitality, have now to come out secretly with bread and water for their welfare. Yet the prophet tells them that within a year, according to the time that a hireling was hired for, the glory of Kedar shall fail, and the residue of their warriors would be few.



CHAPTER XXII.

V. 1. "The burden of the valley of vision."

We cannot but think that this is Jerusalem. The Psalmist has told us the mountains are round about Jerusalem. We see this is called the valley of vision. There can be nothing so valuable as vision. It was when I, by faith, saw Christ dying for me on the Cross that I obtained salvation. I realise it is only by gazing into the glass (the Word) and seeing the glory of the Lord that I am changed from glory to glory by the Lord the Spirit (II Cor. iii. 18). John tells us that when we see Him we shall be like Him (I John iii. 2).

When this was written we remember that Jerusalem and what it stands for had a wonderful experience of vision. We think of Abraham on the mount when he saw that the Lord would provide, *i.e.*, see beforehand. We think of the various prophets, kings, etc. Isaiah was indeed a man of vision, as we shall see as we proceed with his story. Even in worldly things it is the man of vision that succeeds.

"What aileth thee now, that thou art wholly gone up to the housetops? O thou that art full of shoutings, a tumultuous city, a joyous town."

We see here the evidences of a siege; we are not told which, but it would probably be the

advance of the Assyrian army. Here we see that excitement and tumultuous joy that often accompanies a proclamation of war. I remember the proclamation of the Great War. Those I saw in England were dismayed, knowing how little we were prepared for war. But I have seen pictures of Berlin, and if these were true, the people, anticipating an easy victory, were filled with joyous excitement. We can let our imagination loose and picture these people, confident in the impregnable position of Jerusalem as they thought. The question asked is, "What aileth thee?" We shall see that, though dwelling at Jerusalem, *i.e.*, in the valley of vision, this was what they "ailed." We see that place or environment has but little value; it must come from within.

"Thy slain are not slain with the sword, neither are they dead in battle."

V. 3. "All thy rulers fled away together; they were bound by the archers; all that were found of thee were bound together, they fled afar off."

It can only be a matter of conjecture why these are slain; the two probable causes are famine or pestilence, it may be both. This is indeed the other side of the question. I cannot imagine a madder business than war. It ruins both victor and vanquished. "The rulers flee away." How often has history told us that when there is no chance of success, they leave their followers to shift for themselves. However, it does sometimes happen that the leaders do get caught. They do not always make good their escape.

V. 4. "Therefore said I, Look away from me, I will weep bitterly; labour not to comfort me, for the spoiling of the daughter of my people. For it is a day of discomfiture, and of treading down, and of perplexity from the Lord, the Lord of hosts, in the valley of vision; a breaking down of the walls and a crying to the mountains."

It is no light thing to be a servant of the Lord, so Isaiah found it. John could say he knew no greater joy, than to see his children walking in the truth. Isaiah can only see his people walking in the path of disobedience, with its sure result, here, national disaster. They no doubt deserved all they got, but that is no pleasure to Isaiah. Alas! what sorrows we do bring upon those that have the rule over us! We really injure our best friends. How dreadful to see the following! "And Elam bare the quiver, with chariots of men, and Kir uncovered the shield." The greatest power on earth at this time was Assyria, and Elam and Kir speak of the whole extent of the empire, north and south. I have read that to uncover the shield means to take it out of its case, so as to be prepared for battle.

V. 7. "And it came to pass, that thy choicest valleys were full of chariots, and the horsemen set themselves in array at the gate. And he took away the covering of Judah, and thou didst look in that day to the armour in the house of the Forest. And ye saw the breaches of the city of David, that they were many: and ye gathered together the waters of the lower pool. And ye numbered the houses of Jerusalem, and ye break down the houses to fortify the wall. Ye made

also a reservoir between the two walls, for the water of the old pool ; but ye looked not unto Him that had done this, neither had ye respect unto Him that fashioned it long ago.”

Judah here now recognises the gravity of the position. There shall be no more house-top rejoicings. Judah turns to prudential measures, but had no thought of obedience to God.

What they did do was wise and proper. It is a false conception of God, to so rest upon God, that we neglect plain and obvious duties. The three wise things they did were :

1. They looked to their armoury, verse 8.
2. They looked after their water-supply, verses 9 and 11.
3. They repaired the wall with the houses, verse 10.

The one thing left undone was the all-important

4. They did not look to Him that had done this, verse 11.

What a clear definite lesson this gives us! Neglect nothing that wisdom tells us should be done, but never never leave God out of our plans. This indeed is to lack vision. David did great exploits in war, because God was his light and salvation.

In our own dispensation, in I Cor. xiv., we are distinctly taught that the Holy Ghost should guide, rule, and lead. Yet the last verse tells us to “let all things be done decently and in order,” *i.e.*, well planned and by arrangement. These moral things are always true and in every dispensation.

V. 12. "And in that day did the Lord, the Lord of hosts, call to mourning and to baldness, and to girding with sackcloth."

This must ever be so. They looked to their defence, as we see. The heathen would have done the same. But they did not look to God. Dear boys and girls, as we pass through life, how true this seems to be! Alas, too often. We must ever delight in, and wait on God. The first and paramount place must be His. Do not let religion, or the church, take His place. Should we do so, the call to us, as to these saints of God, should be one of repentance and contrition.

V. 13. We find that a callous indifference possessed them. "And behold, joy and gladness, slaying oxen and killing sheep, eating flesh and drinking wine: let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we shall die."

How constantly are we told, "Give me a short life and a merry one." To those of us who know what the joy of the Lord is, how deep and satisfying it is; the joy and gladness of revellers appears to us just like "the crackling of thorns under the pot."

V. 14. "And the Lord revealed Himself in mine ears. Surely this iniquity shall not be purged from you till ye die, saith the Lord, the Lord of hosts."

The scoffer can say and think what he pleases. It is God's will that determines all. Here we see that this iniquity can only be purged by the death of the scoffer.

V. 15. "Thus saith the Lord, the Lord of hosts, Go, get thee unto this treasurer, even unto Shebna, which is over the house, and say, What doest thou here? and whom hast thou here? that thou hast hewed thee out a sepulchre, hewing him out a sepulchre on high, gravating an habitation for himself in the rock! Behold the Lord will hurl thee away violently as a strong man; yea, He will wrap thee up closely. He will surely turn and toss thee like a ball into a large country; there shalt thou die, and there shall be the chariots of thy glory, thou shame of thy lord's house. And I will thrust thee down from thine office, and from thy station shall he pull thee down."

It will be well to look quietly for a little at this Shebna, before we pass on. He was the Treasurer. As far as I can gather, I should say that this position would mean the highest in the land next to the King. We remember that when Uzziah became a leper, Jotham, his heir, became over the King's house. Now this man, so to speak, has become someone of great importance. This turned his head, as it often does those who have pride in their heart. He is to be seen riding in chariots. He will have a sepulchre built for himself high up like the King's. He had become somebody. This sort so lack vision that they appear to view the world as a place to magnify themselves in. He intended all to see it, and it was not to be forgotten. We can easily see that in times such as we have been reading about in the earlier part of this chapter, Shebna's behaviour must have been a sore trial to Isaiah, for it must have made the people reluctant to live

the godly life that Isaiah was working for. Hence we can see how God would deal with this man. Whoever had his sepulchre it was not to be Shebna. The chariots and his very position all went. He himself dies abroad. He had been a shame to his lord's house. What a strong expression is this! He merited his punishment. Now we come to a different sort of man altogether, yet one whose life is full of solemn warning to us.

V. 20. "And it shall come to pass in that day, that I will call my servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiyah: and I will clothe him with thy robe, and strengthen him with thy girdles, and I will commit thy government into his hand: and he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to the house of Judah. And the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder; and he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut and none shall open. And I will fasten him as a nail in a sure place; and he shall be for a throne of glory to his father's house. And they shall hang upon him all the glory of his father's house, the offspring and the issue, every small vessel, from the vessel of cups even to all the vessels of flagons. In that day, saith the Lord of hosts, shall the nail that was fastened in a sure place give way; and it shall be hewn down, and fall, and the burden that was upon it shall be cut off; for the Lord hath spoken it."

Before taking up the message Eliakim has for us; I have met the statement that verse 25 refers back to Shebna. Eliakim is fastened whilst Shebna is hewn down. Though it is clear that

place, it is nowhere said of him that Shebna was "fastened as a nail in a sure place." There is no statement that his family were all hanging on him, nor any suggestion of any burden being on him. His trouble was his own ambition. This Eliakim sets out with the intention of being a blessing. I think perhaps that is why God speaks of him as "my servant Eliakim." He is given Shebna's robe. His girdle and his government were placed in his hands. He becomes a father to his people. Even boys and girls can enter into what this man became to the people. It was not a kingly sepulchre or chariots that moved him; it was a genuine regard for the real welfare of the people. Such was his care for them, that he was regarded as a father to them. This is the sort of man God likes. Hence we are not surprised to read that he was to have the key of the house of David upon his shoulder. We see how high and powerful he became in the government of the country. It rested with Eliakim's decision who was to be admitted into the King's chamber or for whom or what the treasury of the King was to be used. (We are thankful to know that Christ occupies this position now. Rev. iii. 7.) So powerful and strong did Eliakim become that he was as a nail fastened in a sure place. Nothing could, humanly speaking, be more sure. Alas, for things down here! The nail did give way, even though it was said to be in a sure place. We are not left in any doubt as to the cause of this man's trouble. The same spirit that led the man out to be a father to his people led him on to be a father to

all his family. The first would be a simple matter and quite in accordance with the king's wishes. I said it would be a simple matter because, though kind, it would be carried out in view of the merit each had. But when it came to be his relations he had to find a position for, disaster.

What a snare this becomes to many public men. So many find their relations, friends, and supporters all want to derive some benefit from their elevation. I am certain the sanctuary is the last place to be sure for such conduct. As I have read the life of Napoleon Bonaparte, I have felt that one of the causes of his downfall was that he had, so to speak, his whole family hanging on him.

Here Eliakim fell, and his whole house with him. I cannot but feel the lesson God wants us to learn from this is that in our public life we must be impartial, and in our private life, wise and prudent.



CHAPTER XXIII.

The Burden of Tyre.

I have frequently stated that history and prophecy are alike to God, and in order to understand these subjects we must as far as possible be familiar with both, for I personally see allusions in most scriptures to both.

For our present purpose I think we can be satisfied by stating that here we principally get its capture by the Assyrians. In Ezekiel we get its capture by Babylon, which was more pronounced than the Assyrian one. Then later, Alexander captured it. That was even more completely done. As far as I know at present Scripture does not more than allude to it, but Ezekiel deals with the one by Babylon and then connects it with the future. I can only read his description of the King of Tyre in connection, in the past, with Satan personally, and, in the future, with the Antichrist who is Satan possessed. However, beyond pointing this out, it is not my purpose to write on Ezekiel here.

V. 1. "Howl, ye ships of Tarshish; for it is laid waste, so that there is no house, no entering in: from the land of Kittim it is revealed to them."

Tyre was a great maritime city ; its ships were trading all over the then known world. Here these ships have been to Tarshish, the West of Spain. I think that according to what I have read, they probably came to Britain, and also down the West coast of Africa.

When these ships, on their return journey, got back to Kittim, *i.e.*, Cyprus, they heard to their consternation, that Assyria had captured Tyre, so we can quite see the force of the injunction to "Howl," for they would be at a loss as to what they should do.

V. 2. "Be still, ye inhabitants of the isle ; thou whom the merchants of Zidon, that pass over the sea, have replenished. And on great waters the seed of Shihor, the harvest of the Nile, was her revenue, and she was the mart of nations."

Here the prophet counsels Tyre, by saying, "Be still." We can stop here so as to get a little food for thought. We may constantly meditate upon it. Even though we know but little, we have read of many disasters that have overtaken countries, towns, communities, private persons, etc. And it becomes obvious that the panic that so frequently follows is worse than the trouble. Here is the remedy. "Be still!" This, I think, can be done if we are assured that the Lord is God. I am fully persuaded that this assurance can only be given by the Holy Ghost, and this to the man who walks with the Lord in the light of His word. The prophet reminds them of past blessings. The merchants of Zidon

that do a sea-carrying trade have done much profitable business with Tyre. Zidon, so I have read, was the mother-city of Tyre. This advice is profitable to persons as well as to cities, but can only be acted upon by one that is still. If fear or panic possesses us, it is impossible. So, however great our troubles, we are on the high road to recovery if we quietly count our past blessings and trust in God. This Shihor is Hebrew for the Nile. I see it means the "dark water." Egypt was a mighty power, and its business must have contributed largely to the welfare of Tyre.

V. 4. "Be thou ashamed, O Zidon; for the sea hath spoken, the stronghold of the sea, saying, I have not travailed, nor brought forth, neither have I nourished young men nor brought up virgins. When the report cometh to Egypt, they shall be sorely pained at the report of Tyre."

Zidon here, because it is the mother-city, is told to be ashamed. The stronghold or rock fortress is now viewed as a widow bereaved of her children without power to renew them. When Egypt hears the report, she will be "sorely pained." We can quite understand a great nation would be disturbed at hearing of the destruction of one of her best customers. But "sorely pained" is an expression too strong for that. We can only think that this great and powerful nation has overcome a buffer state and come to the sea, and so becomes a menace to Egypt. I remember, during the Great War, how fearful we were lest Germany should get to the coast.

V. 6. "Pass ye over to Tarshish; howl, ye inhabitants of the isle. Is this your joyous city, whose antiquity is of ancient days, whose feet carried her afar off to sojourn?"

Here they are told, (perhaps derisively) to flee to Tarshish, to the furthest extent of the Mediterranean. We saw at the first that they were told to "be still." By now, they have no intention of doing so, so there is nothing else for them to do but to "howl." This must, in varying measure, ever follow panic. Note the question, "Is this your joyous city?" This maritime city with its rock isle, was no doubt suitable for the purpose of pleasure. Most countries spend fabulous amounts on pleasure resorts to attract the pleasure-seeker. Alas! much of the pleasure shuts God out; hence we understand the result, as we see by what follows. The writer has increasingly been convinced, as he has passed through life, how true is a picture he once saw in a picture-gallery. It was called "The pursuit of pleasure." All sections in it were bent on self-indulgence.

V. 8. "Who hath purposed this against Tyre, the crowning city, whose merchants are princes, whose traffickers are the honourable of the earth?"

How up-to-date is this! Even we boys and girls, who have no means of knowing what is going on behind the scenes, as they say, do know that much ink has flowed in seeking to fix upon some one person or nation, the responsibility for the late war. Here comes the answer.

V. 9. "The Lord of hosts hath purposed it, to stain the pride of all glory, to bring into contempt all the honourable of the earth."

What a joy it is to believers in the Lord to know that the last word always rests with God. He over-rules. God has sent His prophets early and late. He has sent His Son and left with us His written word, in order that we may know the path wherein we should walk. How important it is that we should learn this lesson well! At the time of the Reformation England became a land wherein the Bible was honoured more perhaps than in any other. What a great nation we became! Alas! We have begun to turn from it. And here we are hopelessly in debt, and with all sorts of troubles looming in the future.

V. 10. "Pass through thy land as the Nile, O daughter of Tarshish; there is no girdle about thee any more. He hath stretched out His hand over the sea, He hath shaken the kingdoms: the Lord hath given commandment concerning Canaan (M. The merchant people) to destroy the strongholds thereof. And He said, Thou shalt no more rejoice, O thou oppressed virgin of Sidon: arise, pass over to Kittim; even there shalt thou have no rest."

Here the message goes to Tarshish. Their girdle is gone. This mighty Tyre had, like most other powers, sought to bind those with whom they traded, and just as in the flood season of the Nile, so were they, now that restraint is removed, going to take advantage of their liberty.

Now the prophet turns to the oppressed virgin of Zidon, *i.e.*, Tyre, and tells them to "Arise, pass over to Kittim (Cyprus); even there thou shalt have no rest."

We must ponder over this a little, because it contains very much more than we think, or more than I thought. Here is disaster come upon Tyre, a virgin-fortress, never before captured. This was essentially a maritime place. She is told to go to her nearest neighbour which, being an island, would be compelled to direct her attention seaward. We can easily see how mutual the advantages would be, and what friendship there would be. Yet, though out of sympathy they would receive them, they would tire of them, and Tyre can find no rest there. We think of nations and individuals, and have to admit that it is rare for unfortunates to have a sustained kindness. There is this to be said in extenuation; sometimes those who help cannot afford to keep it up.

V. 13. "Behold the land of the Chaldeans; this people is no more; (M. was not) the Assyrian hath appointed it for the beasts of the wilderness: they overthrow the palaces thereof: he made it a ruin."

Here the word to Tyre is "Behold the land of the Chaldeans." We cannot help wondering why they should do this. The only way I can look at this at present is that Tyre is practically destroyed by the Egyptian. As far as I can ascertain by reading, so was Chaldea. (This is before Babylon arose to its height.) The prophet is going to make, I think, some reference about Babylon.

V. 14. I can at present only read this verse, not in connection with the day then present. The capture of Tyre by the Assyrian is not this day, but "that" day.

"Howl, ye ships of Tarshish : for your stronghold is laid waste."

V. 15. "And it shall come to pass in that day, that Tyre shall be forgotten seventy years : according to the days of one King : and after seventy years it shall be unto Tyre as in the song of the harlot."

We behold Babylon. We find it subject to Assyria. In the days of Nebuchadnezzar it establishes itself. Nebuchadnezzar makes it a mighty empire, to be lost in the days of his grandson Belteshazzar.

Nebuchadnezzar captured Tyre more completely than the Assyrian did. He built a causeway connecting the isle with the mainland. I have read that it is still there. The seventy years of the captivity of God's people is the only seventy years I know of.

Here we see how sensitive God is as to the treatment meted out to His people. See Ezek. xxvi. 2. Tyre is delighted at the destruction of Jerusalem, because they think they will capture much of the trade of Jerusalem. God brings Babylon against them, and in this 26th chapter, note verses 4 and 5. This, as travellers have said, has fully happened. Our query is, When?

Certainly not here, for at the end of seventy years, it is said, Tyre shall sing as a harlot that plays and sings in order to attract men. This is the figure. The fact, I have no doubt, is that

she seeks to rebuild on very attractive lines. History tells us of a terrible destruction by Alexander about 250 years later, and yet it is certain this did not bring to pass Ezek. xxvi. 5.

V. 16. "Take a harp, go about the city, thou harlot that has been forgotten; make sweet melody, sing many songs, that thou mayest be remembered. And it shall come to pass after the end of seventy years, that the Lord will visit Tyre and she shall return to her hire, and shall play the harlot with all the kingdoms of the world upon the face of the earth. And her merchandise and her hire shall be holiness to the Lord: it shall not be treasured nor laid up; for her merchandise shall be for them that dwell before the Lord, to eat sufficiently, and for durable clothing."

We see then, after the Babylonian capture, that Tyre is again re-built.

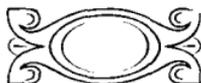
Yet there comes the great conquest by Alexander about 250 years later. We find that it arose again, for Acts xxi. shows that Paul landed there, and ships used to unload there.

I, however, think that the trading mentioned in verse 17 goes to show that her trading is simply for earthly advantage, disregarding the limits set by God. Yet such is the graciousness of God that verse 18 tells us her merchandise and her hire shall be holiness to the Lord. They were to have sufficient to eat and to be comfortably dressed. Personally, I think this is a Millennial promise, and during that blessed time Tyre will be blessed.

Eusebius, about three hundred years after Christ, claimed that this was fulfilled. I have read he wrote as follows :

“This prophecy is fulfilled in our times. For now that the Church of God is established at Tyre, as in other nations, a large portion of her merchandise is consecrated to the Lord and to His church, etc.” This is certainly a partial fulfilment, but I can only see that the Millennium covers the statement.

To cover Ezekiel’s statement—this destruction, so great that the fishermen would lay their nets on the rocks, etc., is true to-day, and must have been after the things we have been considering had happened.



CHAPTER XXIV.

V. 1. "Behold the Lord maketh the earth empty, and maketh it waste, and turneth it upside down, and scattereth abroad the inhabitants thereof. And it shall be, as with the people, so with the priest; as with the servant, so with his master; as with the maid, so with her mistress; as with the buyer, so with the seller; as with the lender, so with the borrower; as with the taker of usury, so with the giver of usury to him, the earth mourneth and fadeth away, the world languisheth and fadeth away, the lofty people of the earth do languish. The earth also is polluted under the inhabitants thereof; because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant."

Space forbids me to take up the question of the everlasting covenant. It, however, is important for every boy and girl that would know their Bible to get as clear a notion as possible. Read Genesis viii. 21 and Genesis ix. 17. This is very solemn. Note the figure God uses as a sign, i.e., the rainbow. Nothing seems more bound up with Nature than the refraction of light. Every dewdrop and every raindrop confirms it. We get the penalty threatened in Lev. xxvi. and Deut. xxviii.

The word "earth" here can be translated "land." I personally think in these verses "land" would be more correct. I can only read

this in reference to the various deportations by Nebuchadnezzar into Babylon, followed by the flight of them that were left into Egypt.

I quite see as we proceed that we shall have to take a larger view and use the word "earth" in its fullest sense. As we read history, how it confirms what is stated here! The members of society are bound together in a way but few realise. The only policy that has any sense in it, is the one that promotes good-will amongst men, for we can be sure in national calamity that all classes are involved in it. Their root-trouble is, as we see, lawlessness.

V. 6. "Therefore hath the curse devoured the earth, and they that dwell therein are found guilty; therefore the inhabitants of the earth are burned, and few men left. The new wine mourneth, the vine languisheth, all the merry-hearted do sigh. The mirth of the tabrets ceaseth, the noise of them that rejoice endeth, the joy of the harp ceaseth. They shall not drink wine with a song: strong drink shall be bitter to them that drink it. The city of confusion is broken down; every house is shut up, that no man may come in. There is a crying in the streets because of the wine: all joy is darkened, the mirth of the land is gone. In the city is left desolation, and the gate is smitten with destruction."

I think every boy and girl will admit that this is indeed a sad picture. We have not time to deal with these in detail, but we cannot see anything left to rejoice in, that is, speaking after the manner of a natural man. We must remember

that this is the land of promise, but those who believe God can see much to encourage and to cheer, even in such a scene as described. Those who love and delight in God's word have a source of joy that the other sort know nothing of.

Because they remember the book of Deuteronomy wherein the promised land is described, they remember that all these things were predicted in that same book.

These are enabled to see God in all these things, and speaking from the little experience we have, it does cheer and strengthen us, to see all things working out according to plan. Hence, though we can understand the attitude of just the few, as we read the following, yet we must not forget that these are involved in the trouble with the others.

V. 13. "For thus it shall be in the midst of the earth (land) among the peoples, as the shaking of an olive tree, as the grape gleanings when the vintage is done. These shall lift up their voice, they shall shout; for the majesty of the Lord they cry aloud from the sea. Wherefore glorify ye the Lord in the east, even the name of the Lord, the God of Israel, in the isles of the sea."

Blessed God and Father, we do indeed thank Thee for the cheer this portion of Thy word gives us, and we pray Thee that however dark the path we may be called to tread, our eyes may ever be open to see Thy faithfulness, and whatever Thy purpose may be.

V. 16. "From the uttermost part of the earth have we heard songs, glory to the righteous.

But I said, I pine away, I pine away, woe is me ! the treacherous dealers have dealt treacherously ; yea, the treacherous dealers have dealt very treacherously. Fear, and the pit, and the snare, are upon thee, O inhabitant of the earth. And it shall come to pass, that he who fleeth from the noise of the fear shall fall into the pit ; and he that cometh up out of the midst of the pit shall be taken in the snare ; for the windows on high are opened, and the foundations of the earth do shake. The earth is utterly broken, the earth is clean dissolved, the earth is moved exceedingly. The earth shall stagger like a drunken man, and shall be moved to and fro like a hut ; and the transgression thereof shall be heavy upon it, and it shall fall and not rise again.”

Here we get the terrible picture of the inhabitants portrayed. We first have the figure of the huntsman. We have brought before us the fear, the pit and the snare. A hunter is just the reverse of a shepherd. I cannot imagine a worse fear than that of being hunted. I have read about the hunted slaves and how their terrors are increased when dogs are used. I remember a one-time-slave whose father, he said, was an African chief. The slave raiders destroyed their village, and those that were useless for their purpose. He himself was hunted and caught, but General Gordon bought him and freed him and sent him to England. It has always been a mystery to me, how men and women considered in good society can find pleasure in hunting a fox or deer to death, especially when one is told how these deer and foxes are procured. In trying to preserve a

measure of respect for them, I have to remember "Evil is wrought by want of thought, as well as want of heart."

It does seem to me, that this must have been the condition of many of the people of the land, after the murder of Gedaliah. I have said, I think, that up to verse 21 of this chapter Isaiah is principally prophesying of this time.

Here the hunter means to catch, for he not only hunts, but digs pitfalls and sets snares, the knowledge of which would increase the terror of the hunted.

In VV. 19 and 20 he introduces the earthquake. We remember Isaiah's experience of the earthquake in the time of Uzziah and what, I believe, are allusions to it, in other scriptures. A very terrible one it must have been. If Isaiah meant this as a figure of the upheaval of the State it follows on in a wonderful way with the picture of the hunter. But if we take it as a literal statement, then the earth being clean dissolved can only apply to that time when it is said, "The heavens and earth shall pass away, etc."

V. 21. "And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall punish the host of the high ones on high, and the kings of the earth upon the earth. And they shall be gathered together, as prisoners are gathered in the pit, (Margin, dungeon—and shall be shut up in the prison, and after many days shall they be visited (M. punished). Then the moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed : for the Lord of hosts shall reign in mount Zion, and in Jerusalem, and before His ancients (M. elders) gloriously."

This clearly brings us on to the last time. We have ever been given to understand that we wrestle against the influences of the world, in its hostility (Russia) or in its friendships and pleasures, and worse still, against the flesh, *i.e.*, self. I expect in an increasing measure we realise what a persistent and insidious foe this self is. Then, in a way, the Devil, who would like us to believe he is dead, and many of his dupes like to think so. He does seem to be the worst of all, because though the world does not profess to believe in these things, yet they are but his tools to work his purpose, and though I think he would like his own to lead decent lives, he is ever seeking through his enticements to lead God's people astray, and especially men who have an influence over others.

Here we are reminded of Eph. vi. 12. "For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places." Hence the exhortation to put on the whole armour of God. We cannot spare a single piece if we want to be safe. We see by our chapter that Satan and his host have been the world rulers from Cain downward, but, thank God, His people have known these things, and Isaiah is reminding us of the time when God deals with these, see Rev. xii. 7. What a grand day that will be! When the whole force of these evil beings is directed earthward, their time is short.

I have lately been much impressed with the thought how careless Christians are as to where they send their children to school. They think

it is to get a good education : I think the best education is to be taught how to live a godly life. The children certainly will not lack the various subjects that are taught, but the habits of thrift, industry, self-denial, etc., will place them a long way in front of those who put sport, etc. first. I quite understand the advantages sport is supposed to give. I am not alluding to the games that used to be taught, but sport as we get it in our newspapers.

However, we can rejoice in the fact that when man has learnt the great lesson that man is not capable of ruling, and that it is God alone who can do this—Satan, and here it gives us clearly to understand, his host also, will be shut up in the prison (Rev. says “the abyss”) and that for a thousand years. We are told how the kings of the earth are to be dealt with, when the Lord comes with all His saints, and of the measures to be taken to keep them in subjection. His government will be strong and just.

Then V. 23 gives us a picture of the Millennial reign. How glorious this reign will be! Personally I have to take the sun and moon as figurative. Neither are moral agents and have done nothing to be ashamed of, but when He reigns the greater and lesser lights or rulers, compared with him, will not make much impression. All minds will be directed to the majesty of His Most Exalted Highness, the Lord Jesus Christ, as He makes good His promises and reigns gloriously before His elders (M.).

CHAPTER XXV.

V. 1. "O Lord, Thou art my God ; I will exalt Thee, I will praise Thy name : for Thou hast done wonderful things, even counsels of old, in faithfulness and truth. For Thou hast made of a city an heap ; of a defenced city a ruin ; a palace of strangers to be no city ; it shall never be built. Therefore shall the strong people glorify Thee ; the city of the terrible nations shall fear Thee."

How similar are these words of Isaiah to those of the apostle Paul. We really must ponder over this, because the reason for their outburst of praise is the same. Both knew the counsels of God, and though surrounded by the declension of God's people and the triumph of His enemies, they, knowing the mind of God and fully assured that God can and will make good His promises, find that their hearts are not only comforted, but filled with praise also. This is an immense benefit, and its source is a real love to know God's mind and His purposes. It will well repay any reader, whether familiar with Romans xi. or not, to read it again. There you will note he is, like Isaiah, thinking of God's dealings with His people and, especially in verses 33 to the end. He begins in verse 33 with "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God, etc."

For old Christians, it is good to look at and keep in mind the way God has led us through this pilgrimage in joy and in sorrow, and to remember that His purpose is to conform us to the image of His Son.

As I read this chapter, I place it alongside Rev. xviii., as it is the last times that are clearly brought before us.

V. 2. "For thou hast made of a city an heap; of a defenced city a ruin; a palace of strangers to be no city; it shall never be built."

V. 3. "Therefore shall the strong people glorify Thee, the city of the terrible nations shall fear Thee."

V. 4. "For Thou hast been a stronghold to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall. As the heat in a dry place shalt Thou bring down the noise of strangers; as the heat by the shadow of a cloud, the song of the terrible ones shall be brought low. And in this mountain shall the Lord of hosts make unto all peoples a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees well refined."

V. 7. "And He will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering that is cast over all peoples, and the veil that is spread over all nations. He hath swallowed up death for ever: and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces: and the reproach of His people shall He take away from off all the earth: for the Lord hath spoken it."

In Rev. xv. 3 we read, "And they sing the

song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are Thy works, O Lord God, the Almighty; righteous and true are Thy ways, Thou King of the ages." Why this? It is because the judgments of God are manifest against the wicked. In Rev. we see how from the beginning to the end, it was the holiness of God that was the predominant impression on their hearts and minds, which produced the wondrous songs. This is what we get here in verse 3.

In verse 4 we see that the prophet realised amid all the sorrows and persecutions that the real people of God had to pass through them. What a God he and God's people had! When one thinks of the dreadful state that the people of God are brought to in Russia at the present time, and of the indifference to their sorrow the various governments appear to have, these scriptures comfort us. When the whole story is told of what God has been to them, I have no doubt there will be a mighty anthem.

In verse 6 we have a grand prospect for this sin-laden earth. The prophet, amid the then fast-approaching disaster and ruin of Judah, sees that in "this mountain," *i.e.*, mount Zion, the very centre of God's purposes on earth, is rebellion against Him. He sees how in the most wonderful way all God's purposes shall stand, and in mount Zion will God make a feast of fat things, etc. I have no doubt of the material prosperity, but it is the spiritual feast that we get here, for the one feeds the body, but it is the soul and spirit that are to be filled here, as we shall conclusively see presently.

It is well for us to note who is to participate in this feast.

V. 6. "Unto all peoples a feast of fat things," etc. God's great purpose was that Israel should be a blessing to all peoples. They have missed it, as the Christian Church has, in proportion to God's intentions, but we bless God and exalt His name, that when we learn our incapacity and turn to God He will bring it to pass.

V. 7. We see the covering and the veil that is over all peoples and nations is brought before us. We carefully look at the verse, and we say, "A covering is a veil." "Why put it in two ways?" I think the reason is that there are two distinct thoughts in connection with this, and we are to keep them both in our minds. The rest of the verse will confirm this. A covering was put over the face when mourning for the dead. We see this in II Sam. xix. 4. "And the King covered his face, and the King cried with a loud voice, O my son Absalom, O Absalom, my son, my son." We are told in verse 8, "He hath swallowed up death for ever." Rev. xx. 14 tells us that "Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire." Poets tell us that death is God's reaper, gathering flowers for the Master. Scripture says in I Cor. xv. 26, "The last enemy that shall be abolished is death." xv. 56 shows us why death cannot be abolished till the end. "The sting of death is sin."

The other thought is that a veil over the face obscures the vision. II Cor. iii. tells us in verse 13 that Moses put a veil on his face; the same

chapter says in verse 18, "But we all with unveiled face, reflecting as a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as from the Lord the Spirit." Hence Isaiah speaks just before of a spiritual feast, and follows on in the same strain in verse 9. So, though the feast is not the marriage-supper of the Lamb (see Rev. xix.) but on earth, it is earth transformed, we might say, into heaven.

V. 9. "And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God : we have waited for Him, and He will save us : this is the Lord ; we have waited for Him, we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation. For in this mountain shall the hand of the Lord rest."

This, I have no doubt, has for its first meaning a reference to the citizens of Judah when redeemed, and when the Lord is near. We, however, remember the prophet has seen right on unto the end. We also remember that those who are faithful can by faith enter into these things, but the principle is the same, we must, to realise the joy, "rejoice in His salvation." The joy of the Lord is ever our strength.

This rest, in its fullest sense, could be ours now if we but follow wholly the Saviour's invitation, "Come unto me . . . and I will give you rest."

V. 10. "And Moab shall be trodden down in his place, even as straw is trodden down in the water of the dunghill."

As we have frequently seen in Scripture, Moab was one of the foes of Israel, and its god Chemosh was placed in opposition to Jehovah. There can be no question that this will be literally true of all that oppose God. This, however, would give no meaning to us, *i.e.*, the Church of Christ, which is not a separate nation, but is or should be found in all nations. For this purpose we must remember what Moab stands for. We have made mention elsewhere of their boasting on the Moabite stone, hence we read of the pride of Moab. We have also seen that she stands for love of ease, *i.e.*, self-indulgence, which we are glad to think will become among the things that are past.

V. 11. "And he shall spread forth his hands in the midst of them, as he that swimmeth spreadeth forth *his hands* to swim : and he shall lay low his pride for all the craft of his hands. (M.) And the fortress of the high fort of thy walls hath He brought down, laid low, and brought to the ground, even to the dust."

Here we have the figure used of the swimmer seeking to swim out of the waters. Moab may make every possible attempt to do the same, but but it will be unavailing. Her pride will be laid low, in spite of her skill, and her strong fortress, *i.e.*, Kir of Moab!



CHAPTER XXVI.

We have seen the fate of Moab, the enemy of God's people, but we can praise God that the prophet can look beyond the severe trials of God's people, for they have a future, and he looks forward to "that day," *i.e.*, the Millennium. The church of to-day, through its folly and rebellion, has also been reduced to trials and sorrows, and though we do not pass through Jacob's trouble, yet when we think of the heathen persecutions, followed by the terrible persecutions of the ecclesiastical churches, the Mohammedan persecutions, and at the present time the Russian persecutions, we see that they can be very terrible. This last feature, to the extent we see it, is a new phase, though I know the Scripture foretells it. I always thought the atheist, as long as he had his liberty, did not interfere. I think the probable reason is that it is a revulsion against the pomp, wealth, and arrogance of the ecclesiastical churches, and their jealousy of the superior comfort and well-being of the Christians owing to their self-denial and thrift. However, proceeding with the prophet's future outlook, I know of nothing that has a greater present value, to calm our fears, and to strengthen our joy, so much as a bright future.

V. 1. "In that day shall this song be sung in the land of Judah : We have a strong city : salva-

tion will He appoint for walls and bulwarks. Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation which keepeth truth may enter in. Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee : because he trusteth in Thee. Trust ye in the Lord for ever, for in the Lord Jehovah is an everlasting rock."

In the previous verses we have seen Moab brought to ruin. Here we have the definite statement that in that day, *i.e.*, the Millennium, they shall sing. Singing is generally a sign of a happy heart. Only a few days ago a friend said to me, commenting on his sister's altered circumstances, "I heard her singing; it's a long time since I heard her sing." We do hear the ungodly sing. Compare the quality of the songs of the world and the songs of Zion. What is that I can fancy I hear some one say? There is no comparison. I quite agree. Apart from the question of the quality of their songs, Moab does not sing. This question of singing is very solemn. For the ungodly, their singing has no future: with the believer, there is such an immense one that I have heard people, deriding heaven, say, "I do not want to have a harp in my hand and spend all my time in singing." We can afford to smile at their crude notions.

We have often turned our thoughts to the book of Revelation with a view to entering into the spirit now of the songs we shall sing then. How it stirs all within our hearts! They transcend all songs, but the Millennial song we have here is well worth our attention. "We have a strong city." This assures them of stability. Even the world recognises the value of strength or

force, and none more so than God. Never let us lull ourselves into a false security. A love of ease is generally the reason for this, though we may not suspect it. We are delivered by the power of God, whatever sort of foe we have to deal with. Power is a grand thing to possess if things are to be done, hence we read, "Salvation will He appoint for walls and bulwarks." Nothing can be done till we are saved, and the assurance of salvation gives us steadfastness.

Who is to open the gates? I can only think of the spiritual host the Lord commands. The thought of the fall of Jericho confirms me in this. Note those who alone can enter in. We have been taught that it is righteousness alone that exalts a nation, hence the care for the right sort of inhabitants. It is the moral law of the nation that is the most important factor.

What a lovely verse number 3 is! The charm about this is that we can prove it by experiment. Many things we believe on the ground that the Word teaches it, but this can be proved. I think it is a good thing for boys and girls to learn to note the scriptures that we have to accept by faith, and those that we can prove by experiment, for these help us to accept all the scripture in a very decided way. It says that God will keep us in perfect peace—the Margin says "Peace, peace"; a learned Jew told me that this is a Jewish idiom for "perfect peace." "Joy joy" would mean perfect joy. It is obvious that if God promises to give, it is meant to be possessed. It cannot depend upon a man's outward possessions, for everything changes. It cannot depend upon a sinless heart, for none but Christ ever had that.

It must be possible because God says so : what then can it be? One very old boy thinks it must mean that there is no war or disagreement between the soul and God. Ask for it and thank Him for it. The reason is that this stedfast mind is so because it trusts God. We are often tried sorely, but to get the prize we must, as I have said before somewhere in writing, trust God even against our senses.

Hence we are exhorted to "Trust ye in the Lord for ever," *i.e.*, constantly, on every occasion. The reason given is that the Lord Jehovah is an everlasting rock. It may seem that to trust God even against our senses is an absurd thing to do, but it is not. It is the most solid ground we can stand on, because He is the Lord Jehovah. This could never be His name, unless He were absolutely reliable.

V. 5. "For He hath brought down them that dwell on high, the lofty city; He layeth it low, He layeth it low even to the ground: He bringeth it even to the dust. The foot shall tread it down; even the feet of the poor, and the steps of the needy."

We see sometimes in the pages of history samples of this, but the full expression is surely that when the Lord reigns, He certainly will allow nothing lofty or proud.

V. 7. "The way of the just is uprightness: Thou that art upright dost direct the path of the just." The Revised margin is equally beautiful. These are wonderful words, and we do well to ponder over them, for they are full of practical suggestion.

This world is full of specious arguments, as to the advantages certain courses will pursue. I have from experience learned to see that there is only one course which is the honest way. This is indeed a cube, for it is always the right way up. At the present moment we English are told that it is splendid to be off the gold standard. The value of the pound is not true as published, for what I used to pay £52 for, *i.e.*, 250 dollars, I have now to pay £77 14s. 6d. The upright path is twenty shillings, and it ought to be twenty shillings. In many newspapers we get sweepstakes published. I was, however, surprised that Socialists should get them up, for I have always understood that they stood for all sharing alike. If that were practical there would be nothing to object to. Believe me, boys and girls, the quickest way of becoming a prey to the various kinds of agitators is to get out of the honest path. This is just as true in our own private life. I have known men quietly turn away from that which is considered a great advantage, because it did not agree with their notions of honesty. I do not remember any having regretted their action.

We shall find that if with unswerving loyalty to Christ we take this path, He will assuredly guide us aright.

V. 8. "Yea, in the way of Thy judgements, O Lord, have we waited for Thee: to Thy name and to Thy memorial is the desire of our soul. With my soul have I desired Thee in the night: yea, with my spirit within me will I seek Thee diligently (M.): for when Thy judge-

ments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the earth learn righteousness. Let favour be shewed to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness; in the land of uprightness will he deal wrongfully, and will not behold the majesty of the Lord.”

What a wonderful man Isaiah was! How profound and deep must his insight have been! As I ponder over his words, I seem to get some sort of glimmering of his spirit. We see a man who trusts God. We sometimes think we do, only to find that when trial comes, it has not been a firm trust. Note what he says. He tells God that he has waited for Him in the way of His judgements. I have found that this is the last place people want to wait for God. It is real trust in God, if we find ourselves waiting for Him there. It is the crucial spot; if we can wait on God there, we can be fully certain we can wait on him anywhere, for it means that the last stage of the natural distrust of God is past. The secret of this is that the desire of his soul is to “thy name.” I think this would mean he longed to see more and more of the character of God, as “name” so frequently stands for “character,” and for the memorial (or remembrance of God. A.V.). His soul desired God in the night. This may be taken literally or figuratively. I personally think both are very beautiful and necessary.

Isaiah can see that it is not the favour God shows that will teach this ungodly world righteousness, but His judgements. This is doctrine that arouses the ire of the modernist more than anything I know. When a young

man amongst a meeting for men, I heard how beautifully everything was to work out, I quoted this scripture, and I shall never forget their anger. I cannot see the world improving in the great purpose of life, though in many directions we see advancement. In my own personal experience the great fact seems to be that amongst those who are called Christian, who all appear to believe the Bible, thousands, more or less, throw it aside. But the reverse is wonderful. I think that there has never been a time when such great numbers read, talk about, and love the Bible so much as they do to-day. The comfort of this passage is that this world will be put right, and it will be done by the strong arm of the Lord. Judgement will be certain. We can see that even amongst the affairs of our own Government : when detection becomes uncertain and the punishment lax, then we soon find lawlessness abounds.

V. II. "Lord, Thy hand is lifted up, yet they see not : but they shall see Thy zeal for the people and be ashamed ; yea, fire shall devour Thine adversaries !"

When we read of the times when God's judgements are finally at work, how manifest this is ! Yet I generally look at everything I read to find a present application of the subject before me. As we read the history of God's ancient people, we see numerous examples of God dealing with His people, nationally and individually, and till the blow fell, they could not or would not see it. Here it is the adversaries of God's people that shall be finally dealt with.

ever, are without excuse, for we have a risen Christ.

Let us get back to our text, verse 15. They see not only their deliverance from their enemies, but the great increase of the people and the extent of their territory.

V. 16. "Lord, in trouble have they visited Thee; they poured out a prayer when Thy chastening was upon them."

Here Isaiah puts his finger on the source of Israel's trouble. They turned to the Lord and visited Him when in trouble. This is of course a very wise thing to do, but it does look a mean thing to do. I have met children who are ready enough to visit their parents to get relief when in trouble. The parents generally are still willing to help, but I know they would like visits when things are bright and prosperous. Jeremiah, as we have seen in chapter xiv. 7, saw the other side. He saw that God could not come and dwell with His people; He could only come as a sojourner. This is a solemn thought.

V. 17. "Like as a woman with child, that draweth near the time of her delivery, is in pain and crieth out in her pangs; so have we been before Thee, O Lord. We have been with child, we have been in pain, we have as it were brought forth wind, we have not brought forth any deliverance in the earth: neither have the inhabitants of the earth fallen (M.) been born.

The attempts of the Jewish people to bring forth something for God is likened to a case of false pregnancy. Some of us remember the

story of Queen Mary and the high hopes she entertained, only to be disappointed in the end.

V. 19. "Thy dead shall live; my dead bodies shall arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in the dust, for thy dew is as the dew of herbs (light M.) and the earth shall cast forth the dead."

There is no doubt that this scripture shows us that resurrection was believed in those days, but here it is used as a figure of what the restoration of God's people will mean. The apostle Paul, referring to the restoration of the Jews, Romans xi. 15, says, "For if the casting away of them is the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be but life from the dead?"

Though this is not what we speak of as the Christian hope, it is an event so wonderful that we find God deeply interested in it, and using in Scripture the strongest expressions concerning it. We shall find therefore, much profit in entering into this great theme.

What a beautiful figure is used here of the gracious influence this will mean to the earth! They are exhorted to wake and sing; "for thy dew is as the dew of herbs (light M.)." Dew is to me just a figure of the Holy Ghost. We most of us know what it is to get out very early on a Spring morning when the dew is covering all vegetation; what a joy it is to inhale the fragrance thereof! Such will be the fragrance of their lives in that day.

V. 20. "Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee; hide

thyself for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast. For behold, the Lord cometh forth out of His place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity: the earth also shall disclose her blood and shall no more cover her slain."

This carries my mind right forward to the time of Jacob's trouble, the worst of all tribulations, terrible though many have been. What a blessed invitation is this "Come!" It guarantees the Lord's presence. Further, arranged places have evidently been prepared. It is profitable to note that though God has a place or places in the wilderness to which His people can flee, yet they must follow instructions. His people are to come, enter, shut, hide, until. . . . At that time God is acting decisively for His people. Yet they must take all precautions. God's people in all ages would have been spared much if they had refrained from presumptuous sins.

What a sight it will be for the whole earth when the Lord comes forth to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity! What a joy it will be to see the wrong things put right, and all wickedness and cruelty dealt with righteously! Rev. xix. is indeed a great event. Isaiah tells us that nothing will be hid.



CHAPTER XXVII.

“In that day the Lord with His sore and great and strong sword shall punish Leviathan, the swift serpent, and Leviathan the crooked serpent : and He shall slay the dragon that is in the sea.”

As it is in “that day” I have no doubt all the enemies of God’s people are included in the three great empires that were Israel’s foes. Note the three adjectives describing the sword of the Lord—sore, great, and strong. How effective the sword will be ! We see, I think, in the swift serpent, Assyria with its swift-flowing river, the Tigris ; in the crooked serpent, Babylon with its winding river, the Euphrates ; and in the dragon, Egypt, see Ezek. xxix. 3, and xxxii. 2.

V. 2. “In that day : a vineyard of wine ; sing ye unto it” (M.).

How different is this song to that of chapter v ! There we have seen that the Beloved had a vineyard. Every care and provision possible is made for it. Yet alas, through covetousness, self-indulgence, etc., it had to be broken down. Here we see the end of God’s purposes concerning Jacob or Israel. We must, I think, be quite clear on this point. Some spiritualise all these plain words, so that everything means the gospel as we understand it, but what God has made to

differ we must keep separate. Personally, I cannot but see that God has different purposes for the Gentile, the Jew, and the Church of God. Variety stamps everything that God does. Praise His name : all is satisfactory and desirable.

V. 3. "I the Lord do keep it, I will water it every moment : lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day."

The scripture makes it clear how fully the Lord does this in the Millennium. Yet, as we read history, we do seem to see how there is an over-ruling Providence protecting His ancient people. I have heard it said that they bring these troubles on themselves. This may have a measure of truth in it, and if so, they have had to pay bitterly for it. We see at the judgement of the nations in the Gospel of Matthew that they are judged according to their treatment of the Jews. History shows in its working that it is true. Look at Russia and Spain!

V. 4. "Fury is not in me : would that the briers and thorns were against me in battle ! I would march upon them, I would burn them together. Or else let him take hold of my strength, that he may make peace with me."

What a wonderful God we have ! We often sing "Who is a pardoning God like Thee !" The enemy are but briers and thorns. There is no anger against them ; there is only pity and compassion. If they persist in battle, God will burn them together. God wishes they were against Him in battle, or else that they would

lay hold of the strength of God and be at peace with Him. There is pardon for the worst if they will but turn to God. Yet this leaves no place for the indifferent, unless they are included as hostile.

V. 6. "In days to come shall Jacob take root : Israel shall blossom and bud ; and they shall fill the face of the world with fruit."

God promised to make Abraham a blessing, and this is the national and fullest expression of it.

V. 7. "Hath He smitten him, as He smote those that smote Him? or is he slain according to the slaughter of them that were slain by Him?"

This appears to me to be two ways of asking the same question, the purpose being that God wishes to teach His people that His smiting the nations was punitive, whereas theirs was disciplinary. He could not exalt Israel till she was humbled, for whether nation or person, none is fit to occupy an exalted position but the humble.

V. 8. "In measure, when Thou sendest her away, Thou dost contend with her : He hath removed her with His rough blast in the day of the East wind. Therefore, by this shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged, and this is all the fruit of taking away his sin : when he maketh all the stones of the altar as chalk stones that are beaten in sunder, so that the Asherim and the sun-images shall rise no more."

The reply is "In measure," *i.e.*, it is limited to the effective result of the purpose for which it was done.

It was indeed a rough blast in the day of the East wind, but it purged this nation of this particular sin, *i.e.*, idolatry. They appear to have learnt this lesson well, for as far as I know, the Jews in every part of the earth have learnt the lesson. How sad to think of the part it plays in the so-called Christian churches given over to Ritualism.

V. 10. "For the defenced city is solitary, an habitation deserted and forsaken, like the wilderness: there shall the calf feed and there shall he lie down, and consume the branches thereof. When the boughs thereof are withered, they shall be broken off; the women shall come and set them on fire; for it is a people of no understanding: therefore He that made them will not have compassion upon them, and He that formed them will shew them no favour."

As I have pondered over these verses I read them to be just a picture of Jerusalem after their removal to Babylon and of the remnant making for Egypt.

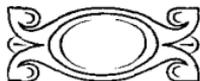
V. 12. "And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall beat off His fruit (beat out His corn, M.). I understand by reading that it is a word used for the harvest of either.

"From the flood of the river unto the brook of Egypt, and ye shall be gathered one by one, O ye children of Israel. And it shall come to pass in that day that a great trumpet shall be

blown ; and they shall come which were ready to perish in the land of Assyria, and they that were outcasts in the land of Egypt, and they shall worship the Lord in the holy mountain of Jerusalem.”

Here we see that at the restoration of His people, God has used two figures, that of the gathering of a harvest, and of the assembling of an army. As we read the book of Ezra and note the proclamation of Cyrus, it was indeed a trumpet-call to all, and if it were not for one expression I should feel inclined to think that the return in the book of Ezra fully covered this prophecy. The expression “And ye shall be gathered one by one, O ye children of Israel.” However carefully I read of that great event, I fail to see the individual care of all in Ezra. I do as I read the events yet to come, so conclude that though practically covered by the return in Ezra, yet it goes beyond it, in this particular expression.

The river, I understand to be the Euphrates : the brook of Egypt, the little river which divided Palestine from Egypt—the extent of the Promised Land.



CHAPTER XXVIII.

V. 1. "Woe to the crown of pride of the drunkards of Ephraim, and to the fading flower of his glorious beauty, which is on the head of the fat valley of them that are overcome with wine."

As I have read this chapter I cannot but see how it opens our eyes to see the true import of things that we see going on all around us. It begins with "Woe" to these people mentioned, apart from any punitive judgement which certainly comes (see verse 2). Yet the woe is the necessary result of the course of conduct they adopt. I think this crown of pride is Samaria. The fat valley tells me of a beautiful and fertile place, and of an abundance of wealth. Alas, this led to a life of self-indulgence, instead of thankfulness and vigilance. The principal vice here is drunkenness. There is an allusion to the custom that in their revelries they adorned their heads with crowns made of flowers, and they are told that as they fade so will their glory fade.

It is true the end came suddenly (Micah i. 6), but that which makes the end possible is a gradual declension in the things that matter.

It is quite clear that indulgence in drink is prominently brought before us here, yet we can see that the things that led on to this teach us

that self-indulgence is bad, whatever form it takes.

V. 2. "Behold the Lord hath a mighty and strong one; as a tempest of hail, a destroying storm, as a tempest of mighty waters overflowing, shall he cast down to the earth with the hand. The crown of pride of the drunkards of Ephraim shall be trodden under foot; and the fading flower of his glorious beauty, which is on the head of the fat valley, shall be as the first ripe fig before the summer, which, when he that looketh upon it seeth, while it is yet in his hand he eateth it up."

This mighty and strong one we are exhorted to "behold" is Assyria. As we have seen, Ephraim and Syria conspire against Judah. Judah calls in the aid of Assyria. The result is told to us in figure, first, as a man who seeth the first ripe fig eateth it up whilst it is in his hand, so is *Samaria* dealt with and trodden underfoot. This confirms what we have said. It may appear sudden at the end, but think of the whole story that brought about this separation of Judah and Israel. I think, boys and girls, as we ponder over these things, we find it is just a picture of what is always going on around us in every direction. I think it must have been this thought that made Solomon say, "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life." Solomon knew of the terrible result of not doing so.

V. 5. "In that day shall the Lord of hosts be for a crown of glory, and for a diadem of beauty, unto the residue of His people; and for a spirit

of judgement to him that sitteth in judgement, and for strength to them that turn back the battle at the gate."

They have had brought before them the crown of pride; here the Lord of hosts is as a crown of glory. The "that day" reminds me how true this will be in the Millennium, but we must ever remember that this can only be true because the people are walking right. Individually, it may be true in measure with us. This would be included in the term, "the residue of His people." Looking at, and pondering over this expression, one can see that in the experience of Hezekiah this in a good measure was true. We will see this as we proceed. We see in the life of Hezekiah and in the residue of God's people that were with him, that the Lord of hosts was indeed a crown of glory to them, and to the King the Lord gave a spirit of judgement, and strength to turn the enemy back at the gate. The prophet saw this. One cannot but feel how glad and thankful Hezekiah must have been at the Passover when, at his invitation, some of the tribes actually attended. What glorious hopes this must have given them for the future (II Chron. xxx. 11). Alas!

V. 7. "But these also have erred (M. reel) through wine, and through strong drink are gone astray; the priest and the prophet have erred (M. reel) through strong drink, they are swallowed up of wine, they are gone astray through strong drink; they err in vision; they stumble in judgement. For all tables are full of vomit and filthiness so that there is no place clean."

Judah also had to be judged. This horrible picture is so strong that even if I have already touched upon drink I feel I must again. Here we see that the priest and the prophet became involved. This makes me think of the ministers of the gospel I have known. On careful inquiry I find that the beginning of their trouble has been the advice of their medical adviser. We have to be very careful in selecting our medical adviser, that he is a man of sense, for I know some in the foremost rank who will never allow drink. In fact, in my own experience, one of our leading surgeons, on account of my age, would not perform an operation, though I kept asking him to do so for three years. On the assurance, however, that I had had no alcohol or tobacco for over forty years, he did, and I rejoice over it. I will now give one sad case as a sample. A friend I had for years—we were like brothers, certainly very close friends—was a minister of the gospel and an abstainer. He had influenza, and his doctor advised him to take a little whisky. He felt sure it did him good. I did not think so. I said to him that it would be better to die than touch that stuff. However, whenever he felt poorly he had a little, and he became a confirmed drunkard. He lost his church, and we all lost sight of him. I had every reason for saying that it would be better to die than to touch it, for though I never signed the pledge or would touch it, yet the havoc it has wrought in the lives of so many I have loved, makes me very bitter against it. I can quite understand America going Prohibition. When I went to America the first time, I always

stayed in the houses of the people. The difference between them and us was so marked that I prayed the Lord that He would make England prohibition. On one of my visits (of four months at a time), I heard a man in America say that he questioned prohibition. I said the trouble is not prohibition, but the disobedience of some who, through covetousness principally, break the laws. I asked the man if there were any thieves in America. He said there were any amount of them. Then I said that if he were consistent he would do away with all laws to protect property, as the law is so broken. The trouble about Prohibition is that there is much money to be made in the business, hence I feel I must agree with those who believe that our newspapers are influenced by these brewers and distillers. Further, I think that certainly England and Canada are to blame. I wonder the States have not declared war upon them. When I was at Niagara I said, looking at the water as it came rushing along, "Is that a submarine in the middle there?" I was told that it was, and that there were 40,000 gallons of whisky in it. It had been in the habit of crossing further up and had got caught in the current. I have read that our vessels go as near as possible and supply the American boats that evade the authorities. It pays for these people to run these risks, for the profits easily pay the fines imposed, just as it pays our swindlers. They swindle the people out of ten thousand pounds, and get five years' imprisonment.

Till crime is made too risky, it will flourish. Give the imprisonment, but insist on full resti-

tution. The way that commends itself to me would be to put the culprit and his relations under the microscope, to ascertain where their money came from. If from the criminal, confiscate all they have. I think that will stop it. If not, then make it a capital offence. Is Prohibition good for America? These are the things told me by the people at whose houses I stayed. One said that he used to have to go every day to the gate of one of the largest railway-stations inland of America, to take on casual labour in place of those away on the drink. Since Prohibition he has never had to do it. I met a well-known Evangelist who, as an Evangelist, visited America for over forty years for six or seven months in the year. In England he is with the brethren. I rarely saw anything of him in America, but I said to him there once: "Where do you get to?" He replied, "Now I work amongst the fundamentalists." I said, "What do you mean by now?" His reply was: "Before Prohibition, there were, right across America, down-and-out Missions. I used to begin at New York and go right across to the other side, and come back by another line, but Prohibition came in and they had to close down."

Can I hear a boy or girl asking what has all this to do with Isaiah? I reply, My dear friend, what is the use of reading our Bibles unless we learn and practise the lessons? The following question to those that question are well worth pondering over.

V. 9. "Whom will He teach knowledge and

whom will He make to understand the message? Them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts? For it is precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line (M. rule) upon line, line upon line; here a little, there a little."

We can look at these questions in two ways. Both ways, I think, are essential to the real understanding of the passage. There is first the truth contained in them, and then, the incident that called them forth. The first requires for our own guidance much meditation. Briefly, we must learn to see that education must begin from infancy. The process is gradual and demands much repetition. The incident appears by the context to be the derisive reply to the prophet's messages. How often do we hear this said? "I learnt what you say when I was a child. We know better now; we have passed that stage. I can think, as well as you, and further, I am about tired to death of hearing you harping upon the same old string." So, dear reader, I see that we must submit ourselves to the inevitable. We must learn the path of wisdom in accordance with the principles contained in these questions, or, like these foolish people, we shall find these very principles in operation to teach us what a fool we have been. Jeremiah teaches us that if we have wandered from God and do not confess our sin, or submit to discipline then, as he says, "Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee" (Jer. ii. 19). The following verses teach us this :—

V. 11. "Nay, but by men of strange lips and with another tongue will he speak to this people : to whom He said, This is the rest, give ye rest to him that is weary ; and this is the refreshing : yet they would not hear. Therefore shall the word of the Lord be unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line (M. rule) upon line, line upon line ; here a little, there a little : that they may go and fall backward, and be broken and snared and taken."

How very solemn this is, spoken to them who have had the way of rest and refreshing pointed out to them. Yet they would not hear, for these men by strange lips and another tongue, *i.e.*, the Assyrians, will come and will assuredly teach them the folly of their ways. I have thought many times that one of the saddest things in life is to look back with regret at the life we have lived, but it is more terrible still to look forward without any hope. Both of these sorrows will be ours unless the Lord is our light and salvation.

V. 14. "Wherefore hear the word of the Lord, ye scornful men, that rule this people which is in Jerusalem. Because ye have said we have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement : when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us : for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves."

Here the prophet attacks the great men, *i.e.*, the rulers of Jerusalem. As we have seen, Ahaz, when threatened with Israel and Syria combined (see chapter vii.) despised the counsel

of the prophet and preferred to rest upon his agreement with Assyria. This he has discovered is a refuge of lies. Does it teach these men anything? Not at all, for they are about to turn to Egypt for help. Isaiah, in chapter xiii. 7 and 8, has spoken of Assyria as a flood, and in chapter x. 24 as a scourge. This language is not exactly what they would say. They would no doubt use high-sounding phrases, but the true comfort is just what the Searcher of mind and heart sees it to be. History later proved what a refuge of lies all these arguments were.

When Jehosaphat (II Chron. xvii.) came to the throne he made himself strong. He walked in the ways of the Lord and had the people taught. All went well till he made an alliance with Ahab.

We have before us as we read our newspapers just the same thing going on to-day. The command God gave to Joshua was "Be strong." When this is combined with the justice of our cause, we can rely upon God.

In the following verse God points out the true refuge, and where their confidence should rest.

V. 16. "Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone (in italics) of sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste."

There can be no question but that this refers to Christ. All I know would agree to this, and I heartily agree with them. There are several kindred expressions in the scripture. One very

beautiful one is "the head-stone of the corner." I have heard all sorts of explanations of this. As I was a master-builder till recently, I am just going to speak as a builder. I am sure that a foundation-stone is not a corner-stone. It is imperative that the whole building must rest upon it, and the foundation-stone must be large enough and strong enough to carry the whole building. Christ is indeed a sure foundation-stone.

We have here a precious corner-stone of sure foundation. The word "stone" is in italics. As a builder, I think we are better without it. They appear to use the word "corner" as an adjective, hence something must be supplied. I should use it as an abstract noun. The stones do not make the corner, but the shape. The corners bind the building together and make it sure, and in a true sense is a good foundation. I remember when I first entered the building trade, the Manager pointed out to me a builder near who had built the whole of the flank wall with no corners. He said that if we had a strong wind it would all come down, which was what happened. Christ is indeed the corner, every corner, for it is only Christ that can bind it together. He is the top corner stone. According to some designs the top stone is all corners. The building would not be complete without it; it is perhaps its most attractive feature. However high we may soar, however lofty our spiritual conceptions may be, Christ will ever be the head of the corner.

This is God's plan for us, to turn from man to God Himself. When we make God our portion and inheritance, we are told that "he that

believeth shall not make haste," *i.e.*, he would never be in a flurry. We remember when Daniel heard the decree, that no one was to ask a favour except of the king, we read: "As aforetime he opened his window. What a rich inheritance is ours! If it was the only blessing it would be worth all to secure it, but it is but one fruit in the life of him that can really say, I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me."

We are further told that to the structure built on the foundation stone, *i.e.*, Christ, God makes the following promise:

V. 17. "And I will make judgement the line, and righteousness the plummet." We can quite understand with a promise like this, what a beautiful structure the individual life can be that is built up on Christ. Oh that God will enable us to use the line and the plummet.

A bricklayer or mason would tell us that the line is to make it horizontally true; the plummet to make it vertically true. If we make the individual life true, we can see the corporate life will be right, whether in the fulfilment of the promises to the Gentile, Jew, or Church. These rulers of Jerusalem at this time fail to see this, as the rulers do to-day, hence the dreadful state of things. We now get the state of things the course that these rulers adopt will lead to.

V. 18. "And your covenant with death shall be disannulled, and your agreement with hell shall not stand: when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, then ye shall be trodden down by it. As often as it passeth through, it shall take you, for morning by morning shall it pass

through, by day and night : and it shall be nought but terror to understand the message, for the bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself on it, and the covering narrower than he can wrap himself in it."

We really must, boys and girls, ponder over this, frequently looking to the Holy Ghost to enable us to see the true import of this, and to take care that the lessons are practised by us.

All intelligent men are aware of the dangers that surround us, and of the disasters that overtake so many. In principle they adopt some plan to overcome them, and scores of various devices and watchwords and catchy phrases are used. Many are useful, only, like the bed, not long enough, or the covering is too narrow. I have been placed like this, and if it is a cold night, it means great discomfort. Others take it more seriously, and go in for Philosophy, Psychology, Christian Science so-called, and I know not what. None of these can meet the case; it is only the Christ of God that can satisfy, *i.e.*, the Christ of the Scripture, not a Christ of our own imagining.

Here, instead of turning to God and walking the path of obedience, they lived as they pleased, and relied on alliances with other countries. It proved a very short bed.

V. 21. "For the Lord shall rise up as in Mount Perazim, He shall be wroth as in the valley of Gibeon : that He may do His work, His strange work, and bring to pass His act, His strange act."

If you will turn to I Chron. xiv. 11, you will see what an overwhelming defeat God enabled

David to obtain over the Philistines. So, just as God acted for them then, now He acts against them: This is the strange act. We can be thankful it is a strange act.

V. 22. "Now, therefore be ye not scorers, lest your bands be made strong." Here is an invitation to repentance. How constant is the folly of man! This was written about three thousand years ago, yet to-day the advice is needed. The truth finds its greatest number of opponents amongst the scorers. The reasons are varied according to the scorer. I can assure you the objections made by the intellectual scorer are very different from those made by the sporting scorer, etc., etc. But the danger is alike to all, *i.e.*, the longer they go on in their course the bands that bind them captive grow stronger. This is a very solemn thought.

"For a consummation, and that determined, have I heard from the Lord, the Lord of hosts, upon the whole land. (M.)"

We are here reminded, and we should give the most earnest heed to it, that God's plans and purposes have a consummation, and that determined. It should be the great purpose of our life to ascertain what is God's will or purpose for us, and see that we make it ours. But what is principally before us is the collective thing, *i.e.*, the whole land.

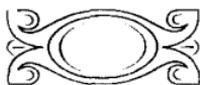
V. 23. "Give ye ear, and hear my voice. Hearken, and hear my speech. Doth the plowman plow continually to sow? Doth he continually open and break the clods of his ground? When he hath made plain the face thereof, doth

he not cast abroad the fitches, and scatter the cummin, and put in the wheat in rows, and the barley in the appointed place, and the spelt in the border thereof? For his God doth instruct him aright, and doth teach him. For the fitches are not threshed with a sharp threshing instrument, neither is a cart-wheel turned about upon the cummin : but the fitches are beaten out with a staff, and the cummin with a rod. Bread corn is ground : for he will not be ever threshing it ; and though the wheel of his cart and the horses scatter it, he doth not grind it. This also cometh forth from the Lord of hosts, which is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in wisdom.”

This reminds me of “A sower went forth to sow” of our Lord. This parable of Isaiah’s, I think, is given to illustrate the last clause of verse 22. God has a purpose in all He does ; the process may be painful, such as the Assyrian invasion, but it is all part of the plan, and, as we find it put in the New Testament, “all things work together for good, etc.” The object is to teach the people, just as the plowman in his treatment of the soil considers the instruments he uses and the methods he adopts with the various sorts of seeds. They are all adapted wisely, and as a result of a God-given intelligence ; he scatters the tiny seeds, and puts the larger in rows. So God would have His people understand the practical and spiritual import of what is going on all around us. We see all sorts and conditions of men ; we think of methods of getting a living in individual or combined effort. We see that some are actuated by noble aspirations, others by the thought of self. Amongst

these are to be found the human sharks, and it is surprising with what cunning these put out their baits, appealing to human weakness and pride. If we were just to walk with the Lord in the light of His word, we should see that we should fully meet our obligations. The most important factor in this is, not to attempt to carry up to your strength. Always leave a good margin. We should believe the Lord when He says, "Life consisteth not in the abundance of things that a man possesseth." Hence, the rule that some adopt with great success, when tempted to buy, is to ask : "Can I do without it?" This does not, of course, apply to a business transaction.

It makes life very full, to seek to see the meaning of things.



CHAPTER XXIX.

V. 1. "Woe to (M.) Ariel, Ariel, the city where David encamped : add ye year to year ; let the feasts come round ; then will I distress Ariel, and there shall be mourning and lamentation : yet (M.) she shall be unto me as Ariel."

We see by the margin that this word "Ariel" means "The lion of God," "The hearth of God." Without question, in referring to where the word "Ariel" is used, it means lion-like men, *i.e.*, men of valour. We know the lion was the symbol of Judah. Ezekiel uses it, xliii. 15, as the "Altar hearth." To me, as I read this first verse, it suggests that we should keep both meanings in our mind, for the encampment and the siege suggest warriors, and the whole year's feasts suggest the sacred festivals. As I read through the whole chapter, this idea is confirmed.

I think we get here another precious view of the character of our God. Though God says He will distress her, "yet" she shall be unto me as Ariel. What a comfort this must have been to the faithful few in Isaiah's time! and to those that have read this passage! We must all, of necessity, be the child of our parents, however trying or wicked we may be. This would call for discipline, but it cannot alter the relationship.

V. 3. "And I will camp against thee round about, and will lay siege against thee with a fort,

and I will raise siege works against thee. And thou shalt be brought down, and shalt speak out of the ground, and thy speech shall be low out of the dust : and thy voice shall be as one that hath a familiar spirit, out of the ground, and thy speech shall whisper (chirp, M.) out of the dust.’’

There were to be several times in the history of God’s people when this scripture might applicably be used, but the story that is immediately before us is the Assyrian invasion, and especially Sennacherib’s invasion. Judah was to be brought very low, with no vaunting speech ; so low, in fact, that she could be described as a spiritist when he seeks to talk to a familiar spirit.

V. 5. “But the multitude of thy foes shall be like small dust, and the multitude of the terrible ones as chaff that passeth away : yea, it shall be at an instant suddenly. She shall be visited of the Lord of hosts with thunder and with earthquake, and a great noise, with whirlwind and tempest, and the flame of a devouring fire.’’

Here is to be the evidence that Judah was to be Ariel to Him. Israel, through her folly, got into these various troubles, but, however bad they may have been, God always had a remnant. Elijah thought he was the only one, but God said He had seven thousand, and we can be sure that God will watch the remnant that is spared. Those that are martyred, as we see in Revelation, which deals with the final state of things, are rewarded more than those that are spared.

We can be sure that the end will be right and desirable, to those that are His.

When God smites, Sennacherib, Babylon, or any other, we get a description of the effect upon them.

V. 7. "And the multitude of all the nations that fight against Ariel, even all that fight against her and her stronghold, and that distress her, shall be as a dream, a vision of the night. And it shall be as when an hungry man dreameth, and behold, he eateth; but he awaketh, and his soul is empty: or as a thirsty man dreameth, but he awaketh, and behold, he is faint, and his soul hath appetite; so shall the multitude of all the nations be, that fight against Mount Zion."

Some interpret this as though it is an experience of Judah. I know nothing of Hebrew, so prefer to accept the translation of the translators, Revised or Authorised, to any individual translator. I think it possible that he may be right. The trouble is that I am not in the position to judge. This being so, I cannot possibly accept any interpretation that contradicts the statement, which clearly states this to be the experience of the enemies of Judah.

This certainly was the experience of Sennacherib, and will be of the Antichrist when the Lord comes to Olivet; apparently it was not the experience of Nebuchadnezzar, and the Romans, etc., that captured the place.

The moral lesson, I think, would be true of all ambitious people, even when victory gives them a certain amount of pleasure. In the case of Sennacherib, he certainly was very hungry for Jerusalem, but he never partook of it. We must

bear in mind, when the prophet wrote this, it was still in the future, though the near future.

V. 9. "Tarry ye and wonder; take your pleasure and be blind: they are drunken, but not with wine; they stagger, but not with strong drink. For the Lord hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep, and hath closed your eyes, the prophets, and your heads, the seers, hath he covered, and all vision has become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed: and the book is delivered to one that is not learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee, and he saith, "I am not learned."

Though I have written the text, each margin in this paragraph of the R.V. is well worth consideration.

We really ought to stop here for a long time, as we are up against one of the most awful facts in the world. It is a fact familiar to all, yet, on reflection, it does fill us with amazement.

As we have frequently seen, God is said to do what He permits. We are never left long before we get the whole of the truth, which, in this case, is in the next paragraph.

Here we see the messages of the prophets and seers fall upon eyes that see not and ears that hear not, the reason being that they are unable to see and hear.

To read God's word can only be done, through the Holy Ghost, and He can only reveal it to them that are born from above. When the Lord of Glory was in the world, we read: "The Light was in the world, the darkness comprehendeth it not." The Gospel is in the world; anyone can

test its value by getting to know those who accept it, yet the world would destroy it, and places its confidence in Acts of Parliament, Unions, Combines, and anything that takes its fancy.

It might be that those who do not ponder over these things may think that they are not to be blamed for not seeing or hearing that which they cannot see or hear. The whole scripture makes it abundantly clear that this question is a moral question, and springs from the heart. It can be had, if it is sincerely desired by the heart, as the following paragraph clearly teaches. I think I can take it for granted that not one of my readers would think of giving gifts to those who do not desire them.

When Christ was here, His wonderful words, His miracles, His spotless life, were and are all explained away. The following applies to those who profess God, so that if these fail, those who do not even acknowledge God are quite out of the question.

V. 13. "And the Lord said, "Forasmuch as this people draw nigh unto Me, and with their mouth and with their lips do honour Me, but have removed their heart far from Me, and their fear of Me is a commandment of men which hath been taught them : (M.) learned by rote.' "

We are frequently taught in the Word that ceremonial worship is insufficient ; there must be the living faith, the striving after holiness, etc. But what can be said when the fear of God that they profess is not God-given but follows the commandment of men which have been taught them."

The only course is to have a scripture for what we believe.

The only practice is to walk with the Lord in the light of the Word.

To illustrate this point: an experienced brother, and a learned one, came to me recently, and said that the Christian work that he had been engaged in for years had been a pleasure to him, but having attended a certain place for some time, he felt that much of it was not as the Word taught. He had a position offered him where he would have the arranging of the meetings, and he asked if I would give him my advice.

My reply was that to do this would tend to place him in bondage, and that Christianity means liberty. I said to him that what we have to be actually sure about whilst we are walking with the Lord in our secret life, is that we are happy with Him. If we are, then to follow our inclinations is true liberty. Two weeks after, he accepted this new position, so I have another interest in life in seeing how it turns out.

Of course, any boy or girl can see that to follow one's inclinations without a close walk with the Lord in the light of His Word, would be license, not liberty.

We look again very carefully at this scripture, and we ask ourselves whether we could adopt a course more hurtful to God, or, as a matter of fact, to anyone else who has any right to expect a measure of love or affection from us, than to withhold it. We ourselves soon detect the difference in the atmosphere. How must God feel the difference when everything is so open and patent to Him! The marvellous thing to me

about it all is, that God so values our love to Him, and is so sensitive about it. Blessed God and Father, we do pray Thee that the Holy Ghost may open our eyes to see more and more of Thy love and beauty.

V. 14. "Therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvellous work among this people, even a marvellous work and a wonder : and the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid."

This verse is not so clear to me as I could wish, so that the readers must be careful to think for themselves, and unless satisfied that they have the mind of God, suspend their judgement. That is what the writer proposes to do.

After what has gone before, I think it is the usual interpretation to think that God is going to bring upon these hypocrites that terrible judgement by which the wisdom, understanding, or light they have, shall perish.

This is true, our Lord said, "To him that hath, it shall be given him; but to him that hath not, it shall be taken away, even that which he hath."

Without saying it is so, I note these are very strong words to use, and remembering the full force of the next paragraph, I am inclined to think that this remarkable work and a wonder alludes to the most wonderful thing God has ever done, namely, giving us the gift of His Son. Without that gift, the next paragraph would not be possible. Further, I know nothing that is more opposed to the wisdom of men, than the story of the Cross, and to one that has been born

from above, there is no question as to where the victory will lie.

V. 15. "Woe unto them that seek deep to hide their counsel from the Lord, and their works are in the dark, and they say, Who seeth us?"

V. 16. "and who knoweth us? Ye turn things upside down! Shall the potter be counted as clay: that the thing made should say of him that made it, He made me not, or the thing framed of him that framed it, He hath no understanding."

Here we note that Isaiah starts with "Woe." Whatever men may think, this must ever be the result of a life that opposes the Lord, or seeks to be independent of Him.

I, however, think that Isaiah's intention was to show that to hide a thing from God's servant is equal to hiding it from Jehovah. Just as Ahaz kept his agreement with Assyria from the prophet, so now they were seeking to hide from the prophet their agreement with Egypt. We can quite understand that the feelings of those who opposed Isaiah would be very mixed. Some would be opposed to him or to anyone or anything else, simply because he is God's servant. Others may have a measure of respect for him, yet are annoyed because God's plans upset the desires of their hearts. I think it must be this sort that raises these three questions in their minds: "Who seeth us?" This sort, nay we ourselves, boys and girls, know full well, that if we are doing what we desire to do, and are not

happy with God about it, we like to persuade ourselves that God does not see. "Who knoweth us?" This is another false refuge. If we were only understood, if our reasons for so acting were known! God does, and it is all right, but in our hearts we are far from sure about it. The last statement, "Ye turn things upside down." How often has this thing been said, especially in priest-ridden countries. This sort, with their shows and processions, which they know so appeal to the superficial. Should it arouse the ire of anyone who thinks, as it often does, he is at once placed amongst the rabble and treated if possible with prison, if not with disdain. I remember the first I ever saw in England was in the East of London. I felt very indignant and upset to think such gross idolatry should be allowed in England. A young man whom I knew, who had an excitable disposition, and who loved his Bible and his Saviour, saw me. He came running up to me, full of wrath and said, "Brother Knox, shall I throw this brick at it?" He meant at one of the images. It was with difficulty that I restrained him. From that time I have always felt that no show or procession should be allowed in public that are provocative. The two main channels of this trouble are religion and politics. But alas; it does seem that most politicians are more concerned about keeping their position than anything else.

Note the reply: "Shall the potter be counted as clay; that the thing made should say of him that made it, he made me not; or the thing framed of him that framed it, he hath no understanding."

The prophet here places his finger on the sore spot, on the very reason why the proud and arrogant, who have something that they are desirous of bringing about, but who realise that God is against them, say this in some way or another. The prophet's illustration is so simple, that we almost smile at the absurdity of it. Note he says these things, and, boys and girls, it will pay you to compare them with the three questions. I am afraid my book will be too big as it is, so I must leave this to you. "Shall the Potter be counted as clay?" We think the potter makes the vessel to the design he wishes. I remember saying to a scientist, "The design-argument of Paley wants beating, does it not?" The reply, with a laugh, was, "I learned that in the University years ago. It was exploded long ago." In a word, one can see that this is turning the Potter into clay very much indeed. "That the thing made should say of him that made it, 'He made me not.'" I have been told very seriously by those learned in the sciences, that they cannot see any room for a Creator. In the scientific world the physicist is right in the forefront, and he teaches that there is but one substance. My reply has been then that there is no reason why the old quest may not prove true. What is that? he asked. "The old alchemists sought to make gold." He replied, "There is no reason whatever why it should be deemed impossible." Then, if man, bird, beast, and all things are made of one substance, how do you account for the difference?" The reply has been "Pressure." I have replied, "I did not know that all things are but one substance, and

the difference is due to pressure, but I am very glad to say that I know the Presser." I could see that I was regarded as hopeless.

If it should be true that there is but one substance, how marvellous! I have ever thought the Creator's wisdom past finding out. And yet I have thought He had created many elemental substances. It is past thinking of—everything made out of one substance, things that agree, things that go off with a bang if they but meet, all depending upon the nip the Presser gives. I should like to know where the press is or how it is done. It really makes me feel with the Psalmist, "Oh magnify the Lord with me, Let us exalt His name together."

"Or the thing framed, say of him that framed it, He hath no understanding?"

I am quite satisfied that modernism, or the Kenosis theory, etc., illustrates what we have here. I have been told that a school-boy of to-day knows more than Christ did. I have heard men saying some wonderful things, but when a simple soul has said, "Christ said," away goes their wonderful theory. This sort can see that if they are to establish any reputation at all, they must get it fairly established in the people's minds. A teacher once told a daughter of a friend of mine that the ideas got from her parents were obsolete. It has also frequently been said of Christ that He had no understanding beyond the knowledge of His own time.

V. 17. "Is it not yet a very little while, and Lebanon shall be turned into a fruitful field, and the fruitful field shall be counted for a forest?"

It has been my constant experience that the thought of God as a potter does not appeal to many. I remember as a young believer hearing an old man preaching on Romans ix. To say the least, it was very dismal, and things looked in a bad way till, like Jeremiah, I got down to the house of the Potter and saw Him working His clay on the wheel. Ever since, my heart has been going up in praise and joy for the sovereign grace of the Potter, and it is ever my delight to trace His work, both inside and outside of the Word. I have seen for years that all hope is to be found in the Sovereign Grace of the Potter. Isaiah evidently had no gloomy thoughts of the Potter, as we shall see. He said, "It is but a very little while, and Lebanon shall be turned into a fruitful field. Chapter x. 34 shows us the invader, *i.e.*, the Assyrian, destroying the forest of Lebanon, but he looks onward; he sees that notwithstanding all the present and coming disasters, it will only be "a very little while." Isaiah has told us in chapter x. 12, that the Assyrian will be punished when "the Lord hath performed His whole work upon Mount Zion and on Jerusalem." This is not done yet. So that though there is no doubt that the prophet here had Sennacherib in his mind, yet his spirit goes on to the consummation. Yet about three thousand years has passed by, and he says, "a very little while." This spirit lives in God's people. Ever since the Lord left us and promised to return, all through the ages we have been looking for His coming. It must be hundreds of times that I have been solemnly assured that it cannot be long now before the

Lord comes. I generally reply that I hope it will be to-day. The fact is that we want it, and so, apparently, did Isaiah.

V. 18. "And in that day shall the deaf hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity, and out of darkness."

This expression cannot have a big fulfilment, unless we take it figuratively. It is just a reversal of verse 11 of this chapter. We see this fulfilled in some measure after the destruction of Sennacherib, for undoubtedly from the King Hezekiah downward, the overthrow by God of the terrible Assyrian gave many exalted views of God. The effect was greater at the overthrow of Babylon by Persia with the permission of Cyrus to return to Jerusalem. We see a fine picture in Neh. viii. 12, when Ezra read the word of God, of the joy of the people when they heard the word read and understood it.

In this Gospel age, since Christ ascended up on high, and since the descent of the Holy Ghost, the love for the Word has been steadily growing. Alas! that the tyranny of Russia will not allow it! Yet the sale of the Bible has grown to an immense amount. After having been a Christian for fifty-five years, for about forty years my bank-holidays have been spent with God's people reading the Word. I have never seen or read of a time when real heart-love for the Bible was greater than it is to-day. I love to look forward to the time when on earth during the Millennium, for we read that it will not be usual to say, Know ye the Lord, for "all shall know the Lord, from the least to the greatest."

V. 19. "The meek also shall increase their joy in the Lord, and the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel."

Then there will be increased vision and understanding of the Word, and we shall all hear and see what God has for us in the portion of the Word that may be before us. We see that it is the meek that increase their joy in the Lord. Ponder over this, for I am persuaded that in our moral state it is a most important factor that we have a joyous heart in the Lord. This is confirmed by the statement that it is the poor among men that shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel. I am inclined to think this means the poor in spirit. The Lord on the Mount said these are blessed. A man may be rich in money and yet poor in spirit. The evidence will be if his object in its use is self or Christ, and that it shall be a blessing to his fellow-man.

V. 20. "For the terrible one is brought to nought, and the scorner ceaseth, and all that watch for iniquity are cut off :"

We read of the lawless one being brought to nought by the manifestation of His coming. Here I believe Isaiah has the Assyrian in his mind, *i.e.*, Sennacherib, leading on to the Assyrian spoken of as the King of the North, the great opponent of the Antichrist. The same would be true to-day if God would remove these rulers of Russia. What a relief it would be to the saints who love to get together to hear His Word.

V. 21. "That make a man an offender in a cause, and lay a snare for him that reproveth in

the gate, and turn aside the just with a thing of nought.”

This looks, especially if we take into consideration the margin, that they did the same to Isaiah, as it is clearly stated in Jeremiah xxxvii. 12 that his opposition to the King was that Jeremiah was a traitor. Here their arguments against Isaiah were of no weight, not so much because they were false; they were that, but because they were what I should call flimsy arguments. How trying this must have been to Isaiah is better imagined than expressed.

V. 22. “Therefore saith the Lord, who redeemed Abraham, concerning the house of Jacob :”

I have read that there is a Jewish tradition which says that the kinsmen of Abraham had brought Abraham before the court of Nimrod and charged him with not worshipping the host of heaven, and that God redeemed him by calling him out. Be that as it may, I think we can see that when God did redeem Abraham, His purpose was to establish the house of Jacob; this I understand to be the Israelitish nation. In the Revised Version we have a colon after Jacob, whereas the A.V. has a comma. I prefer the colon, for I think the following refers not to Jacob personally, but to the nation. We must keep in mind that Divine elections are never made primarily for the elect's sake, but for the sake of someone whom they were to bless.

“Jacob shall not now be ashamed, neither shall his face now wax pale. But when he seeth his

children ; or (M.) when his children shall see, the work of mine hands, in the midst of him, they shall sanctify my name ; yea, they shall sanctify the Holy One of Jacob, and shall stand in awe of the God of Israel. They also that err in spirit shall come to understanding, and they that murmur shall learn doctrine."



CHAPTER XXX.

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

The plan suggested in secrecy, see xxix. 15, where in their counsels they did not consult the Lord, appears to have further advanced, for we see the Ambassadors were about to go down to Egypt. We can, as in chapter xxix., quite see the "woe" in this chapter, for to act without being guided by the Lord is folly.

The margin says "weave a web" which appears to me clearer. The counsels that these had been engaged in is likened to weaving a web which would prove to be no covering.

To be clothed with His Spirit and to inquire of Him, is the first object of the children of God, or should be. To persevere in any other course is to add sin to sin.

V. 2. "That walk to go down into Egypt, and have not asked of my mouth: to strengthen themselves in the strength of Pharaoh, and to trust in the shadow of Egypt!"

God's instructions from the very first were "Be strong," constantly reiterated. When God's people were strong, they were feared, and the surrounding nations desired their friendship.

Assyria had previously come to the aid of Judah, but only with the view of capturing Judah also. They were not only to be strong; they had their empire given them; but they were not to take the land given to others, which is the cause of so much trouble. We can be sure Egypt, even if strong, would only come to the help of Judah to the extent that it suited its purpose.

V. 3. "Therefore shall the strength of Pharaoh be your shame, and the trust in the shadow of Egypt your confusion. For his princes are at Zoan, and his ambassadors are come to Hanes. They shall all be ashamed of a people that cannot profit them, that are not a help nor profit but a shame, and also a reproach."

These are to find out that a broken cistern cannot hold water. We can quite imagine how they would dwell upon the might of Egypt, and their hopes would run high; but I cannot but feel the consciences of many Jews would be uneasy at having to turn to Egypt for help.

"The princes have arrived at Zoan." I see by the map that this is but a little way from the coast. I have read that Pharaoh had a palace there; hence they had now actually arrived at the place where they could personally do business. At present I cannot trace, with the small map I have, where Hanes is, but I have read that it is in the delta of the Nile. So I conclude they landed there and made their way to Zoan for the business in hand. What a dreadful picture! God's people conducting business, and not guided by God, nay, in opposition to God's direction. They were never to turn to Egypt. We remember

Jacob was a great believer in sending a present, and actually sent a present to Egypt to the great ruler. This is what they do here, in their negotiation with Egypt. I have no doubt they relied upon these presents. I can understand payment for value received, but when it comes to presents, one has to define clearly as to whether it is a present or a bribe. However, our attention is now called to the presents, or payment, or bribe, whichever, boys and girls, you may decide it to be.

V. 6. "The burden of the beasts in the South." This is plural. All the great nations, such as Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome, are called beasts, though each is more or less made up of many nations, as I have no doubt Egypt at this time was. I have regarded each as a beast. By what follows I think it is to be taken literally here.

"Through the land of trouble and anguish, from whence comes the lioness and the lion, the viper and fiery flying serpent, they carry their riches upon the shoulders of young asses, and their treasures upon the bunches of camels, to a people that shall not profit them. For Egypt helpeth in vain, and to no purpose : therefore have I called her Rahab that sitteth still."

As we take our map, or read about the wilderness between Judah and Egypt, with its lions, vipers, and fiery flying serpents, we realise what an arid place it is. We know what lions and vipers are. I can understand a fiery (venemous) serpent, but it is the word 'flying' that makes me think. I have no doubt a naturalist would soon put us right, Thank God, I have had but little

personal experience of these things. Among the Blue Ridge Mountains in Pennsylvania, I have seen on the roads rattlesnakes and copperheads, and on inquiry I am sure 'flying' does not apply to them. Whilst riding in a closed car along the roads in Indiana, I called my friend's attention to some half-dozen or more large snakes. I said, "Look!" The reply was that they are blue racers. The natural antipathy of man to snakes was roused. He rode over their heads and then kept going back till he had done it over the lot. I asked why he called them blue racers, and his reply was that they can go as fast as a horse. I said, "They cannot glide at that rate, surely!" He replied that they appear to leap. This is hardly flying. I am rather inclined to think that they may be scorpions. I should not be surprised, if I came across a Hebrew scholar, if he should say that the word does not mean flying. In that case the fault is with the translators.

What a sad picture, this terrible journey is! Parting with so much treasure only to procure that which cannot help! How common this is, in our everyday life!

If any godly Jew were among them, with what mixed feelings must he have pursued his journey, going to ask help of Egypt. We are told that Egypt's help is vain, to no purpose, therefore have I called her Rahab that sitteth still. The margin tells us the name means arrogancy. I have taken trouble to get at the meaning of the word, and I find it is called haughty, boasting, bragging, but idle, doing nothing. What a dreadful state of feelings these ambassadors must have come to!

V. 8. "Now go, write it before them on a tablet, and inscribe it in a book, that it may be for the time to come (for a witness, M.) for ever and ever."

How marvellous is the patience of our God. Not only has He put this experience in a book, but has told us more than we can meditate upon. We shall never be able to say we know not the way; it will be because we do not want to know.

V. 9. "For it is a rebellious people, lying children, children that will not hear the law of the Lord: which say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophecy deceits: get you out of the way, turn aside out of the path, cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us."

This, of course, would not be their language literally, but an unvarnished expression of the true meaning of that which they say, as God hears it. The trouble then was, as it undoubtedly is to-day, they wanted messages that entertained and lauded them, not repelled or even instructed them, if it was not to their liking. How terrible! Their words and actions implied, if they did not actually say it, "Cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from us."

How modern is this! Numbers of so-called Christians make it clear that it is not the Christ of God, *i.e.*, the Christ of Scripture they desire; it is a Christ they imagine.

V. 12. "Wherefore thus saith the Holy One of Israel, Because ye despise this word, and trust in oppression and perverseness, and stay thereon;

therefore this iniquity shall be to you as a breach ready to fall, swelling out in a high wall, whose breaking cometh suddenly at an instant. And He shall break it as a potter's vessel is broken, breaking it in pieces without sparing: so that there shall not be found among the pieces thereof a sherd to take fire from the hearth, or to take water withal out of the cistern."

The origin of all trouble, "Ye despise this word." We go back to Adam and Eve. We read the instructions in chapter ii. Chapter iii. opens with a query, "Hath God said?" We note Eve's reply, and we see that she had altered, added to, and taken from God's word of chapter ii., showing to us that God's word was not ruling her mind and heart. This spirit also has continued up to the time of Isaiah, and all through the history of the Israelites. God had undertaken to guide, protect, and bless Israel. The men of Judah have here rejected God's help for that of Egypt; hence the rebuke. Like all worldly-wise policies, it can only be a policy of cunning. Here in verse 13, it is likened to a bulging wall. The foundation is wrong, and it is just a question of time before it suddenly falls with a crash. It then is likened to a potter's vessel, in verse 14, not a part of it serving a useful purpose. Has this no voice for us; I mean, the professed church of Christ? We can quite understand men who make no profession nor show any desire for God, following the path they consider the wisest course. The direction they follow is probably the best possible, with its various theories, most of which they profess to believe proved. They seek in the most learned

way to account for the earth, for man, etc. They appear to think pleasure is the thing to be pursued. I am thinking of those who profess Christ. I believe God will honour and bless those who honour His Word; and the talk of scientists, educationalists, and those who magnify themselves with positions and titles will be like the potter's broken vessel at the last.

V. 15. "For thus said the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel. In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength: and ye would not."

We see here that there is the constant effort to save. They are given to understand that in turning from their self-chosen way and resting from their self-confident work they will find their salvation, and this will be manifest by quietness and confidence, as the outcome of the strength they have received. Alas! we read, "And ye would not." Yet the value is beyond rubies.

V. 16. "But ye said, No, for we will flee upon horses; therefore shall ye flee: and, We will ride upon the swift; therefore shall they that pursue you be swift. One thousand shall flee at the rebuke of one; at the rebuke of five shall ye flee: till ye be left as a beacon upon the top of a mountain and as an ensign on an hill."

I understand that Egypt was famed for its horses. Probably the cavalry of Egypt they hoped to get. Certainly they would buy horses and would speedily get out of their way by flight, but alas! for them; their foes would be swifter, their terror would be such that the shout of but one would fill them with terror. The disaster

would be so great that like a beacon or ensign they would just serve as a warning. Underlying this incident comes to us the folly of relying on others for help. This is just the reason of the trouble with the modern world. The people are trained to look to the Government for everything. It is to provide everybody with work at such a rate of pay that all will have a high standard of living, etc. Also they are all to disarm so as not to fight. However, this is all very well till an Assyrian comes along. I am sure Cromwell's advice is good: "Trust in God, but keep your powder dry." I understand this to be, "Do your very utmost and look to the Lord for blessing."

V. 18. "And therefore will the Lord wait, that He may be gracious unto you; and therefore will He be exalted, that He may have mercy upon you: for the Lord is a God of judgement: blessed are all they that wait for Him."

How wonderful is the marvellous grace of God, we have seen as we have read the word of God, or even the pages of history. What do we find, all through the history of man? Bloodshed, theft, and every abominable crime it is possible to think of. We come to the present day, when the main thought appears to be wealth and pleasure. Inventions of every possible kind have been brought about. Comforts abound in one very real sense. We can any morning read what is going on in any part of the world that the Editor thinks may interest the reader; and yet, notwithstanding all the education and science, what do we read? China has civil war. Armies are against armies, many no better than bandits. Russia is dominated by a criminal class whose main object is to

destroy the very thought of God. Europe has not long since been convulsed with the worst war the world has seen. Fear and perplexity take possession of all. America has a big underworld of crime. A great financial difficulty faces us. As to our own country, we are afraid to leave our houses. The police are next door to helpless in the matter. Our magistrates appear to be afraid to punish. Just at present our papers tell us that we are the admiration of the world, because we have balanced our budget. We should have thought this simple act of common honesty would be what all would do. This is enough to make us pessimists, but it does not; first, because we are told clearly and consistently that these things will happen, the reason being that the Gospel of Christ in the absence of Christ is the only thing that can help. Above and beyond all is the great fact revealed, that God is gracious and waiting to be gracious and have mercy upon us. Further, we know that "Blessed are all that wait for Him." How we bless God that though we are comparatively a small remnant, actually it is a larger one now than ever. Things were in a bad way when there was only Noah and his family that could be spared. Things looked very dark when there were but Abraham and a few here and there. When Elijah thought he was the only one, God told him in Israel he had seven thousand. However, all these know how blessed it is to wait for Him. Enoch walked so close to God that his waiting was finished in middle life. Noah, though he appeared to be waiting for judgement, found it was not for him. Abraham, though promised Canaan, sought a heavenly city.

The Jewish nation, those among them who belonged to the true Israel, waited for their Messiah. To-day we are waiting for the Lord from heaven. Then Israel will wait for their King, which time I think will be brought before us before we get out of this chapter.

Blessed God and Father, we do bless Thee for Thy loving-kindness to all that wait for Thee. We know we get involved in the troubles brought upon us by others, but we also know something of Thy sustaining grace and what it is to have songs in the night. Amen.

V. 19. "For the people shall dwell in Zion at Jerusalem; thou shalt weep no more; He will surely be gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry: when He shall hear, He will answer thee."

The margin tells me that this can be "O people that dwellest," making it vocative. This implies that as they are dwelling at Zion, the palace of the King, the King has come, and that the millennium has come. I believe this is further than many would be prepared to go, so, dear reader, read this carefully. I believe the Holy Ghost is just giving a peep at the end to encourage His people. This is God's constant practice. Nothing encourages me more than to keep the end in view. I will indicate the points that lead me to think so here. I make a difference between waiting upon the Lord and waiting for Him. I believe, since my conversion, that I have waited upon the Lord daily. I am waiting for Him, and when He comes I shall see Him and be with Him. Now He is with me. What confirms me in this view is "Thou shalt weep no more." In the con-

struction of our language a negative proposition extends its predicate, *i.e.*, it has to be taken universally, so that there never can be a time when this can be true, except when the King is here. Though after the Millennium, when Satan is loosed for a little season and gathers all the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, against the Holy City there will be no occasion to weep for those at Zion. All weeping will be done by the enemies of God's saints. Notice again the value of the expression, "He will surely be gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry; when He shall hear, He will answer thee."

This implies to me clearly that there will be no waiting. At present, we are tried very often; sometimes, as we say, the heavens seem as brass. Having given His people a peep, so to speak, of the end, He now goes on to give those who are obedient the assurance of a provision that God makes then, and to us now, "Till He come." Praise His Name!

V. 20. "And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet shall not thy teachers be hidden any more, but thine eyes shall see thy teachers." The margin gives, "And the Lord will give." In our dispensation the Lord has told us "In this world ye must have tribulation, but be of good cheer," etc.

So God's faithful people of the Jews were told the same as we are. However, they will be at no loss as to what they shall do, for they will see who are their true teachers, *i.e.*, the prophets, who shall open up the Word as far as it was written

and give new messages from the Lord. At the present day we have a completed canon of Scripture. The early Christians appear to be similar to the Jews in this way. The difference appears to me to be in the following.

V. 21. "And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way; walk ye in it: when ye turn to the right hand or when ye turn to the left." Note, this voice is said to be "behind thee." How beautiful is this! Notwithstanding that their teachers were to be seen, occasions did arise when seemingly the prophets of the Lord were in conflict. As a sample, see Hananiah and Jeremiah, Jer. xxviii. The Holy Ghost, who in all ages has taught His people who are walking in the path of obedience, has ever been the true teacher. These Jewish saints had an ordained priesthood, a visible temple with its sacrifices, etc. In our own dispensation, when the priesthood, the Temple, and its sacrifices have passed away, we are put into a position of absolute dependence on the Holy Ghost. Hence, on the Lord's departure He tells us of the Holy Ghost. John xiv. 17. "Ye know Him; for He abideth with you and shall be in you." This increased nearness came about at Pentecost. What a safe and blessed position!

Here follows the sure sign of a Holy-Ghost-led person. It does seem to me that no one who realises that "God is Spirit" could ever be satisfied or helped with images.

V. 22. "And ye shall defile the overlaying of thy graven images of silver, and the plating of thy molten images of gold: thou shalt cast them

away as an unclean thing : thou shalt say unto it, Get thee hence !”

After the plain command, Ex. xx. 4 (R.V.) “Thou shalt not make unto thee a graven image, nor the likeness of any form that is in heaven above or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth : Thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them, nor serve them,” etc., it does seem strange that this heathen custom should ever have been adopted by God’s people. I suppose it is that they want a God that they can see. We think the argument absurd which is used by Romanists and heathen, *viz.*, that they worship what they represent. But to Romanists I would call attention to the fact that they are not to bow down or serve them. During a visit to any Roman Catholic church that I have been to, one sees them at it. We know how the prophets hold them up to ridicule. Here we are told what shall be done with them.

V. 23. “And He shall give the rain of thy seed, that thou shalt sow the ground withal : and the bread of the increase of the ground, and it shall be fat and plenteous : in that day shall thy cattle feed in large pastures.”

Here we are brought to “that day,” *i.e.*, Millennial day. Here is a picture of general and great prosperity, which shows that general prosperity with the Lord here is desirable. I also recognise that even now the Christians, if free from tyranny, by their habits of thrift, industry, and being satisfied with food and raiment and the things that they have, do well in this world.

V. 24. “The oxen likewise and the young

asses that till the ground shall eat savoury provender, which hath been winnowed with the shovel and with the fan."

Is not this a delightful picture? Here we see in "that day" care will be taken that our animals' food will be looked after. I think it carries with it more than the food. Horses will not be over-driven, and will see more of meadow-life. Dogs will not be kept on the chain and howl all night, because of either the chain or the cold. I think, generally, Christians practise some of this to-day, but in some cases I have spoken to Christians even, hoping to see less of it. I must admit a dog on a chain is a sad sight.

V. 25. "And there shall be upon every lofty mountain, and upon every high hill, rivers and streams of waters, in the day of the great slaughter when the towers fall."

This reminds me of Isaiah ii. 15 . . . when the bulwarks of self-confidence, self-help, and pride, are high. These war troubles were self-created by their conduct. When that is altered, the blessing comes.

V. 26. "The light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the Lord bindeth up the hurt of His people and healeth the stroke of their wound."

Under our present physical conditions, such light would be intolerable; it could not be borne. We think of the New Jerusalem which comes down out of heaven. We are told there is no night there, and that there is no need of the sun,

for the Lord Himself will be the light thereof. This new Jerusalem is the place we look forward to. Here we see both moon and sun. Is this the new earth, and is it the ultimate destiny of the Jewish hope? These are questions that I should not attempt to answer. We do know that the Millennium, blessed as it will be, and a very desirable time on which to live on this earth, will speedily prove, when Satan is loosed for a little season, that whilst man rules, even under the most glorious conditions, it will not stand the test. God wanted to be King over His people. The Israelites wanted a man that they could see, like the other nations. History shows us what a mistake they made. It is just about the same in our church dispensation. The true Israel were those who sought a heavenly city, like their father Abraham, and made God the King of their lives. We have to sanctify Christ as Lord in our hearts, *i.e.*, from the deepest recesses in our hearts. We want Him to rule us, and we will allow no man to usurp His place. We can be quite sure that a hundred years under the best conditions down here would never satisfy the heart of a godly man, whether Jew, Gentile, or Christian. So we could, from a text like this, go on raising questions, I felt inclined to say, *ad infinitum*. Did I hear a boy or girl speak? Do you not think that such texts as this should be taken spiritually and not literally? My reply is that I felt inclined on first reading it, to take it that way myself. I quite see, or think I do, that however literally I may take it, it would be of very little value apart from the spiritual side of things. Yet, on reflection, we do not lose the spiritual even if we think

it literal; and it is wonderful how literally the various prophecies work out.

V. 27. "Behold, the name of the Lord cometh from far, burning with His anger, and in thick rising smoke: His lips are full of indignation, and His tongue is as a devouring fire: and His breath as an overflowing stream that reacheth unto the neck, to sift the nations with the sieve of destruction (M.) and a bridle that causeth to err, shall be in the jaws of the peoples."

What is it that Isaiah saw? Is he thinking of the judgment on Sennacherib? It does not answer to this scripture. Probably the destruction of Sennacherib may have been that which, humanly speaking, led his spirit on to the future. As far as I can gather through the reading of the Word, God's judgements have been chastisements, and generally with a view to heal. Isaiah himself has told us the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness when His judgements are on the earth. These are to be seen in the seals, trumpets, and vials, culminating in His dealings with God and Magog. Hence I think we read that the name of the Lord cometh "from far." If we reflect, we can quite understand His anger and His lips being full of indignation, when we think of the rich provision in material blessings He has given us: the prophets He has sent, and above all, of the gift of His Son, of the support and guidance now, and of the rich provision for the future. Man rejects His Son, even denies His existence, and glories in a godless life. They will not have God as King or Saviour. As we read these judgements in Revelation, we find they

refuse to worship Him as Creator. But, praise God, we have it clearly stated that He will not allow this cruelty and wickedness to continue for ever.

V. 29. "Ye shall have a song as in the night when a holy feast is kept : and gladness of heart, as when one goeth with a pipe to come into the mountain of the Lord, to the Rock of Israel. And the Lord shall cause His glorious voice to be heard, and shall shew the lighting down of His arm, with the indignation of His anger, and the flame of a devouring fire, with a blast and tempest and hailstones."

I have no doubt but that this is an allusion to the Passover feast, when the destroying angel had passed over, the Egyptians had been punished, and their release arranged for. There must have been a similar joy when the Israelites saw the hosts of Pharaoh drowned, and how gladly did Miriam sing. Presently, (D.V.) we shall be reading about the destruction of Sennacherib's army and the joy that followed, but this scripture brings me to the last scene which brings about the Millennium.

V. 31. "For through the voice of the Lord shall the Assyrian be broken in pieces, which smote with a rod, and every stroke of the appointed staff, which the Lord shall lay upon him, shall be with tabrets and harps : and in battles of shaking will he fight with them. For a Topheth is preserved of old : yea, for the king it is made ready ; He hath made it deep and large ; the pile thereof is fire and much wood ; the

breath of the Lord, like a stream of brimstone, doth kindle it.”

I do feel how necessary it is to keep in the current of God's thoughts. As we look on to the great tribulation that brings us to really the last scene that can be put here, for the revolt after the Millennium as far as I can see does not bring suffering to God's people. At the last we see the Antichrist head over the ten kings (Roman Empire). Though there is the King of the South (Egypt) it does not make so prominent a place as the Antichrist and his powerful enemy, the King of the North (the Assyrian). Note here that we are told Topheth (Hell) is prepared for him. That he will get there is certain, but though not expressly stated, as it is with the Beast and the False Prophet, they are to be cast alive into the lake of fire. I feel that the Assyrian makes the third.

Every stroke he is to receive, we are told is with tabrets and harps. We have seen how the redeemed in heaven and all spiritual intelligences, as they perceive the holiness of God and the happy (for all) destruction of evil beings and influences, culminate in the Hallelujah chorus which appears to have entranced Handel. The “much wood,” alas, shows us the great amount of wicked to punish.



CHAPTER XXXI.

V. 1. "Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help, and stay on horses; and trust in chariots, because they are many, and in horsemen, because they are very strong: but they look not to the Holy One of Israel, neither seek the Lord."

Though Isaiah's warning had failed to prevent the alliance with Egypt, yet he still continues to decry it. It is the old trouble. They prefer to rest upon big battalions rather than upon the unseen God. As to Isaiah, the secret of his constant effort was, that God was a living reality to him, and Isaiah did endure as seeing Him Who is invisible.

V. 2. "Yet He also is wise, and will bring evil, and will not call back his words: but will arise up against the house of evil doers, and against the help of them that work iniquity."

Isaiah could see the folly of their plan, and no doubt heard the conceited sort of talk that many political leaders indulge in, with their wonderful promises. It sounds like irony, therefore, when he tells them that they are not the only wise ones; that God also is wise; and further, that God's purposes are against evil workers, and will bring or allow evil to come upon them, as a result of the folly of their ways.

V. 3. "Now the Egyptians are men, and not God: and their horses flesh and not spirit; and

when the Lord shall stretch out his hand, both he that helpeth shall stumble and he that is holpen shall fall, and they all shall fail together." It does seem strange that the prophet should write like this to Israel, with its wonderful experiences of God, but the fact is that every generation has to be taught, because it is the constant tendency to trust in man instead of God. This means that it is the spiritual and moral prosperity that makes a nation strong, and without it, whoever or whatever we may rely upon for help, we shall fall, and the helpers with us.

V. 4. "For thus saith the Lord unto me : Like as when the lion growleth, and the young lion, over his prey, if a multitude of shepherds be called forth against him, he will not be dismayed at their voice, nor abase himself for the noise of them : so shall the Lord of hosts come down to fight upon Mount Zion, and upon the hill thereof. As birds flying, so will the Lord of hosts protect Jerusalem : He will protect and deliver it, He will pass over and preserve it."

This is very comforting to those who have faith in the Lord. The picture is brought before us of the lion who has his prey, and though many shepherds go out to rescue the sheep the lion will not be afraid of them. This picture may be considered suitable on account of the Assyrian lion that was on the prowl, but Jehovah here says He will be like that. He may allow nations to chastise His people, but He will come down and fight for Mount Zion. Then comes the promise of another passover, see Exodus xii. 23. The same word is pass over, which is described as a

bird fluttering over its nest, to protect its young. In Exodus xii. 23, Jehovah says, "The Lord will pass over the door, and will not suffer the destroyer to come in unto your houses to smite you."

V. 6. "Turn ye unto Him from whom ye have deeply revolted, O children of Israel."

Here is a call to repentance. As we read the following three verses we see that this call is supported by two powerful reasons.

"For in that day they shall cast away every man his idols of silver, and his idols of gold, which your own hands have made unto you for a sin. Then shall the Assyrian fall with the sword, not of man, and the sword not of men shall devour him: and he shall flee from the sword, and his young men shall become tributary. And his rock shall pass away by reason of terror, and his princes shall be dismayed at the ensign, saith the Lord, whose fire is in Zion and his furnace in Jerusalem."

The first reason is that in that day idolatry would be recognised in all its wickedness; its sin will be so apparent that, however costly it was, it will be put away. As far as I can trace, the chastisements of God have certainly swept the house clean from idolatry, but alas, when the unclean spirit finds the house clean and empty, he will enter it and make it worse than ever. I wish heartily the so-called Christian church was as free from this foolish sin as the Jew now appears to be.

The second reason is that their safety from Sennacherib, (near) the King of the North (far),

will be not because of man or nations, but because of God's grace.

Dear reader, may we ever keep in mind that our dependence and safety equally depend upon the grace of God, and should ever form the basis of our thinking, and it should call forth a spirit of obedience and thankfulness on our part.

I have no doubt that Isaiah had in his mind Sennacherib. We, however, see that his spirit went on to the end, to the ultimate destruction of the Assyrian to perfect this prophecy, especially in this last verse.

We must remember that there are no chapters in the original. These are for our convenience, and in chapter xxxii. we are introduced to the King.



CHAPTER XXXII.

V. 1. "Behold, a King shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgement. And a man shall be as an hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest : as rivers of water in a dry place, as a shadow of a great rock in a weary land."

In comparison with Ahaz, Hezekiah in some degree is to be found in this verse, for without doubt Hezekiah was a godly King, and sought practically to do the right. But to use this language of any King would not be accurate. The Holy Ghost leads the prophet on to that Blessed One who has ever been the hope of God's people in any dispensation. It is our joy, and to our profit, to meet with God's saints who have learned much of Christ, and we are greatly strengthened by the contact, but our spirits always go out to Christ. He does satisfy us, and we realise, whether it be Isaiah or any ordinary saint, that we all come to the Apostle Paul's statement, that "For me to live is Christ." This, in its fulness, refers to the Millennial reign of Christ. But God wanted the message to have a then-present result; and to say we call Christ Lord, which is perhaps stronger than the word King. The scripture makes it clear that Christ looks for absolute obedience from His people.

V. 3. "And the eyes of them that see shall not be dim, and the ears of them that hear shall hearken. The heart also of the rash shall understand knowledge, and the tongue of the stammerers shall be ready to speak plainly. The vile person (a fool, M.) shall no more be called liberal (or, noble, M.) nor the churl said to be bountiful. For the vile person will speak villany, and his heart will work iniquity, to practise profaneness, and to utter error against the Lord, to make empty the soul of the hungry, and to cause the drink of the thirsty to fail. The instruments also of the churl are evil : he deviseth wicked devices to destroy the meek with lying words, even when the needy speaketh right. But the liberal deviseth liberal things ; and in liberal things shall he continue."

I think here, with the inspiration of the thought of such a King to come, that we should seek to obtain these great principles which will govern them, for, as I have often said, these things are written for a practical result. We see here three blessings that will be Judah's : *First*, Righteous government as a blessing to His people ; *Second*, There will be an opened understanding ; *Third*, The naming and treating everyone according to his true character.

How important is this for us to see that nobility of birth or wealth gives place to nobility of character.

This blessed King, *i.e.*, Christ, will be in all we need to see and hear. The four figures used here, Wind, Tempest, Desert, a Weary land, have their counterpart in our mental, moral and spiritual make-up. We find it by sanctifying

Christ in our heart as Lord. He becomes a liberal man. He deviseth liberal things. It gives him so much satisfaction that he continueth in liberal things. He much prefers to be a blessing than to obtain one.

We get side by side a picture of the person who is not under the government of this King. He will be rash, a stammerer, *i. e.*, he will not speak plainly. He will speak villany, work iniquity, practise profaneness; he will speak against the Lord to make the hungry and the thirsty (spiritually) empty! He will seek to destroy the meek.

My dear reader, as I write these things I cannot but feel that though Christ has meant so much to me, I have not had or enjoyed Christ to anything like the extent that I might have done. The conscious presence of Christ is heaven below. During the night a line of Newton's hymn has been running through my mind, "And should He be ever thus nigh, I have nothing to wish or to fear: no mortal so happy as I, My summer would last all the year."

V. 9. "Rise up, ye women that are at ease, and hear my voice: Ye careless daughters, give ear unto my speech."

The prophet has given us a wonderful but dreadful portrait of these women in chapter iii. 16-24. As his mind is led again to think of them, two features of their character stand out in his mind. They love ease, and they are careless. The reason is easily seen. These, if I may put it so, are faults of character that direct the life,

and breed every woe imaginable. This love of ease leads on speedily to a life of pleasure, which really is misery or at least a life full of regrets. Pleasure is a very desirable thing, but I am sure, as we have seen so often, it is only to be found in the path of duty, which does not give ease in the sense that the prophet has in his mind. Then they are careless; the margin says confident. Well, I must say the two are combined in a wonderful way. A young man just begins to get a pound or two beyond his expenses, which, as he is not married, are not very heavy. He must have a car; the evil is that this starts others who had very nice sweethearts. They feel they must enjoy themselves whilst they are young. The girls naturally have allowed their affections to go, hence they are upset. "What is that the reader says? "Why, you are talking about men; our text is about women!" Well, you are correct, but I would remind you that men are just as silly. I spoke to one two or three days ago, and his face was full of self-satisfied smiles. I met yesterday one of the mothers, who naturally is very much upset. What upsets her is that the daughter will not listen to her. I said, "Give her a message from me: Tell her that a young man that cannot seriously face his future, is not worth having." Unless, of course, they attend to the prophet's exhortation, and, even if they do, they have lost much ground. However, we can be sure that if we have gone astray in this or any other direction, our only hope is to "rise up" and give ear unto God's word. There is nothing worth having in this world or the next unless you do.

V. 10. "For days beyond a year shall ye be troubled, ye careless women, for the vintage shall fail; the ingathering shall not come."

As far as these are concerned, they will not have to wait very long, but it is only a question of time. It is sure to come. When in America, just going into Brooklyn, one depot had about two thousand cars for sale, the purchasers having failed in their payments. I was told they had mortgaged their houses to get the cars. As I knew of many such in England, I quite believed it.

V. 11. "Tremble, ye women that are at ease: be troubled, ye careless ones; strip you, and make you bare, and gird sackcloth upon your loins. They shall smite upon the breasts for the pleasant fields, for the fruitful vine."

If they do not "rise up" in time, the trembling and the trouble will surely come. If you do rise up, the prophet points a way out. Strip you, make yourself bare. This is the only way out. During a long life, to how many men and women have I said I should give up this or that, sometimes the house, frequently the home, or anything that I could see was heavier than they could carry. The reply, alas, so frequently has been, "I could not do without that." But they have had to. How many women cling to their home! It is very natural and very desirable, if you can see a way to do it. I can assure you, dear widow, never attempt to carry more than you can. I have never seen any of the few regret following this advice of the prophet. I remember a widow I met in America, who lived in a beautiful place.

There was no visible source of income, and the house was mortgaged. I advised her to sell house, home, jewellery, all except necessary clothes. I told her I had an experience in England more than she knew. She had some wrenches, but had the resolution to do it. When all was done, she had just about enough left to pay her way, if she lived with a relative. Later, she got an easy situation that made it possible to live comfortably. I suppose it must be a boy speaking. He thinks I am not writing about Isaiah. The prophet meant that these ease-loving women are to pay the penalty of their conduct. My reply is that the best way to show sorrow for sin is to forsake it. Alas! these did not obey the words of the prophet, and the natural result follows.

V. 13. "Upon the land of my people shall come up thorns and briars; yea, upon all the houses of joy in the joyous city: for the palace shall be forsaken; the populous city shall be deserted; the hill and the watch-tower shall be for dens for ever, a joy of wild asses, a pasture of flocks."

Thorns and briars are very desirable as hedges to keep dogs and undesirable people out, but only lovers of ease would allow them over the land. An unbalanced budget has just caused great trouble almost all over the world, bringing in all sorts of anxieties. My dear reader, it will be just the same if you do not balance your private budget. I have heard it said that money troubles are the worst of troubles; they bring trouble upon everything. All these things are the melancholy

result of a life of ease and carelessness. How long do you think, dear reader, this will go on for? Is there an end to it? Yes, praise God. He tells us :

V. 15. "Until the spirit be poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness become a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be counted for a forest."

We know, dear boys and girls, that this will be true in the Millennium, but it is very clear that it was available to the Jews at any period of their history. They had but to "rise up" and attend to the words of the Lord. They were, and are, careless, but Joel tells us, in God's grace, there shall be such an outpouring of God's grace that when that comes all shall be well. We remember that the Church dispensation began with the descent of the Holy Ghost. He has ever been at the service of the saints of God in all dispensations. In ours He dwells within us. It is essential, however, that we must walk in Him and be led and controlled by Him if we are to have the blessings God intends for us. Then our lives will become fruitful in every true sense of the word.

V. 16. "Then judgement shall dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness shall abide in the fruitful field. And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and confidence for ever. And my people shall abide in a peaceable habitation and sure dwellings, and in quiet resting-places."

How true this is, whether national or political !

Nothing can give peace better than doing what is right. Nothing can prevent friction more than justice. The work of right-doing makes for peace; the effect is quietness and confidence. The promise is to "My people." This should make us think. I cannot see how anyone who has not God and is without hope, can ever hope to have a sure dwelling and enjoy quiet resting-places.

V. 19. "But it shall hail in the downfall of the forest; and the city shall be utterly laid low. Blessed are ye that sow beside all waters: that send forth the feet of the ox and ass."

Here we see intimated that before peace is secured, the Forest, a figure of nations, must fall; and the city, *i.e.*, Jerusalem, be brought low. The blessed ones that sow beside all waters will be literally true during the Millennium. It is always spiritually true.



CHAPTER XXXIII.

The prophet in this chapter brings us to the fourteenth year of Hezekiah's reign. Assyria is in Judah threatening Jerusalem.

V. 1. "Woe to thee that spoilest, and thou wast not spoiled; and dealest treacherously, and they dealt not treacherously with thee! When thou hast ceased to spoil, thou shalt be spoiled; and when thou hast made an end to deal treacherously, they shall deal treacherously with thee."

We want to look carefully at this, because we find here the reason for war. It is the national expression of "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he reap." Assyria had never been spoiled by Judah. Judah in her folly hires Assyria to help them in the attack of Syria and Israel. She becomes a razor to shave Judah, just as Isaiah warned them. They have now come up against Jerusalem. II Kings xviii. tells us that Hezekiah gave them three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold. They took the money, but broke their covenants.

Note.—We can never satisfy the forces of evil with our agreement. We remember "They that use the sword shall perish by the sword." This principle is very far-reaching; so is the opposite. See xxxii. 8.

V. 2. "O Lord, be gracious unto us; we have waited for Thee; be Thou their arm every morning; our salvation also in time of trouble."

Here we see the prophet identifying himself with the people, and waiting on God for salvation.

He appeals to God to be their defence. He realises that every day brings its own dangers ; so his prayer is that God will be their arm every morning, and their salvation in time of trouble.

We must really see that we also secure this great boon, for it is ours by promise. We need God's arm every morning, and as we are told, Man is born to trouble, we necessarily want daily salvation.

V. 3. "At the noise of the tumult the peoples are fled ; at the lifting up of Thyself the nations are scattered."

The noise is from Jehovah, see xxix. 6. When God's thunderings begin, the mighty army of Assyria is scattered, and they flee.

V. 4. "And your spoil shall be gathered as the caterpillar gathereth : as locusts shall they leap upon it."

Here we get two figures as to the action of the people of Jerusalem, and as to the Assyrian army. I have read of, and know, those that have experience of locusts. I understand that where they pass over, there is not a vestige of green left. I have had an experience of the caterpillar. I have had my gooseberries practically lose every leaf. This prophecy of the prophet should have been a great encouragement to God's people.

V. 5. "The Lord is exalted ; for He dwelleth on high : He hath filled Zion with judgement and righteousness. And there shall be stability in thy times, abundance of salvation, wisdom, and knowledge ; the fear of the Lord is his treasure."

The destruction of Sennacherib, so manifestly the divine work of the Lord in the defence of His people, exalts Him in their hearts and minds. They now realise where God dwells; there can be no contending against Him. The result is the abundance of things that such disturbance brings. This results in abundance in thy times (Hezekiah's times), abundance of salvation, wisdom, and knowledge: the fear of the Lord is his treasure. In reading such statements as these, I love to remember that God is no respecter of persons, and apart from that which we might almost say is the miraculous intervention in the case of Sennacherib, this is a general truth, though now used particularly of Hezekiah. If I understand this correctly I see "the fear of the Lord" is the foundation grace on which all that possess it can build all the treasures of the above, *i.e.*, salvation, wisdom, and knowledge. I cannot help wondering why this order. I think why salvation is put first? I remember what a wonderful meaning this word has. Without going into that, I remember what an inclusive word this is; it covers past, present, and future. Without being saved, nothing is of real or permanent value. Wisdom I understand to be the right use of knowledge. Knowledge, which is so valuable, is dangerous unless used properly. Knowledge, though we value it, we must remember that apart from the fear of the Lord, it "puffeth up." It is, however, so valuable that God says, "My people shall perish for lack of knowledge." This we see in every department of life, in things great and small.

V. 7. "Behold, their valiant ones cry without; the ambassadors of peace weep bitterly."

The Assyrians had taken Hezekiah's money; made a covenant, then broken it. We should have thought that when a covenant has been called a scrap of paper, when Russia apparently has no intention of keeping her word, no one would be foolish enough to sign any. Yet our enlightened rulers are continually signing, which to honest men is a solemn bond. To wicked men, it forms but little restraint, if any.

V. 8. "The highways lie waste, the wayfaring man ceaseth: he hath broken the covenant, he hath despised the cities, he regardeth not man. The land mourneth and languisheth: Lebanon is ashamed and withereth away: Sharon is like a desert; and Bashan and Carmel shake off their leaves."

Here follows a description of the state of the country as Sennacherib continues to destroy the place, following his broken agreement. They are now reaping the bitter fruit of disobeying God and making a covenant. The older I get, the more clearly I see that the only path of safety is to act justly, and devote our strength in protecting ourselves. Evil men want only to attack weak persons or nations.

V. 10. "Now will I arise, saith the Lord; now will I lift up myself; now will I be exalted."

Three times we get "now" used in this one short verse, so we must look carefully at the then present time. What we see at that time is the mightiest empire in the world overflowing one of

the smallest nations. They had lost hope in themselves or God. As a last straw they hoped in Egypt, but saw that their help, if it came, would be too late. What a picture this is of the time when the Lord comes to Olivet. This is all that real believers know is true in the spiritual world. It was when men were helpless and without strength, that Christ died for the ungodly. It is not till we discover the helpless condition we are in, that we can turn to Christ. Nothing sets us back more than to think there is some merit or strength left in us. We cannot help thinking of the last verse in the doctrinal argument of the Apostle Paul. Romans xi. 32. "For God hath shut up all unto disobedience, that He might have mercy upon all." What a wonderful God we have! We can quite understand the Apostle's outburst of praise in verses 33-36, and the practical deductions he makes in xii. 1, 2. Another thing I can understand is why Christians love to sing "Grace 'tis a charming sound, harmonious to the ear."

V. 12. "Ye shall conceive chaff, ye shall bring forth stubble: your breath is a fire that shall devour you. And the people shall be as the burnings of lime: as thorns cut down, that are burned in the fire."

Judgement is said to be God's strange work, but Sennacherib found it very effective, in fact, just as God here expresses it. What a relief it will be when sin and evil are dealt with permanently!

When Jehovah says this, the prophet sees that the enemy are but hay and stubble.

V. 13. "Hear ye that are afar off, what I have done: and ye that are near, acknowledge my might."

How wonderful it is to see that God wants all to take heed to His acts of judgement in order that they may, by acknowledging God's might, repent and get pardoned. This, to me, is clearly His purpose. There is always a way made for all sinners, except the finally impenitent.

V. 14. "The sinners in Zion are afraid; trembling hath surprised the godless ones. Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?"

Here is a lesson for those that are far off and those that are near (later). We see how the nations sought Hezekiah's friendship. But particularly it is a lesson to the sinners that dwell in Zion. In our dispensation we should say to those we speak of as "professors and not possessors" in the Church. They raise the question "Who?" They see that God is a consuming fire, and as He is from everlasting to everlasting, none can endure it. They raise the question "Who?" inferring that none can. However, God furnishes the answer. This is very important. God says, This man can. Then follows a picture of a man that need have no alarm at the judgement of God. Living according to God's will, he lives in the love of God, and he knows God has met, at this time, by promise, his sins. There can be no anxiety on that account, and, being saved, his works are an evidence that he has saving faith.

V. 15. "He that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly; he that despiseth the gain of oppressions (M. fraud), that shaketh his hands from holding of bribes, that stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood, and shutteth his eyes from looking upon evil; he shall dwell on high."

All scripture goes to show that not only shall such a man dwell on high with God, blessed consummation to our life; but he can walk with God down here on earth, which is clearly man's highest state on earth. As without doubt all Christians want this, we must carefully ponder over these hindrances, for we cannot walk with God whilst any sin gets in between us.

V. 16. "His place of defence shall be the munitions of rocks; his bread shall be given him, his waters shall be sure."

We see that his walk with God has come to mean to him that the holiness of God which the sinner cannot endure has become to him a rock-fortress. As I write, the picture of Gibraltar comes to my mind, with all its means of defence: and the promise is that bread and waters (plural) shall be sure. I think, to the man who so walks with God, he has all he needs materially and spiritually.

V. 17. "Thine eyes shall see the King in His beauty: they shall behold a far-stretching land."

How humbled Hezekiah had been. Now he is reigning in all his kingly dignity and beauty. What a picture this is of the Man of Sorrows, now exalted and crowned with glory and honour! How extensive is His dominion now!

V. 18. "Thine heart shall muse on the terror : Where is he that counted, where is he that weighed the tribute? Where is he that counted the towers?"

When they looked back and thought of the terrible army that was drawing nearer, and of the men that would assess them at the tribute, and of the military men that would count the towers ; and realised that they were to overcome all, what a delight in God must have been theirs ! This musing upon our terrors is a wise thing to do : what a delight and with what profit do we meditate upon the terrors that have distressed us in times past, and then to realise that our God is a God of deliverances.

V. 19. "Thou shalt not see the fierce people, a people of a deep speech that thou canst not perceive ; of a strange tongue that thou canst not understand."

These in Jerusalem are to be delivered of even a sight of this terrible foe. What a relief ! Yet this terrible foe was real enough. I have often said that the worst troubles I have had have never happened. They were real enough. As I look back, I see how real they were, but what has amazed me is the simple way that God averted them, so that I never saw them.

This is a splendid example of such.

V. 20. "Look upon Zion, the city of our solemnities (*i.e.*, set feasts, M.) : thine eyes shall see Jerusalem a quiet habitation, a tent that shall not be removed ; the stakes whereof shall never be plucked up, neither shall any of the cords

thereof be broken. But there the Lord will be with us in majesty, a place of broad rivers and streams; wherein shall go no galley with oars, neither shall gallant ship pass thereby. For the Lord is our Judge, the Lord is our law-giver, the Lord is our King; He will save us. Thy tacklings are loosed; they could not strengthen the foot of their mast, they could not spread the sail; then was the prey of a great spoil divided; the lame took the prey. And the inhabitant shall not say, I am sick; the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity."

I can only understand this scripture by seeing that the prophet's mind goes on again to the end, for Hezekiah's time would only be a faint picture of what we have here. If we "look upon Jesus" we see (a) They can dwell quietly there; (b) It is permanent (c) There the Lord will be in His majesty (d) Broad rivers and streams will be there (e) No warship or pirate will traverse them.

V. 21 tells them that the Lord will be their Judge, Lawgiver, and King. He will save them.

V. 23. This expression, "He will save us" appears to me to bring the prophet back to his own time, and describes the Assyrian as a wrecked ship. The Lord saves His people.

Not being learned in the Scriptures, there is a difficulty to me in interpreting such scriptures, because not only Isaiah, but all the prophets, being moved by God's Holy Spirit, see the past, present, and future. With this in mind, I can fit all these expressions in. The reader may not agree with me, but he, looking to the Holy Ghost, can do it for himself.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

“Come near, ye nations, to hear : and hearken, ye peoples : let the earth hear, and the fulness thereof : the world, and all things that come forth of it.”

This and the following chapter finishes the first great section of Isaiah's prophecies. The four historical chapters form a connecting link with the second half of his prophecies. The story of Sennacherib appears to be past. He was but one factor in the world's melancholy history of rapine and blood, for we see the prophet takes up his pen to prophesy against any or all the nations that carry on war, aggression, covetousness, jealousy, or any other malignant spirit that proceeds from the ungodly.

V. 2. “For the Lord hath indignation against all the nations, and fury against all their host : He hath utterly destroyed them. He hath delivered them to the slaughter.”

Here we see the indignation of God expressed in such very strong terms that some speak of the language of the prophet as “hyperbole.” This is a word composed of two words, “above,” and “to cast.” Personally, I cannot distinguish it from exaggeration. Hyperbole is a kind of an apology; Exaggeration is wrong or a fault.

The best part of this sentence to me is, “He hath utterly destroyed them.” In all ages and

in all parts of the world these wars and other forms of cruelty have been going on, till, as we think of them, it makes the head reel and the heart grow sick. It comes like sunshine after rain to know that God will completely stop it.

V. 3. "Their slain also shall be cast out, and the stink of their carcasses shall come up, and the mountains shall be melted with their blood."

Isaiah had a specimen of this, I expect, through the destruction of Sennacherib; his mind, like Ezekiel's, goes on to the destruction of Gog and Magog after the Millennium.

V. 4. "And all the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll; and all their host shall fade away, as the leaf fadeth from off the vine, and as a fading leaf from the fig-tree."

We get this spoken of in Hebrews. When God begins this work, it will be effectively done. We can praise His Name that we have His promise of a new heaven and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. I may have mentioned this before; if so, it is because God constantly brings before us the same truth, for He knows us. However, we are told that when He ariseth to shake the earth He will shake the heavens also, but He remaineth. What can give a soul more solid satisfaction than when this is done, when we begin eternity, so to speak. Everything that can be shaken will be, and we shall have nothing to fear; because only that which is unshakeable will remain.

V. 5. "For My sword hath drunk its fill in heaven."

Before the Lord comes to the earth, Michael and his angels clear the heavenlies. He then comes to the earth and deals with Edom and Bozrah.

“Behold, it shall come down upon Edom, and upon the people of my curse, to judgement.”

It appears strange that when the prophet foretells the passing away of the heavens, he singles out the judgement of Edom. But here Edom stands as a representative of all the powers that are hostile to God and His people. Edom was so persistent in its opposition. All through the Word, it is clearly taught that God will destroy the world when its sin culminates in unbelief and His peoples persecuted to the fullest extent.

V. 6. “The sword of the Lord is filled with blood; it is made fat with fatness, with the blood of lambs and goats, with the fat of the kidneys of rams, for the Lord hath a sacrifice in Bozrah, and a great slaughter in the land of Edom. And the wild oxen shall come down with them, and the bullocks with the bulls; and their land shall be drunken with blood, and their dust made fat with fatness.”

These animals represent the Edomite nation. Verse 7 gives us an idea of the exhaustive nature of these judgements.

V. 8. “For it is the day of the Lord’s vengeance; the year of recompense in the controversy of Zion.”

This is the day of the Lord’s vengeance. The Lord has told His people not to avenge themselves. “Vengeance is mine, I will repay,” saith the Lord. All that hurt the Lord’s people

will find what a dangerous course they have adopted. And it is well for the Lord's people, as far as lies within them, to rest in this, remembering the power of the controversy rests with the Lord.

V. 9. "And the streams thereof shall be turned into pitch, and the dust thereof into brimstone, and the land thereof shall become burning pitch. It shall not be quenched night nor day; the smoke thereof shall go up for ever: from generation to generation it shall lie waste: none shall pass through it for ever and ever. But the pelican and the porcupine shall possess it; and the owl and the raven shall dwell therein: and He shall stretch over it the line of confusion and the plummet of emptiness, (M.) They shall call the nobles thereof to the kingdom, but none shall be there; and all her princes shall be nothing. And thorns shall come up in her palaces, nettles and thistles in the fortresses thereof: and it shall be an habitation of jackals, a court for ostriches. And the wild beasts of the deserts shall meet with the wolves, and the satyr (or he-goat) shall cry to his fellow: yea, the night monster shall settle there, and shall find her a place of rest. There shall the arrowsnake make her nest, and lay and hatch, and gather under her shadow: yea, there shall the kites be gathered, every one with her mate. Seek ye out of the book of the Lord and read: no one of these shall be missing; none shall want her mate: for My mouth it hath commanded, and his spirit it hath gathered them. And he hath cast the lot for them, and his hand hath divided it unto them by line: they shall

possess it for ever : from generation to generation shall they dwell therein.”

This scripture, I have no doubt, contains things far beyond my understanding, and I am not in the position to say that these animals have no figurative meaning or spiritual significance of a bad kind. What appeals to me is, that it is a literal statement, especially as we read verse 16; we see that whoever lived when the judgement came upon Edom is invited to search the Scriptures and he will find none of these things absent which are predicted. Everything shall be clearly seen. The reason for this is very clear : it is Jehovah's Word.



CHAPTER XXXV.

V. 1. "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad ; and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose. It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing : the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon ; they shall see the glory of the Lord, the excellency of our God."

We have seen what continued and bitter hostility to God's people brought Edom to. This is fairly true now, if that which I have read by travellers can be relied upon, and I think it will be found in the end to be permanently true. Here we get a beautiful picture of God's people in Millennial times. The reason for all this will be the presence of the King. We see how literally our Saviour interpreted this. Alas! They would not have that man to reign over them. They will then.

It is also true that there are spiritual forces at work, in things both good and bad. These in any full measure are only open to the eye of faith. "So that what is seen hath not been made out of things which do appear" (Heb. xi. 3). Though I value the literal prospect, it is the spiritual that gives it its value, and, as God has given to all believers a measure of faith to see these hidden things, to that extent we can get a present realisation of the things that really matter.

Let us take then the literal as the outcome of the spiritual, and a true figure to us. We have seen spiritually and, praise God, have had some experience of it. We have the wilderness, the solitary place, and the desert brought before us. Many lives we have known, and do know, that can be so described.

Having accepted Christ, they have blossomed and borne fruit, and with hearts full of gladness and rejoicing, have experienced something of the glory of Lebanon and Carmel; and the glory of the Lord, the excellency of our God, occupies their heart and mind.

To do this (that is to say, those that want it) we are to forget self and set out to be a blessing. This great truth, in some way or other, is brought continually before us. This should impress us with its importance. Here the form it takes is as in Hebrews. We are to

V. 3. "Strengthen ye the weak hands and confirm the feeble knees. (M. tottering)"

Their works cannot be up to much if their hands are weak, and their standing and walk are unsatisfactory if knees are tottering. We are to seek to strengthen such. We must not forget that the heart is the source of most troubles; we are therefore to

V. 4. "Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong; fear not: Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God: He will come and save you."

These two things are essential to any satisfactory life, namely, strength, and an absence of

fear. The prophet here shows us that these can be obtained by a strong faith in the coming of the Lord, and by leaving Him to judge the guilty and to reward and save His own.

These words are applicable at the time of Sennacherib, but the end is kept in view, for it says,

V. 5. "*Then* the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing : for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert."

How literally the Lord understood the Scriptures ! and it is true that the application of these to the spiritual side is most important. I feel quite sure that the Bible is very much more literal than many I have met think. He actually did these things before their eyes, and yet they would not receive Him as their King. What could be greater evidence than to remember this scripture, and to see it carried out before their eyes ? We can see that miracles or any other evidence, can never give life or understanding of divine things ; but, bless His Name, He has not left us orphans, but sent unto us the other Paraclete, who alone can give us opened eyes and unstopped ears, so that we can enter into these things and be enabled to walk aright, to sing His praises and revel in the refreshment He provides.

V. 7. "And the glowing sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water : in the habitation of jackals, where they lay, shall

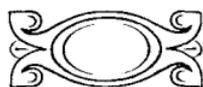
be grass with reeds and rushes.” The word “pool” so the margin tells us, may be used for a mirage. With this in our minds, we see it is sin that blinds, deafens, lames, etc.; and though the sinner mocks at sin, it is equally true that sin mocks the sinner and causes him to see a mirage in this world’s desert which lures him on to destruction.

But to him who has his eyes anointed with eye-salve, there is a pool of refreshment. We may be sure that what will be in its fulness in the *then* may be enjoyed to-day by every transparent soul.

V. 8. “And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness: the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, yea fools, shall not err therein. No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast go up thereon; they shall not be found there; but the redeemed shall walk there: and the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their heads: they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.”

Here we get a highway and a way. The first, I think, is literal. The way is spiritual. Both are true in the Millennial times, which I think the prophet has principally in his mind. As far as I understand, there will be a highway leading from all parts to Zion, just as we here, in whatever part of England we may be, ask for the London Road, *i.e.*, the highway to London. However, the highway leading to Zion will be a

private road, reserved entirely for the Redeemed. No unclean person from among the heathen or from Israel itself, will pass along this road. Not one will make a mistake along that road, however simple he may be. There will be no ravenous beast, no sorrow or sighing; and as they walk this road their mouths will be full of singing and their hearts filled with joy and gladness. Such will be the moral character of the place that it will be called "The Way of Holiness." Without doubt, in this highway, which I think, as I have said, is quite literal, the behaviour is such that it is called the way of holiness. This high tone is produced by the presence of the King. This way of holiness has ever been seen by the eye of faith. Job, in chapter xxviii., fills me with delight by what he says about it. I think, since Pentecost this way has been seen with wonderful clearness. The Christians were said to be "of the way." There can be but one way for a Christian, namely, the way of holiness. This, I think, explains the intense rapture of all created beings as they behold the holiness of God, even in His judgements. The book of Revelation shows that the great appeal that the character of God makes to all is His holiness.



CHAPTER XXXVI.

V. 1. "Now it came to pass in the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, that Sennacherib King of Assyria, came up against all the fenced cities of Judah, and took them."

In II Kings xviii. 13 the same data is given. We are told by several men of reputation that the inscriptions of Assyria give a date thirteen years later. This makes us, who have no qualifications that would enable us to settle this point, ask ourselves what we are to do. My reply to my own query is that I need not attempt to settle it. It is better to accept the fact, *i.e.*, that the inscriptions differ from the Bible by about thirteen years, on the statement of some who have seen these inscriptions. But we must beware of interpretations. I once heard that at a meeting while a brother was on the point of a conflict in dates, a man got up and said: "There is a date on a brick which shows the Bible wrong." The brother said, "The brick differs from the Bible; you take the brick, and I will take the Bible."

Can nothing be done to explain this? Many have made conjectures. The most popular one is reckoning back the fifteen years that his life was spared; they conclude that Hezekiah's illness preceded Sennacherib's campaign by ten or eleven years. There are other solutions, and you can also make a few conjectures of your own,

but whatever conclusion you come to, do not contradict the fact. As most boys and girls know, facts are stubborn things. I have found that many seeming difficulties are difficulties for the want of the knowledge of perhaps but one factor in connection therewith.

V. 2. "And the King of Assyria sent Rabshakeh from Lachish to Jerusalem with a very great army."

It is essential in understanding this portion to read carefully II Kings xviii., also II Chron. xxxii. There we see that two points that Assyria had against Judah were that Hezekiah refused to pay tribute, and further, that they were seeking to get up an alliance with Egypt, against Assyria. We are told that Hezekiah, when he saw that Sennacherib was on his way, paid the tribute of three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold (II Kings xviii. 13-16), but did not give satisfaction as to the alliance with Egypt. Had Hezekiah and the people obeyed the prophet's voice in not making a covenant with Egypt, it would possibly have saved this invasion.

"And he stood by the conduit of the upper pool in the highway of the fuller's field."

This is the spot (ch. viii. 3) on which thirty years previously Isaiah met Ahaz. This Rabshakeh (M. Title of an Assyrian officer) took up this position there as a threat against the water-supply of the city, as we see by his words to them.

V. 3. "Then came forth unto him Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, which was over the household,

and Shebna the scribe, and Joah the son of Asaph the recorder.”

I have wondered whether this Shebna is the same one that we read about in chapter xxii. I know some think he is. If so, he would be degraded and put under Eliakim who has taken his place, before his final downfall. As we read chapter xxii. I can quite believe that a man who had such big ideas as to his own importance would strongly resent being placed under one that he thought his inferior. I have noticed that some, when placed back, so to speak, have been just as sweet and have done their best quite regardless of the work or position they occupied. I am sure that Joseph was just such a man. I remember once reading of the Duke of Wellington advising his young officers on this very point. He said that he never objected to being put back again to an inferior command, but gave his best attention to the work or position he occupied at the time. The other sort are really “impossible” people. There is no doing anything with them. They get filled with envy and jealousy. What a wonderful virtue humility is! I think, after reading Phil. ii., it is God’s favourite virtue.

V. 4. “And Rabshakeh said unto them, Say ye now to Hezekiah : Thus saith the great King, the King of Assyria ; What confidence is this wherein thou trusteth ? I say thy counsel and strength for the war are but vain words : now, on whom dost thou trust, that thou hast rebelled against me ?”

Though it is clear that this officer is speaking on behalf of his master, and gives him his title,

he appears to have no respect for any dignities but his own. If this verse were all, we can quite understand his contempt for a little country (Judah) no bigger than Yorkshire, daring to oppose so mighty an empire as Assyria.

V. 6. "Behold, thou trusteth upon the staff of this bruised reed, even upon Egypt : whereon if a man lean, it will go into his hand, and pierce it : so is Pharaoh King of Egypt to all that trust on him."

This was the fear of Assyria. Egypt was indeed a mighty country, and though called a bruised reed it was to be feared, given time. Egypt, if she willed, might probably make it out of the question for Assyria to possess Judah. It probably was this fear that made Assyria desire to attack Judah.

He undoubtedly sought to impress Hezekiah that Egypt would be no help, but the reverse. Isaiah has sought to impress this upon them also, for reasons that Rabshakeh could not possibly understand.

V. 7. "But if thou say unto me, We trust in the Lord our God : is not that He, whose high places and whose altars Hezekiah hath taken away, and hath said to Judah and Jerusalem, Ye shall worship before this altar."

Rabshakeh had evidently heard of Hezekiah's cleansing of the Temple, and would naturally infer that there would be those among them that would resent such conduct on the part of Hezekiah, so this seems to me a crafty suggestion to make those who were under Hezekiah and

who wanted the high places, to have their confidence in Hezekiah shaken.

V. 8. "Now therefore I pray thee, give pledges to my master the King of Assyria, and I will give thee two thousand horses, if thou be able on thy part to set riders upon them."

This is his answer to what he knows they expect from Egypt. You look to them for horses; we can supply horses, and will give you two thousand, if you have the riders.

V. 9. "How then canst thou turn away the face of one captain of the least of my master's servants, and put thy trust on Egypt for chariots and horsemen? And now am I come up without the Lord against this land to destroy it. The Lord said unto me, Go up against this land and destroy it."

He now makes his purpose clear. He intends to destroy the land and actually says, The Lord sent him to do it. The natural man, when it suits his purpose, will often seek to speak in a pious way. I have heard them many times, but the language of Zion is one that foreigners cannot acquire. They do not deceive them who are really God's people. We detect it at once.

V. 11. Then said Eliakim and Shebna and Joab unto Rabshakeh, Speak, I pray thee, unto thy servants in the Syrian language: for we understand it; and speak not to us in the Jews' language, in the ears of the people that are on the wall."

These tactics make Eliakim uncomfortable. When people speak in a pious way they give the

leaders of God's people much uneasiness, for alas, there are many of God's people who do not appear to make any effort to ascertain God's mind and will.

But yesterday a lady engaged in what she said was God's work, asked assistance. I replied, "Madam, I would not do it for £10,000." "Oh well, you know, Mr. Knox, we never do agree," she replied. "You serve God in your way and I serve Him in my way."

I do know that I do pray to the Lord that I may serve Him in His way. We are without excuse; we have the Bible. The lesson of the men of Bethel that came to ask Zechariah, has ever impressed me, since I read it. When the Jews were captives in Babylon they established certain fast-days to show their sorrow and contrition. When they got back to the land, they thought these were out of place, so asked Zechariah what they should do. Zechariah asked the Lord. The reply was (for the seventy years they fasted) that they did not fast unto Him. He had given them no instructions. I remember once a relative asked me if I would like a chair for my birthday. I was delighted, and said "Yes." I was told the sort I was to have. I replied that I did not like that sort, and told her the sort I liked. When it came it was not the sort I liked, and it became a nuisance to us because I had not room enough and it was rarely used. When I said that it was not the sort I liked the reply was that it was the sort *she* liked. I think that it was silly of her, and it is so if we do for God what we like without getting to know His mind.

The lesson I learn from this is that we must

not only listen to the pious things that are said, but weigh carefully the person that speaks.

Eliakim, etc., who made this appeal, did what we often do, namely, give credit to others for virtues that they do not possess. If they had made request to be spoken to in the Syrian language, without giving the reason, it would have been better. Rabshakeh sees his advantage.

V. 12. "But Rabshakeh said, Hath my master sent me to thy master and to thee, to speak these words? Hath he not sent me to the men that sit upon the wall, to eat their own dung and to drink their own water with you?"

The point evidently that Rabshakeh wanted to bring home to these men was that the dire effects of the war would fall primarily on them, thinking no doubt to discourage them, as his position would argue that he could control food and water supplies.

V. 13. "Then Rabshakeh stood and cried with a loud voice in the Jews' language, and said, "Hear ye, the words of the great King, the King of Assyria. Thus saith the King: Let not Hezekiah deceive you; for he shall not be able to deliver you; neither let Hezekiah make you to trust in the Lord, saying, The Lord will surely deliver us: this city shall not be given into the hand of the King of Assyria."

Here the natural man makes the great mistake that he generally does. Had he followed up the pious talk of verse 10, he might have done some mischief, but he openly declares himself as the enemy of God, and says: Do not let Hezekiah

deceive you by getting you to put YOUR TRUST IN GOD. Why, instinctively, in times of trouble, that is what every spiritual man wants to do at any cost. Thank God, the natural man never does understand us.

V. 16. "Hearken not to Hezekiah : for thus saith the King of Assyria, Make your peace with me and come out to me ; and eat ye every one of his vine and every one of his fig-tree, and drink ye every one the waters of his own cistern : until I come to take you away to a land like your own land, a land of corn and wine, a land of bread and vineyards. Beware lest Hezekiah persuade you, saying, The Lord will deliver us."

He now invites them to surrender and have a quiet time and a prosperous one, which they would no doubt be longing for. He evidently knew how to make this agreeable, but he has gone too far. The Jews, as they thought of the Israelites taken away from the land of promise and transported to Assyria, would not be attracted by a like fate. In this case he has gone too far and disclosed his hand, which these men generally do.

"Hath any of the Gods of the nations delivered his land out of the hand of the King of Assyria ?

V. 19. "Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad ? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim ? and have they delivered Samaria out of my hand ? Who are they among all the gods of these countries, that have delivered their country out of my hand, that the Lord should deliver Jerusalem out of my hand ?"

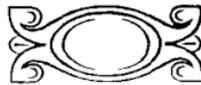
He now follows with a bold blasphemous defiance of all gods, including the Lord, whom in verse 10 he says sent him.

He includes God amongst the gods. This is really a very common thing to do. The natural man thinks there is but little difference in the various religions, and should political expediency come in he will study the one which suits him the best. Even the politicians of so-called Christian England will not allow Christian work in parts of Egypt, as they want to keep in with the Mahometans. Yet the Mahometans may work here. There appears to be two attitudes in this matter : one is that it sees good in all and thinks religion a good thing and to be encouraged where it suits their purpose. They do not mind—in fact, I have heard some say that no country ought to be allowed to be interfered with by the religionists of another country. How different is this to the teaching of Scripture ! The Master commands us to go into all the world to proclaim the good news. The only good news the worldling knows is material benefit ; he is too blind to know truth from error. The Christian is not like the Mahometan or the ecclesiastic ; he does not want to force, but just to proclaim and teach. All may reject or accept. The other attitude is that all religions are just superstitions and should be destroyed ; and very superior they think themselves to be. Yet if they could but see how empty they are, they would see that the humblest savage who can and does believe there is One who is greater than himself, is far above these who think they are above all creation. These Assyrians are to speedily learn a very severe

lesson, as all will that are against God and His Christ. It is just waiting God's time.

V. 21. "But they held their peace and answered him not a word : for the King's commandment was, saying, Answer him not. Then came Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, that was over the household, and Shebna the scribe, and Joah the son of Asaph the recorder, to Hezekiah with their clothes rent, and told him the words of Rabshakeh."

Under these circumstances, silence was indeed golden. The best way to meet this sort is to obey the King's commandment. These three men were practically ignored by Rabshakeh, so they returned sorrowfully to the King.



CHAPTER XXXVII.

V. 1. "And it came to pass when King Hezekiah heard it, that he rent his clothes and covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of the Lord."

What a desperate position has Hezekiah been reduced to! Egypt unable to help, perhaps unwilling, but as far as I can gather, I think it is unable. Town after town had been captured by the Assyrian, and it is but a small remnant that can possibly be left. As Hezekiah realises how helpless they all are in their trouble, he falls back on God. He went into the house of the Lord. He probably got the others to go with him, as in all ages God's people love to get together in prayer. We are living in a dispensation that has no need to go into any Temple to pray or worship, as the Lord told the woman of Samaria.

V. 2. "And he sent Eliakim, who was over the household, and Shebna the scribe, and the elders of the priests, covered with sackcloth, unto Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz."

What an immense advantage the godly have in time of trouble! Hezekiah was godly. He may have in some measure been influenced by the politically wise man, but he knew his real place of refuge. He instinctively turned to the temple of the Lord. He confirms this wise course by turning to the prophet of the Lord.

V. 3. "And they said unto him, Thus saith Hezekiah, This day is a day of trouble, and of rebuke, and of contumely : for the children are come to the birth and there is not strength to bring forth. It may be the Lord thy God will hear the words of Rabshakeh whom the King of Assyria his master hath sent to reproach the living God, and will rebuke the words which the Lord thy God hath heard : wherefore lift up thy prayer for the remnant which is left. So the servants of King Hezekiah came to Isaiah."

We delight in the word "so" in the text "God so loved the world," that it attracts my attention here, and I pray that the reader may see the full significance of the word here, though I fail to give it.

It is clear by that which follows that it is a prayer that God answered. We cannot examine such too closely, for we remember we are told that we "ask and receive not because we ask amiss." It is clear this was not amiss.

It is clear that Hezekiah, with the tokens of grief upon him, had spent a season in prayer with God in His Temple. I ask myself if this is not enough. Certainly Hezekiah did not think so. Such was the terrible position that the people were in that he felt he must send to the prophet of the Lord for assurance and the comfort assurance gives. As this is written for our learning it is clear that we can turn to that which the prophets have written, *i.e.*, the Word. Our experience confirms this, for I do not know a Christian but will admit we can only walk with the Lord in the light of the Word. We must note, even though

he had spent a season in prayer to the Lord, he sends to the prophet in such a way as he has approached God, *i.e.*, in sackcloth and with a confession that it was a day of trouble and of rebuke and of contumely (A.V. blasphemy) and that every effort they had made or could make was abortive. This has made me think a little, and I am afraid that we do not always use our Bibles in the same spirit that we should when we approach God. Even in the approach to God we have to take care not to go in to Him lightly.

I very much like his words, "It may be the Lord thy God will hear the words of Rabshakeh." Blessed God and Father, we do pray Thee that the object of our prayer to Thee may never so take possession of us that we may get away from the fact that it is Thy will that is to determine the matter. Grant it may ever be "It may be." I also note that twice in verse 24 Hezekiah, through his servants, says "Thy God." All sorts of thoughts came to my mind that I could not be happy with till I realised why it is that all saints are ever asking one another for their prayers. We all know what a joy to us fellowship in prayer is.

V. 6. "And Isaiah said unto them, Thus shall ye say to your master, Thus saith the Lord, Be not afraid of the words that thou hast heard, wherewith the servants of the King of Assyria hath blasphemed me. Behold, I will put a spirit in him and he shall hear a rumour, and shall return unto his own land; and I will cause him to fall with the sword in his own land."

They were to say to their "master." I can

quite imagine how some people I know (not Christians) would hate this word "master." I can almost see the disgust on their faces, as they repeat it. Yet as I read, I often find those that hate the word turn out to be among the worst tyrants the world has seen. Whether we like it or not, we find our master in every direction. As a child, my parents, then the schoolmaster. When I got into the playground and among things not friendly, I more than once found my master in every game I played. Then in my business, I cannot but say that I know of nothing in which I have been occupied but what I have found my master and that, when I have accepted the inevitable, I have found some of my best friends among them. But beyond all comparison, the best master I have ever found is the Lord Jesus Christ.

"Thus saith the Lord, Be not afraid." Here God sends through His prophet the assurance that they should not "be afraid." The only prospect of the message fulfilling its purpose is that the people receive it as a "Thus saith the Lord." Apart from this, the message has no value. Yet all around us we see, as Jude puts it, those that have crept into the Church, destroying the value of the Word.

The assurance that we have a "Thus saith the Lord" and the consciousness of His presence with us should mean that our troubles would not trouble us or our fears frighten us. Nor will they. It all depends on the measure of our faith.

The Lord saith "I will put he shall hear, he shall return I will cause him to fall in his own land." Praise God.

It does look as though the god of this world has his way, but history records and our own experience confirms that God over-rules. This personal experience of God of which we get so much in Jeremiah, is indeed a real joy and comfort to us. Let me give all the young boys and girls a bit of advice : Regard your life as a book and every day a leaf, and do not allow yourself to forget if possible a single page. You will get a wonderful story ; no dull life for you, and a firm assurance that God over-rules.

I did not have this advice. It did not come to me till far advanced in life, so when I get a little quiet time I take a portion of my life and quietly seek to recall it. Already I have received much benefit and pleasure. I advise the old boys and girls to try it.

What is it that I hear? The Apostle Paul would not do that? In Philippians iii. 13, he says, "But one thing I do, forgetting the things that are behind, and stretching forward to the things that are before," etc. It is very clear that you remember something that you have read.

I have often tried to remind you that it is not so much truth that we want as the balance of truth. The best way, if not the only way I know, is to get it for yourself and not trouble to read about it. Constantly weigh it in your minds, and frequently discuss it with your friends. I personally have done it and find one helps the other. Paul must have done it, for he is constantly reminding us of the past, and above all the Word is full of the past and the future.

V. 8. "So Rabshakeh returned, and found the

King of Assyria warring against Libnah; for he had heard that he was departed from Lachish. And he heard say concerning Tirhakah King of Ethiopia, He is come out to fight against thee. And when he heard it he sent messengers to Hezekiah saying”

Rabshakeh hears the rumour. He returned and found his king warring against Libnah. He further hears that the King of Ethiopia was coming against Assyria, probably due to Judah's negotiations with Egypt, combined with the fact of their own fears of having such a strong country as near neighbours. After the threats Rabshakeh had made against Judah, it must have been galling to have to depart till he had made his threat good.

V. 10. “Thus shall ye speak to Hezekiah, King of Judah, saying, “Let not thy God in whom thou trusteth deceive thee, saying Jerusalem shall not be given into the hand of the King of Assyria.”

As we consider the position of Rabshakeh, we see that he has certainly enough to irritate him. The leader of an Assyrian army, with his foe practically in his grasp, his mouth had been speaking great swelling words. Now he has to strike his camp and go away without any real attempt. The effect upon this man is as we should expect. He first threatens Hezekiah and indulges in boasting. We have to smile at the message he sent to Hezekiah. Imagine, dear reader, a man who has been born from above receiving such a message.

God's ways are often beyond our understand-

ing. Our faith is tried, but instinctively we pray for patience and for more trust. We never need be on the alert lest God deceive us. This seems almost humorous to consider.

If we try to ascertain his reasons for sending such a message we should find it interesting, but as he would probably give a different answer to each person, we must try to find a reason for ourselves. We, however, can generally find something we may learn from those we meet.

V. II. "Behold thou hast heard what the Kings of Assyria have done to all lands, by destroying them utterly: and shalt thou be delivered? Have the gods of the nations delivered them which my fathers have destroyed, Gozan and Haran and Rezep, and the children of Eden which were in Telasser? Where is the King of Hamath, and the King of Arpad, and the King of Sepharvaim, of Hena and Ivah?"

Like most threateners or boasters, they generally put it the wrong way. It really means, Be subject to us or we will destroy you. If there is but little courage we naturally say, We will have a good fight for it and would prefer to die fighting than submit. This would be helped by the offer to mount two thousand of them. They would have to fight either way, for or against the King of Assyria. This Rabshakeh makes the common mistake. He does not distinguish between Jehovah and the gods of the nations. They are all one to him; either he did not believe in any or he thought the god of his country superior to the others. This error is rampant to-day. People cannot distinguish between the Christ of

the Scriptures and the Christ of man's imagination. Others, as in Russia, believe in none. They believe it is all false and that nothing is true. The Assyrians learnt a lesson in due time, as all will learn that oppose God.

Hezekiah can distinguish easily enough. We shall find it interesting to note the effect of this letter upon him.

V. 14. "And Hezekiah received the letter from the hands of the messengers, and read it: and Hezekiah went up unto the house of the Lord, and spread it before the Lord."

This letter was a very serious business to Hezekiah. It is true the army had departed, but the letter showed that the hostility and intention were there, and would be active on the very first opportunity. He, however, takes the wisest course. He gets into God's presence. In those days the house of the Lord was where the Lord dwelt in a special sense. As the Lord told the woman of Samaria, there would be no special place in this dispensation, so that, from that time, no building could be called the house of God. I can quite understand being asked whether we have any equivalent in the present, seeing that men in all ages have been able to pray. My reply is that I think we have, for the Lord has distinctly promised that where two or three are gathered together in His name, there He is in the midst. This, I think, is in the special sense of Hezekiah or any other Israelite going into the house of the Lord. Do we not love the assembling of ourselves together for prayer, notwithstanding our own private prayers? The fact is, the house of

God to-day is where we are gathered together ; hence the warning not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is ; the reason being that such willing absence is the sign that the RED LIGHT danger is near, when we neglect the prayer-meeting.

If I may make an excuse for any doing so, it would be this :—that some fail to distinguish between private and assembly prayers. It appears to me that there are no restrictions in our private prayers, but in the assembly, if I may be allowed to make a few suggestions, we ought to have something definite to pray for. It was a grand prayer-meeting, I have no doubt, when the assembly met to pray for Peter when in prison. I cannot think that whilst they were about it, they prayed for everything they could think of ; nor do I think anyone gave God a long or profound explanation of the scripture, nor do I think they wanted to tell God what a number of long words they knew.

We can see, however, that Hezekiah was very definite. He took the letter into the house and spread it before the Lord. This, to me, is equivalent to saying : “This is the business, Lord. I may need many things, but they can wait. The contents of this letter is that which I bring before Thee and about which I need Thine assistance.” If we read together Hezekiah’s prayer, I think you will agree with me.

V. 15. “And Hezekiah prayed unto the Lord, saying, O Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel, that sittest upon the cherubim : Thou art the God, even Thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the

earth ; Thou hast made heaven and earth, incline Thine ear, O Lord, and hear ; open Thine eyes, O Lord, and see : and hear all the words of Sennacherib, which hath sent to reproach the living God. Of a truth, Lord, the Kings of Assyria have laid waste all the countries, and their land ; and have cast their gods into the fire : for they were no gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone ; therefore they have destroyed them. Now therefore, O Lord our God, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that Thou art the Lord, even Thou only."

I have strongly recommended minute prayers at some of the meetings I have been to, yet we should not have insisted on that to a second or so. This was to avoid those unreal ten-minute prayers. On slowly reading this accepted prayer, I found it took me just one minute. I can quite agree that there may be requests that would demand ten minutes, and we have nothing to say against that, if it is obvious. It is well to remember that the longest prayer recorded in the Word, that is, Solomon's, takes five minutes.

Let us seek to get into the spirit of this prayer. He speaks to God as the "Lord of hosts." As God is the great "I AM" it is our great privilege to come to Him in the attitude that best suits the occasion. To Joshua before the battle, He came as "Captain of the Lord's host." When Abraham was to be tempted with the goods of the cities of the plain, He sent Melchisadek with a blessing to him as the Lord Most High, possessor of heaven and earth, etc. The point to remember in the two samples I have

given you is that God was presented as the above quotations said, whereas here, the Holy Ghost fortified and enlightened Hezekiah, so that when he approached God he knew the sort of God he wanted. God responded, as He will, in His own way; and it was not long before Hezekiah was to see in a wonderful way that the Lord was the "Lord of hosts" indeed.

His next point was that the Lord was the "God of Israel." God had declared this many times. Hezekiah gladly accepted Him as such, and he gives the Lord to understand by this that this had given them expectations, the very first of which would be protection.

He next reminds God of the Ark, with its mercy-seat and the Cherubim, and that He dwelt between (M.) them. As most boys and girls know, the Cherubim are God's executors of justice and righteousness. All Hezekiah is asking for is that they might have the undisturbed possession of the place which God had given them.

He next reminds God of their faith in Him by declaring that "Thou art the God, even Thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; Thou hast made heaven and earth." Further, he reminds God that He alone is God, and that He has created the heaven and earth, so that God has no difficulty about it. There is no opposition of any account, and if He can make heaven and earth, He can do anything; so it must be just a question of His will to do it. It is a grand thing, dear reader, when we get to this point in the spiritual experience of Hezekiah.

Having got to this point, he asks the Lord to hear and see. Hearing, right through the word,

carries with it the thought of response. If I hear God, I obey Him, else it would be said I did not hear. If God hears my prayer He answers it (in some way) else I should say He does not hear. We must remember that "No" is an answer, and we can be sure that the Holy Ghost will soon make it clear to us, whether our prayer is answered by a negative. He also asks the Lord to open His eyes. Hezekiah has the letter. Here is the evidence as to what I say. It is not a question of Sennacherib and Hezekiah; he is reproaching Thee, the living God. I do not think the Lord would answer an insincere prayer. Hence we get the thing that stirred the heart of Hezekiah. It was not their safety, but God's honour and reputation that concerned him most. The other was just a minor factor in the case.

Hezekiah proceeds with what Sennacherib says in his letter: that he has laid waste the countries and their land, and that he has cast their gods into the fire is quite true; but they are no gods, only wood and stone, the work of men's hands. Now comes his prayer. "O Lord our God, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that Thou art the Lord, even Thou only."

This is the prayer that finds acceptance with God. I cannot but feel what a blessing it is when our requests involve God's honour.

When we come to read the following verses we might ask ourselves this question: Why did not God answer Hezekiah directly? God talked to Abraham, Moses, etc. We can but conjecture. It may have been that Hezekiah, by laying the letter before the Lord in the house of the Lord,

made an assembly matter of it, hence a personal reply would have been hardly suitable and certainly not so effective as an authoritative reply from an accredited prophet like Isaiah. Further, we realise in our own experience that it is very comforting to feel that God has spoken to us, but there is nothing like a plain scripture that is obviously intended for me, and a "Thus saith the Lord" by the prophet would be equivalent.

V. 21. "Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent unto Hezekiah, saying, Thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel. Whereas thou hast prayed to me against Sennacherib King of Assyria, this is the word which the Lord hath spoken concerning him."

The Lord must have revealed this, as well as the reply to Isaiah, unless, as I suggest, Hezekiah's prayer made it an Assembly matter. Further, I am inclined to think that in some way Sennacherib received the message, as a warning. If so, the next verse is very strong.

V. 22. "The virgin daughter of Zion hath despised thee and laughed thee to scorn; the daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken her head at thee."

This is to tell him that this very little kingdom compared with Assyria regards him with contempt and derision.

V. 23. "Whom hast thou reproached and blasphemed? and against whom hast thou exalted thy voice and lifted up thine eyes on high? Even against the Holy One of Israel.

This certainly would remind the Jews, and give hope to them. The main point appears to be that it is an effort to bring Sennacherib to see that Jehovah is not to be compared with the gods of the nations. This same spirit exists to-day. Learned men talk about comparative religions. I once heard a Canon say he agreed with most in some respects. We must ever keep in mind that it is not a religion, that is an idea from man; it is the Holy One of Israel whom we know as the Lord Jesus Christ by whom all creation became. All through Old and New Testaments it is "the Lord" that the real saints think of. Religion, including Christianity, has deluged the world with blood. Christ would, if we but accepted Him and sanctified Him in our hearts as Lord, fill it with joy and peace and goodwill. Other things I think are worse than religion, such as ambition, covetousness, etc.

V. 24. "By thy servants hast thou reproached the Lord, and hast said, With the multitude of my chariots am I come up to the height of the mountains, to the innermost parts of Lebanon; and I will cut down the tall cedars thereof, and the choice fir-trees thereof; the forest of his fruitful field. I have digged and drunk water, and with the sole of my feet will I dry up all the rivers of Egypt."

This should have been a very solemn word to Sennacherib. I, however, cannot trace any evidence that it had any weight with Sennacherib till the judgement came. But for him, alas! he had no time for repentance, even if he had desired it. This message made it quite clear

that the Lord knew all about his boastings, and the wonderful things he intended to do. So with that marvellous grace which God shows even to the very worst, God asks him if he had heard, not what He intended to do, but that which He had done.

V. 26. "Hast thou not heard how I have done it long ago, and formed it of ancient times? Now have I brought it to pass, that thou shouldest be to lay waste fenced cities into ruinous heaps. Therefore their inhabitants were of small power, they were dismayed and confounded; they were as the grass of the field, and as the green herb, as the grass on the housetops, and as a field of corn before it be grown up."

Here we get a more personal thought in addition to the Lord asking him if he had heard what he had done, namely, what Sennacherib had done. God had brought it to pass. He was but an instrument in His hands. This fact is constantly stated throughout Scripture, *i.e.*, that nothing can possibly happen unless God does or permits it; and it is clear that nothing can thwart the counsels of His will. It is when it is revealed to us at the end that accounts for the wonderful Hallelujah choruses of Revelation.

V. 28. "But I know thy sitting down and thy going out, and thy coming in, and thy raging against me."

This is indeed the 139th Psalm in a nutshell. I have tried in my old age to commit that to memory, but after a little time I cannot repeat it; and yet things I learnt in early life I can recall at

pleasure. Some alas, I would like to forget, but cannot altogether. Listen to my regret, young people. Commit to memory as much as possible the wonderful things in the Word, that you never may have anything to regret. However, boys and girls of any age may commit this to memory, it is so short, but it will be found very effective, for what can be so helpful to us as to remember that God knows all about us.

Further, the Lord says, "But I know . . . thy raging against me."

Sennacherib might have replied, "If Thou art the creator of heaven and earth, and inhabiteth eternity, what can I do to injure Thee? I think we can all agree, and say, "Nothing." However, my mind goes to the gospel of Matthew, and I can hear the Lord reply, "Inasmuch as ye did it not unto the least of these my brethren, ye did it not unto Me." Sennacherib was to have a very bitter lesson, as all will that are finally impenitent as to the great truth that Christ and His own are one.

Knowing God as I do, I feel sure Sennacherib could have learnt the lesson that Paul learnt. When making havoc of the Church, he heard a voice saying, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me"?

Jude, the Lord's brother, reminds us that God knows all the deeds and hard speeches that the ungodly have spoken against Him (v. 15).

V. 29. "And for that thine arrogancy is come up into mine ears, therefore will I put my hook in thy nose, and my bridle in thy lips, and I will

turn thee back by the way by which thou camest.”

Sennacherib had brought this particular judgement on himself. Like a wild beast that had been subdued by force, the Assyrian would have to return home without fulfilling his purpose.

V. 30. “And this shall be the sign unto thee : ye shall eat this year that which groweth of itself, and in the second year that which springeth of the same ; and in the third year sow ye, and reap, and plant vineyards, and eat the fruit thereof.”

Here Isaiah again gives a sign in the near future, so as to strengthen them for the grand promise in the future, that he has given them from time to time, when he says this Sennacherib is on his way to capture the place, there was *no evidence* whatever of deliverance. This is the sign this present year. All agriculture is stopped ; they must do the best they can with what grows of itself. Next year will be but little better, as it will take that time to get things in order. The following year all would be as usual. So, after such a deliverance such as they were about to pass through, they can be sure that the God who has brought them thus far will be faithful to His word in the unseen future.

To get the lesson for our own comfort we must learn to read the lessons and deliverances of the present as a sure guarantee of future faithfulness on God’s part. We can separate the facts of our faith that we can now prove, from the facts of our faith that we must accept by faith. One guarantees the other. As a sample of each, we can now

taste and see that the Lord is good in many ways. We can only accept by faith that the Lord is coming for, and later with, the saints. We are told in the New Testament that our possession of the Holy Ghost dwelling in us, which we now experience, is an earnest of our inheritance.

V. 31. "And the remnant that is escaped of the house of Judah shall again take root downward, and bear fruit upward. For out of Jerusalem shall go forth a remnant, and out of Mount Zion they that shall escape. The zeal of the Lord of hosts shall perform this."

This last expression makes it clear to me that Isaiah has chapter ix. 7 in his mind, which is quite Messianic.

V. 33. "Therefore thus saith the Lord concerning the King of Assyria. He shall not come unto this city, nor shoot an arrow there, neither shall he come before it with shield, nor cast a mount against it. By the way that he came, by the same shall he return, and he shall not come unto this city, saith the Lord, For I will defend this city to save it, for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake."

This man and his army shall not be allowed to come unto the city. It shall not be a question of an attempt that failed. He shall not be allowed to make the attempt. There shall be no shield with which to protect himself; no arrow to kill or wound, no mount to make it possible to mount the walls. He will not be allowed. This will be done for two reasons. He will defend the city to save it, "for mine own sake." The long-

suffering of God and His patience is marvellous. Yet from time to time He does speak, to remind us. The other reason is, "for my servant David's sake." This is a remarkable expression. Sometimes God's people are told that the trouble shall not come in the life of the one that God is speaking to. This would lead us to understand that after we are dead, it does not matter what happens. I have heard many say, when speaking of some trouble that threatens, that they hope this will not come in their life. But long after David is gone, God remembers him. One lesson is very clear, that we of the present do receive much blessing from good men that have lived in the past as well as evil from bad men. When we have said this, we still see the need to balance these two truths, but it is better to do it ourselves with the light of God's word.

V. 36. "And the angel of the Lord went forth, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred and eighty-five thousand. And when men arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses!"

In II Kings xix. 35, we are told "And it came to pass that night." We can read this in two ways. We can read it as the night the Lord spake to Isaiah, or, in referring to it, we can say "That night," meaning the night of this tremendous event. I think you will find it worth pondering over and talking about. As "that" is not in Isaiah, there is more need to see the significance of it in reading Kings. The angel of the Lord is used for the Lord personally, or He may have sent a messenger. We are not told how He

did it; the word "smote" suggests to me that it was punitive, and not the natural result arising from their sin, as punishment so often is.

Who can withstand God? I think this helps us to understand the "silence of God" we hear about from time to time. When we see such a tremendous punishment brought about without any effort, we can see that the hard speeches of men or their wicked actions, though not forgotten, can be dealt with at the right time.

It appears to me clear that it was unexpected. It was silently done, for "when the men arose" to me, shows they did not expect to see such a sight. God has used, or permitted, all sorts of agents, both inside and outside the Bible: plague, frost, heat, insects, etc.

These men saw that "they were all dead corpses." I do not know how this would read in the Hebrew, but in English, perhaps I may say, all I have heard read it, do so with an amused laugh. I see that the word "dead" alone, being a word with more than one meaning, people could twist it to what they pleased; but the word corpses can only mean dead bodies: whatever it may come to mean through change as time goes on, I can see it shuts out any thought of including their souls or spirits, therefore nothing from this expression can be inferred.

It is very emphatic. I remember walking along a little river at Sidmouth in Devon, with a friend, a Devonshire man, who delights to retain his knowledge of the dialect he used when young. We saw several boys with either a thoughtless or cruel disposition throwing stones at fishes. One,

in an excited tone, called out something, and as my friend laughed, I asked him what that boy had said. He replied, "I killed him dead, I did." The boy meant the others to understand that there was no mistake about it.

Whatever others may think, Sennacherib had no doubt about it, for we read, "So Sennacherib King of Assyria departed, and went and returned, and dwelt at Nineveh."

V. 38. "And it came to pass, as he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his god, that Adrammelech and Sharezer his sons smote him with the sword: and they escaped into the land of Ararat. And Esar-haddon his son reigned in his stead."

This "came to pass," according to what I have read, was twenty years after. What a sad end! Whilst worshipping he was killed by his two sons, who appear to have got no benefit by it. But it is far sadder that after such a terrible lesson, he still worships his god. One would have thought the lesson would have made him seek out the true God.

The fact is that miracles, disasters, etc., cannot teach some; as Proverbs says, "Though thou shouldest bray a fool in the mortar with a pestle among bruised corn, yet will not his foolishness depart from him" (Proverbs xxvii. 22).



CHAPTER XXXVIII.

V. 1. "In those days Hezekiah was sick unto death."

This suggests that this illness took place just before the destruction of the Assyrian army. We shall see that verse 6 will make this certain, so that we may say we have one of those so-called untimely sicknesses, in the midst of one of the most terrible occasions and dire peril that the nation had passed through, when, if ever the country needed him, it was now. I think we shall not get the true meaning of what Hezekiah wrote unless this factor in the situation is kept in mind. History has many such cases. One comes to my mind as I write. I think of the time of Holland's dire peril in the time of Philip the Second of Spain, when the Dutch revolted against the Inquisition and excessive taxation. Its armies had been destroyed; its prince had to flee the country, yet, started by De la Mark, a few towns made another attempt, and the Spanish were slowly destroying them. That terrible siege of Leyden was just proceeding when the Prince of Orange was taken ill. His (at that time) piety, developed by their suffering, combined with his wisdom and resourceful mind, made it indeed an inopportune sickness. So was this of Hezekiah's, and so are many of the ill-

nesses in our domestic life, from the richest to the humblest.

“And Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz came to him, and said unto him, Thus saith the Lord, Set thine house in order ; for thou shalt die and not live.”

To speak in our modern way, we should say that Hezekiah had not made his will. This was not the mind of God, so the message was sent that he was to do it. I am very glad we have this brought before us, for as I have passed through life I have felt annoyed when a Christian dies without making a will, for I never like a Christian to die and leave behind a reproach against him, especially one of a callous nature. The distress of mind, the inconvenience, the expense, and alas, the hatreds created between the children and relatives of the deceased, are so unnecessarily created, that it makes me feel bold enough to pass on a few thoughts about will-making. What is that I hear an old boy saying? “This does not trouble me ; I have nothing to leave.” Do not be so silly. It is very rare that people go to their own place without leaving something. You have a fountain pen. I see you think I am the silly one. I have seen unpleasantness and almost quarrels over a few trinkets or the furniture of a room. I have been asked by one that had a few pounds and one roomful of furniture, to give the clock to this one, and the teapot to another. I wrote it all down in a letter to one. Then all was left to that one. It was known there was a letter, so we can dispose of the old boy that interrupted, though in this case it was an old girl. As it was God’s mind that Hezekiah was to make

his will, so I am persuaded that God intends all His own at least to set their house in order; so your first duty is to be in close consultation with God about it, for after all, all we have is His, and as you are off to meet Him, I am sure you will like to meet Him with a smile and hear His "Well done!"

Do not be presumptuous, so I advise you to buy, whilst it is being published, *Whitaker's Almanac*. For will-making, it is very valuable to a novice. If possible, make a simple will, as advised in that book. If you cannot do this, employ legal aid. Beware of those who lead you to think that they know all about it. They may do, but not always. I give one sample of what I mean. I knew a widow who had no children, who was very desirous of eventually leaving her money to the aged poor, but first a few shillings each per week to several relatives. As they died, so the money was to go to carry out the desire of her heart. She had a friend who was a good man and who, I have no doubt, could have carried out a simple will easily enough. This friend wrote her will and, when stating what was to be done with her money when these relatives died, used terms that have no meaning to the Government, such as benevolent, philanthropic, etc. The result was that when those who were first to benefit, died, she had died intestate, and the aged poor lost over two thousand pounds, so that her wishes were never carried out.

When you have legal advice, do not think all is safe. Be very suspicious if they put Acts of Parliament in. The writer has suffered from that. If a lawyer is not able to make a will that

you and your friends can understand, try another. I have been grieved to see that young people who are to inherit at a given age or at death are allowed to borrow. Only a few weeks ago I had experience with a will I was Trustee to for years. The young man went and got a sum of money out, and sold his reversion to a money-lender (I believe he was.) A short time after, his grandmother died, and he had nothing instead of having enough to live on. He is now unable to get a situation and yet he is well educated and willing and strong. Have a clause put in that they lose it if they attempt to borrow on it. I know some lawyers who think this is a desirable provision, but it is against the wishes of the one that left it. Further, I have noted that very often a legacy of capital does more harm to the inheritor than good. I think it a good plan to leave them so much per week, and at their death, the money to be decided on by the one that leaves the money. Even then, have it so that it is lost if they seek to borrow on it.

I feel sure I hear one remark that this cannot be called an exposition of Scripture. I do know Hezekiah was told by God to set his house in order, and I hope he did it wisely. We are clearly told that all Scripture is written for our learning, and if you do not set your house in order, as far as you are concerned it would be better for you if this scripture had not been written. If by writing like this, the Lord uses it to lead His people to act with prudence and sense, I shall not mind adverse criticism. I like to make my Bible a guide. The prophet's reason was "For thou shalt die and not live!" Hezekiah

would conclude that his death was to be the result of the boil, hence, he had but a short time. We have till the Lord comes, though we do not know when. It is equally true of us. It is very salutary ever to keep in mind that whatever we may be doing it is only in passing.

V. 2. We see that Hezekiah turned to the Lord. Wise Hezekiah! "Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall, and prayed unto the Lord, and said, Remember now, O Lord, I beseech Thee, how I have walked before Thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in Thy sight. And Hezekiah wept sore."

We must remember that Hezekiah was a child of God, and it is not here a question of the soul's salvation. Whichever the dispensation a saint is in, none knows better than he that he is saved by God's sovereign grace. Should any one suggest good works are necessary, I should at once suspect the reality of his conversion. This is one who is a child of God, and he is dreadfully upset at the thought of dying, and it does seem natural that he should be. His beloved people are threatened with destruction. He was but thirty-nine years of age, and therefore there were many useful things that such a man would be desirous of bringing about, not done. He asks God to remember how he had walked before Him in truth, *i.e.*, according to the light of God's word, with a perfect heart. That means that there was nothing between him and God that tends to separate. He had done that which was good in His sight. He was conscious that he

had honestly sought to do God's will, not his own. Then he thought of the word he had received, and he "wept sore." I feel quite sure that our Father rejoices in an obedient walk, and all fathers worth the name will almost do anything possible for an obedient child. To walk the path of obedience is greatly to be desired, hence the following.

V. 4. "Then came the word of the Lord to Isaiah, saying, Go and say to Hezekiah; Thus saith the Lord, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer; I have seen thy tears."

We cannot but rejoice in a scripture like this. The more one dwells upon it, the more lovely it is. When the Lord sees an obedient child weeping sorely, we can quite understand His heart goes out to His child. He would be a strange parent that was not affected by the distress of his child, hence, "Then." How beautiful God presents Himself to him. "The God of his father David." This is the outcome of His promise to David. Here is a desirable child of David, so there can be no reason to refuse.

Dear reader, David's God is ours, and we naturally turn our thoughts to Him, the true David. We remember when we have been comforted, and say, Blessed be the God and Father, of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and God of all comfort, etc. (II. Cor. i. 3).

This is indeed an Old Testament reminder of our happy position. When Hezekiah took his letter into the house of the Lord, He prayed that the Lord would incline His ear and open His

eyes. There was the letter; that certainly was very fine; for the Lord did. But to know that God sees our tears and is moved by them, just appeals to our hearts.

When our prayer brings a five-fold response like this, we can but say, This is indeed grace. Note the "I wills."

"Behold, I will add unto thy days fifteen years." This would bring him to fifty-four, which is then not very old. I have no doubt there was a good reason for not giving him length of days. We do note that during these fifteen years Manasseh was born, one of the worst Kings Judah had. But for the fact that he became a saved man, I should think it was not a wise prayer. I often think praying has to be carefully done, for unless we have the mind of the Lord about the object we desire, we get an assurance "for we know not how to pray as we ought." Praise God, we have the Holy Spirit to help us, else we should be in a difficulty.

V. 6. "And I will deliver thee and this city out of the hand of the King of Assyria: and I will defend this city."

This promise of defending the city was necessary even after the destruction of Sennacherib's army on account of the messages and threats sent after.

These three "I wills" contain a full answer to the letter. In Isaiah we see that God gives seven signs that He will keep His word.

VV. 7, 8. "And this shall be the sign unto thee from the Lord, that the Lord will do this

thing that He hath spoken : behold, I will cause the shadow on the steps, which is gone down on the dial of Ahaz with (or by M.) the sun, to return backward ten steps, on the dial whereon it was gone down.”

This message means that death rolled back fifteen years, and the shadow on the steps returned. It is well to ponder over this, as it makes me think of the death and resurrection of our Lord. It does look as if those that think it is an Old Testament figure of these, have ground for their opinion.

There is the usual divergence of views as to whether this miracle was optical or cosmical, but it is very clear that God did a wonderful miracle. Read II Chron. xxxii. 31 ; also II Kings xx. 8-11. The shadow appears confined to the steps. This dial appears to be an obelisk with ten steps, and the hours could be told by the position of the shadow on them.

V. 9. “The writing of Hezekiah King of Judah, when he had been sick and was recovered of his sickness.”

It does seem to me that we must be careful in reading the following, to read it as it states in verse 9, *i.e.*, that it is the impression made upon Hezekiah by his sickness as he looks back.

V. 10. “I said, in the noontide of my days I shall go into the gates of the grave (Sheol). I am deprived of the residue of my years.

I said, I shall not see the Lord, even the Lord, in the land of the living.

I shall behold man no more with the inhabitants of the world.”

“Mine age (M. or habitation) is removed, and is carried away from me as a shepherd’s tent :

I have rolled up, like a weaver, my life ; He will cut me off from the loom :

From day even to night wilt Thou make an end of me.”

Here we have the lament of a young man full of vigour, with plans for his people, and hoping to live a useful life, finding himself about to die, without even an heir to his throne.

V. 13. “I quieted myself until morning : as a lion, so he breaketh all my bones.

From day even to night wilt Thou make an end of me.

Like a swallow or a crane, so did I chatter ;

I did mourn as a dove, mine eyes fail with looking upward ;

O Lord I am oppressed, be Thou my surety.”

Here we see him longing for the morning, in hope that with the day he would get better, but no relief came. He said he chattered, he mourned, he looked up ; no relief ; then he asks the Lord to be surety for him. This is the only prayer we can really pray to God. Till this is answered, there is no ground upon which we can pray. Having got this, he has got with it everything, hence we understand in some measure.

V. 15. “What shall I say? He hath both spoken to me, and Himself hath done it.”

When he realises the Lord is his surety, he does not know what to say. I know what I feel like saying when I think of what the Lord has done for me. That is : Hallelujah. How it thrills our very heart, when we realise the Lord

hath spoken to us. We know of nothing like it, and delight to say that "He Himself hath done it." No one else could. It is beyond the power of any man, whose breath is in his nostrils.

"I shall go softly (see margin) all my years because of the bitterness of my soul."

What an unusual position! Try to picture it, boys and girls. Here is a man who knows he has fifteen years to live. As each day passes, how he would ponder over it. However, God's mercy for the fifteen years he has to live will solemnize his whole outlook. He would live each day in view of the last day. How this would alter his value of things!

My dear reader, ponder over this. The Lord and Hezekiah knew. In our case, the Lord knows, but we do not; but that makes no difference, there will be a day when either He comes for me or I go to Him. The fact is there; it is only our knowledge that is missing. Blessed God and Father, if one may speak for others, we are afraid we lose sight of this great truth, that makes our lives important, nay, even grand. Undertake for us, open our eyes to see the full value of our lives, for,

V. 16. "O Lord, by these things men live." Otherwise it is mere existence; we are passing through without any real purpose.

"And wholly therein is the life of my spirit." We believe this, Lord; so for the rest of our lives, make it "wholly." Do not let us lose a day.

"(M.) So wilt Thou recover me, and make me to live."

We can see that even in the carrying out of our desires, we depend upon Thee ; and it will indeed have to be a recovery, judging by our past, if we are to know how to live down here. I remember, dear reader, many years ago, reading the following. I will quote it as correctly as I can.

“Live while you live,” the sacred preacher cries, “and give to God each moment as it flies.”

“Live while you live,” the epicure replies, “and give to pleasure each moment ere it dies.”

George Herbert, the poet, read this, and said :
“O Lord in me may both united be, for I live to pleasure when I live to Thee.”

Every one that is born from above, experimentally can in some measure testify to the truth of this.

V. 17. “Behold, it was for my peace that I had great bitterness” :

This has proved itself wonderful to us. We think of the great sorrows that we have passed through, painful experiences, only to find in Thee the God of all comfort, and that our experience of Thee has greatly enriched us. I now have seen enough to know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them that are called according to His purpose.

V. 17. “But Thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption, for Thou hast cast all my sins behind Thy back. For the grave cannot praise Thee ; death cannot celebrate Thee : they that go down to the pit cannot hope for Thy truth. The Lord is ready to save me : Therefore we will sing my songs to the stringed

instruments all the days of our life in the house of the Lord."

The margin says, "Thou hast loved my soul from the pit." When I ponder over this, it gives me to understand that Hezekiah realised that he was delivered from death. For fifteen years, instinctively, his mind would go to the end of his reprieve, and he takes this as an evidence that God had loved his soul from the pit, *i.e.*, Resurrection. This alone gives stability to all that God has done for us.

The mind of a man "born from above" sees, as the Lord in His miracles taught, that bodily healing involved the forgiveness of sins, for, says Hezekiah, "Thou hast cast my sins behind Thy back." Resurrection is one of the blessed results of the answer to his prayer, verse 14, "Be Thou my surety."

The word "grave" here is "Sheol." As we have traced this word we find that it takes in the grave and all beyond it, so that, if the grave were all, there could be no praise here, and comparatively little to praise God for now. As I ponder over these words I quite think that when Hezekiah wrote them, he intended this for the fifteen years, and was fully assured that it would be in a greater measure after, for all the saints, in any age, must have known that God is the God of the living, and only resurrection ground can give us full song.

V. 21. "Now Isaiah had said, let them take a cake of figs and lay it for a plaister upon the boil, and he shall recover. Hezekiah also had said,

What is the sign that I shall go up to the house of the Lord." See II Kings vii. and viii.

This is an interesting wind-up to this chapter, and I feel sure that there is far more in this allusion to (1) that which Isaiah had said, and (2) to that which Hezekiah had said. I will just mention how it comes to me at the present moment, and leave you to find out the rest. Isaiah had been bringing messages to Hezekiah as to what God would do, but he did not forget the plaister. We should all agree that God could have carried out His promise to Hezekiah without the plaister, but He did not; hence we can be sure that God hates presumptuous sins, and is ready to bless the approved remedies.

We should all probably agree that a plaister of figs would be excellent for drawing a boil or ulcer. Many of us at the present day would prefer constant dipping in very hot water, for speed and effectiveness. Hezekiah wanted to know "What was the sign that I shall go up to the house of the Lord on the third day?" Isaiah omits the third day, I think the reason being that the promise is a promise no longer. It is an accomplished fact. The day to Hezekiah may have brought thoughts about the third day, the resurrection day upon which all hopes must be confirmed.



CHAPTER XXXIX.

V. 1. "At that time Merodach-baladan, the son of Baladan, King of Babylon, sent letters and a present to Hezekiah, for he had heard that he had been sick and recovered."

This is a very interesting verse, and if your inclination has a leaning for history, you will find much to help you in getting reasons for scriptures that to us boys and girls are rather obscure. Unless you have an inclination, leave it alone, for there is not much done without that.

In my reading I gather that Assyria had broken away from Babylon, and at this time was a more powerful country than Babylon and meant to control it. It was a country to be dreaded by Babylon, for Assyria had been increasing in power and apparently made the great mistake Germany made. Thoroughly prepared for war, in every sense of the word, she annoyed much of the world by keeping on rattling the sabre to such an extent that the nations of the earth cast about to see where help could be obtained. So alliances, ententes, and I know not what, were made. This can be seen by the number of nations that declared war against Germany. It was wise of Germany to become strong, but to become aggressive, as we see, is lunacy. It is mad for one spot of the world to think it can dominate the world. The Bismarcks, von Moltkes, etc., who might

do it, all die off and leave behind those that think they can, but cannot.

We can quite understand the effect the news would have on a country like Babylon. When they heard that the God of Judah had destroyed 185,000 of their foes, had wrought to lengthen the life of the King, and had performed such an astounding miracle as to set back the sun on the dial by ten steps in order to strengthen his faith, they thought that if they could but secure the friendship of Judah, it would be an immense gain.

The illness of Hezekiah gives them just the opportunity. On his recovery they sent an embassy with letters of congratulation and a present.

We can quite understand presents from those we love, and we can appreciate them, for we have a clear reason. When in business, the firms loved me so much that I used to get quite a number of presents at Christmas. I should have been silly to think they really did. They had a reason which did not need much guessing. Be careful about presents. In my case it was a trade custom. We used to assure them it did not affect our purchasing, nor did it. They were afraid to drop it, lest it might have that influence.

In this case, it gave an opportunity to send an embassy to give the present, which would perhaps deceive other nations, but Hezekiah would understand, or it would not be long before he did.

V. 2. "And Hezekiah was glad of them." He did understand that Babylon, great country that it was, was desirous of an alliance with him

against their common foe. We may say that was natural, for all nations in time of war are delighted if others join with them. In the Great War we were especially glad when America came in.

Hezekiah realised that, compared to Babylon, he was but small. He, however, wanted the ambassadors to see that though little he could help, for we read,

“And shewed them the house of his precious things, the silver and the gold, and the spices, and the precious oil, and all the house of his armour, and all that was found in his treasures : there was nothing in his house, nor in all his dominion, that Hezekiah shewed them not.”

What a strange compound man is! We should think Hezekiah would bring to his mind how glad his father was when he secured the aid of Assyria against Ephraim and Syria, and that the lesson he was taught was that Assyria, having disposed of his enemies, would have served him in the same way. He, however, was shaved clean when the great deliverance by God over Sennacherib became a fact. This should have led him to obey the command of the Lord to “Be strong” and, having done his duty, to leave it to God.

Not so, however. He is glad, but it led on to Babylon shaving Judah more effectually than Assyria ever did.

We, however, dear reader, must not throw stones at Hezekiah, for I cannot but feel sure that many of us live in glass houses. May the Lord lead us on to great searchings of heart in order that the Holy Ghost may lead us to see any

neglect on our part, so that, having as dear children walked in the path of obedience, we may have no reason to expect the chastening hand of a Father.

V. 3. "Then came Isaiah the prophet unto King Hezekiah and said unto him, What said these men? and from whence came they unto thee? And Hezekiah said, They are come from a far country unto me, even from Babylon."

When we remember the way they traversed to get to Babylon, owing to the desert, it was indeed a far country. This, however, is a matter of principle, and distance does not affect it.

"Then said he, what have they seen in thine house? and Hezekiah answered, All that is in mine house have they seen, there is nothing among my treasures that I have not shewed them. Then said Isaiah to Hezekiah, Hear the word of the Lord of hosts. Behold the days come that all that is in thine house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store until this day, shall be carried to Babylon : nothing shall be left, said the Lord. And of thy sons that shall issue from thee, which thou shalt beget, shall they take away : and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the King of Babylon."

So we see that God did not share Hezekiah's gladness. The long-suffering of God is marvellous, for I cannot regard this punishment as punitive, but just the outcome of the course Hezekiah had adopted.

After his father's experience with Assyria, it does seem incredible that he would experiment with Babylon. It is in this case, born of his

fears. Isaiah, as we have seen, said, "I will trust and not be afraid." Hezekiah, however, did get to where David was when he said "At what time I am afraid I will trust in Thee." Blessed Lord, may our faith in Thee be so deep and strong that our fears or desires never make us stumble.

Then Isaiah told him the result of his folly. Note his reply.

V. 8. "Then said Hezekiah unto Isaiah, Good is the word of the Lord which thou hast spoken. He said moreover, For there shall be peace and truth in my days."

We must think this verse over, for I know that some think unfairly of Hezekiah. I have heard some say words to this effect :

"As long as he is at peace and truth, that makes him say it is 'good.'" I think Hezekiah had sufficient knowledge of God to know that God would always support and bless His people, if they trusted Him.



CHAPTER XL.

I have heard, through my life, that some claim that two different men, both named Isaiah, wrote this book. Among the thousands of Christians I know, all those who read and love their Bible would not mind in the least if the Holy Ghost used two pens or one. I do not know of one who thinks there are two. Probably, if I had been to College, I should know many. I certainly think the Lord taught one, and whilst I see that, I trust in God's grace to think as He did.

Some years ago I went through Isaiah in our Bible reading, and it is the notes I made then that help me as I write this. I have, however, in writing this book, carefully pondered over every verse, looking to the Holy Ghost to lead me. I have thoroughly enjoyed doing so, and feel that I have gained a more intimate knowledge of Isaiah than I have hitherto enjoyed. At times, as he looked to the future, his language has been grand, but on the whole he has been occupied with the present difficulties and follies of his people. That is enough to restrain anyone. He is now to be mostly occupied with God's purposes for His people. If anything is calculated to unloose the tongue, stir our spirit, and excite the imagination to its utmost heights, it is God's purposes for us, principally because, in our inmost heart we know we can rely upon them.

As we look at the first paragraph of eleven verses, we cannot fail to see that there are four messages.

V. 1. "Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem."

Notwithstanding all the sin, folly, rebellion, etc., yet here we see the great heart of God wanting His people to have comfort. It is no wonder the apostle Paul, carried away with the thought, says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort" (II Cor. iv. 3).

The Lord Jesus Christ has told us that in this world we must have tribulation. It is true that through our folly and the sin of others, we have more than God ever intended, but it is comfort we want, so we must get a clear vision as to how we can secure it. I can see that God is so desirous for us to have it that, as we read His word, it comes to us in many ways, as we shall see. I am, however, sure that by far the most important is the dwelling upon God's purposes for us. Let me give just one or two scriptures to prove this, though all can be confirmed by our own experience.

Let me begin with the Lord. In John xiv. He tells His sorrowing disciples that they were to have the same confidence in Him as they had in the Father. He assured them that in that bright future place, there were places where they could abide, and that He was going to prepare a place for them, in order that His own and Himself would all be together.

They were to find present comfort in the bright hope for the future.

The Apostle Paul tells the saints in I Thess., chapter 4 about the coming of the Lord for them in the air, and concludes that we are to "comfort each other" by this hope. The Apostle Peter tells us the same in I Peter i. with an outburst of praise to God for having begotten us to a living hope by the resurrection, unto an inheritance, incorruptible, undefiled, and permanent.

The Apostle John, in Revelation, leads us on from one bright picture filled with song till we come to the grand Hallelujah chorus.

Boys and girls, ever wait upon God to give you an ever increasing love for, and confidence in it : For according to the measure that you have, will be the measure of your comfort.

V. 2. "And cry unto her that her warfare (M. or time of service) is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned (M. or her punishment accepted) : that she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins."

The underlying thought of this verse appears to me to be that there is a limit to their warfare and time of service. If I knew Hebrew I should expect to see that the word carried both thoughts. At any rate, it is a fact that sin does impose conflict and bondage. The sin is pardoned, the payment accepted. We must remember that this is written to men who knew the teaching of the sacrifices. The stipulated punishment has been met. This clearly teaches us therefore, that this first message is that the foundation of comfort is that sin is forgiven.

My dear reader, are you quite clear as to this? There can be no comfort, or future, for you worth having unless you are at one with God about sin and your sins.

V. 3. "The voice of one that crieth, Prepare ye in the wilderness the way of the Lord, make straight (M. or level) in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low : and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain : and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together : For the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it."

Though this picture is literally that of the making of a road, I have no doubt that at the coming of the Lord to the earth it will be literally true. A highway broad, smooth, and straight will be made, with bridges across valleys and cuttings through mountains, and with all the ideas of the civil engineer. Yet the argument demands a spiritual application for those who are seeking to prepare the way of the Lord. John the Baptist claimed to be this voice. When the ecclesiastical authorities sent to ask him, "Who art thou?"

Three things are told us in this message.

(a) The way was to be prepared. (b) It was to be in the desert. (c) It was for the Lord. Alas, but few heard it. Instead of preparing a way for the Lord, they crucified Him. However, of this we may be sure, God's purposes will stand, because of the few that did hear, including some Gentiles. Though the sixty-ninth week (Dan. ix.) had passed, God stopped His prophetic

clock and, at Pentecost, the Holy Ghost formed a new man, which is the present Church. We are looking for the Lord to come in the air (I Thess. iv.). Perhaps in some measure we prepare for that blessed time Isaiah speaks of. We are to come with Him (Rev. xix.) when all wrong things will be put right. The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it. We can seek, however, to walk worthily of it.

V. 6. "The voice of one saying, Cry. And one (M.I.) said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field: the grass withereth, the flower fadeth; because the breath of the Lord bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever."

How solemn is this third voice! How important it is that we keep this great fact ever before us. We are so likely to give undue fear or applause to men, forgetting that all are but as the grass, and that whatever fruit they may bear in any department will wither. We think of nations, Kings, Emperors, Popes, warriors, poets, All are gone. God has but to blow upon it and it is gone. The only thing that will last is the word of God. The science, etc., of one age is smiled at by the next, but praise His Name, His word abideth for ever. What solid ground this is to build upon.

We now come to the fourth voice.

V. 9. "O thou that tellest good tidings to Zion, Get thee up into the high mountain: O

thou that tellest good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up thy voice with strength : lift it up, be not afraid : say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God.”

When we see all around us, men and women giving themselves over to pleasure, till the whole world appears to be becoming a vast Vanity Fair ; when the foundations of righteousness are looked upon with contempt and derision, we are told to comfort one another with the hope of His coming in the air for us. What a thrill we shall have ! What rapture will be ours, when we hear the shout, the voice of the Archangel, the trump of God. The good tidings this one is to declare with strength to those on the mountains, in Jerusalem, or in the cities of Judah, is that the Lord has come. When we remember that we are told over and over again that at this point the tribulation and persecution will be the most intense the world has ever seen or ever will see, as we enter into our joy we can have real joy about theirs, for we shall come with Him. I think their rapture will be as keen as ours, and to us it will, I am sure, be another rapture, as it will be the same Beloved One who comes to His own on earth.

V. 10. They are then told to Behold four things about Him.

“Behold, the Lord God will come as a mighty one.” Read again about that Mighty One coming out of heaven (Rev. xix.). The scene is beyond our imagination. When He came to the earth the first time, a babe in a manger, what a contrast to this, His second coming to the earth ! “And

His arm shall rule for Him." There is no need of the help of even His own that come out with Him.

"Behold His reward is with Him." This is just like Him. Amid such a tremendous occasion He will not forget the cup of cold water, not to speak of visiting His who are sick or in prison. This is cheer for them, is it not?

"And His recompence before Him." This Mighty One comes out of Heaven on a white horse. His sword is girded on His thigh. His Name is The Word of God, and His recompence is before Him. This inclines me to think He is prepared for those who have deluged the world with blood and misery, just to carry out their mad ambitions. Amid it all, note the tender way He deals with His feeble ones, for, as far as I can see, at that period His flock are as poor and feeble as possible.

V. 11. "He shall feed His flock like a shepherd, He shall gather the lambs in His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and shall gently lead those that give suck."

Note the two uses of His arm. The first is a picture of tremendous might; the second is a picture of gentleness and tenderness of manner. We might well exclaim, "How can these things be?" We are now introduced to the Comforter.

V. 12. "Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of His hand, and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance?"

We all, as we pass through the world, especially those who have the Comforter dwelling in them, find ourselves constantly called to give comfort. How we realise our helplessness! Observe those who have not Christ. They cannot do it, nor can we, apart from the Word of God. The reason why is that we, through the Word, can introduce them to the Almighty, to whom we are brought here. What joy this has brought into our lives, as we have seen the comfort the Holy Ghost does give to those who belong to or turn to Christ.

V. 13. "Who hath directed the Spirit of the Lord, or, being His counsellor, hath taught Him. With whom took He counsel, and who instructed Him, and taught Him in the path of judgement, and taught Him knowledge, and shewed to Him the way of understanding?"

Who indeed? Some men would like to, and apparently think things would then be better. Some have said to me, after their education in Science, that they do not see any room for a God. Such is the conceit of men. How fine is that which the Apostle Paul says on this verse in Romans xi. 33.

V. 15. "Behold the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance; behold, He taketh up the isles as a very little thing." Note the R.V. margin as to the Isles. We look at three very small things. The one that takes my attention most is that the nations are counted as the small dust of the balance. Many years ago I was in a University

extension class, and the Professor, speaking of a very delicate experiment, spoke of the small dust on the balance. There was a balance in a glass case, and though it was kept so carefully, he said there was small dust upon it, and it had to be carefully removed to get the weight accurately. I could see none, and thought he was joking, but he assured me it was so. It became then a question of confidence in the Professor. In my Bible I have a note written, "If the nations are counted as small dust, what am I?" Marvellous grace! We can say with a triumphant voice, "The object of His unalterable love."

V. 16. "And Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, nor the beasts thereof sufficient for a burnt offering. All the nations are as nothing before Him; they are counted to Him less than nothing, and vanity."

Though the Jewish ritual had been set up by God as a method of teaching great truths, yet the people had made these things as the end, and occupied themselves with them. They are reminded that the forests of Lebanon would not be sufficient to burn the sacrifices. All is as nothing and vanity. Even in these days the only cleanser is the Word. I heard a brother illustrating this last night. I thought, being but an old boy, that it was most excellent. He said, "Let us think of a burglar being converted. He reads in his Bible, 'Let him that stole.' He thinks to himself, 'This clearly is a message to me. I will carefully and prayerfully read it.' 'Steal no more.'" He says to himself, "Since I have been converted I have no inclination to do such a wicked thing, but old habits may over-

come me." He prays that the Lord will ever keep him by His grace from such a wicked thing. "But rather let him work with his own hands." "Yes, Lord. Thou wilt have to make me resolute, for I have done but little work, and there can be no other honest way for me to get the things I want or need." "In order that he may have somewhat to give." "Lord, I can understand having to work for my own living, but this is a thing I never dreamed of, but if this is what Thou dost require, give me the grace to do it." Before long he says, "Lord, I have never had such pleasure in my life." "This," said the speaker, "is how the young man cleanses his way, by taking heed to Thy word." God speaks through the word, and He replies, "Dear Reader, I suppose you know something of this, if you have had this experience." You will agree with me that it is a delightful and effective way of reading the Word.

We must, however, remember that these sacrifices pointed on to Calvary, and that it is on the ground of the sacrifice of Christ that God is delighted to receive a humble and contrite heart.

V. 17. "All the nations are as nothing before Him: they are counted to Him as a thing of naught and confusion (M.)." The last word is what is used for "chaos" Gen. i. The thought is that so great is God that the nations are nothing in comparison to Him.

V. 18. "To whom then will ye liken God? Or what likeness will ye compare unto Him? The graven image, a workman melted it, and the

goldsmith spreadeth it over with gold, and casteth for it silver chains. He that is too impoverished for such an oblation chooseth a tree that will not rot : he seeketh unto him a cunning workman to set up a graven image that shall not be moved.”

We see in large sections of mankind this craving for images. Here we are told what the well-to-do arrange in this matter, also the impoverished. They appear bent on something they can see. The prophet puts aside all the statements people make about these images ; how they help them, etc., and distinctly states that it is an attempt to produce a likeness of God. I am convinced that however intelligent a person may be, he or she will gradually transfer the image into God. I can quite sympathise with the Apostle Paul on seeing the images, “His spirit was stirred within him.” I have felt the same as I have seen people actually prostrate on the ground before an image of Mary and also before the various images of the Apostles, saints, etc.

What makes this image-worship so solemn is the ten commandments. The first is that they were to have no other God ; the second, that they were not to make images, to bow down, to worship or serve them. Yet those who are supposed to be leaders in the Christian faith encourage it. I make no apology for stating these things, because if one writes about the Word of God one finds it is constantly being mentioned, and God is angry with it. The other term used for idolatry is adultery. God is not deceived. Let us see to it, dear reader, that we may not be guilty in this respect.

V. 21. "Have ye not known? have ye not heard? hath it not been told you from the beginning? have ye not understood from the foundations of the earth?"

These four questions are well worth pondering over. For it is clear that the spirit that runs through these words is surely that they could have known. How can an idolater enter into true worship? "My people shall perish for lack of knowledge." We see this great truth proved in every department of our lives. I have read of explorers perishing with thirst, in Australia, at a place where they could have got water by digging, etc.

V. 22. "It is He that sitteth upon (M. above) the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in: that bringeth princes to nothing; He maketh the judges of the earth as vanity. Yea, they have not been planted, yea, they have not been sown; yea, their stock hath not taken root in the earth: moreover He bloweth upon them, and they wither, and the whirlwind taketh them away as stubble" (read M.R.V.).

How true this is! It is really the trouble of the world put in a pictorial way. He, God, is shown as dwelling above the earth. The inhabitants are as grasshoppers. The margin well illustrates this, and history confirms it. Man is ever wanting to be somebody or something. Princes rise, only to be brought to nothing. Empires scarcely take root. All shut out God. God blows on them and they wither. At this

time, we see Nineveh, Babylon, etc. How short-lived they were! In my own life I have seen the German States combining for mutual advantage. They get strong. In 1871 they defeat France. They combine as an Empire, polish up their sword, and almost perish by it in 1918. When the Jews, some 50,000, returned from Babylon, they had learnt some bitter lessons and they asked Ezra to bring the Book (Neh. viii.). Oh, if in its present troubles the world would insist on this, what a difference it would make! Here we are told that God just blows upon man's efforts to live without Him. Elsewhere we are told that He will overturn, overturn, till He comes, whose right it is to reign.

V. 25. "To whom then will ye liken Me, that I should be equal to him? saith the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high, and see who hath created these, that bringeth out their host by number: He calleth them all by name; by the greatness of His might, and for that He is strong in power, not one is lacking."

This brings out the folly of idolatry. We see the great Creator's work. He creates all things. Man creates His likeness. Folly can go no further. Only God can do this; Christ is the image of the invisible God.

Here is a lovely paragraph to those of little faith.

V. 27. "Why sayest thou, O Jacob and speakest, O Israel, my way is hid from the Lord, and my judgement is passed away from my God."

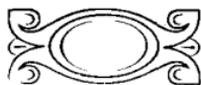
In other words, God neither sees nor cares, Jacob means, *i.e.*, the nation. How dreadful for Jacob! to say this! No wonder God asks the reason why. Look at Jacob by nature, a supplanter; by grace, one that could wrestle with God and get his way. Nationally, it is the least of all the nations. By grace it is God's chosen nation, and yet it can make such a statement. I think the reason is that they loved to wander but hated restraint. We have brought before us the cure.

V. 28. "Hast thou not known? Hast thou not heard? The everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not neither is weary: there is no searching of His understanding. He giveth power to the faint; and to him that hath no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint."

What a gracious Lord God have we! Here they are reminded that all grow weary and faint, even the young and strong. There is no strength that they have that can stand the strain of life. They act as if they had never heard or known of God. The Lord, the creator of all things, never wearies. All Nature testifies that it pursues an unwearied course. The Lord supplieth all needful strength to all things, and He has not overlooked any one. If I can so put it, everything goes on mechanically, except man.

God never intended him to live so. He wants man for a companion and friend, and should man forget this, he grows weary and faint. The condition of renewed strength and power is TO WAIT UPON GOD. If we but do this, according to the measure, we get three 'shalls.' There is nothing doubtful about these shalls. We can confirm them by our experience. Try, dear reader, to WAIT on the Lord. In other words, exercise the faith that comes into His presence and abides there, and you will, of a truth, live the triumphant life portrayed in this marvellous verse.

Note that they mounted first. By this, I think, they get occupied with God. Their mind will be fixed on heavenly things. This will qualify them to be His messengers and run in His service. They will be enabled to walk calmly and happily with the Lord amid all the sorrows and trials that are to be found in a world that must have tribulation.



CHAPTER XLI.

V. 1. "Keep silence before me, O islands, and let the peoples renew their strength; let them come near, then let them speak: let us come near together to judgement." This call to judgement is not a call to the tribunal of God, but to reason. It is a call, but to the Isles, *i.e.*, the coastlands. It is well to remember that this expression "O islands" refers to lands in general. As it is at Judah where the message was given, it would surely, if taken literally, be the great number of isles in the Mediterranean. What a number there are, south of Greece. I say this on account of those who think it is the British Isles.

Let them keep silence, means take time to think, then let them speak.

V. 2. "Who hath raised up one from the East, whom He calleth in righteousness to His foot? He giveth nations before Him, and maketh Him rule over kings; He giveth them as the dust to His sword, as the driven stubble to his bow. He pursueth them and passeth on safely; even by a way that had not gone by his feet."

This question "Who hath raised up one from the East?" raises a question of the utmost importance. This is God's challenge to the world, as we see in verse 23. As we proceed we see there can be no question but that this is

Cyrus, who ordered the Temple to be rebuilt (see my booklet on Ezra). There we get the story at the end. Yet this temple stands for another 140 years, and it is 210 years before this prophecy is completed. The expression in verses 2 and 3 as to "his feet" is very difficult for me to understand. I am inclined to think it has a reference to what I said when writing on Ezra. I believed Cyrus was converted; and hence would be a worshipper at His feet. It is only the righteous that can really do this. The victorious career of Cyrus is well described in the latter half of verse 2.

V. 4. "Who hath wrought and done it, calling the generations from the beginning? I, the Lord, the first and with the last, I am He."

The Saviour claimed to be this. We who have been born from above, know this, so we call Him Lord, which none can do except by the Holy Ghost. This calling Him Lord can only be done by obedience. The Saviour said, "Why call ye me Lord, and do not the things that I say?" It is an insult to Him. Religion, which consists of outward behaviour, see James, and is best expressed by visiting the widow and orphans, and by keeping ourselves unspotted from the world, is used by man to turn us from Christ-pleasing and to guide us in our lives instead of walking with the Lord in the light of His Word. Hence we have the command to "Cease from man whose breath is in his nostrils." This is just the reverse of being "the first and with the last." This expression includes all men, Kings, Popes, or call man what you will, Christ is Lord!

V. 5. "The isles saw and feared ; the ends of the earth trembled : They drew near and came. They helped every one his neighbour : and every-one said to his brother, Be of good courage."

This is very solemn. Indirectly it brings out the baleful effect of being taught by man instead of by the Word, for what follows is opposed utterly to its teaching. It is a lovely sight to see people bound together in neighbourly, brotherly feeling, even if they are not Christians ; but if they are, we see the most perfect expression of it that we are likely to see whilst here below. The people saw the disasters brought amongst the peoples, for victories and miseries go hand in hand, and if we look closely at the victors, we see as far as miseries are concerned, that there is but little to choose. Look around, 1932, fourteen years after the world war. We see a world of distress. It is not that all is due to the war, for personally, I think the love of pleasure instead of duty leads people on to want and misery more than perhaps war, though war is more evident.

As I said, the people, seeing the disasters, encouraged each other and made an idol.

V. 7. "So the carpenter encouraged the goldsmith, and he that smootheth with the hammer, him that smiteth the anvil, saying of the soldering, It is good : and he fastened it with nails, that it should not be moved."

As the idol progressed I can quite think there would be a certain amount of pleasure as they saw it shaping up or being adorned. I remember as a young man before I was a Christian, being taken by a Romanist aunt to a place where their images are sold. Very beautiful some appeared,

and they would have cost much money. How pleased she looked with them! We know that sin has a very attractive form. We read in the Word about the pleasures of sin. Alas, for those who sin, for their pleasure is short-lived. As to the idol, our scripture says it has to be fastened with nails, else it would tumble over, or someone would run away with it.

Fear may possess the nation, but not God's servant, and should not all that are the objects of God's sovereign grace see when they hear the language of affection that God uses, that timidity and anxiety must grieve Him.

V. 8. "But thou, Israel, my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend :"

How beautiful is this! It is "Israel" that is God's servant, the man who wrestled with God and prevailed. This is the essential condition of a truly effective servant. Let each one of us ponder over this. We need not be discouraged, because it was Jacob, the supplanter, that God chose. We know, do we not, that He has taken all His own out of the pit and the miry clay. He does not mind how great a sinner we were as long as we know that we are nobodies, and have a humble and contrite heart, and have accepted Christ as our Saviour. He must do it because of the eternal covenant with His Beloved Son, just as God must keep His promises to His friend Abraham and bless his seed, aye, and the whole world through that seed. Did you note the expression, "Abraham my friend"? Our hearts give a thrill of delight. That is just what our

blessed Lord calls us. This only leaves one thing to be desired, namely, to see Him and to be ever present with Him.

V. 9. "Thou whom I have taken hold of from the ends of the earth and called thee from the corners thereof, and said unto thee, Thou art my servant, I have chosen thee and not cast thee away; fear thou not, for I am with thee. Be not dismayed (M. look not around thee) for I am thy God, I will strengthen thee, yea I will help thee, yea I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness."

There can, as far as I can see, be no question that the chapter brings us to the Millennium. Further, I know no time when the Jews were said to be scattered to the ends of the earth and to its corners except for their rejection of Christ, until He manifests Himself and brings in the Millennium. In my judgement therefore, it includes the present days. With this in view we can note one or two things they were to remember. "I have chosen thee." It is a wonderful power which the election of God gives to those that have faith. It is an assurance that however dark and painful their course may be, all will be well. It may appear that God had cast off His people. We think of the Apostle Paul when he raised this question with his "God forbid." What a cast-away, persecuted career they have had since Paul's time. Disliked, as far as I can see, in most countries, they are an outstanding proof of God's preserving care. When Frederick, called the Great, asked a Christian officer for a proof of his faith, the reply was "The Jew, Sire." So I

have read. The next thing to note is (and I believe this can be applied to His saints of to-day) that they were not to fear, because they were to be sure God was with them; nor were they to be dismayed. The margin puts me in mind of Moses, when he is said to have looked this way and that, because they had His promised help, and "Yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness." God could not say this and break His promises. That would not be a righteous thing to do. The right hand speaks of ability. Let this thought ever be with us (the history of man is a terrible history, brought about by sin, notwithstanding this) that He is able and has promised.

V. 11. "Behold, all they that are incensed against thee shall be ashamed and confounded: they that strive with thee shall be as nothing and perish."

Though I think this is referring to the end which God ever keeps in view and will be carried out to every jot and tittle then, yet how true this has proved itself to be! Note verse 12.

V. 12. "Thou shalt seek them and shalt not find them, even them that contend with thee: they that war against thee shall be as nothing and as a thing of nought."

The people that were contending with His people, where are they to-day? We have to depend, apart from the Bible, upon history. As we have remarked before, how distorted this is by the side that writes this. It is not truth they wish to write. We have the conjectures of the

archæologists, more or less true, as they contemplate the things they dig up. We think also of the reliance they place upon monuments which they find. I am sure I could not put much reliance on tomb-stones, or anything in modern times, or manuscripts. We have no such difficulty about finding Jews, whether we like them or not, we find them practically all over the world.

V. 13. "For I the Lord thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not; I will help thee. Fear not, thou worm Jacob, and ye men of Israel: I will help thee, saith the Lord, and thy redeemer is the Holy One of Israel."

Here God assures them that they have nothing to fear, that they may ever count upon Him. He realises their feebleness, that they have no more strength than a worm, and He knows the strength must come from Himself, but assures them that their redeemer is the Holy One of Israel. To the Jew this would have a significance more than to any other nation, because with them the right of the redeemer belonged to the near kinsman, or, as we should say, the next of kin.

V. 15. "Behold, I will make thee a new sharp threshing instrument having teeth: thou shalt thresh the mountains, and beat them small, and shall make the hills as chaff. Thou shalt fan them, and the wind shall carry them away, and the whirlwind shall scatter them: and thou shalt rejoice in the Lord, thou shalt glory in the Holy One of Israel."

As we read the scriptures that deal with the

nations, and remember that God makes Judah His sanctuary and Israel His dominion, we see what an effective weapon He makes them. It does not matter in the least what Jacob was. The thing that matters is what will God make of them. We can be sure that, whether we or they enter into the great fact that "Christ is all" we shall be able to rejoice in the Lord and glory in the Holy One of Israel.

In the following verses we get figurative language, and this gives us a present application for our use, but this fighting here is just before the Millennium. When the Lord comes to Jerusalem, it is clear that Jerusalem is being besieged, and that half the city is taken. It is also clear that those who have been gleaned from the Word, when they see the Abomination set up will follow the Lord's instructions and flee to the wilderness. We know elsewhere that they are instructed to pray for their daily bread. Here we see that want of water is a sore trial, hence,

V. 17. "The poor and needy seek water and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst : I the Lord will answer them ; I the God of Israel will not forsake them, I will open rivers on the bare heights, and fountains in the midst of the valleys. I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water. I will plant in the wilderness the cedar, the acacia tree, and the myrtle, and the oil tree : I will set in the desert the fir tree, the pine, and the box tree together : that they may see and know, and consider and understand together, that the hand

of the Lord hath done this, and the Holy One of Israel hath created it.”

I have no doubt about the literalness of this prophecy, otherwise there would be no future for God's people (the Jews) as a nation. If we but ponder over these figures and apply them to our own individual lives, to the extent we enter into them is our testimony and our joy. As I have passed through this scene I have seen the poor and needy amongst all sections of the Christian people, certainly seeking refreshment, and I am sure that God has kept His word. For many times I had to say that these great sufferers were the happiest persons I knew. The reason is that their own inner life with God is so intimate, their faith in Christ so strong, that the dry land becomes indeed “springs of water.” Blessed God and Saviour, may the writer and the reader ever find themselves able to rejoice in Thy beloved Son under all circumstances, whether in garden or wilderness; and for this we request that we may ever be filled with the Holy Ghost. Amen. Let it be so, Lord.

V. 21. “Produce your cause, saith the Lord : bring forth your strong reasons, saith the King of Jacob.”

Here again we get God's challenge. The more I ponder over this, the more I see that it is flung far and wide. For many years, apart from this line, I have been fully assured of the truth of the Word. I remember what I read about what an infidel discovered. He read the Bible to overthrow it. After he read it, he said, “Whoever wrote this book knew me.” Also, as I

have stated before, there are many scriptures that we can put to the test. Experiment, I think, proves more surely than a scientist can, for their findings are constantly overthrown, or stated to be so by a later one. This particular challenge comes to the Atheist and the idolater and the unbeliever in the Word.

V. 22. "Let them bring forth and declare unto us what shall happen."

What a great number of prophecies there are in the scripture concerning the first coming of the Lord. I once heard a learned man, when speaking to three thousand persons, state that there are hundreds of them, and that by the law of the probability of chances there is sufficient evidence to convince any reasonable person. But this is only one factor of the prophetic sphere. The one we are now reading about, was 210 years before hand, and involves quite a few different factors, such as the country, the King's name, the Temple, etc.

"Declare ye the former things, what they be, that we may consider them and know the latter end of them; or shew us things for to come."

If I really have got the right understanding of this verse, it will be found a great protection to boys and girls who realise that they know but little or next to nothing. These former things, I think, mean things within the compass of men to guage, such as the fulfilling of Cyrus that we have here. The latter things would be things that may be thousands of years hence. As I ponder over this, I think that we are warned to take care not to accept things that have no mean-

ing to us. I remember a young lady who, when told anything incredible, used to say that that was true when it first happened, or if it were future, she would say that that will be true when it happens. In other words, we must not get out of our own capacity. What a lot of words, mere sounds without meaning, is the conversation of those that talk about the infinities. Let them get on with it. I can understand 'forever' means that it will never stop; I am puzzled when I hear it will stop, and with all sorts of explanations. Though I cannot grasp mentally eternity, time, space, etc., I am quite sure that if we enter into the subject that the Holy Ghost is telling us about now, we can accept all He says, only I think He wants to tell us Himself; in fact, that is why He has given us His Word, and the Author of the Word to dwell within us.

Those people who love to be considered scientists, are terrible culprits in this direction. When they produce facts, even boys and girls delight in that, but their interpretations are beyond us. Let those talk about millions and hundreds of millions if they will, but that is not for boys and girls.

V. 23. "Declare the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that ye are gods."

This was the bait that tempted our first parents, and ever since, in the minds of some, there is this constant effort to be so. Here is the challenge to such. The Word of God has many hundreds of prophetic things. I have known hundreds of prophetic students, many having different views, which is to be expected

when we see the vast fields to explore. But I have found that they are all firm believers of the Word.

“Yea, do good or do evil, that we may (M.) look upon one another, and behold it together.”

This verse to me is not clear, but I once heard a man say that these were intelligent men who wrote and wrote good sense, but that it gets a little obscured through the translations. This has been a great help to me. I think it means that whatever things happen, good or evil, are looked upon as signs from heaven, and they consider it together to say what it means. Whereas the challenge is not to interpret the present, but to tell us the future.

V. 24. “Behold, ye are of nothing, and your work of nought. An abomination is he that chooseth you.”

This, I think, is Isaiah’s comment to these idolaters. The Apostle tells us their gods are nothing, and their work naught; and he who chooses idolatry is an abomination.

As I write this, I remember this is the week of the great Eucharist meeting at Dublin. The picture I saw was supposed to have been of a hundred thousand people worshipping a little bit of bread they have turned into God. No wonder Christ said, He hated Nicolaitainism.

V. 25. “I have raised up one from the north, and he is come : from the rising of the sun one that calleth upon my name : And he shall come upon rulers as upon mortar, and as the potter treadeth clay.”

We must keep in mind that God's challenge is that God can foretell future things, hence it could not be any name that has lived in the past from Isaiah's time. There can be no real question but that this is Cyrus, and further, that the statement is that he is one that calls upon the name of the Lord. As we read the story in Chronicles and Ezra, there we are assured of this. It is essential to our comfort and well-being in spiritual things that He knows, but this is essential too, that we must trust, for all believers sooner or later say that we must trust even though we cannot understand His ways. It is always wise to do so, for trusting makes us happy; doubting makes us miserable.

V. 26. "Who hath declared it from the beginning that we may know? and beforetime, that we may say, He is righteous? Yea, there is none that declareth, yea, there is none that sheweth, yea, there is none that heareth your words. I first will say unto Zion, Behold, behold them; and I will give to Jerusalem one that bringeth good tidings. And when I look, there is no man; even among them there is no counsellor that when I ask of them can answer a word."

Here is another scripture that is difficult for me to feel sure that I have the mind of the Lord concerning it. As I ponder over it, it appears to me that there is none that can possibly declare God or His ways to them. This reminds me of Jeremiah when he was asked to produce one man who was right with God. Here God says that He will give to Jerusalem one that bringeth good tidings. In view of the next chapter, I can but

think it is the Lord Jesus who alone has declared God in the full sense of the word.

Further, God says that when He looked there was no other. I have always felt it must have been no light thing for God to give His Son.

V. 29. "Behold all of them are vanity and nought : their works are vanity and nought, their molten images are wind and confusion."

This is God's mind as to all that, apart from Him, man can do. I cannot think of two better words than vanity and nought. When we think of the perplexity of the nations (1932), how helpless man is to govern himself! Yet nationally we turn from God. As to a nation's religion, man might think it grand and imposing, but God's terms are "wind," nothing in it, "confusion," Babylon. So we see that this can never be God's mind. What a delight to turn from it all to the Man who is God's fellow!



CHAPTER XLII.

V. 1. "Behold my servant whom I uphold. My chosen, in whom my soul delighteth. I have put my spirit upon Him : He shall bring forth judgement to the Gentiles."

This is the true Israel of God. We are here told to "behold." It is ever the strong desire of His redeemed ones to keep their gaze fixed upon Him in whatever they may be occupied with.

We have seen in xli. 8 that the seed of Abraham was the servant of God. Alas! how little real fruit for God there was in them. This Blessed One satisfied and delighted His soul. His spirit was upon Him. We know He was born of the Holy Ghost. He was also baptized of the Holy Ghost which, as the servant character of the Lord, is, I think, before us here. His life glorified the Father, and brought forth judgement to the Gentiles. It is no wonder that God declares, He is "my chosen." He was the only one that God could choose. We are chosen in Him, and this fact fills our heart with gratitude.

V. 2. "He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause His voice to be heard in the street."

Though this servant is quite certain of His divine call, and brings to the nations the highest and the best, His manner of appearing is quiet, gentle and humble, just the opposite of the lying

teachers who by their noisy demonstrations and spectacular functions, seek to exalt themselves. The Blessed One seeks not His own. He brings that which commends itself. He has no need for a trumpeter.

V. 3. "A bruised reed shall He not break, (M.) and the dimly burning wick shall He not quench: He shall bring forth judgement in truth."

With an unassuming appearance there is associated a tender pastoral care; not only will He not destroy the life that is feeble, He will actually save it. His course is not to destroy, but to save. As He is "The Truth," so will all His judgements be.

V. 4. "He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till He hath set judgement in the earth; and the isles shall wait for His law."

What confidence this verse should give us. There is no failure with Him. He will pursue the course of truth and right; nothing will daunt Him, till He establish truth and right upon the earth. How little we see of it now. Blessed Lord, hasten the time, we pray Thee. What a grand time it will be when we see all, both Jew and Gentile, welcome His law with delight.

V. 5. "Thus saith God the Lord, He that created the heavens, and stretched them forth; He that spread abroad the earth and that which cometh out of it; He that giveth breath unto the people upon it, and spirit to them that walk therein:"

In chapter xl. we saw the Creator as the God of comfort. Here we see Him as the servant, cp. Phil. ii. 7, "taking the form of a servant." This no created being can do, only God's equal can do it.

V. 6. "I the Lord have called Thee in righteousness, and will hold Thine hand and will keep Thee and give Thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles; to open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison-house."

This servant brings us to the incarnate Christ, for without question in my mind, it is He who is the servant. What an inspiration it is to watch Him, as He passed through the pilgrimage down here! Our texts tell us He was called in righteousness. I have heard those who, though they called themselves ministers of the Gospel, say they do not want another man to suffer for them. It makes it clear to me that they cannot have been born from above, otherwise they would not talk such nonsense. Our salvation is of God, and this incarnate one is God manifested in the flesh, or "the Word became flesh." Take His Deity away, and there could be no righteousness in the plan of salvation.

God took His hand and kept Him through it all. It would be unthinkable for God to devise a plan and not to bring it to a successful issue, because our texts tell us He is the covenant between God and the people. The most solemn of all covenants is a covenant of blood. We are confirmed in these thoughts by the fact that we

know. Our experience, and above all, the Word of God, confirm it, namely, that He alone has the eye-salve which enables us to see. I have met professors of our Universities and found them as blind as bats, I have met some who have had but little, if any, of what is called education, and found them to be spiritual giants. The reason is clear as our verse reminds us. They have been delivered from the dungeon in which all the once-born live, for are we not certain that that is where we lived in comparison with the "large room" we have been brought into, where we know something of the liberty of the sons of God. How readily we admit the darkness of our prison-house, but praise His Name, He is become our light and salvation.

V. 8. "I am the Lord (*i.e.*, Jehovah); that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise unto graven images."

We must ponder over this name of Jehovah, see Exodus iii. 14. for here it is declared to be God's name and His glory. If we do this, there will be no image worship. If any think this is a thing of the past, let them go into Ritualistic churches, especially one of the various churches that call themselves Catholic, whether the Old Catholic, the Roman Catholic, or the Anglo-Catholic. Note well the expression, "My glory I will not give to another." However we may delude ourselves with specious arguments, we shall never deceive God. He knows as soon as an image is introduced, that it is not the Christ of God that is worshipped. I admit it would probably be the illiterate that would worship the

image itself, but however learned or spiritual we may think ourselves to be, the image formed in our mind will be another Christ, and not the Christ of the Word.

V. 9. "Behold, the former things are come to pass, and new things do I declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them."

These former things, as we have seen, mean those things that were foretold and have come to pass in our own day, 1932. These are now hundreds, including the changes that were connected with the first advent of the Lord. These things prove themselves to be more than sufficient to confirm our faith in the new things yet to come. Have you ever thought, dear reader, that we cannot open a single newspaper any day without seeing the mystery of iniquity at work, but I can find nothing that must come to pass till the Lord comes for us in the air (I Thess. iv. 16). The daily expectancy of this is enough to make any saint sing.

V. 10. "Sing unto the Lord a new song, and praise from the end of the earth; ye that go down to the sea, and all that is therein, the isles and the inhabitants thereof."

For the new things there is to be a new song. This, I think, is the Jewish hope, which cannot be fulfilled till the Church is gone. This new song is to be taken up all over the earth, which can only be when all wrong things are about to be righted. The Apostle Paul spake of this in Romans viii. 21. "That the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption,

into the liberty of the glory of the children of God.”

The restoration from Babylon would have but a very faint resemblance to this glorious time.

V. 11. “Let the wilderness and the cities thereof lift up their voice, the villages that Kedar doth inhabit : let the inhabitants of Sela sing, let them shout from the top of the mountains. Let them give glory unto the Lord, and declare His praise in the islands.”

We love to ponder over the culmination of the hope for this poor sin-cursed earth. We see that the song of triumph will only be surpassed by the grand Hallelujah chorus of Revelation. Sela will only be too glad to give her tribute of lambs in those days. It will no longer be a question of policy as to whether it is paid to Israel or Judah. These will be one, but the glory and praise will be the Lord’s.

V. 13. “The Lord shall go forth as a mighty man : He shall stir up jealousy (M. zeal) like a man of war : He shall cry, yea, He shall shout aloud ; He shall do mightily against His enemies.”

We know by other scriptures that when the Lord comes to Jerusalem He does indeed go forth like a man of war : Rev. xix. gives us a wonderful picture of this event. Other scriptures fill in, in a wonderful way, step by step, the path of this mighty Saviour.

V. 14. “I have long time holden my peace ; I have been still, and refrained myself ; now will

I cry out like a travailing woman : I will gasp and pant together."

Personally I think the primary meaning of "I have long time holden my peace" refers to the long time of exile in Babylon, and the language that follows, I think, refers to the way in which God's action is reflected in His people. The history of the Return leaves me with that impression.

It, however, reminds me of that great problem which is spoken of as "the silence of God." I have heard several speak about it from time to time, and have often pondered it over in my own mind. In their minds it gives the thought that God does not care. We think of the Inquisition. We, knowing how secluded the homes of Mahometans are, and being aware of the privacy of monasteries and convents, and remembering what we hear from time to time, wonder how much of it is still going on. Apparently, to say the least, God does not interfere. I will pass on two or three of the thoughts that help me, when face to face with this problem.

(a) I believe God will have us understand that He is not concerned to stop what we can, if desired, easily stop ourselves. As an illustration; during the war, many said to me, "Why does God not stop the war?" Some added, "If there is a God." I replied, "The war can easily be stopped. Men have only to leave off fighting." All that may go on in these shut-up places could easily be stopped if men would not allow it. I cannot understand why any desire it. They certainly would not unless there is something to fear from light.

Russia, and all other tyrannies, could never be, if people would not allow any section of the people to over-ride any others who are unarmed and living quietly. The troubles of others do not effectively appeal to people, unless they suffer themselves; but there are blessed exceptions.

(b) God is teaching us, *i.e.* man, that if favour is shown to the wicked, man will set his face to do evil, and men will one day learn it is the judgments of God that alone will stop it.

(c) I have mentioned elsewhere that we have two books, the Word, and the book on which we write ourselves each day a page. If we will thoroughly keep these in mind and ascertain God's purpose in each, we find that God is not silent at all. He is always speaking to us.

There are other thoughts that these three will suggest to you.

V. 15. "I will make waste mountains and hills, and dry up all their herbs: and I will make rivers islands, and will dry up the pools."

I have no objection to a literal interpretation of this, for the chastisements of God constantly involve literal work, but the purpose of God is better expressed here in the figurative teaching.

Man sets himself to build up states and empires, large or small, as best he can (mountains and hills). History shows us they become waste. Man seeks to cultivate that which will sustain his mind and soul (herbs). They wither or become dry. He has his rivers, namely education; science, invention, etc. These rivers and pools with God are very desirable, even as the others are, but they can never satisfy man's

thirst. Only God the Holy Ghost through the Word can do this.

V. 16. "And I will bring the blind by a way that they know not; in paths that they know not will I lead them: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked places straight. These things will I do, and I will not forsake them."

As I ponder over this verse, two things stand out as plain as a sunbeam, namely, the folly of God's people and the persistent goodness of God. It never has been or will be the purpose of God that His people should be in darkness, or walk in crooked places. It is our inner life that we lead, that settles these sort of questions. Can we imagine greater folly for a child of God whose right and privilege it is to have Him for a constant companion, not to avail himself of the privilege. We have the light of His Word to walk by. Praise the Lord, in all ages there have been faithful souls that have ever had a "Thus saith the Lord" to lighten them every step of the way. For the rest of God's people it appears to be a case of degree. What a consolation, here is a definite promise to His people, whoever they may be. He abideth faithful. "And I will not forsake them," however much it may appear to be so, when under the discipline of God.

V. 17. "They shall be turned back, they shall be greatly ashamed, that trust in graven images, that say unto molten images, Ye are our gods."

There may be an application to the heathen here, but to me it would be out of harmony with the context. It is just the same people we have been talking about. It is very clear that God's

people in Old Testament times were guilty of gross idolatry of the visible sort. God has so dealt with them, that wherever you may find the Jew he is quite free from that. Idolatry to-day can only be found with the heathen, and such sections of the so-called Christian churches that have their cross, crucifix, and the saints so-called. The Jews are ashamed of it now. Their house is empty and swept clean, till, as the Lord tells us, the lawless one comes and has his image set up in the Temple.

V. 18. "Hear, ye deaf; and look, ye blind, that ye may see. Who is blind, but my servant? or deaf, as my messenger that I send? Who is blind as he that is at peace with me, and blind as the Lord's servant? Thou seest many things, but thou observest not; his ears are open, but he heareth not."

This is connected with verse 16. It is the blind whom Jehovah will lead into liberty. The blind who bring upon themselves, not only His compassion, but His displeasure; for it is their own fault that they do not see. Here comes the summons to free themselves of the cause of the trouble.

For a child of God, what can be more important than this? This is exactly the theme the Lord takes up in His letter to the church of Laodicea. Dear reader, let us ponder over this, for I am sure this lesson is necessary to-day. We see how it displeases the Lord. I come to my own self after having been a believer for fifty-five years, I have not properly learnt the lesson that of the many

things I see, I do not OBSERVE; that though my ears are open, that I do not HEAR, *i.e.*, obey. These here did not, and I am sure I do not in a way that satisfies God. He wants us to trust him absolutely. I will illustrate this. Last Sunday morning I heard a brother on Luke xii. It was so simply and yet so ably put, that with a heart full of joy I said I had never heard anything finer. We all could walk away with his exposition of the chapter. He said, among the several other things, that we are not to fear, to worry, *i.e.*, be anxious. We are not to covet. On Tuesday (yesterday) I found I was not free from the two first. Do not let us deceive ourselves; it means that we do not wholly trust Him, so it is no wonder He is displeased. We should not like it ourselves, if our loved ones were to show that they did not altogether trust us.

V. 21. "It pleased the Lord for His righteousness sake, to magnify the Law and make it honourable."

This involves correction, for the law-breaker. Yet we cannot think that the law is rendered honourable till it is observed. We remember with joy that Christ has established the law. What a faithful and true witness He was, whilst down here! As far as man can judge there is a large amount of obedience to the law by Christians. I have only known personally two or three in my whole life who have been in prison for wrong-doing, and these had but trivial sentences. I have read of others, but cannot judge except where I have had experience. But God judges far deeper than man can.

V. 22. "But this is a people robbed and spoiled; they are all of them snared in holes, and they are hid in prison houses; they are for a prey, and none delivereth; for a spoil, and none saith Restore. Who is there among you that will give ear to this? that will hearken and hear for the time to come? Who gave Jacob for a spoil, and Israel to the robbers? Did not the Lord? He against whom we have sinned, and in whose ways they would not walk, neither were they obedient to His law."

Here we get a picture of the condition of God's people, sometimes from external foes, always by those who by their false teachings entrap and ensnare. None of them say "Restore." They are all after Number One. They will have every comfort. A man should be very careful how he gains a good living from the Lord's work.

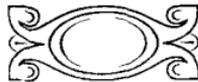
As to this state of things, four questions are put. Let us look at them. The first is, "Who will give ear to this," namely, will seriously consider the question of the state of so many who call themselves Christian with the view of answering the second question, "that will hearken and hear for the time to come." We can be sure that unless we are honest in our intentions to be right for the future, we may as well shut up the book at once, for we only aggravate matters. At this point the third question is put. "Who gave Jacob for a spoil, and Israel to the robbers?" There could be no question as to the state of His people. The reply comes, "Did not the Lord?" In view of what we have been reading, we have to reply by saying "Yes." He is almighty, nothing can happen unless He permits or directs; in

other words, there can be no second causes. If we can but let this great truth come into our inner consciousness, we can then accept everything from His dear hand, and we shall speedily learn "that all things work together for good to them that love God."

If we persist, as these did, then the next follows.

V. 25. "Therefore He poured upon him (Jacob), the nation) the fury of His anger, and the strength of battle: and it set him on fire round about, yet he knew not; and it burned him, yet he laid it not to heart."

I have often heard it said, "A burned child dreads the fire." This, I have no doubt, is true if taken literally, but alas, let a man get ensnared in a bad habit or sin, or a love of ease or pleasure; let him get into the habit of fear, worry, or covetousness, and he will be burned, right enough. Only by walking with the Lord in the light of His word, will he be saved from these things.



CHAPTER XLIII.

V. 1. "But now, thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and He that formed thee, O Israel: Fear not, for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine."

What a sudden change we have here. We have had their sin brought out very strongly, but here they are reminded that their hope was in their Creator and Redeemer. What a comfort it is that our hope is not in ourselves, but in God. Israel is reminded that God formed them into a nation. They might rely upon this and realise that He who did this would certainly shelter and preserve it. They were to be of good cheer, and their early history is a pledge of this; besides, God says they are His. This is a gospel in itself.

It does seem to me, as we read the New Testament, and as we study our own lives, that we must ever keep in our mind what we are by nature and what we are by grace, *i.e.*, the natural and the spiritual man. So here we have Jacob, the natural man, and Israel the man that wrestled with God and prevailed.

This can be carried into the nation, as here, and on to the whole Israel of God, of any dispensation. If not, we shall lay ourselves open to the rebuke the Saviour gave Nicodemus—Art thou the teacher, and understandest not these

things? *i.e.*, being born from above. When we do this, it makes the scripture practical to ourselves, and we can see it teems with life and meaning.

V. 2. "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee."

Note.—It is not 'should you pass through,' but 'WHEN' you pass through. Let this be very clear in our minds. Sorrows must come to all, none escape, but if we are His they cannot injure, though they may hurt. The reason is the same as given here to the Israelites. He will be with us to sustain and comfort us with the assurance that we shall neither be burned or drowned. The end will be right. How the whole history of the Jew has proved this! It is an outstanding miracle. It is unique.

V. 3. "For I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour. I have given Egypt as thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee."

The reason for verse 2 is that the Lord is their God, and praise His Name, He is ours also.

This latter expression is very interesting. Isaiah is telling these things about two hundred years beforehand. I have read that Cyrus by Cambyses his son, captured Egypt and Seba on the Nile (see map). Here we see Isaiah is regarding it as a compensation to Cyrus for letting His people return. God gives him Egypt and Seba as a compensation.

V. 4. "Since thou hast been precious in my sight, and honourable, and I have loved thee, therefore I will give men for thee, and peoples for thy life."

This is a very precious and comforting verse; the more so if we bear in mind that the ground of their or our preciousness to God is not what they were, or we are, but the price His people cost. God, remembering the ransom, would account them of great honour. Can there be anything so calculated to fill our hearts with solid comfort, as the fact that we are seen in Christ and arrayed in His sight, with His merit. God loves Christ, hence He must love all that are Christ's. This is the reason for the gift of Egypt, etc., for the good of the Jews.

V. 5. "Fear not; for I am with thee: I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather thee from the west: I will say to the north, Give up, and to the south, keep not back: bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth."

Here again we are reminded that God being with us, it is a sin to fear, and without doubt it is folly.

Then comes the gathering together of His people from all parts. I have read that some think that this is at the restoration by Cyrus. When I read the story in Ezra, etc., I realise that that, though a great mercy, is but a small thing to the re-union yet to come, which, I believe, is what we have before us.

V. 7. "Every one that is called by My Name, and whom I have created for my glory : I have formed him, yea, I have made him."

God has called Israel by His Name, and created him for His glory. This secures the end.

V. 8. "Bring forth the blind people that hath eyes, and the deaf that have ears. Let all the nations be gathered together, and let the peoples be assembled : who among them can declare this, and shew us former things? Let them bring their witnesses, that they may be justified, or let them hear and say, It is truth." Here we get a challenge to those of Israel who could not see or hear.

They had the name, but were not really the Israel of God, coupled with the nations that know not God. How solemn ! And alas, just as common in our own dispensation. They are asked to tell us the future. How helpless is man in this thing !

V. 10. "Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, and my servant whom I have chosen : that ye may know and believe Me and understand that I am He ; before Me was no God formed, neither shall there be after me. I, even I, am the Lord, and beside Me there is no Saviour."

The Jewish nation was intended by the Lord to be witnesses for Him. Our Saviour said, Ye are my witnesses, so that it is clear that His people, collectively or individually, are chosen in order that we may know and believe and understand that the Lord is He, and there is no Saviour beside Him. There never was, and never will be. Whatever dispensation we may be thinking

about, His people must realise that Christ is all. Our only hope is in God. This is a grand truth and solid rock.

V. 12. "I have declared, and I have saved, and I have shewed, and there was no strange God among you : therefore ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, and I am God. Yea, since the day was, I am He, and there is none that can deliver out of my hand : I will work, and who shall let it?"

I can only make this to mean, guided by the word 'therefore,' that the conclusion of this paragraph is that to be faithful and true witnesses for God is to be free from any thing that introduces idolatry, whether seen or moral. How very careful we should be not to mar our testimony.

V. 14. "Thus saith the Lord, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel : For your sake I have sent to Babylon, and I will bring down all of them as fugitives, even the Chaldeans, in the ships of their rejoicing."

The fall of Babylon is here foretold, but what makes it of great interest to us is that God said here that its fall was brought about because it was to the interest of Israel that it should be so. Certainly, when the fall of Babylon came to pass, this was clearly seen, as Deut. xxxii. 8, "When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when He separated the children of men, He set the bounds of the peoples according to the number of the children of Israel."

This gives us a new way of reading history. I

remember a dear old saint, now with the Lord, who said when Russia and Japan went to war, "It is a big country against a little one, but the Russians are ill-treating the Jews; Japan must win." So they did.

It seems a dreadful history for hundreds of years, this constant fighting amongst the nations of Western Europe. If any knew how to fight, it was the nations of Western Europe, and when the Mahometan hordes swept every country they came into contact with, they were checked when they got to Western Europe. I have no doubt that was because God's remnant was there.

The godless campaign of Russia was made possible by the persecutions of the Greek Church against those who wanted to worship God according to their conscience, and to dispense with the services of the Greek Church. The Russian Government has the same persecuting spirit as the Greek Church. Yet, if what I hear from those who are in touch amongst our own people (*i.e.*, those who are seeking to help the saints there) is true, it is an encouraging report, of the constancy of the saints in Russia. I feel sure that the result will be a freedom for worship such as Russia has never known. I read all the missionary reports about Russia; I always look to see about Russia when I read the papers. May the Lord hasten the time, or better still, may we hear the Shout to-day. This is our real hope, is it not?

V. 15. "I am the Lord, your Holy One, the Creator of Israel, your King."

The fact that God is their King, is the best

guarantee that they will never be allowed to be permanently despised.

Is not this blessedly true to-day? We are indeed a feeble folk, but God's character is at stake. We are the objects of His sovereign grace, and what sort of God would He be, if the end is not triumphant.

V. 16. "Thus saith the Lord, which maketh a way in the sea, and a path in the mighty waters : which bringeth forth the chariot and horse, the army, and the power : they lie down together, they shall not rise ; they are extinct, they are quenched as flax : Remember ye not the former things, neither consider the things of old."

Here the Lord reminds them of the great deliverance from Pharaoh, and rebukes them for not considering the things of old. I have spoken elsewhere of the importance of keeping the history of our lives ever in our memory, and considering them, otherwise we can never really get a personal experience of God. This would take in also the fact that the history of the scripture must also be kept in mind, as fulfilled prophecy gives us a tremendous assurance of the faithfulness of God's Word. There are many prophecies in Scripture yet to be fulfilled, and we can enter into the profit of these as though they were accomplished facts. Note the following :

V. 19. "Behold, I will do a new thing ; now shall it spring forth ; shall ye not know it? I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert. The beasts of the field shall honour me, the jackals and the ostriches : be-

cause I give waters in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert, to give drink to my people, which I formed for myself; that they might set forth My praise.”

Here we see a new thing. This new thing in a literal sense, I have no doubt, is best expressed in the Millennium; but we can be sure that they, or we, have not to wait, for they were told by Isaiah, “Now shall it spring forth: shall ye not know it?” We really must, boys and girls, get very clear about this. It is quite clear from Isaiah xlv. The story of the new birth is constantly brought before us, chapter xl. 1. Who can God comfort but His people, and that through the Word that abides for ever, and so we go on from point to point till we get this blessed assurance that they, or we, have not to wait; it is now. As Paul puts it in Galatians vi. 16, nothing avails, “neither circumcision nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. And as many as shall walk by this rule, peace be upon them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.” *i.e.*, those who are new creatures, whether of the circumcision, *i.e.*, the Jewish dispensation, or ours. The one thing counts, *i.e.*, being born from above.

Surely, if any of God’s saints lived in difficult times, they were those who lived in the days of the last Kings. Truly they were in a spiritual wilderness or desert, yet God says: “I give waters in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert” (*i.e.*, the Holy Ghost) “to give drink to my people, my chosen.”

It has ever been God’s intention that His people should be filled with the Holy Ghost.

Note.—We really must ever keep in mind that

when God formed us, it was for Himself, in order that we might set forth His praise.

Blessed God and Father, our hearts go up to Thee in praise, for does not our experience confirm this; we are fully assured that we do know, however difficult the wilderness or dry the desert, that we have within us a well of water springing up within us unto everlasting life, which is the source of our joy. How blessed are we since Pentecost, for now the Holy Ghost is not only with us, but He is in us. What a gift to have Him as an indweller.

V. 22. "Yet thou hast not called upon me, O Jacob, but thou hast been weary of me, O Israel."

This is very serious. This is nothing less than the neglect of prayer. If we remember that we have been taken out of the pit and miry clay, by nature a real Jacob, we should ever be calling upon our blessed Lord. Ponder over this. Turn back a few pages of the book you are writing day by day, and you will discover that prayer is the power-chamber, and its neglect means that our Israel life is seriously injured; that spiritual things weary us, and further, we shall see that the wretched effect is very deep.

V. 23. "Thou hast not brought me the small cattle of thy burnt offerings; neither hast thou honoured me with thy sacrifice: I have not made thee to serve with offerings, nor wearied thee with frankincense. Thou hast bought me no sweet cane with money, neither hast thou filled me with the fat of thy sacrifices: but thou hast made me to serve with thy sins, thou hast wearied me with thine iniquities."

This is the natural result of neglect of waiting upon the Lord in prayer. They cease, or nearly cease to bring their gifts to God. When we remember the first creative act of God, "He spake and it was done; He commanded and it stood fast," He claims that the cattle on a thousand hills are His, so that we can be sure that it was not for the sake of the cattle, the sweet cane or money, that God was grieved. It is very wonderful, but all things in the Word teach it, and our own experience confirms it, that God really loves to receive sacrifices and gifts from us, because He hungers for our little offerings. This to many, and I can quite understand it, might appear absurd, but we know it is so. How a father, mother, lover, looks for gifts, not because of the value of the gift, but because they know LOVE WILL GIVE. So it is with God. He can get all the sweet cane He wants, but it is because of what it is an evidence. Alas! this scripture shows a very much blacker side, for God did not get the gifts, but He did get a people who wearied Him with their iniquities. Do we not see the same spirit? It generally follows that the children who show a lack of love for their parents, more or less break their hearts with sin of some sort.

V. 25. "I, even I am He that blotteth out thy transgressions for Mine own sake; and I will not remember thy sins."

This is an old story, but it is ever new. We remember the Apostle John writes and says, "Little children, your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake." Nowhere do we find sins for-

given because they deserved it. We cannot meditate upon this too much.

V. 26. "Put me in remembrance; let us plead together: set thou forth thy cause, that thou mayest be justified. Thy first father sinned, and thine interpreters (or M.) ambassadors have transgressed against me. Therefore I will profane the princes of the sanctuary, and I will make Jacob a curse and Israel a reviling."

We can see that one that has not given these things may attempt some measure of self-justification, and if they have any real excuse they are invited to, but they are reminded that their first father sinned and their ambassadors sinned against Him. This first father has been taken to mean Adam, Abraham, Jacob, etc. I am inclined to think it means first in position, not in time, and it is ambassadors.

It would mean therefore, that the King who should be a father to his people, and the ambassadors sent abroad to negotiate with the nations, all did wrong, so that the Lord brings punishment upon them. The punishment is their capture by Babylon.



CHAPTER XLIV.

V. 1. "Yet now hear, O Jacob my servant ; and Israel whom I have chosen : thus saith the Lord that made thee and formed thee from the womb, who will help thee. Fear not, O Jacob my servant : and thou, Jeshurun, whom I have chosen."

This is interesting. We see it is put the reverse way to that in chapter xli. 8. There Israel was the servant and Jacob chosen. Abraham is introduced there, Jeshurun here. I cannot but believe that in all Scripture there is a reason for every difference, though it is not always readily seen. In chapter xli. 8 the meaning of the names makes it fairly clear, and you can refer to it to see how I have treated it there. Here I have to make a guess or conjecture. A man of science would make an hypothesis. We must suspend judgement till we can safely accept it as we have done in the case of gravitation. I write thus because I am writing to my own class, not to learned people, but just to boys and girls, and I can assure them I have found it a very interesting way of reading the Bible. Here comes my guess or conjecture. It has been helped on by the introduction of the word Jeshurun, which I understand is an ideal term for the nation, *i.e.*, the Upright one. In Deut. xxxii. 15, which is very largely a prophetic chapter, we read, "Jeshurun waxed fat and kicked : Thou art waxen fat, thou

art grown thick, thou art become sleek. Then he forsook God which made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation." Israel is the name given to Jacob when he wrestled with God and prevailed. This is surely an ideal name. As we have been reading the history up to this point, we gather that they have lost in a large measure both ideals, the nation has become as Jacob, *i.e.*, the natural man, just as some Christians of the present day so act that we should not know they were Christians unless they told us so. If I am right in this, our hearts ought to go out in adoration to our God for the constancy of His love. What an encouragement this should be to the backslider to return! Note his exhortation, "Fear not, O Jacob my servant, and thou Jeshurun whom I have chosen," notwithstanding the fact that the ideal has been broken. He promises His help, and then gives him a promise of a further supply of His spirit. What a wonderful God we have! Reader, remember that this is the God of the Old Testament, just the same as of the New. Notice that I said, a further supply of His Spirit. We shall read of the Spirit being poured out.

Both for the Word of God and the Holy Spirit water is used as a figure, hence we get the words "poured" or "supply" used so frequently. This has misled many to think that the Holy Ghost, to use the Saxon word, instead of the Latin word 'Spirit,' is not a person but an influence. I am not the judge, but it would be difficult for me to think that any one that has been born from above could be so misled. We might as well say that Christ is not a person, for on the Cross (Psalm

xxii. 14) He said He was poured out like water. The only way to settle a question like this is first to get a clear definition as to what an influence is, and its limitations, and then to do the same with personality. Then, as one seeks to get acquainted with the use of figurative language, I feel sure that all twice-born ones will have no difficulty in believing that which the Church has ever taught. As we ponder over the Word, let us not labour to establish a system of theology: let it grow. I have several very important points that I keep in my mind as I read the Scripture. If I do this, when I have arrived at a decision, I find I never have to change my mind. This is what I understand by depending upon God (The Holy Ghost) for the truth.

V. 3. "For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and streams upon the dry ground." The margin has "land" for "him." We see that here is figure upon figure. Though I believe that during the Millennium the ground will be well watered (literally) yet the context demands a personal application. I understand this to be a promise that wherever there is an absence of the Holy Ghost (*i.e.*, dry or barren) God will give His Spirit, provided the soul is thirsty. This is the essential condition. This is one of the reasons why we are called the salt of the earth, because our lives should be so lived that we make others THIRSTY. Only to the thirsty will the gift be given.

This question of Christ is most important for all, for physically we cannot drink very much unless we are very thirsty. David had a great

thirst. He said, "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God" (Psalm xlii.).

"I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring: and they shall spring up among the grass as willows by the water-courses."

This clearly means those who are spiritually born, for it is not true of those who are born after the flesh. The whole of Joel ii. points to this great time, but praise God, we have it wherever there is thirst.

V. 5. "One shall say, I am the Lord's: and another shall call *himself* by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord, and surname *himself* by the name of Israel."

Seeing that this is the result of the pouring of the Holy Ghost and the favourable condition they are brought into, we have here a varying degree of delight of those that are so blessed. The one that appeals to me most is the one, "I am the Lord's." To know I belong to Him is indeed a delight, and seems to secure everything.

V. 6. "Thus saith the Lord, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer the Lord of hosts: I am the first and I am the last: and beside me there is no God, and who, as I shall call, and shall declare it, and set it in order for me, since I appointed the ancient people? and the things that are coming and that shall come to pass, let them declare."

How important it is to get a definite notion as to the question "Who, as I shall call." We can be sure none can preach as God can, because all power is with Him. There is no God but He. It is the Lord that is the King of Israel and his Redeemer, so that all power is with Him. His love is to His people. He is able to tell us of things to come, so that we can readily see that a "Thus saith the Lord" is a solid rock to build on. Man's thoughts, whether in science, religion, or in any other sphere, may be interesting, but we cannot afford to build upon them.

To the man that rests here, nothing can disturb, whatever the future may be, even though it may mean an empire being overthrown and ourselves involved in it. When it comes God will be there also. Oh to learn this.

V. 8. "Fear ye not, neither be afraid : have I not declared unto thee of old, and shewed it? and ye are my witnesses. Is there a God beside me? Yea, there is no Rock : I know not any."

We see how essential this great truth is, by the constant and various ways it is brought before us.

I suggest that the central point for us to fix upon is, "Ye are my witnesses." This is what the Lord tells us in our dispensation, so that though we have considered it many times, we must do so till we have so considered it that it becomes our very own. A witness must have an experience of the matter that he is witness to; no judge would listen to a witness if he had been told of him that he had got his information on hearsay only. There must be no hesitation on

the part of a witness, otherwise suspicion would be aroused. To obtain this assurance we must mark well the question the Lord puts to us. "Have I not declared it, and shewed it?" The first part of the question clearly proves to me that we must have a clear scripture for what we state. The scripture must be obvious. The second part of the question shows that we must know that God has shown it to us. We must learn to distinguish between the truth that we experience and the truth that we accept only on Scripture authority, such as the new birth, the fruit of the Spirit, etc. Scripture teaches it; we experience it. The coming of the Lord, the glories that await the saint. Scripture teaches it; we hope for it. Having found the first true, we can assuredly accept the second.

A witness must have no fear from within, nor be afraid of anything or person from without, for that would seriously impair the value of his witness.

The great truth that we are to witness to, is brought before us in the second question of this verse. "Is there a God beside Me? Yea, there is no rock; I know not any." God declares that He alone is God, and that He is the only Rock that there is to build upon. He further declares "I know not any." This then is our witness: God is our Hope, we know of nothing or nobody but He, on whom we can build.

We might say that this is so obvious who can doubt it. We shall see that an idol invalidates any such testimony, hence the long time it is dwelt upon in the next twelve verses.

We might hear someone say, "Surely not in England," when we read the next verse. Keep this in mind as we read the next twelve verses.

This week, July, 1932, I saw pictures in our leading daily papers of an impressive ceremony. What was it? A Mass in Westminster Cathedral. This is what helps to carry away from this great truth many that are called Christian.

Westminster Cathedral is an immense and imposing building. There is beautiful music, an elaborate ritual, highly placed men with all sorts of titles of dignity claiming a priesthood on earth with all sorts of powers, aromatic spices burning, these men gorgeously dressed, and everything to appeal. How about God? They have a wafer. The seed has been sown, gathered, ground, baked. A few words have been said, and the god is made. Listen to their own testimony. *Cure of Ars.* page 159. New and enlarged edition. Here it is exactly as printed :

"And the holy Cure interrupted his discourse to weep; then he resumed :—

"See the power of the priest! Of a particle of bread the priest makes a God! It is more than the creation of the world." The book abounds in like statements.

When one sees these things it is salutary to remember Carlyle's writing on clothes. I cannot claim to repeat it exactly, as it must be more than forty years since I read it, but he was certainly of the opinion that if the House of Lords were naked, much of their dignity and impressiveness would be lost, as it depends upon clothes.

V. 9. "They that fashion a graven image are all of them vanity (confusion)." A piece of bread claimed to be God is very much worse than an image, but one has only to go into their places, and you find they do not lack these images. Here the Lord says they are vanity or confusion. Those that I have known have a confusion in their minds about Christian things that (till one talks to them) seems incredible.

"And their detestable things shall not profit" :

All the cathedrals, titles, clothes, sweet-smelling spices, ornate services, simply lead to superstition, whether in prince or peasant.

I cannot take all things as one would wish, else this book would be too thick.

"And their own witnesses see not, nor know, that they may be ashamed. Who hath fashioned a god, or molten a graven image that is profitable for nothing? Behold, all his fellows shall be ashamed; and the workmen, they are of men: let them be gathered together, let them stand up. They shall fear, they shall be ashamed together. The smith maketh an axe, and worketh in the coals, and fashioneth it with hammers, and worketh it with his strong arm: yea, he is hungry, and his strength faileth; he drinketh no water and is faint. The carpenter stretcheth out a line; he marketh it out with a pencil; he shapeth it with planes, and he marketh it out with the compasses, and shapeth it after the figure of a man, according to the beauty of a man, to dwell in the house. He heweth him down cedars, and taketh the holm tree and the oak, and strengtheneth for himself one among the trees of

the forest : he planteth a fir tree, and the rain doth nourish it.”

V. 15. “Then shall it be for a man to burn ; and he taketh thereof and warmeth himself ; yea, he kindleth it and baketh bread : yea, he maketh a god and worshippeth it ; he maketh it a graven image and falleth down thereto.”

V. 16. “He burneth part thereof in the fire ; with part thereof he eateth flesh ; he roasteth roast and is satisfied : he warmeth himself and saith, Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire : And the residue thereof he maketh a god, even his graven image : he falleth down unto it, and worshippeth, and prayeth unto it, and saith, Deliver me ; for thou art my god. They know not, neither do they consider : for he hath shut (M. daubed) their eyes that they cannot see, and their hearts, that they cannot understand. And none calleth to mind, neither is there knowledge, nor understanding to say, I have burned part of it in the fire ; yea, also I have baked bread upon the coals thereof ; I have roasted flesh and eaten it : and shall I make the residue thereof an abomination ? Shall I fall down to the stock of a tree ? He feedeth on ashes ; a deceived heart hath turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand ?”

What is here said is said of graven images, but the truth affects any sort of idolatry, whether covetousness or anything else. As to these twelve verses, I will but call your attention to the three questions that are raised in them.

“Who hath fashioned a god, or molten a graven image that is profitable for nothing ?”

The "who" of verse 10 is the "they" of the 9th verse. We saw in that verse that it was vanity or confusion, and without profit. This, I think, must apply to those that are misled. The few that I have met certainly seem to have very confused ideas as to the way God saves. How a man can think that a cross, an image, or a bit of bread, can be God, is to me beyond all understanding. I can quite see how it can be made to be a very money-making concern, and we have proof of that all around us. The whole argument goes to show how ridiculous it is, especially verses 16 and 17. They cannot know, see or hear, verse 17. The second question is in verse 18, "Shall I make the residue thereof an abomination?"

We can see by this question that it does not matter what use one may put the tree to, if we use it to warm ourselves or to cook our food, and with the residue we make an image or idol, the word God has placed in the questioner's mouth is "an abomination." It would be difficult to find a stronger term.

The third question is, "Shall I fall down to the stock of a tree?" We, if rich, may have the tree beautifully carved, embellished in a variety of ways, and adorned with jewels, so that to our eyes it may be very beautiful indeed, but it is still the stock of a tree. The same is equally true of stone, or metal, etc. If a man has every title of dignity, immense wealth and learning, is decked in the most gorgeous dresses, he is but a man, his breath is in his nostrils. Listen: this is what God says of these foolish people that are guilty of idolatry. "He feedeth on ashes." A decision such as this should make us ponder, and

bring us to our knees with a cry for deliverance. Here God, in His grace, has graciously revealed the reason for this dreadful state. "A deceived heart hath turned him aside." I have long since discovered that the point is: What am I wanting? If it is Christ I shall surely find Him. If it is a substitute for Christ, I shall soon find reasons for it. The wise man said, "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life." Note the wretched condition he is brought to, "that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand?" because he knows in his inmost mind it is a lie. Dear reader, it means to us that we must have Christ or be lost.

V. 21. "Remember these things, O Jacob: and Israel, for thou art my servant; I have formed thee; thou art my servant. O Israel, thou shalt not be forgotten of me."

Here we are distinctly told, or Israel was, "to remember these things." We can divide this into how, and what. The best way I know as to *how* to remember, is by constant meditation and conversation.

The first thing they had to remember was that they were Jehovah's servant, and that He would never forget them.

V. 22. "I have blotted out as a thick cloud thy transgressions, and as a cloud thy sins: return unto me, for I have redeemed thee."

It is most important that we should ever remember that our sins are forgiven by reason of that which Christ did for us on the Tree. The

Israelites had theirs forgiven through forbearance. God, knowing the Cross was part of His plan, on these great fundamental questions in all dispensations, dealt with sins, etc., through the Cross. My own opinion is that Spirit-led men, opening up the sacrifices, offerings and prophetic utterances, were able to instruct properly the saints of God. They are reminded that the Lord had redeemed them. It does seem incredible that the Lord should ever have to ask them or us to return to Him. That it is possible, I nearly said probable, and perhaps I should have done, that we should ever wander from such a Saviour, is, as I think of it, shameful indeed. How God can bear with us, I do not know. Blessed God and Father, we are Thine. Thou hast bought us with Thine own beloved Son, and all this forbearance is because He has bought us with His precious Blood. We pray Thee that the Holy Ghost may not be hindered by us, so that we can live without grieving Thee. Amen.

It is no wonder this makes the Israelites sing, as it makes us. What joy to sing,

“For Him who washed us in His blood,
Let us our sweetest songs prepare;
He sought us wandering far from God,
And now preserves us by His care.”

V. 23. “Sing, O ye heavens, for the Lord hath done it : shout, ye lower parts of the earth ; break forth into singing, ye mountains, O forest and every tree therein : for the Lord hath redeemed Jacob and will glorify Himself in Israel.”

We know it is natural to Spirit-filled men to praise. They cannot help it. Here the writer is so exultant that he calls upon heaven to join

in. John shows us in Revelation that heaven knows how to sing, so we can understand it, and I trust practise it.

He concludes this section by again stating the reason. For the Lord hath redeemed Jacob, the natural man, and finds Himself glorified in the man that wrestles with Him and prevails, the new man.

V. 24. "Thus saith the Lord, thy Redeemer, and He that formed thee from the womb. I am the Lord, that maketh all things : that stretcheth forth the heavens alone : that spreadeth abroad the earth :"

Here we have another prophecy of things to come in about two hundred years. And it begins with a "Thus saith the Lord" and a re-statement that He hath made all things and that 'alone.' No creature help.

V. 25. "Who is with me? that frustrateth the tokens of liars, and maketh diviners mad; that turneth wise men backward, and maketh their knowledge foolish : that confirmeth the word of His servant, and performeth the counsel of His messengers :"

Here we are told of that which shall occur in Nebuchadnezzar's time. As we read the story in the book of Daniel, and note the experience that these diviners and wise men went through, how interesting it is to read! They certainly, with all their pretension, were in very grave peril, and certainly owed their life to Daniel.

"That saith of Jerusalem, She shall be inhabited; and of the cities of Judah, They shall

be built, and I will raise up the waste places thereof : that saith to the deep, Be dry, and I will dry up thy rivers : that saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall perform my pleasure : even saying of Jerusalem, She shall be built ; and to the Temple, Thy foundations shall be laid. ”

Here the prophet declares again in substance the prophecy made before, namely, that the Temple shall be built. This is about 140 years before the existing one was destroyed. And the foundation should be laid—about 210 years before it was laid. And Jerusalem itself, the cities, and the wasted country shall be restored. In my little book of Ezra, we see these happy events accomplished, just as God says. Evidently the lesson God wanted His rebellious children to understand was that they were His, and the end would be right. But alas, they were not so for long, when they returned in a happy state, as Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, etc., clearly show. So the end is deferred. God has brought in a new man, *i.e.*, the Church. But the God who foretold these things has also plainly foretold the dark days of the last week of their dispensation. He will come in the person of His beloved Son, and their safety will not be due to their faithfulness, but to His. It is the old story. Adam's life in the garden depended upon Adam's faithfulness, whereas outside the garden it depended upon the faithfulness of Christ.



CHAPTER XLV.

As we read through this chapter we shall see that the great fact that the Lord wants His people to be assured of is that "I am the Lord, and there is NONE ELSE; beside Me there is NO GOD."

As this is repeated in many chapters, I always think of this as the NONE ELSE chapter. Boys and girls, this is a very important chapter for us, for though we are really not clever enough to look after ourselves, there is every reason why we should and could rest upon this, and by doing it we shall assuredly be safe and happy for time and eternity. This means that we cannot put our trust in man, whose breath is in his nostrils. It does not matter who he may be, whether the Greek Patriarch or the Italian Pope, or an Emperor, a King, or a Professor. The position, or his ability, cannot help him apart from this great truth. In fact, it is a great boon to be among the simple ones of this earth who can be content with food and raiment, and go on trusting in the Lord; for position, wealth and ability are wonderful gifts if used to His honour, glory, and praise, but if they become our master and are used to please ourselves, we are much better without them.

V. 1. "Thus saith the Lord to His anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to

subdue nations before him, and I will loose the loins of kings : to open the doors before him, and the gates shall not be shut : I will go before thee, and make the rugged places plain : I will break in pieces the doors of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron : I will give unto thee the treasures of darkness, and the hidden riches of secret places, that thou mayest know that I am the Lord, which call thee by thy name, even the God of Israel.”

Cyrus, as far as I know, is the only Gentile King that the Lord calls His anointed, and, as I mentioned in Ezra, I believe he became a converted man. I look forward to the time when, from his own lips, I shall hear his full story. The Bible would be a very big book if it told us everything.

I can quite understand Cyrus being so gracious to the nation whose God made such promises to him. The Lord promises him that he will subdue kings for him. No obstacle shall prevent him, whether doors of brass or bars of iron ; nothing shall bar his progress, and the rugged path shall be made plain. Mineral wealth, and hidden riches shall be his. All this is done, because Cyrus was to learn that the God of Israel is Lord, and, as a proof of this, God called him by his name, *i.e.*, Cyrus, and surnamed him, My Anointed.

V. 4. “For Jacob my servant’s sake, and Israel my chosen, I have called thee by thy name. I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known Me.”

Here this tends to confirm the reason I gave

in chapter xliv. We can, I think, quite see that had Jacob, whom God chose out of the pit and miry clay, and who met with and wrestled with God and prevailed (for we saw in xli. 8. He there calls Israel His servant). Had Jacob continued in the Israel condition, and walked in the path that prevails with God, he would never have passed through this terrible discipline. Here I have no doubt that Cyrus would be led of the Lord, probably through Ezra, to see that all these things that had come to pass were not through his ability, but because God was acting on behalf of His own, whom He had brought under discipline, but whom He would never forsake. As shown in His dealings with Babylon, He would severely punish those who added to their affliction by going further than He intended.

God is just the same to-day. Let any one read carefully in these modern times the history of the nations that have added to the afflictions of the Jews, and they will, I feel sure, be fully confirmed in this.

I quite admit that the Lord will never agree to any course between man and man, whether he be Jew or Gentile, or the Church of God, when cruelty or injustice is done. But this is not so clearly manifested as it is as regards injustice to the Jew.

V. 5. "I am the Lord, and there is none else : beside me there is no God : I will gird thee, though thou hast not known me : that they may know, from the rising of the sun, and from the West, that there is none else beside me : I am the Lord, and there is none else."

As I read this verse I am reminded of the means the Lord uses to make Himself known. The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament declareth His handiwork, so that His eternal power and Godhead may be known. For about five thousand years there has been a nation in the world, and for the last two thousand years that nation has been scattered throughout the world. Of the messengers He has sent forth from time to time, here we get another case of the foremost man in the world being selected. The greatest hindrance is not in the testimony (for wonderful miracles do not avail in any large measure); it is, I think, that people do not want to know God because they think it will interfere with their pleasure. The god of the world does blind their eyes.

Yet Cyrus was to know that Jehovah is Lord, and that beside Him there is no God, there was NONE ELSE. From the East to the West, the story of Cyrus would be known.

V. 7. "I form light and create darkness; I make peace and create evil: I am the Lord that doeth these things."

That God does evil in a moral sense is unthinkable, but evil in the sense of punishment He does do, and He certainly has permitted all the moral evil that has ever been done, which is ever the spontaneous work of a creature.

V. 8. "Drop down, ye heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness: let the earth open that they may bring forth salvation (M. be fruitful in salvation) and let her cause

righteousness to spring up together. I the Lord have created it.”

I am not speaking of the time when there will be a new heaven and a new earth, but as we know it, I am quite sure righteousness can only come from above, through the power of Him who came down to dwell in our bodies in order that we might be fruitful in salvation. This can only be done to a will surrendered by us to His. It will help us if we keep in mind that “I the Lord have created it.” This is His intention, that earth and heaven shall be in harmony. I do not know how the learned would view this. I can only see this to be an Old Testament way of stating Phil. ii. 12. “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling: For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to work, for His good pleasure.”

We can only work out that which God works in, or, as here, we can only be fruitful in salvation with that which comes from above.

V. 9. “Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker! a potsherd among the potsherds of the earth: Shall the clay say to Him that fashioneth it, What makest thou?, or Thy work, He hath no hands? Woe to him that saith unto a father, What begetteth thou? or to a woman, With what travaileth thou?”

Though the truth taught is for all, we must remember in the first place that this is a message sent to Cyrus about two hundred years before he saw it. We must remember that after the fall of Babylon, he was the mightiest monarch of the world. These people are likely to be proud, and

take all the credit to themselves, hence the word 'Woe' twice told. It would be perilous to Cyrus, if he strove against his Maker. In comparison with his Maker, he was just one of the vessels of clay. God asks him four questions. The correct replies are obvious.

V. 11. "Thus saith the Lord, the Holy One of Israel and his Maker : Ask me of the things that are to come ; concerning my sons, and concerning the work of my hands, command ye me."

I have no question in my mind that this is God's message to Cyrus, but as we read, we cannot but see that it is also indirectly sent to His own people. And here am I, about three thousand years after pondering it, to see what I can learn of my blessed and beloved Saviour. I remember that what He said did come to pass, and this, with many like words, makes me believe that all He has said will come to pass. This telling beforehand is God's challenge to unbelief, and it is sufficient to satisfy anyone who really WANTS the truth. Cyrus is actually asked by God to "command ye me." I cannot help looking at this longingly, and, by God's favour, as I read the Word, seek to get a clear notion as to the extent to which I can use these words.

V. 12. "I have made the earth, and created man upon it : I, even My hands, have stretched out the heavens, and all their host have I commanded."

Here God distinctly states that He created the earth. I have met a few men who talk about science. They may be men of science, but I cannot help remembering that I have frequently

heard people talk about scholarly fools. A little time back I came across a book called "Premiums paid to experience," and one of its chapters was devoted to this fact. This book suited me. I think, personally, that there must be scientific fools? When I hear them say, "I can see no room for a God." They might reply that that is because I am ignorant of the facts that they know. I should reply that I must be, but that I have Scripture for the view I take. Boys and girls, I have often said it, and I hope still to say that I am glad when I have a scripture for what I think.

Coming to the Scripture, it says in Psalm xiv. 1, "The fool hath said in his heart, 'There is no God.'" The Authorised Version has 'There is' in italics; the Revised Version has it in the text. Personally, I think the Authorised put it there, because it makes sense. I think the Revised put it there, because the grammatical construction demands it. So the first thing we gather from either version is that when we hear a man who thinks he is scientific say this, we know exactly where Scripture places him. I know some curious Christians who say they leave out the italics, especially if it makes sense without. The better way would be, if you know a person who knows the Hebrew or Greek grammatically, to ascertain his views. These beloved brothers would read it, "The fool hath said in his heart, 'No God'." There is this to be said for it. It says "in his heart," *i.e.*, he does not want a God, so the scripture says "in his heart" because all the time the man's head is secretly telling him not to talk nonsense. What is that I hear a boy

say? "Which way do you read it?" My reply is that when things are so stated, and both ways are to be preferred to one way, I so read it, for both are true.

Further, God claims to have stretched out the heavens with His hands. This I take to be a figure of speech, though I am acquainted with what others state. The last expression is well worth pondering over: "All their host have I commanded." I have read, and I have heard, (I hope you will not ask me to tell you the book) but it is true that I have heard men say that they believe God created the world and so wound it up that it runs on by the laws given to govern it—for they cannot believe that God in any particular way interests Himself in the affairs of this world. We can quite understand a man without faith talking like that. The strange thing would be if he did not.

V. 13. "I have raised him up in righteousness, and I will make straight all his ways: he shall build my city, and he shall let My exiles go free, not for price nor reward, saith the Lord of hosts."

That which strikes me as so wonderful in the ways of God is the manysidedness of them. His transactions continue to sparkle with fresh light and reflect many colours. Take this one: It is so wonderful that as Cyrus reads it, it becomes the method that the Lord uses for his conversion. It involves Cyrus in a great political enterprise which naturally would involve him in a great expense, and which is full of risks and dangers. It is an enterprise calculated to arouse many

jealousies among his subjects, but God does give him a straight path. We see the stirring of his heart. All messages that convert must do that. In fact, we may question any conversion that does not lead to beneficent action. We see that he does this great work without any thought of price or reward. This is in itself the secret of happy labour. The Lord opened my eyes to see this very early in life, and though I can quite see that there may be times when Bobby Burns was right when he describes his cotter as "gathering gear by every wile that's justified by honour" (quoted from memory), I made a resolve that, rich or poor, I should look for my support by a diligent attention to my business, and that all the rest I should do without price or reward. I must confess that I cannot say that I am quite there, for I do long to get His "Well done, thou good and faithful servant," for I have the idea that if I can get this, it will indeed be the highest crown of life that I can think of.

The happiest people I know are those who are satisfied with little. Having by labour and self-denial got sufficient to provide their wants, they direct their other labours without hope of price and reward. We see the desire of this slavenship gratified, for their beloved city and temple is to be rebuilt, and the exiles are to return. We also see that Cyrus has his eyes opened to see that God tells him beforehand of his reward so that he can learn, as we all may, that if we but walk with the Lord in the light of His Word, the Lord will be no man's debtor. Continued meditation will reveal much more.

V. 14. "Thus saith the Lord, the labour of Egypt, and the merchandise of Ethiopia, and the Sabeans, men of stature, shall come over unto thee, and they shall be thine : they shall go after thee ; in chains they shall come over : and they shall fall down unto thee, they shall make supplication unto thee saying, 'Surely God is in thee ; and there is none else, there is no God.' "

In chapter xliii. we have seen in some measure that God gave these nations to Cyrus as a compensation for his loss of Israel. From a human point of view, it is a handsome reward. These people, in their turn, learn the great lesson, as they behold the deliverance of the Israelites, that there is NONE ELSE, there is no other God.

If we have, by the reading of God's word made ourselves familiar with the times and the incidents that happen when Christ comes down to be the deliverer of His people, and if we meditate upon the last times, we see that Cyrus and the incidents that go with it remind us that when God's true anointed comes to reign, Assyria and Egypt play a great part. With Israel they are brought into the highest position. But Christ gets all the nations for His inheritance, and His people have their dwelling in Jerusalem. The whole world will know that "there is none else." Oh, to learn this lesson well !

V. 15. "Verily Thou art a God that hidest Thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour."

The thought appears to be that God guides with marvellous strangeness the history of the nations of the earth, and by secret ways which human eyes can never discern, He conducts all to a

glorious issue. How different it is to us who have bought of Him the eyesalve! With God's Word in our hand, and the Holy Ghost in our heart, we see the whole thing in a way that is marvellous, and we cannot take up even the papers of this world without seeing that what God has told us is all being worked out.

V. 16. "They shall be ashamed, yea, confounded, all of them : they shall go into confusion together that are makers of idols. But Israel shall be saved by the Lord with an everlasting salvation : ye shall not be ashamed or confounded world without end."

Here is a statement that clearly puts the result of the two streams that will eternally separate mankind. To those who have refused God, or made a substitute of their own, there is shame and confusion. To the others, who are the true Israel of God, for this is true beyond the Jewish nation, there is an everlasting salvation, and they shall never be ashamed or confounded.

V. 18. "For thus saith the Lord that created the heavens ; He is God : that formed the earth and made it : He established it ; He created it not a waste ; He formed it to be inhabited : I am the Lord ; and there is none else."

It will be well for us to ponder a little over the statement that is made in this verse, and then in the following verse we shall see the argument God deduces from it.

God distinctly states here that when He created the earth He did not create it waste, but formed it to be inhabited. It is only a careless reading of Genesis i. 2 that would lead anyone

to think that He did, hence the idea so generally prevalent in the world that the first chapter of Genesis is the creation story. The first verse deals with the creation of heaven and earth. Here it is stated that it was not a waste, but formed to be inhabited. In the second verse we read, "And the earth was waste and void." In Isaiah xlv. 18 God said He did not make it so, and elsewhere the Bible makes it clear what happens between these verses. I am inclined to think that the past tense of the verb to be, "was" that is used here, is partly the reason for the confusion. This word is used about a score of times, and we find the sense as here used should be "became." As we have to give it that meaning, whether we will or not. I believe it is "was" in the Hebrew; I know it is in the Greek Septuagint, also in the English, which gives us another lesson in the use of words, etc.

V. 19. "I have not spoken in secret, in a place of the land of darkness. I said unto the seed of Jacob, seek ye me in vain (M. as in a waste). I the Lord speak righteousness; I declare things that are right. Assemble yourselves and come: draw near together, ye that are escaped of the nations: they have no knowledge that carry the wood of their graven image and pray unto a god that cannot save."

I understand the argument to be that just as God did not create the earth a waste place, but formed it to be inhabited, neither when He created Israel did He intend it to go to waste or chaos. He foresees the trouble they are bringing on themselves. He knows that when,

through sin, the earth was brought to chaos, so in Genesis i. God brought it back into order and placed Adam and his seed upon it, so He tells them when they are escaped of the nations that they are to assemble themselves together and come to Him and hear. They did in some measure on their first escape (see Ezra and other prophets). These are their instructions whenever they escape from the nations, but we are assured that God's purpose will be carried out perfectly when the Lord Himself comes to deliver them. We ourselves, as we read this, can take great comfort because, when we read of the time when God formed Israel, He made it clear that He did so with the view of making them His agents in the recovery of the race. They were to be a blessing to the whole world, and so they would have been had they been true Israelites, i.e., men who would wrestle with God and prevail.

This is the trouble with the Church formed at Pentecost. Ungodly men have crept into it, and though the Apostle speaks of us as the Israel of God, how many can prevail with God? Alas! though God says they have no knowledge, that carry the wood of their graven image, and pray unto a god that cannot save. We see the same thing in the so-called Church, and even among those who have escaped from that and who follow the instructions here, *i.e.*, to assemble themselves and draw near to God and hear. If writer and reader would ask themselves what time they give to the word and to prayer (here it is the collective prayer-meeting) the answer would perhaps humble them.

V. 21. "Declare ye and bring it forth; yea, let them take counsel together: who hath shewed this from ancient time? who hath declared it of old? Have not I, the Lord? and there is no God beside me; a just God and a Saviour; there is none beside me. Look unto me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God and there is none else."

What a gracious invitation this is! All nations are invited to hear the wondrous gospel, that God is a just God and a Saviour, and that He offers salvation to all. The question, for the three are so bound together that I regard them as a question, and the answer. We are told to take counsel together and to consider this. We do so. We take everything into consideration, and we get another wonderful vision of God's great heart, for not only is He a great God and a Saviour, but He Himself has had to come to us to declare this, and to do so continually. No sooner had Adam sinned and got away from God than we see God began to seek and to save the lost. What a revelation of the heart of God is the call, "Adam, where art thou?" And, by divers messengers and in various ways, the search has continued. Thank God, many have responded. But note that the initiative has ever been His. We that have responded will be glad to respond and cast our crowns at His feet and say, "Thou art worthy."

"A just God and a Saviour." What a tremendous statement this is! A creature cannot compass the Creator, but to me this must have been the greatest problem God has ever worked out. The creation of worlds presents no great thing,

but this one involved the Incarnation, for no creature could do it. It must be a man that is Jehovah's fellow. Every creature that God has ever created God has a claim upon. This is why I think God says, "There is none beside Me."

So, for salvation, our only hope is to look unto God, for there is NONE ELSE. We must turn from self, from man, and from systems.

V. 23. "By Myself have I sworn, the word is gone forth from My mouth in righteousness and shall not return, that unto Me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear. Only in the Lord shall one say unto (M. of) Me, is righteousness and strength : even to Him shall man come, and all that were incensed against Him shall be ashamed. In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory."

What a comfort this is. As the 2nd Psalm tells us that the nations of the earth may rage against the Lord and against His Anointed. "Yet have I set my King upon my holy hill of Zion." Here God says He has sworn by Himself that "unto Me every knee shall bow." He can swear by none greater, so how sure the triumph to come is.

The Apostle Paul, in Phil. ii. tells us the same bright story. We must never forget it is "in the Lord" is righteousness and strength. "In the Lord" shall we be justified and glory. Blessed God and Father, keep us from ever turning to any other source for safety, certainty, and enjoyment.

CHAPTER XLVI.

V. 1. "Bel boweth down, Nebo stoopeth; their idols are upon the beasts, and upon the cattle: the things that ye carried about are made a load, a burden to the weary beast. They stoop, they bow down together: they could not deliver the burden, but themselves are gone into captivity."

After the prophet has shown to Israel what she has to expect from Cyrus, he turns to what awaits Babylon at the hand of Cyrus. So we see God does not mind revealing many things in the future. No other so-called gods dare risk it.

Bel and Nebo are evidently gods of Babylon. Jeremiah mentions Bel twice. This appears to be the only mention of Nebo. I have read that we have an image of Nebo, with an inscription of Nebuchadnezzar upon it, in the British Museum.

Their images are taken from their place of honour, to be put on beasts of burden, but themselves are taken into captivity. When we come to read the history, and we look at this statement carefully, we see that it can be read in two ways. I incline to think it means that when the images were taken, they themselves were taken, *i.e.*, the gods, for when the images were taken that was all there was to take. Anyhow, we know that it is true. It looks like sarcasm.

V. 3. "Hearken unto me, O house of Jacob, and all the remnant of the house of Israel, which have been borne by me from the belly; which have been carried from the womb: and even to old age I am He, and even to hoar hairs will I carry you. I have made, and I will bear; yea, I will carry you and will deliver. To whom will ye liken Me, and make me equal, and compare me, that we may be like?"

We note that Israel is warned. The root of all the trouble man is heir to is because we do not hearken to God.

The Lord points out that if what was true of idols, the reverse is true of God. He did carry His people from birth to old age, aye, and saved them again and again, and will do so still. Then the Lord asks the question, "To whom will ye liken Me?"

We are but feeble folk, but when we ponder over the attributes of our God, we are not surprised to find that one of His names is "Wonderful," and that He is beyond our imagination. Then, to reduce Him to a bit of wood, metal, or stone, or bread, is ridiculous in the extreme, notwithstanding that it may be an expensive and, technically, a fine bit of work. How God resents it! Note His description.

V. 6. "Such as lavish gold out of the bag, and weigh silver in the balance; they hire a goldsmith, and he maketh it a god: they fall down, yea, they worship. They bear him upon the shoulder, they carry him and set him in his place, and he standeth; from his place shall he not remove, yea, one shall cry unto him, yet can

he not answer, nor save him out of his trouble.”

The only explanation to this, as far as I can see, is that men will, for power or wealth, exploit the foolish people who crave for a god they can see.

V. 8. “Remember this, and shew yourselves men : bring it again to mind, O ye transgressors. Remember the former things of old : for I am God, and there is none else ; I am God and there is none like me ; declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done ; saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do my pleasure : calling a ravenous bird from the east, the man of my counsel from a far country ; yea, I have spoken, I will also bring it to pass : I have purposed, I will also do it.”

How important this command is to remember. Such is the perverted state of men’s hearts that their fancies, or self-interest, as they think, will not allow them to so trouble. We should think the Great War would never be forgotten, yet one writes a poem, “Lest we forget.” Monuments are all over the world, in order to prevent it, so that there are some men who see the danger, and seek to show that there are some who may forget. Histories are written for the same purpose. Alas ! how partisanship twists the records. There are monuments of the noble men and women who died for the truth and liberty. How few are concerned about them now ! There is no hope anywhere in man. A great nation steps forth to make the world safe for Democracy. Men seeking advantage for themselves to retain the

positions, resort to mass bribery. Honesty, truth, etc., are destroyed. The thing that matters is that they get into power.

We thank Thee, Lord, that Thou hast not left us without some solid ground to stand upon, amidst the conflict and the turmoil of this world. Thou hast in this part of Thy word reminded us many times that Thou art God, and there is none else. We pray Thee that this great truth may become absolutely ours. Then, what strength we shall have! We bless Thee for the assurance Thy words give to us. "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure." We believe it, Lord, but we notice Thou art never in a hurry, and we are. We want the Lord to come at once. We sometimes get dismayed at the length of time, and we are not surprised to read that some say "My Lord delayeth His coming" and they get into trouble. We ask Thee to give us patience to walk quietly with Thee.

The particular way God's pleasure is manifested here is that He will call a ravenous bird from the east. This is Cyrus. I have read that he had a golden eagle on his ensign, *i.e.*, the kind called a golden eagle (his own might have been made of gold). He was certainly a ravenous one, as his history shows. Yet God can use him, as easily as any other. This became history about two hundred years after.

Truly God can say, "I am God and there is none like me; declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient things, and from ancient times, things that are not yet done." Boys and girls, may we ever wait upon the Lord, in order that we may ever remember this.

Let us remember that the Word of God has given us a measure of light as to a past time, before this world was made fit for Adam (Gen. i. 2), sufficient for us to be able to smile at the speculations and will-of-the-wisps of those who can trace man back to many hundreds of thousands of years ago. All their remarks, however wild, were quite true when they First happened, as a very dear one of mine used to say. Here we have a God who tells us of the past. He begins with Adam, about the "seed of the woman," takes up with Enoch and Noah, etc., all the way through the Word, right through the ages, into time yet still to come, right on to the great white throne and the lake of fire, on to the New Jerusalem above, and on to eternity. How faithful and true it has proved! As we read our papers in the morning, we have unmistakeable evidence that it is all according to plan. It will be truly, "The Lord is my light and my salvation."

V. 12. "Hearken unto me, ye stout-hearted, that are far from righteousness: I will bring near My righteousness; it shall not be far off, and my salvation shall not tarry: and I will place my salvation in Zion for Israel my glory."

The particular event here is the return to the land under Cyrus, but the prophecy takes us further, till Israel becomes His glory, which is not yet. But God never tarries. Though we have no indication as to time, God has kept this in His own keeping. We can be assured, however, that His time will be kept to the tick of the clock, as truly as the heavens above work in perfect order.

CHAPTER XLVII.

V. 1. "Come down and sit in the dust, O virgin daughter of Babylon; sit on the ground without a throne, O daughter of the Chaldeans: for thou shalt no more be called tender and delicate. Take the millstones and grind meal; remove thy veil, strip off the train, uncover the leg, pass through the rivers. Thy nakedness shall be uncovered, yea, thy shame shall be seen: I will take vengeance and will accept no man."

It will be made very clear to us before we leave this chapter why Babylon is to come down and sit in the dust. She who reigned and was a mistress among the nations is now to become the maid. She is to take the millstones and grind the meal, the position of the poorest; and to strip herself as she does her work, like the most degraded of the people. No more shall be the refinement with those things that go with power and culture.

What a joy it is for us to remember that the Lord has said, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay." Here He declares He will take vengeance and will make no truce. Hostilities between God and Babylon will continue.

V. 4. "Our Redeemer, the Lord of hosts is His name: the holy One of Israel."

I can quite understand Isaiah bursting out

like this as he is telling his story. Three things are in his heart, and, Father, may we ever keep them in ours. First, the one who is at work, making events work out according to His will, is "Our Redeemer." His object is to save His people. He is the Lord of Hosts, so quite able to do it. He is the Holy One of Israel, hence His work will stand the closest moral scrutiny when we have all the facts before us from either side.

As we think of what is going on to-day in every country in the world, we have just the same experience when our eyes are opened from time to time, and we have unmistakable evidence that our Beloved is above all the things that happen.

V. 5. "Sit thou silent and get thee into darkness, O daughter of the Chaldeans: for thou shalt no more be called the lady of kingdoms."

I think Shakespeare must have seen this great principle at work when he wrote "There is a tide in the affairs of men which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune." This is quoted from memory, but I think it is his meaning.

When in my teens, and before my eyes were opened to see the inexhaustible (ponder over this word) riches of God's word, I committed much of Shakespeare to memory. I meant to keep my eyes open, not to miss the tide. The tide came when at the age of eighteen I caught a vision of Christ dying for me on the tree. It revolutionised my life, and in my seventy-fourth year I rejoice that I did not refuse the tide, and that I know the best is yet to come. Babylon

(for it is true of nations) misses the tide. We shall now see how she does so.

V. 6. "I was wroth with my people; I profaned mine inheritance, and gave them into thine hand: thou didst shew them no mercy: upon the aged hast thou very heavily laid thy yoke. And saidst, I will be a lady for ever; so that thou didst not lay these things to thy heart, neither didst remember the latter end thereof."

We remember in Jeremiah that God promised Babylon that if they would learn the lesson He intended to teach His people He would bless Babylon also.

Here we see that God used Babylon as an instrument for punishing His people, and, as just mentioned, was prepared to bless Babylon with Israel. We see in Jeremiah in what high esteem Nebuchadnezzar held Jeremiah. They were quick enough to see that if Judah obeyed Jeremiah, their purpose to capture Jerusalem would cost but little. At the end they would have given much wealth to Jeremiah, but he turned from it, and preferred to be poor with God's people even though they opposed him. But the teaching or preaching of Jeremiah they had no time for. It did not fit in with their plans, hence they missed the tide.

The early Church grew in a wonderful way. As far as I can gather, there were no extravagant modes of living, but there was care for the aged, etc. We must keep in mind these things which by Isaiah are foretold. The Lord states that she will say, "I shall be a lady for ever." He tells her that her behaviour will be cruel to the

aged. He also tells that she will not remember the latter end thereof.

She thought her foundations were sure, and that nothing could disturb her. She finds her foundations were not righteous, and that upset her.

We are now to see how great was the care of God to foretell Babylon by his servant. He heeded not God's word; he believed in Bel and Nebo. This is the old trouble, and it is yet new. How many in the world guide their lives by God's word Happy they that do.

V. 8. "Now therefore hear this, thou that art given to pleasures, that dwellest carelessly (M. that sittest securely), that sayest in thine heart, I am, and there is none else beside me; I shall not sit as a widow, neither shall I know the loss of children."

We must give great attention to this. God is speaking to and of Babylon. He gives three reasons for her judgement. She had given herself to pleasures; she dwelt carelessly, *i.e.*, felt so secure that there was no occasion to take care; and she exalted herself above all others. This last sin took two forms. She said, "I shall not sit as a widow," *i.e.*, be separated from the kings of the earth. "Neither shall I know the loss of children," *i.e.*, be robbed of her population by war or captivity. Though this is spoken of the nation, we can be sure that the whole is built up of its parts, and the result is true of an individual life at any time.

I can think of very few things that lead on to disaster in the life of a nation or an individual

so much as a life given to pleasure, when nothing must stand in the way. Duty is a very distasteful thing, they think. If funds fall short, there is no stopping, so they have a loan which they make no serious attempt to pay, and hence there is a meeting of creditors. All this they do rather than deny themselves. Personally, as a lad, I was led to see that if a man had to depend on his wages for his bread and butter, he might live in a palace, but he lived next door to the workhouse. As I never have had anything but what I have earned, I have lived on as little as I can, and sought my pleasure in the path of duty, and found it there. I am one of many, but I give my testimony. The other sort cannot dwell securely, because others see to that.

V. 9. "But these two things shall come to thee in a moment, in one day: the loss of children, and widowhood: in their full measure shall they come upon thee, despite (M. amidst) the multitude of thy sorceries and the great abundance of thine enchantments."

Coming back to Babylon, we read that her disaster was sudden. Sometimes we notice the gradual decay, but when the end comes it generally is sudden. Babylon brought her trouble on herself. The reason now follows.

V. 10. "For thou hast trusted in thy wickedness; thou hast said, 'None seeth me'; thy wisdom and thy knowledge, it hath perverted thee: and thou hast said in thy heart, 'I am, and there is none else beside me.'"

How modern is all this. The reason for their wisdom and knowledge perverting them is that

they had not the "fear of the Lord," which, as we know, is the beginning or foundation of wisdom. We see this in every department of life, among rulers, ecclesiastics, merchants, modernists, scientists, and even amongst the common people, as they are called.

V. 11. "Therefore shall evil come upon thee; thou shalt not know the dawning thereof (M. how to charm it away), and mischief shall fall upon thee; thou shalt not be able to put it away; and desolation shall come upon thee suddenly, which thou knewest not."

Here the Lord has foretold their future greatness. He tells of their ways and arrogance, and now He tells them that suddenly evil will come upon them, and the evil will not be put away. It will come from a direction that they knew not.

V. 12. "Stand now with thine enchantments, and with the multitude of thy sorceries, wherein thou hast laboured from thy youth; if so be that thou shalt be able to profit, if so be that thou mayest be able to prevail. Thou art wearied in the multitude of thy counsels: Let now the astrologers, the star-gazers, the monthly prognosticators, stand up and save thee from the things that shall come upon thee."

These may be past masters at sorceries and enchantments, but they will not be able to conjure God's judgements away. They are invited to try. They are commanded to make a stand with all the powers that their black arts will give them in order to avert the calamity.

We read carefully the book of Daniel, and we see what a high position these men held. We

have to admire in a sense, their adroitness, and the way they stated their case; but when God came in, had it not been for Daniel, it would have been bad for them. We are no better to-day. Read the things said by our philosophers, scientific men, etc. However, nothing averted the judgement foretold by God about Babylon, nor will anything avert those to come.

V. 14. "Behold, they shall be as stubble; the fire shall burn them, they shall not deliver them from the power of the flame: it shall not be a coal to warm at, nor a fire to sit before. Thus shall the things be unto thee wherein thou hast laboured: they that have trafficked with thee from thy youth shall wander every one to his quarter (M. his own way); there shall be none to save thee."

Here we see that Babylon, by learning the lesson the Lord intended to teach His people, could have entered into a like blessing. But she preferred pleasure, and, being controlled by these men already mentioned, she acted unjustly. The fire of God's anger came upon them. Note that it says, "shall burn them," for they are reminded that the fire is not for warmth. Note that those whose fortunes were built up with trade, etc., with them, turned elsewhere.



CHAPTER XLVIII.

V. 1. "Hear this, O house of Jacob, which are called by the name of Israel, and are come forth out of the waters of Judah; which sware by the name of the Lord and make mention of the God of Israel, but not in truth nor in righteousness."

This is addressed to those who claimed to be Israelites. Judah shared this name, and it was from Judah these came. These nationally claimed these things, but they had no desire for the reality of the things claimed.

The professing church is often addressed in the epistles. It was this church that the men crept into that Jude writes of. Every so-called religion in the world is more acceptable than the so-called Christian religion. Even this, we see, can be owned if reality can be avoided. Christ of the New, and Jehovah of the Old Testament, claimed to be Lord. Jesus is a contracted Greek name for Jehovah. Nothing satisfies Him unless He is sanctified in our hearts as Lord. He expects, nay, insists on this. He expects us to delight in an absolute surrender to Him. When we do this we know what true liberty is, for we are "bond-servants to righteousness."

V. 2. "For they call themselves of the holy city, and stay themselves upon the God of Israel; the Lord of hosts is His name."

This complaint that God makes against them is just, for it is a serious matter in His sight, to claim to be His and yet not represent Him to the world, nor know what friendship with Him is. This matter is greatly aggravated because of the greatness of the One whom they claim. It should be evident that to call themselves of the holy city laid an obligation on them as citizens to be holy in their character and conduct.

V. 3. "I have declared the former things from of old; yea, they went forth out of my mouth, and I shewed them: suddenly I did them and they came to pass. Because I knew that thou art obstinate, and thy neck is an iron sinew, and thy brow brass; therefore I have declared to thee from of old; before it came to pass I shewed it thee."

We see here that the Lord declares to His people how well He knew their character. He said their neck is an iron sinew. I cannot think of a figure better adapted to represent a stiff neck. Their brow was brass. I think this means impudent. He also said they were obstinate. Truly, had it not been for grace, nothing could have been done with the people He had chosen. So the method the Lord adopted was to tell them long before it happened. Then it came to pass suddenly. Surely the fall of Babylon was unexpected and sudden enough, so that there could be no other explanation. It is true that the book of Ezra gives us to understand that Cyrus had prepared for it for twenty years, but he had to do it secretly, and it was but a venture.

V. 5. "Lest thou shouldest say, Mine idol hath done them, and my graven image, and my molten image, hath commanded them. Thou hast heard it; behold all this; and ye will not declare it? I have shewed (M. I shew) thee new things from this time, even hidden things, which thou hast not known. They are created now, and not from of old; and before this day thou heardest them not; lest thou shouldest say, Behold, I knew them. Yea, thou heardest not; yea, thou knewest not; yea, from of old thine ear was not opened: for I knew that thou didst deal very treacherously, and wast called a transgressor from the womb."

When the Jews who were left behind at the time of the captivity went to Egypt, this is what they did say. They told Jeremiah that when they worshipped the Queen of heaven they had bread to the full, etc.

So the Lord says He will tell them new things, even hidden things, that up till then they had not heard of, otherwise they would say that they knew them. The Lord knew all their treacherous ways, and why Jacob was called Supplanter, and refers to the fact that he was called a transgressor from the womb. We read that Esau and Jacob struggled in the womb, which caused Rebecca to call upon the Lord. See Genesis xxv. 21. Naturally, most people prefer Esau to Jacob. The Lord preferred Jacob, because Jacob, with all his faults, had the promise of the birthright and valued it and wanted it. This appears to be the deciding factor in a man's life as far as the Lord is concerned. God has given to every creature ex-

ceeding great and precious promises. His great gift of His Son was given to the world. These gifts and promises were given to man in his lost and helpless estate. Let any man value and want Christ, and the Lord will see to it that He will be found of that man. We now see how.

V. 9. "For my name's sake will I defer mine anger, and for my praise will I refrain from thee, that I cut thee not off. Behold, I have refined thee, but not as silver; I have chosen (M. tried) thee in the furnace of affliction. For mine own sake, for mine own sake, will I do it: for how should my glory be profaned? and my glory will I not give to another."

On what solid ground this verse places every poor guilty sinner, just as much as the Jew. God has offered salvation to all in the gift of His Son. If we accept the offer, it is an evidence that we want it, and God says here to the Jew that He will do it for His name's sake, just as John, in his epistle, says "Little children, your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake." We cannot but love the God we adore. How can we help it? Out of the largeness of His heart, He makes promises to the individual, the Jewish nation, the Gentiles, and the Church. God is quick to see that when He makes promises to such people, nothing but sovereign grace can make it possible. Angels may be able to be put on a different footing altogether, but sinners cannot. Then note that He says that He has refined them not as silver, but in the furnace of affliction. We see now why God allows affliction. We know that there will be a day

when they will be refined as silver. I have heard preachers say that the refiner of silver is not satisfied till he sees his own face in the silver. However, we know that we are told that the Holy Ghost is labouring to form Christ in us, and that God will not be satisfied till He sees His beloved Son the first-born among many brethren. So we can learn how God values character. He must be an almighty God to produce such results from such unpromising material as we know ourselves to be. Father, we thank Thee, we bless Thee, we adore Thee. We pray Thee that we may down here be helped by the Holy Ghost to glorify Thee.

V. 12. "Hearken unto me, O Jacob, and Israel my called: I am He: I am the first, I also am the last."

When the Lord sent this message to His people they were in great trouble. It is wise to take to heart the way God comes to His people, especially when we remember that this trouble is what they had brought upon themselves. He reminds them just as the Lord did when on earth. "I am He," *i.e.*, the Absolute, there is no other. In the same way when John was a prisoner in Patmos the Lord appeared to him and said, "Fear not, I am the first and the last." Blessed Saviour, we see these are indeed tremendous terms; may we ever have a growing apprehension of them.

V. 13. "Yea, mine hand hath laid the foundation of the earth, and my right hand hath spread out the heavens: when I call unto them, they stand up together."

What a powerful God is ours! Here at the foundation of the world the earth and the heavens are declared to be the work of His hand, and at His voice they stand up together. "He spake and it was done; He commanded and it stood fast" we are told elsewhere. We do not know how many schemes, if I might so call them, God had before Adam, before the earth became waste and void. We have a fair amount of information in the Word about one. I sometimes am inclined to think of two. The earth as it tells its story certainly does give evidence of great age, which leads us to piece our Bible together much better. It is interesting to listen to the wild-cat speculations of men who are too wise and learned to want the Bible.

V. 14. "Assemble yourselves, all ye and hear: which among them hath declared these things? The Lord hath loved him (see margin). He shall perform his pleasure on Babylon, and his arm shall be upon the Chaldeans. I, even I, hath spoken; yea, I have called him: I have brought him and made his way prosperous."

We note what appears to me a sarcastic remark about these idols not declaring the future, for this is exactly what the Lord is doing here. God tells us that He loved him, *i. e.*, Cyrus. Then the text is thought by some to be ambiguous. They are not quite clear as to whether God will perform His pleasure upon the Chaldeans or upon Cyrus. I have seen over and over again throughout the Bible that a thing is so stated that we are to understand it both ways. Though Cyrus did not see this at first (till Ezra and his

companions came) he had thought he worked his pleasure, which was quite true. When confronted with this and like scriptures, he could see that he was but an agent in the great God's hands, though a willing one.

V. 16. "Come ye near unto me, hear ye this : from the beginning I have not spoken in secret ; from the time that it was, there am I : and now the Lord God hath sent me, and His Spirit." The A.V. has "Spirit." This makes it intelligible to me. I know nothing of the Hebrew. All through the scripture we see the two Paracletes, translated Comforter, or Advocate, as needed. We remember our blessed Lord said that He would not leave us as orphans, but that if He went away He would send another Paraclete, who is with you and shall be (from Pentecost) in you, this making the difference. I have used the word "Paraclete" as this is the word used. The Lord declared He was "I am." This fills us with joy, because we can add what we need. It is so with this word Paraclete : He is with us to dwell within us for all practical purposes.

A question is raised in my mind. Why does Isaiah say "The Lord God and His Spirit hath sent me"? It does look to me that we have here the whole of the Trinity (as we say) engaged in sending Isaiah, with the following wonderful and charming message. I know Trinity is not a scriptural word, but Paul, writing of Christ, said, "It pleased all the fulness in Him to dwell" so we can say scripturally that it pleased all the fulness to send Isaiah with this message. So I

think, boys and girls, we can expect a really marvellous message. It is true that we have heard it many times, but, if our hearts are right, that will increase its beauty.

“Thus saith the Lord, thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: I am the Lord thy God, which teacheth to profit, which leadeth thee by the way that thou shouldest go.”

This is the message, and we shall see presently what follows it.

We remember that this is written to the nation of Israel, and necessarily includes all in the nation. I know that if a message is sent to the Church, I take it as sent to me, personally.

As we look attentively at the message, we see that it must be true of every saint, from the first one unto the last one.

The speaker is “The Lord,” the One whose right it is as our Creator to control our lives. He is our blessed Redeemer. This confirms His right, as He is our Lord for these two reasons. He is the Holy One of Israel, and we can add, as the Apostle, yea, and the whole Israel of God.

The message is that He is our Teacher and our Leader in order that we walk in the right path.

We remember that our Lord said to His disciples “Ye call Me Master (*i.e.*, Teacher) and Lord. Ye say well, for I am.” So it is as plain as a sunbeam that, if He is our teacher we must accept what He teaches; and if He is our Lord, we must do as He commands.

As pilgrims down here, we are painfully conscious of the losses we make in every sense of the word, and alas, how often have we missed our path!

I think the reason for our trouble lies in two directions. We trust self and we trust man, and both are as blind as bats. It is indeed a case of the blind leading the blind. We can be helped by self and teachers God has given us, provided we are trusting in His Word and relying upon the Holy Ghost, for then "The Lord is my Light."

V. 18. "O that thou wouldest hearken to my commandments; then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea."

The pathos of the little word "O" tells us something of God's heart. Alas, how foolish we are when we do not hearken, for it is only "then" that this peace like a river can be ours, and the result in our lives is that our righteousness is as the waves of the sea, *i.e.*, it is ever flowing on.

V. 19. "Thy seed had been also as the sand, and the offspring of thy bowels like the grains thereof: his name shall not be cut off or destroyed before me."

We see here that God tells them that if they would but hearken, the nation would be numerous and prosperous. This is equally true of the Church, aye, and even the local Assembly.

V. 20. "Go ye forth of Babylon, flee ye from the Chaldeans: with a voice of singing declare ye, tell this, utter it even to the end of the earth: say ye, The Lord hath redeemed His servant Jacob: And they thirsted not, when He led them through the deserts: He caused the waters to flow out of the rock for them: He clave the rock also, and the waters gushed out. There is no peace, saith the Lord, unto the wicked."

The Lord clearly has told them they shall go to Babylon, but He does not leave them there. He tells them to flee from the Chaldeans. This is clearly the time of Ezra, because it is the last recovery to the land. Israel returns in unbelief, so they could not sing. Also they return from all parts of the earth. These people were to be forcibly taken to Babylon at the time the Lord is speaking of. Persia captures Babylon; things are to be yet further disturbed. Permission is granted to them to return. They are to flee, but not with terror, which generally is more or less a prominent feature of flight, but with singing, for there can be nothing more calculated to make the heart sing so much as to know that we are acting according to His plan. Circumstances count for but little then, so, if our hearts are not singing, it is time to want to know the reason why. Further, Redemption is the theme of their song. There can be no better subject to sing about; here it is deliverance from captivity. We have redemption from Sin, its penalty, its presence, our love of it here, and its power over us. Now we have only the first. We are all familiar with the way we sing, when we are thinking of it. We enter not into it so much as we should, for certainly the other three grow upon us here. One reason why the book of Revelation is such a favourite with a mature Christian is that we get the fullest possible expression of our redemption there. How wonderful are the songs in Revelation, culminating in the Hallelujah chorus!

Notice the tender reminder by the Lord of the time He led them through the wilderness.

He refers to Moses. They did not suffer from thirst. Look at a map and note that it is desert between Babylon and Jerusalem. It made the journey long, because the desert was avoided as far as possible. Then I think we shall see that the warning is equally tender.

“There is no peace for the wicked.” They knew something of this.



CHAPTER XLIX.

V 1. "Listen, O isles, unto me; and hearken, ye peoples far: The Lord hath called me from the womb: from the bowels of my mother hath He made mention of my name."

Here is a command to the isles or coastlands that are near; also to the people that are far, *i.e.*, to all. We are to "listen." This is a very sensible thing to do, for we are again about to be introduced to the One we saw in chapter xliii. the true Israel of God.

V. 2. "And he hath made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of His hand hath He hid me; and He hath made me a polished shaft; in His quiver hath He kept me close: and He said unto me, Thou art my servant; Israel in whom I will be glorified."

We can see that God, in verse one, goes beyond His plan for the salvation of His people Israel, and takes in His plan for the redemption of mankind. Other scriptures clearly shew us and God's purposes teach us that God has a tremendous work to do apart from His scheme for the salvation of man. One lesson at least will be taught the powers, principalities, etc., above, and that is that no creature can rule, which was the cause of the downfall of many of

them. We know also that God is teaching His manifold wisdom to them, and further, that when His full work is done, all shakeable things will have been shaken. So we can enter with joy into what is said of this Blessed One in His work and person in connection with the salvation of man. We are told here that "He hath made his mouth like a sharp sword." It will be sharp : Later we are told that "Out of His mouth proceeded a sharp two-edged sword;" we are also clearly taught that this sword is the Word of God.

Men may pretend to despise God's Word, but really they are afraid of it. The Roman Church does all it can to stamp it out, because it knows that where it is valued, away go all the pretensions they have. It is the same with any ecclesiastical body, such as the Greek Church, etc.

Some scientists, so-called, deride it, for we are taught by it to welcome any increase of knowledge in any direction; but the line is drawn at their wild-cat theories, etc. The false religions, such as Mahometanism, Buddhism, etc., are opposed to it. There is no objection made by Christians to any person having or using their sacred writings. When the criminal classes get into power, as in Russia, we see they abolish it out of the country, for away go their plans. The natural man, knowing he would have to alter his course of life, neglects it. In fact, in person Christ is the Word of God (see Rev. ix.), "And His Name is called the Word of God." This is a big theme, so we will proceed to the next: "In the shadow of His hand hath He hid me."

This sentence is not so evident as the one that preceded it. I do not know what the learned think, but to the writer it is intended to emphasise the previous verse. The hand is the expression for manipulative skill. The shadow is where we would get if we do not want to be manifest. This is where He is said to be hid. So that it confines the knowledge of Christ to that which God hath said, *i.e.*, the Word. David said, "The heavens declare the glory of God" (Psalm xix). The Apostle Paul said that God's eternal power and divinity are clearly seen by the things that are made, *i.e.*, His handiwork. The works of God are the shadow. The Word of God is the full blaze of light.

"He hath made me a polished shaft." This points to an effective instrument or weapon (there is no impediment) suitable for His work. Till the purpose of God is actually history, we shall not see how effectively Christ carries out God's purposes. As we read the word of God our eyes are opened by faith to see much.

"In His quiver hath He kept me close." The quiver is where the arrow or arrows are kept. This one is said to be kept close, *i.e.*, ready to hand.

"And He said unto me, Thou art my servant; Israel, in whom I will be glorified." The nation Israel has failed. This is the true Israel. It is wonderful to trace out the history of Israel, *i.e.*, the sons of Jacob, and then of the Lord. How they run on parallel lines; one to failure, the other to triumph. When the Word became flesh, the incarnate Son of God, who was in the form

of God, takes upon Himself the form of a servant, and makes this verse true. "In whom I will be glorified."

V. 4. "But I said, I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought and vanity : yet surely my judgement is with the Lord, and my recompence with my God."

To get a full knowledge of the word of God we must be familiar with it all, for it is evident every writer used by the Holy Ghost makes his contribution, which is a factor in the full result. Daniel says, "And after three-score and two weeks shall the Anointed One be cut off and have nothing" (This makes the sixty-ninth week) Dan. ix. 26. When we come to the story of the Cross, how like failure it all looked ! "They all forsook Him and fled." Only John and a few women were left at the Cross.

Yet in this verse it tells us, "Yet surely my judgement is with the Lord, and my recompence with my God." How important it is to read Psalm xxii., with that which follows !

V. 5. "And now saith the Lord that formed me from the womb to be His servant, to bring Jacob again to Him : and that Israel be gathered unto Him (for I am honourable in the eyes of the Lord, and God is become my strength).

This brings us to the Incarnation. The Word became flesh in order that as man He becomes the servant of God, and He became obedient unto death, even the death on the Cross, because nothing can be settled till the great question of sin is settled absolutely for the believer.

What then looked like failure is proved to be

the greatest triumph that will ever be known. It is become the basis throughout eternity of all blessing.

V. 6. "Yea, He saith, it is too light a thing that thou shouldest be my servant, to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth."

This verse is worth all the meditation we can give it. The statement is made, "It is too light a thing?" That is, for the Word to become flesh, to become a servant, in order to restore Israel and bring light to the Gentiles also. Elsewhere we read, "For the joy that was set before Him, He despised the Cross," etc. God's intense love and pity for man is indeed a love that passeth knowledge. No one had such a life planned out for him as the Lord Jesus; but its compensations, to gather Israel to the Lord, and be a light to the Gentiles, in order that salvation may be for all, fill His heart with joy. In our very much smaller measure, we have the same Father, and if we constantly have a present mind with but one object, as He had, "I always do those things well-pleasing to Him," our life, notwithstanding its trials, will be joyous because of its compensations.

V. 7. "Thus saith the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel, and His holy One, to Him whom man despiseth, to him whom the nation abhorreth, to a servant of rulers: Kings shall see and arise: princes, and they shall worship. Because of the

Lord that is faithful, even the Holy One of Israel, who hath chosen thee.”

How marvellous it is that He should be despised and His own nation abhor Him so, even to this present day!

The Lord Jesus as the Servant of God did not want anything that man valued, such as honours, wealth, power, etc., yet they hated and abhorred Him. Why? This is indeed a heart-searching subject to meditate upon. If it could be possible to put it in a few words, I should say the natural man does not like humility for himself. He does not mind it in others, in fact, the common people, in his opinion, have nothing to be proud about. But as for himself and his friends, they want to be somebody and have something. But to find that if they have anything it is to be used in blessing others, means to him that there is nothing in it. But God is faithful. Though all men combined with devils, are against Him, yet He shall be crowned Lord of lords and King of kings. Praise His Name! We shall be there to bend the knee in homage, filled with wonder and praise.

V. 8. “Thus saith the Lord, in an acceptable time have I answered thee; and in a day of salvation have I helped thee: and I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant with the people, to raise up the land, to make them inherit the desolate heritages.”

Here we see the Lord giving assurance in the secret of the servant's soul. These things will all be developed in a right time. It will be an acceptable time to all concerned: to the Lord who

planned, to the Servant, *i.e.*, the incarnate Christ who wrought, and to all that receive. The Servant is to be helped, preserved, and given for a covenant with the people. As I read this, it seems so vast that it is difficult for me to express what I think. It is like the promise in Genesis iii. "The seed of the woman" is so developed through Scripture that it does look as if every precious promise springs out of it.

We see that this is such another promise. I quite think the root is in a covenant in a past eternity. It became a fact at the Cross on the night the Lord was betrayed. He established the Lord's Supper. The word He said was, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood." So we see every possible blessing is based upon the blood of Christ. We can see that a just God could do no other, and a God of love could not think of anything better. A God of wisdom could provide nothing safer for a poor lost sinner or nation. It is just like our God. He has made a sufficient plan for all. We all benefit: the Gentile, the Jew, the Church of Christ, the creatures, and I know not where it stops. We shall be eating the fruit of this Tree, *i.e.*, the Cross, through the countless ages of eternity.

NOTE.—There is the literal side and the spiritual. Let us see that we get all God intended us to have.

This here in Isaiah primarily is directed to that which benefits the Jew, as developed by Jeremiah (chapter xxxi. 31). There are many blessings accruing to the Jew (as with all) as time spends itself, but this principally is ful-

filled at the Millennium. Though, of course, it does not stop there. God's blessings never stop. They may change or develop, but limitation would not suit Him or us.

V. 9. "Saying to them that are bound, Go forth; to them that are in darkness, Shew yourselves. They shall feed in the ways, and on all the bare heights shall be their pasture."

The spiritual side of the great truth that underlies this verse is ever true according to the measure of the need of the Lord's people in any dispensation.

However, I feel that we are pointed forward to the time the Lord will come to reign. When He comes to Olivet His people will be passing through the time of Jacob's trouble. Never has and never will be such a time of trouble. To those of us who are familiar with the condition of things that will prevail then, we can, as we meditate upon it, begin to enter into the mighty deliverance set forth in the two commands, "Go forth: Shew yourselves."

Space forbids us enlarging here, but you can in your meditations think of Jerusalem being besieged and half the city captured. Think of those who, when they see the abomination of desolation set up in the Holy Place, in obedience to the Lord's command, flee to the wilderness, hiding amongst the mountains with no proper means for sustenance, and, like Elijah, depending only on God's acting on their behalf. Think of the general body of the Israelites, scattered all amongst the nations. The time has come to be re-united with Judah. From North and West,

even from distant China on the East, they make their way homeward. What a thrill the following words will give them! We have already seen by the last expression, that the day of want is passed. "They shall feed in the ways, and on all the bare heights shall be their pasture."

V. 10. "They shall not hunger or thirst, neither shall the heat smite them: for He that hath mercy on them shall lead them; even by the springs of water shall He guide them."

V. 11. "And I will make all my mountains a way, and my highways shall be exalted. Lo, these shall come from far, and lo, these from the North and from the West; and these from the land of Sinim."

I think it well to remember that the things we are told will be when the Lord comes for us, and is also with us, and when He comes to exalt the Jews and make them a real blessing to the Gentiles, for we are told this blessed hope is comforting and purifying now. We are also told that godliness is profitable in this world as well as in that which is to come. I have found this so beyond my wildest expectations, but it wants to make a happy life down here a more practising one than I have done. As I am writing to boys and girls, I do not mind repeating myself. If we really walked with God, we should receive each new day as a gift from Him. We should live just a day at a time. This does not mean that we must not make arrangements for the future. If we did, it would be in that day's work and done in consultation with Him. We should seek to

enjoy each day with Him. We then, to the measure we did this, would be enabled to rejoice in the Lord always. As the poet writes :—

“Trust no future, howe'er pleasant,
Let the dead past bury its dead ;
Act, act in the living present,
Heart within, and God o'erhead.”

This would be to get the present application of these verses as far as it is possible.

V. 13. “Sing, O heavens ; and be joyful, O earth : and break forth into singing, O mountains : for the Lord hath comforted His people, and will have compassion upon His afflicted.”

It is God's purpose to fill us with joy and singing, but note, the promise is to them that are His. Blessed God and Father, may those who read this book proceed no further till this question is happily answered, for the sake of Him who died for them in order to bring this about.

We now take up with Zion, and though we do not come into this, we can remember that this faithful God is ours.

V. 14. “But Zion said, Jehovah hath forsaken me, and the Lord hath forgotten me.”

How common this attitude of mind is ! Man plunges into war, then when he has had more than he wants, and its horrors dawn upon him, he wants to know why God allows such things. The Lord has promised never to forsake us. When it looks like it, we should remember that the path of trust is the path on which we find all the desirable things. On the path of doubt all noxious weeds grow, such as gloom and despair, etc.

V. 15. "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, these may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee on the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me."

It does not seem possible that a woman can forget her sucking child, but alas, we know that it happens. This only proves the woman to be a callous and unnatural one. It would be the most dreadful thing for us to imagine that the Lord could possibly be like that. He, however, assures them, "I will not forget *thee*." We must never let slip from our minds that if God loves the whole (surely Jerusalem, or with us, the Church) the whole is built up of all its parts or units.

He further adds, "Behold." There is always something well worth considering when we get a "Behold" in Scripture. I am sure the following will give unspeakable comfort.

I have met those who rightly are full of joy at this figure, but some think it means to cut, others, to tattoo. Both are engraven, but tattoo is, I think, more probable and certainly more enduring, as it will last as long as the skin lasts. If our faith would only match the strength of the statements of the Lord, how happy we should be.

V. 17. "Thy children (M. builders) make haste; thy destroyers and they that made thee waste shall go forth of thee."

Children and builders could not be separated. The word probably contains both ideas. These

move with haste, or quickly. Those who made Jerusalem waste are gone.

V. 18. "Lift up thine eyes round about, and behold :"

Here we see the place being rebuilt. The destroyers are gone. They are told to lift up their eyes to behold ; I do think we ought to get clear ideas about this, for this is one of the scriptures that deal with the reunion of Israel to Judah. I do think that to be so occupied with the church (by this I mean that which was formed at Pentecost and built up of Jew and Gentile), and not to be interested in anything that God is interested in, is a great mistake. When we read and meditate on this, we shall find it to be one of the most touching events in Scripture. In Jer. xxxii. 41 God uses that which I consider the strongest expression in Scripture in connection with it. "Yea, I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will plant them in this land assuredly (M. in truth) with my whole heart and with my whole soul."

This land I take to be all that God promised Abraham. We can quite see how empty it would be with Judah only. We must be careful to distinguish between the national reunion of Israel and Judah which we have here, and those incidents that we read of when amongst the Israelites, some found their way to Judah.

"All these gather themselves together, and come to thee. As I live, saith the Lord, thou shalt surely clothe thee with them all as with an ornament, and gird thyself with them, like a

bride. For as for thy waste and thy desolate places and thy land that hath been destroyed, surely now shalt thou be too strait for the inhabitants, and they that swallowed thee up shall be far away. The children of thy bereavement shall yet say in thine ears, The place is too strait for me: give place to me that I may dwell. Then shalt thou say, Who hath begotten me these, seeing I have been bereaved of my children and am solitary, (M. or barren) an exile, and wandering to and fro? And who hath brought up these Behold, I was left alone: these, where were they?"

Here we get an interesting picture which is for the time of the end, for the return in the time of Ezra was not in God's mind as He wrote this. We see after the great tribulation that about one-third were apostate. Then we have two sections, one of which we know as the martyred remnant. These take part in the first resurrection, so are to be congratulated. The other section are what we know as the spared remnant. It is these that are here spoken of. As I read the story of this time, it is clear to me that the drama will take place in the land they used to dwell in, so we can understand that so few would be lost in the land, so to speak, *i.e.*, they could not inhabit it, because they will be so few. When we think of Israel, who were to pass their time of sorrow among the nations "sifted as wheat" (Amos ix. 9) we do get sufficient evidence to show that though in the past in the return from Babylon, all the Jews did not return, they will now. With the whole of Israel, they have had enough of the nations, for this sifting had not been pleasant,

but it had done God's intended work. It brought them out, hence we read in verse 17 "Thy children make haste." What with modern modes of travel, it could be easily done, on top of the great desire to be away from the nations. The nations expedite matters, I think, for two reasons. The nations, from time to time, have had enough of them, and the fault has not been all on one side. This sifting has been an evidence. The other reason is that the Lord has come to Jerusalem, and the effect on the world will be immense. Now they have one great desire, to please them. It will be perilous to be out with the Lord's people now, for the Lord's day of forbearance is over, and His day of vengeance is come.

We can imagine the joy of the Jews, as Israel comes home to be reunited as one nation. The two sticks become one (Ezek. xxxvii. 19). Right glad are they to welcome them for us. Verse 18 says, "As I live, saith the Lord, thou shalt surely clothe thee with them as an ornament, and gird thyself with them as a bride."

I think the joy will be mutual, but their immense numbers soon bring about verse 20, "The children of thy bereavement shall yet say in thine ears, The place is too strait for me; give place to me that I may dwell."

What answer could they give to this? There can be but one, namely that they must take possession of all the land that God promised Abraham. Israel in its best and strongest days never claimed this. However, it may take thousands of years to bring it about, but God never forgets a promise. Praise the Lord.

We are now to see something of the effect this wonderful event will make on the world. The papers will probably have many editions and the news will be radiod frequently, so rapid and so interesting will be the news. Perhaps other methods will be in use then, to let the people know.

V. 22. "Thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I will lift up my hand to the nations, and set up my ensign to the peoples."

It will be clear to the minds of the nations that this tremendous upheaval will be God's work. I can but feebly represent the revulsion of feeling the nations will have, as to the Jews; for to them as now, Israel and Jew are but one. We cannot discriminate between them. From bitter hatred and tyranny it turns to overpowering desire to help. At this particular moment, I cannot see that affection is manifest in them toward the Jew. That will come, for nothing less than love towards another will suit God.

"And they shall bring their sons in their bosom, and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders."

Here, I think, we see that which leads up to it, among those of the nations that rally to God's ensign. To use the figure, we see a universal law at work. They help the Jews to carry out their intention of getting back, however much they may have disliked the Jew hitherto.

This is something that any boy or girl can try for themselves. If you know anyone that you dislike, (I hope you do not, but sometimes we cannot help it) if you do, pray for him. Then

watch for opportunities to do him a real service. Then I think you will learn better than I can teach you or tell you, something of the feeling that takes place among the nations that rally to the ensign.

V. 23. "And kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers : they shall bow down to thee with their faces to the earth, and lick the dust of thy feet ; and thou shalt know that I am the Lord, and they that wait for me shall not be ashamed."

No one wants a nurse, unless feeble or sick, or helpless as a babe as we say. I gather by this that the feeblest or the poorest of the Jews will be quite safe, as royalty will take up their case and exercise every care and kind attention to help them home. Note the figure used. Could any express a more profound humility on their part? It looks as though those that rally to the ensign consider it their greatest privilege to be able to help the Lord's people.

We now get a different picture altogether. It is clear that all do not rally to the ensign. It makes no difference to the Jew, but it does to those who oppose. They are now to learn in a way they will not like, that the Lord reigns.

V. 24. "Shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or the lawful captives be delivered?"

This is indeed an interesting question. When this great event takes place the Jews are in a dreadful state. The great and mighty hold them captive, aye, and can claim to do so lawfully. This explains why those that rally to the ensign had to nurse them. We can have no idea what

the time of Jacob's trouble or the sifting of Israel can mean.

The question is raised : these refuse to let them go. It means so much to them to have these slaves. Shall the prey be taken from the mighty?

When the Lord comes in, there are no mighty. Every one has His "breath in his nostrils." It is His will to deliver, and they will be delivered.

We, however, see that it is a serious thing to refuse to rally to God's centre at any time. Note the fate of these.

V. 25. "But thus saith the Lord, Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered; for I will contend with him that contendeth with thee, and I will save thy children."

V. 26. "And I will feed them that oppress thee with their own flesh; and they shall be drunken with their own blood, as with sweet wine; and all flesh shall know that I the Lord am thy Saviour, and thy Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob."

What a tremendous description of the overwhelming destruction that will fall upon these proud oppressors of God's people, when His time has come to deliver; so terrible will it be that "all flesh" will know the difference between real might and their fancied might.

"The Mighty One of Jacob" delivers His people.

CHAPTER L.

“Thus saith the Lord, Where is the bill of your mother’s divorcement, wherewith I have put her away? Or which of my creditors is it to whom I have sold you? Behold, for your iniquities were ye sold, and for your transgressions was your mother put away.”

The question was raised, “Where?” The answer to it is that such a bill did not exist. It was not Jehovah that broke off the relationship with Zion.

The mother of Israel had no bill of divorce to show; if she had, she could never have been taken back. Deut. xxiv. 1-4 makes this very clear.

Moreover, Jehovah had not yielded to outward constraint, for God always has met His obligations.

It is true their condition was that of being sold and put away, but it was Israel herself that broke off the relationship.

What a real comfort it is to realise that all is well as far as the Lord is concerned. If any trouble arises, the fault is ours, never His, otherwise our case would be hopeless.

V. 2. “Wherefore when I came, was there no man? when I called was there none to answer? Is my hand shortened at all, that it cannot redeem? or have I no power to deliver?”

In a sense God came to His people from time to time, in the prophets. He here comes in the person of the Servant of Jehovah.

As we attentively examine these four questions, it will readily be seen that their root-sin was disobedience to the word of God, and further, when He came to deliver they had no confidence in His power. What marvellous grace in verse 3, for Jehovah shows them the power He has.

V. 3. "Behold, at my rebuke I dry up the sea ; I make the rivers a wilderness : their fish stinketh, because there is no water, and dieth for thirst. I clothe the heavens with blackness, and I make sackcloth their covering."

We have recently seen how the Lord told them about Cyrus. About two hundred years later, it became history. What Isaiah now brings before them became history about five to six hundred years later, now about nineteen hundred years ago.

V. 4. "The Lord God hath given me the tongue of them that are taught."

This is indeed a blessed portion of God's word. It gives us, if I might so speak, an insight into the inner life of our beloved Lord. If ever we need to keep before us the balance of truth, it is surely when the Lord in person is the object of our thoughts. We must never forget it is the Father only that knoweth the Son, and if we walk humbly with the Lord, looking to the Holy Ghost to open our understanding, we can meditate with delight on every vision of Christ the Holy Ghost

gives us. Personally, I think Christ, as Jehovah's servant, has set us an example that we may follow His steps. At Pentecost the Lord fulfilled His promise, and sent the other Paraclete to dwell within us, in order that our lives may be controlled by Him.

We remember again, "The Word became flesh." He that was in the form of God took upon Himself the form of a servant. The great difference was that He was without spot. He, however, sets us an example of an obedient servant. As creatures we are servants.

We will remind ourselves of a few scriptural statements. He frequently declared Himself to be "The Son of Man" and though His person is beyond my understanding, yet I believe His humanity was as real as it was possible to be. Hence the Incarnation. He claimed to be the Son of God. We read "It pleased all the fulness to dwell in Him," *i.e.*, Deity. "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." Personally when I get home, I expect to see Christ, and know that He is God. I do not expect to see three gods, but One.

He said, "The Father is greater than I." In the use of "Father" is conveyed to me the thought that His Deity is greater than His humanity, that is, greater than the man that was speaking to them. He said the Father (Deity) doeth the works. I believe Christ was a real man, and a man cannot do miracles. When Christ did a miracle it was because He was God. I feel quite certain as to His manhood. We have in Him a man that could live a perfect life

absolutely dependent on the will of His Father, for such was His own will.

I feel quite certain that Scripture is written for us in order that this perfect submission of man to God may set us an example. It is our privilege to follow His steps, notwithstanding the pit from which we have been digged. Blessed God and Father, may the Holy Ghost who dwells in all believers, enable us to enter into the greatest possible apprehension of the truth.

With these few remarks, which I trust may help us to understand, let us ponder with delight each expression. We read "The Lord God hath given me" (*i.e.*, the Son of Man) "the tongue of them that are taught," I understand this to mean that as He spake it was evident to those that had an ear to hear, that all He spake was God-given, and that this man was guided by God because He was in perfect accord with God. How can this help us? I find it does in two ways. First, I am conscious that I am full of pleasure when, if in any measure, I feel I am guided in my speech by the Holy Ghost. Secondly, I am conscious of great possibilities in this, as I come in contact with dear saints that I have met who have made much more progress in the Spirit-led life than I feel I have. This is confirmed to me by the samples I get in the Scriptures.

"That I should know how to sustain with words him that is weary."

This is the very best form of ministry. We have all followed with delight His way both in action and in word. He ever was to the poor, the sick, the sad and the weary, able to sustain. We have had the joy of seeing that His saints

have been used by Him in this way. I, by reading the word, and by observation, have discovered that the Lord qualifies us all in some measure in this form of service. At this point I should like to give my testimony that after fifty-five years of Christian life, the most effective help to me has been the lives and conversation of a large number of humble and obscure men and women who, to use a common phrase "never come to the front." They just live on quietly, clothed with humility, but live their lives in company with the Lord. I heard Lord Radstock say once at a public meeting, that the man who had helped him most was the man who blacked his boots.

"He wakeneth morning by morning. He wakeneth mine ear to hear, as they that are taught."

As we read the gospels and observe our beloved One, we have noticed how He loved to steal away so as to be alone with His Father, and especially so in the morning. The prophets received special revelations from God, frequently in dreams and visions in the night. This was good, and we are glad for all recorded of them. The Saviour, by soul-communion morning by morning, however, has set us an example that all can follow. I think probably this is the secret of these humble and obscure people. They have learned how to live on little. They have no embarrassing labour, no ideas of making a future. The Word, and prayer, combined with the fellowship of the saints, is all they want. Happy people! These happy people have learned what it is to dwell on the west side of the

Altar. Like David (Psalm xxvi. 7) we should compass the altar, and we must all begin at the North, *i.e.*, the place of Judgement and sacrifice. There the offerer brought his offering, laid his hand on the head of the victim, *i.e.*, identified himself with it, as recognising death was his portion. The offering being offered up, the ashes were placed on the East side of the altar, in order as the sun rose, the first thing to be seen at the beginning of the day was the ashes of an accepted sacrifice. This fitted him for a visit to the South side, where the sweet breezes blow and the spices flow, due to the river that is flowing from the south side of the altar (Ezek. xlvii. 1). This river is a wonderful figure of the Holy Ghosts. There was water to the ankles; enough of the Spirit to walk well. The river deepens until it is up to the knees. This enables the saint to pray acceptably. The river still deepens, till it is up to the loins. Having learned to walk worthily, and pray acceptably, the saint is now qualified for service (Note, not unless he can). The river still deepens till there is enough water to swim in. Blessed figure of a saint full of the Holy Ghost! He then is occupied with the trees on each side of the river, which speak and figure Christ, and the fruit is constant and luscious. Hence he can get to the West side (about thirty miles west there was the Great Sea—the Mediterranean). The sea speaks of trouble, ever in motion in some degree, yet subject to storms. It casts up mire and dirt. When the saint is on the West side of the altar he has between him and the troubles of life the Laver, which speaks of the Word, (the other figure—water—stands

for his daily cleansing) and the Temple, where he can worship with his fellow saints. This, to these dearly-beloved obscure saints, to-day mean the Bible, prayer, and the fellowship of his fellow-saints. No spirit-filled person wants more. The best book I know that illustrates Holy-Ghost-filled men is "The Acts of the Apostles."

V. 5. "The Lord God hath opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away backward. I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that pluck off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting."

This is indeed a terrible verse in two ways at least. It fills us with worship and adoration when we look at it from the Lord's side.

Man's hatred to Christ expressed here was upon His own blessed person. His life was spent for others, ever doing. This is how they returned such love.

How dreadful are our sins, that they made it necessary for Him to come from above, endure the gainsaying of sinners, and then atone for those sins on the Cross. What captured our hearts was the devotion of this blessed one as He came down here to save us. Is there any example for us in this? Yes, there is. It is true we cannot possibly take any part in the atonement for sin. He had indeed to tread that path alone, absolutely. We, however, have seen that He also died as a martyr to righteousness. The whole history of the martyrs go to show how helped and inspired His saints have been by His example.

V. 7. "For the Lord God will help me, therefore have I not been confounded : therefore have I set my face as a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed."

This brings to our minds the most terrible questions, such as the Saviour's need of help. Many a martyr has died for the truth in a cruel way, for of a truth many men are little less than devils in cruelty; yet these martyrs have died triumphantly. But this blessed One died as a sin-bearer. As I have sought to meditate upon His sufferings I find I have nothing to measure it with. I can only see that the shadow of the Cross was before Him all His life, and it does look by this that the strain must have been more than even His human frame could stand. But He is sustained by help from His Father. We know that at Gethsemane angels came and ministered unto Him. This enabled Him, as we read, to stedfastly set His face as a flint to go to Jerusalem, knowing all that awaited Him.

V. 8. "He is near that justifieth me; who will contend with me? Let us stand up together: who is mine adversary? Let him come near me."

V. 9. "Behold the Lord God will help me; who is he that shall condemn me? behold, they shall all wax old as a garment."

Here we get a similar thought that the apostle takes up in Romans viii. 33. "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth, etc."

Here we see the Saviour passing through an experience of a kind that we can know nothing

about, but He is supported by that which He has given us (see Romans viii), in order that we may find comfort and help in all our afflictions so that we may be able to comfort others in any affliction.

The main point is His consciousness of the near presence of Him that will justify Him against any charge that can be made against Him.

His adversaries can face Him with false accusations. The Lord God will help Him, who then can lay any charge against God's elect? Then He contrasted the frailty of His enemies.

We should ponder over these two verses, as in a world like this, "we must have tribulation." This may come to us in a number of ways. Let us remember we have God's presence ever with us. And if we can be happy with Him about the thing that troubles us, we can rely upon it, even if we are opposed by them that can kill the body, that they can do no more. They are but men, and their end will come and He has promised to help us.

V. 10. "Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of His Servant. He that (M. though) walketh in darkness, and hath no light, let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God."

Here is a solemn question and a delightful answer. The question for us to be clear about is whilst we fear God and obey the voice of His servant, do we obey the word of Christ, *i.e.*, the Servant? This tells us how we can tell. Are we sure that we can walk through a dark path where

we can see no glimmer of light in any direction? Do we trust in the name of the Lord and stay upon God? If we can, we are where the Lord wanted to put His sorrowful disciples. John xiv. 1, "Let not your hearts be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me."

Do we feel we must be able to see, even though but little? Let us be quite sure here: note the next verse.

V. 11. "Behold all ye that would kindle a fire, that gird yourself about with fire-brands: walk ye in the flame of your fire, and among the brands that ye have kindled. This shall ye have of mine hand; ye shall lie down in sorrow."

The A.V. has the word "sparks" instead of "brands," as in R.V. I understand these fire-brands to be torches. This appears to be the attitude of all rejectors of the Word that think at all, in all ages. To walk in the dark and obey Christ and trust God, is not at all to their liking. They kindle a fire for warmth, *i.e.*, for comfort and light. They walk in the light of their fire, and as they cannot get far away from their fire, if they desire to penetrate further, they take a torch to lighten their way. This is clearly a figure. I do not think God has in his mind the acquisition of knowledge which leads on to so many useful inventions, and that helps to fight disease, etc. Many of His saints have distinguished themselves in this way. The more the better. I do think it alludes to Spiritism, philosophies, etc., that tend to oppose God and bring about just the opposite of verse 10. To walk in darkness and trust and obey, is what they

will not have. What an unspeakable mercy it is to be "born from above." How it cheers our hearts and makes us delight to sing, "Trust and obey, for there is no other way." What does God say to it all? "This shall ye have of mine hand," *i.e.*, God has placed it on record. He is not afraid to risk His reputation on that which He says. "Ye shall lie down in sorrow." I think this is put three times in this book in another way, *i.e.*, "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked." This one here is a very wide statement to make, and culminates in that last time we "lie down," *i.e.*, come to die. Even beyond it can only end in one way—sorrow.



CHAPTER LI.

This chapter addresses those who make **RIGHT** their object in life, and seek after Jehovah. These are not turning from God to mind earthly things, or to promote their own advantage. This is clearly addressed to Israel, but we shall find the chapter very rich for every saint.

V. 1. "Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the Lord : Look unto the rock whence ye were hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye were digged."

The exhortation is to those who have an ear to hear. These belong to the Lord. These are directed to look back to their origin.

V. 2. "Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you : for when he was but one I called him, and I blessed him and made him many."

The argument appears to me to be that, after the loss of the ten tribes, followed by the invasion of Assyria into Judah, the nation was very much discouraged by their fewness of number. So the Lord comforts those who want to do right, reminds them that their origin was from one pair, and that God will yet bless. They would also remember Abraham was old and Sarah past age, so that their increase was the result of resurrection power. The nation, so to speak,

was chosen in Abraham. How this reminds us of our own blessed Hope.

V. 3. "For the Lord hath comforted Zion : He hath comforted all her waste places, and hath made her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord : joy and gladness shall be found therein ; thanksgiving, and the voice of melody."

It is well to read Ezekiel xxxiii. 24 here. We shall then see what a revelation is passed over here in silence. Here we see that Jehovah has followed His usual method of comfort, the plan He has adopted right through the whole word of God. He reminds them of their waste and desolate places, and reminds them of the time when the Lord shall comfort Zion, and the end thereof is "joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody." Circumstances down here since the Fall, however bright and comfortable they may be, can never satisfy, for weakness, failure, etc., will ever be with us in His absence, hence our eyes are ever directed upward to the Father's house, the incorruptible inheritance, etc. This makes life sacred, and our present existence not only supportable but enjoyable, because it gives us a future which fills us with hope, and in a very real sense even in this world "We are saved by hope." This makes atheism and all its relatives insupportable, and as I have said before, I can quite agree with what I read that Professor Huxley said, *viz.*, that it wanted some friendly planet to come into collision with us and put an end to the whole thing, for without the good news

concerning God and His Christ, creation, however it may have come about, is a terrible catastrophe.

V. 4. "Attend unto me, O my people; and give ear unto me, O my nation: for a law shall go forth from me, and I will make my judgement to rest for a light of the peoples. My righteousness is near, my salvation is gone forth, and mine arms shall judge the peoples; the isles shall wait for me, and on mine arm shall they trust."

Here His people, *i.e.*, the Jews as a nation, are told to attend unto Him. This is always the only sensible thing to do, but here it is very necessary, for the prophet in verses 4-6 is about to take a tremendous jump, if I may so express it. So that each expression to make sense, must cover much ground. The message is that the work in the future goes beyond the restoration of Israel, that blessed time to which the pious Jew looked forward to so fervently; for the restoration of Israel becomes the source of the restoration of the world.

V. 6. "Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath: for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment, and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner (note margin) but my salvation shall be for ever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished."

This verse carries us on yet further, for it takes us on to the final stage of the world's (aye, and the heaven's) existence. We are told even in stronger language elsewhere that the heavens and earth are to pass away with fervent heat.

But God remains. So we see this need not disturb us. If all that we see is destroyed, the unseen verities will stand. What assurance the two following statements give us, for they secure the realisation of every promise.

“But my salvation shall be for ever.” There is no end to it. I know this is an affirmative statement, and these are liable to be twisted; but the next is a negative one, “And my righteousness shall not be abolished.” This would not be true if in billions of years His righteousness is abolished. I do thank God that the great verities of our faith are given us in affirmative and negative statements. The one thing required is that we must love and know our Bibles.

V. 7. “Hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law: fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be ye dismayed at their revilings. For the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool: for my righteousness shall be for ever, and my salvation unto all generations.”

Verse 1 says, “Hearken unto me”; verse 4, “Attend unto me”—the A.V. has “hearken.” I expect there is a different word here, else the Revisers would not alter it. Now in verse 7 we have again “hearken.” In looking at these expressions I understand “hearken” means that we are expected to do something, but “attend” means that we are expected to learn something. Here we see the followers and seekers, of verse 1, after righteousness have now become possessors of righteousness, and of a rich experience of God.

The knowledge of God that this experience gives will enable us to listen and obey the command not to fear the reproach of men, neither to be dismayed at their revilings.

We are told elsewhere "to obey them that have the rule over us, for the powers that be are appointed of God." Yet we see the apostles Peter and John disobeying them, and their reason is "that we must obey God rather than men." And these brave men did not fear the consequences of their disobedience. I think this is the weak spot. Some fear the wrath of men, because they may lack the martyr's spirit. We see here that God would strengthen us. How really insignificant it all is when God comes in. The moth and the worm are sufficient for them, so that we have but to think of their future destiny to realise how calm we can afford to be, even though the trial be severe.

V. 9. "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord : awake, as in the days of old, the generations of ancient times. Art thou not it that cut Rahab in pieces, that pierced the dragon? Art thou not it which dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep ; that made the depth of the sea a way for the redeemed to pass over?"

There are several views as to who is speaking here. I believe it is the godly calling out. We see by that which follows that it is the time of Jacob's trouble that is before us. Earnestly they are calling upon God to wake up and put on strength. When we seek to image the terrible state of things during the worst trouble the earth ever sees, we realise that for very much less

trouble we have felt the heavens are as brass, and that God does not reply.

“Art thou not it that cut Rahab in pieces, that pierced the dragon?” We note the word “it” twice repeated. It is clear that it is “Thou” by Psalm lxxxix. 10, “Thou hast broken Rahab in pieces.” I do not know the Hebrew language at all, but I expect we are up against a neuter pronoun, and our English ideas hinder us on these occasions. We get cases in the New Testament. The one that is twisted most is “pneuma,” which is wind or spirit, and is used for the Holy Ghost. But “pneuma” is a neuter noun, and in some translations it is translated “it,” and I have seen distress occasioned by it, through the suggestions of others. I have stated before, or I hope I have, that in one place the Holy Ghost is masculine, feminine and neuter. John xiv. 16, “And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter,” *i.e.*, Paraklētos (masculine), “even the Spirit” (*i.e.*, “pneuma” (neuter)) of truth (alēthias (feminine)).

“Rahab” Isaiah has said in chapter xxx. 7. “For Egypt helpeth in vain, and to no purpose: therefore have I called her Rahab, that sitteth still.”

“That pierced the dragon” (Ezek. xxix. 3). “Behold, I am against thee, Pharaoh King of Egypt, the great dragon that lieth in the midst of his rivers.”

As we piece these statements together, it becomes very clear to me that we see God’s people passing through trial that is the worst they ever know.

V. 11. "And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be on their heads: they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."

Here is the reply for help. Again we see that God's method of comfort is to fix the heart on the glorious end; however weary the way, it becomes supportable. The prophet actually repeats word for word what he had given them in chapter xxxv. 10.

V. 12. "I, even I, am He that comforteth you; who art thou, that thou art afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass?"

We often have to walk a weary, and sometimes a painful path, and none more so than the sons of Jacob, in the time of their trouble. But note that God said, "I, even I." Meditate upon the Person, and let us ever remember that He undertakes to comfort any and all of His people in times like these. I can quite understand the poet singing "If blest with a sense of His love, a palace a toy would appear; And prisons would palaces prove, if Jesus would dwell with me there."

It is a great help to realise that, whoever the man may be, he is one that shall die.

V. 13. "And hast forgotten the Lord thy Maker, that stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth: and fearest continually all the day because of the fury of the oppressor."

We are here exhorted to compare the men we are afraid of with our Maker and Creator. The man here that appears most dreaded is the Lawless one. But what is he even, compared with our Maker?

V. 14. "The captive exile shall speedily be loosed; and he shall not die and go down into the pit, neither shall his bread fail."

We might at first think that this refers to the captive Jews that went into captivity in Babylon. There might be an allusion contained in it. The context, however, compels me to think that it is the time of Jacob's trouble, and these verses 12-16 bring before us the fact that the Lord never forgets any of His own, and that Israel is being sifted as wheat amongst the nations, for Judah in the land could not be considered as an exile.

V. 15. "For I am the Lord thy God, which stirreth up the sea and the waves thereof roar. The Lord of hosts is His name."

We are familiar with the sea being used at times as a figure of the world, always a measure of motion. Here it is stirred up that the waves roar. It is the worst storm God's people ever pass through. Russia gives us a picture of it. It is interesting to note that the margin has for "stirreth" "stilleth" the sea when the waves roar. Which shall we accept? I accept both; the word used appears to give a doubt in the minds of the translators, unless they intend us to understand both.

Do I hear a lad say that these terms are opposites, and that both cannot be true? My reply

is that when a storm arises directed against His people it is the Lord's permissive will. When the storm is calmed, it is the Lord's directive will. It gives the writer comfort to think like this.

V. 16. "And I have put my words in thy mouth, and have covered thee in the shadow of mine hand, that I may plant the heavens and lay the foundations of the earth and say unto Zion, Thou art my people."

I have said elsewhere that on the West side of the altar between the great sea, all the saint has is the Laver and the Temple. The Laver tells us of washing by the Word, and God sees to it, that they get the Word so effectively that they can repeat it, as it is said to be "in thy mouth." He also says "And have covered thee in the shadow of mine hand." The hand is the instrument of manipulative skill, therefore it leads me to think that though they have no temple the Lord's resources are such that He will be able to do things that will give them the comfort of it.

This last expression gives me to understand the Millennium for the expression "And say unto Zion, Thou art my people." This expression I can only apply in future to that time. As to "That I may plant the heavens and lay the foundations of the earth," I quite agree with those who think "The heavens and earth will pass away with fervent heat," but we also do get scriptures telling us of the Millennium, that the change in world conditions are so wonderful that

figuratively there is said to be a new heaven and a new earth.

V. 17. "Awake, awake, stand up, O Jerusalem, which has drunk at the hand of the Lord the cup of His fury; thou hast drunken the bowl of the cup of staggering, and drained it."

Now the Lord turns to Judah. As we read the state of things as described in the various prophets, we see here that the figure of a woman lying stupefied, having drunk the goblet of the wrath of God, is not a bit too terrible, for as I read the various scriptures that deal with this terrible time, I quite see that the sufferings of Judah in the land are far worse than Israel being sifted as wheat, terrible though that will be. I have asked myself why it is that the Lord permits Judah to pass through so much. The only reason that I can see is that Judah returned from Babylon, glorious and promising as it was at the first, led on to them crucifying the Lord of Glory. Nationally Israel's sin was idolatry. As I have remarked before, no doubt some of Israel personally returned.

V. 18. "There is none to guide her among all the sons whom she hath brought forth; neither is there any to take her by the hand, of all the sons she hath brought up."

As a man advances in life, and helplessness in any direction comes upon him, he naturally relies more and more on his children, especially those whom he hath brought up and who are still with him. From Abraham several nations had come. None of these, nor his own that now formed the family, can help, and some would not

if they could. These things leave a man or a nation desolate indeed. Hence we read

V. 19. "These two things are befallen thee; who shall bemoan thee? Desolation and destruction and the famine and the sword; how shall I comfort thee?"

These two things so desirable for a man or a nation, are so often lacking. There are none to pity, none to comfort. This will be found in a marked degree as the Jews are in their trouble (Matthew xxiv. 15-22). We, as we read the terrible story, fail to see any better condition among those who, in obedience to the Lord's command have fled to the mountains of Judaea, or those who remain in Jerusalem, resolved to fight to the last, and intend to sell their lives as dearly as possible.

V. 20. "Thy sons have fainted, they lie at the top of all the streets as an antelope in a net: they are full of the fury of the Lord, the rebuke of thy God."

The men are described as fainting and lying at the top of the streets. I have never seen an antelope in a net. We can, as we think of this figure, think what such a capture would mean to a poor creature with such an intense love of liberty. Caught in a net! How it would struggle till all strength was gone, and then would have to lie passive to meet any fate that may befall it.

We must ever keep in mind that it was God's intention that His nation should have been imperial. We know He never gives up any pur-

pose of His directive will, but all this has come about through their sin and disobedience, and the Lord permits it. This is indeed a rebuke. It is the same to-day with the Church. We know it is God's purpose to conform us to the image of His Son. As we look within, or look around at our fellow-believers, we see it is just the few that attain to anything like the high level of Christian living that we might reasonably expect to attain to, even whilst down here.

We are now to see that there is One who will have an eye to pity, and if they will but read their Bible, they will find the comfort that God now gives. Bless His name!

Blessed God and Father, we often say to one another that man's extremity is God's opportunity. We have to thank Thee for our own experience of this in times past in our own lives. We also have to thank Thee for the recorded scenes in Thy Word. Especially are we grateful to see the way that Thou hast promised to come to the help of thine earthly people in their dire extremity.

V. 21. "Therefore hear now this, thou afflicted, and drunken but not with wine: thus saith thy Lord the Lord, and thy God that pleadeth the cause of His people, Behold, I have taken out of thine hand the cup of staggering, even the bowl of the cup of my fury; thou shalt no more drink it again; and I will put it into the hand of them that afflict thee; which have said to thy soul, Bow down, that we may go over: and thou hast laid thy back as the ground, and as the street, to them that go over."

As we read the story of Adoni-Bezek (Judges i. 7) we see there is that which I have heard described as poetic justice, whatever that may really mean. As I read history I might call it historic justice. By the Word of God I see that whatsoever a man soweth that shall he reap. This is equally true of nations. And it is the cause of wars, strikes, discord, etc. But God is not mocked, and beyond this, God has declared that there is punitive justice, for it does appear that as far as persons, and even nations, are concerned, the actual culprits do escape. We are glad that justice is the basis of His throne. This is why I think there are Atheists, or those that seek to deceive themselves that they are. They are like the ostrich; whatever they do not see is not going to happen. I was told a few days back that at a funeral that had no burial service, one pointed upwards and said, "There is no one up there," then pointed downwards and said, "No one down there."

I feel sure that is what they would like. Alas! for them; justice is not so easily disposed of.



CHAPTER LII.

V. 1. "Awake, awake, put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem the holy city: for henceforth there shall no more come into thee the uncircumcised and the unclean. Shake thyself from the dust; arise, sit thee down, O Jerusalem; loose thyself from the bands of thy neck, O captive daughter of Zion."

I have been given to understand that in the Hebrew the repeating of a word is for strong emphasis, so we should say, "Very much awake," *i.e.*, be on the alert. This is a most valuable quality, recognised by all. It is used in all directions. Hereward, the last of the English, possessed this in a remarkable degree, so much so, that he was called Hereward the Wake. In chapter li. 9, we saw that the people's position was so terrible that they thought apparently that God had gone to sleep, and they called upon Him to awake. In li. 17, God calls upon Jerusalem to awake, figuring her as a woman stupefied with suffering, and promises her deliverance. This promise is here fulfilled, but we see that now it is so, alertness is just as necessary. They were still to be very much awake. The Millennium provides a great future for Jerusalem, hence they are to be on the alert so

as not to miss opportunities. There are two things before us here : that Jerusalem is to put on strength, and her beautiful garments. To see what this means we must try to picture what a state of joyous expectancy Jerusalem will be in at the beginning of the Millennium. They are reminded that strength is to be put on. They are to be taught as we are taught that we are to be "strong in the Lord." It is interesting to note how God makes us strong. When He met Gideon, Gideon did not suggest a strong man, but the Lord said to him, "The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour." He was called a man of valour and told God was with him, and he became so. The apostle Paul learned this lesson, so he could say "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

They were to put on their beautiful garments. I quite think that garments are just a figure of character. This also has to be put on. We were all clothed with "filthy rags," like Joshua (see Zechariah). What a bright occasion it was when we first realised that we were clothed with His righteousness! Now they are to put on the beautiful garments, the reason being there was to come into Jerusalem nothing to defile her. She was to be a holy city; hence her life was to correspond. Just as in our own dispensation, God in Christ has given us a wonderful position. Then we are told to put on the whole armour of God, in order that our state may correspond with it.

This involves a certain line of action. Jerusalem is here reminded that the bands that held her captive are broken. (See M.) She is to

shake the dust from her, and everything that will degrade her.

V. 3. "For thus saith the Lord, Ye were sold for nought; and ye shall be redeemed without money."

With but little meditation we can see that this may be read profitably in more than one way. I will just mention the way I love to read it, leaving it to you to find out a better way. I see these people sold themselves (We can see it as God selling) for nought. This is ever true when a person gives themselves to any other pleasure that does not put God first, and do not make it their first pleasure to please God first. It is only a question of time before they discover that they have indeed played the fool, and reap anything but satisfaction. Blessed be His Name, we see how quick God recognises the poverty of His people. As they sold or gave themselves for nothing, He comes along with this blessed promise, "Ye shall be redeemed 'without money.'"

What could, or can suit the sinner or backslider better than to know salvation or redemption is free. We have only to see that we want it, and God will see we get it. His great purpose is to save us and conform us to the image of His Son.

V. 4. "For thus saith the Lord God, My people went down at the first into Egypt to sojourn there: and the Assyrian oppressed them there without cause."

This is a verse that used to puzzle me for years. I could not see how the Assyrian could punish Israel in Egypt. One time I was staying at a house in Ventnor, Isle of Wight. There were some books there dealing with the work of the explorers, and I read that in their digging they discovered through the records and mummies that there was an Assyrian invasion, and they took the throne and governed. This explained to me how it was there arose a King who knew not Joseph. Since then, I have actually seen in the lantern pictures of these very people, and one is believed to be the actual Pharaoh that Moses confronted. What pleased me to note was that God saw there was no reason for this persecution, though for about four hundred years they were there, and much of this time they were suffering. It must have looked to these Israelites that God did not care.

He did, as we see, and in His own time took their case up.

V. 5. "Now therefore, what do I here, saith the Lord, seeing that my people is taken away for nought? They that rule over them do howl, saith the Lord, and my name continually all the day is blasphemed."

This verse, as I read it in the English, presents the Lord to us in a curious way. It pictures to my mind the Lord communing to Himself and calling Himself to task for not interfering on behalf of His people. As we read these verses we cannot fail to see that the Lord may act as the Gracious One, or as Judge, or as Redeemer. This expression clearly shows that He always

acts as the Absolute One. He receives nothing, but gives everything. In punishing or Redeeming, He is all-sufficient, and in guarding His people, Almighty.

The time has come after thousands of years waiting, and we are told exactly when He will act. The time is just before His coming to the deliverance of His people. He says, "They that rule over them do howl." When I first read this I thought they certainly made the Lord's people howl, but when I turned the word, as here, to them that ruled, and meditated upon it, what a horrible picture is presented! This impression is confirmed when we read that "My Name is continually blasphemed." We have read of many blasphemous things Atheists say, but here I expect under the Lawless One it arrives at its height or perhaps deepest degree.

Now speaks the Absolute One, "Therefore my people shall know My name; therefore they shall know in that day that I am He that doth speak; Behold, it is I." (M. here I am).

This brings us to the point where the Lord comes to Olivet. We read elsewhere of the terrible condition of the city as the result of the siege. At their extremity Christ touches Olivet; the mountain is cleft in twain, and they escape through the pass. The Lawless One is brought to nought through the manifestation of His coming, and these dreadfully harassed saints get a magnificent demonstration of His power, and now they know His name, that He is the great I Am. Perhaps I ought not to put this word 'great' here, for there is no other. There is only one God. What a joyous sound it will be

for them when He says, "Behold, it is I." The margin says "Here I am." I like both of these, text and margin.

V. 7. "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace, that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth."

We have had a glance at those Jews that remained in Jerusalem. The Lord came to their aid first. There is no doubt in my mind that this would be because their position was so critical. He, however, has not forgotten those who had made themselves familiar with the Word of God. These always get the best of it, though their position was a trying experience.

These had read that "When ye see the Abomination of desolation set up in the Holy Place" they were to flee to the mountains. We can be sure this was not the only fact they had read. They would know that the promise was that He would come and establish His kingdom, in 1260 days, but because of the severity of their trials they also knew that He had promised to shorten the time, hence this called them out in prayer.

"To come." We can picture, and have often pictured, these dear saints of God amongst the mountains of Judaea, not knowing how their food would come. All the usual vocations of life are brought to a standstill, and they are calling to their Father in heaven to come to establish the Kingdom; calling for their daily bread, deliverance from the evil one, etc.

The Lord sends His messengers to these fugitives amongst the mountains of Judaea. How beautiful must the feet of these messengers have been as they wended their way amongst the mountains with their message that in Zion "God reigneth." Their Messiah has come. It meant peace and salvation to them. Everything good is now to be theirs.

The Apostle Paul in his epistle to the Romans, no doubt with this scripture in mind, applies it to the Gospel, *i.e.*, Good News. He omits the word mountain, for the message is not for the fugitive saints wandering amid mountains, but it is a world-wide message, offering salvation to all now. We all know the affection we have to the messenger or agent that brought us the good news that led us to a decision for Christ. This good news means for us a deliverance from this evil world by the Lord catching us up in the air, to be for ever with Him (I Thess. iv.). We also in some measure have fellowship with the Jews and godly Gentiles in their deliverance, for we see that after the marriage He comes out of heaven to carry out this event which we are here looking at, and, praise His name, we come with Him (Rev. xix.).

V. 8. "The voice of thy watchmen : they lift up the voice, together do they sing; for they shall see eye to eye, when (M. now) the Lord returneth to Zion."

How beautiful is this! We picture these dear saints who naturally appoint watchmen and place them in the best positions. Their first thought would be for protection from the enemy. Their

dearest thought would be for the coming of the Lord. They begin to sing when they see when and how the Lord comes to Zion."

Personally, I have no doubt that if any singing is done by them in their trouble, it would be because of the hope of His coming. It is just the same with us. Nothing can possibly fill our hearts more now with singing than the prospect of His coming. The Book of Revelation shows us the great extent and the subject of our songs when He does come.

What a delight it is to read that "They shall see eye to eye how and when the Lord returneth to Zion." It is no wonder the Millennium will dawn. It is a happy Assembly when the saints see eye to eye. I am very thankful to say that among the various Assemblies that I know, there is a great divergence in our views on things that should not create trouble, but on the vital points there is not. We certainly are agreed as to the wonderful Saviour we all have found.

When, however, we look at the various so-called churches, the variations are very great. There are several churches called Catholic of one sort or another. Then I know not how many others. Each one of these have variations in themselves, the Roman Church included.

V. 9. "Break forth into joy; sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem: for the Lord hath comforted His people, He hath redeemed Jerusalem. The Lord hath made bare His holy arm in the eyes of all the nations: and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God."

I know of no greater joy for a saint than to see the Lord manifestly working. When we see sinners saved, and the saints stirred up to a higher place, then the Holy Ghost's presence is realised among us. What an abundance of manifestation these saints get at this time, for the Lord has made bare His arm in the sight of all nations, and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.

I like to think of this time. The earth that has so persecuted the Jews, when they see God step forth, and in the magnitude of His power come to the salvation of His people, what astonishment, and certainly at first fear, must have possessed them!

We can, however, imagine the great joy of His people. It is ever so. We all have had some experience of Him that causes our hearts to leap for joy, but this is a special occasion for the coming of the Lord to the earth, to the Jew, and certainly to some Gentiles, is for them what the coming of the Lord to the air will be to us.

V. 11. "Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch no unclean thing; go ye out of the midst of her; be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord. For ye shall not go out in haste, neither shall ye go by flight: for the Lord will go before you; and the God of Israel will be your rearward."

I cannot quite understand why the command to depart out of the midst of the wilderness should be emphasised so strongly. One would think they would only be too glad to go. I have,

however, noted that there is a reluctance amongst many of us when the home call comes, to depart and be with Christ, which we all believe to be far better. I can quite understand during that dreadful experience among the mountains of Judaea, that there must have been some wonderful experience of God's goodness and power, so that many places must have been hallowed spots in their experience. I have also noticed that sometimes there is with some of us just a little evidence of uneasiness, perhaps fear.

Note the importance of the injunction, "Be ye clean." These people are to be in God's service. They enter into a very high position in the future. We can be sure that this section of His people who were readers of His Word, and who acted upon it, will ever be among those that Christ will select for service. What can be so necessary for a servant and a worshipper as a clean life? Much work for God is spoiled because our lives speak louder than we can possibly do. In fact, our words would only have power when our lives force them home.

We may feel a little surprise that such a people should need such a message. If there is, we have missed a very elementary lesson. Persecutions generally purify. To be admired and sought after, surrounded with every comfort, tend to lessen the strain, and may, and alas, sometimes do impair our testimony. They were told to depart, to be clean. Now they are told not to hurry or go out by flight. This is a very important lesson to learn. As we go through life we have to take care in every department of our life to give to every thing we do sufficient

time to do it quietly and properly. Yet the reverse is true. We must not give more time than that. The right use of time is a responsibility we all have to accept.

The following leaves them, and I think us, without excuse. He says to them, "For God will go before you." So that though we see but one step before us, and we know not what the morrow may bring forth; He does. This certainly should give us quietness. Then the God of Israel says He will come up behind. No enemy can come behind them, and we know that Israel's God is ours.

V. 13. This brings us into another section. I have felt that these verses should be tacked on to chapter liii. Yet I think I can see the reason why they are tacked on to lii. It certainly is a separate section from chapter liii. Probably those who split it up into chapters could see it was more likely to be kept distinct by being attached to a chapter it does not belong to.

"Behold my servant shall deal wisely, he shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high."

This servant, *i.e.*, the Lord, is said to act wisely (A.V., prudently). As we gaze upon the Beloved as He walked this scene, we can see it can only be those that have been born from above that can in any way see or agree with the mind of God. As we read the story, we see what the various people that came in contact with Him thought. Even His beloved disciples did not fully understand Him. But the Father did. I cannot think of a man less understood than He,

nor a man so abused, as we shall see by the next verse. Here is the Creator in the world to work the Father's will, but from man's point of view a less successful man probably could not be found, and though He spent His life in doing good, doing, working, and speaking messages of love, He was not wanted (Luke ix. 51-56). They did not want Him in the village. In another place they besought Him to depart out of their coasts, and so we could go on.

We, however, who have had our eyes opened to see His beauty, rejoice in the future because of the promise that we shall see Him and be with Him for ever.

We rejoice to read that He shall be exalted. God highly exalted Him, and gave unto Him a Name that is above all names (Phil. ii.).

This is clearly the Lord, who is called "Servant." Though Israel collectively is called Servant. The same is true in this dispensation, as a church or as individual saints. The Apostles gloried in the servant character. We see without any comparison with our beloved Lord that our reward as servants depends upon our obedience.

V. 14. "Like as many were astonished at Thee (His visage was so marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men)." Read carefully R.V. margin.

What a terrible statement this is! The facts fully confirm it. What fiendish cruelty these people had, that His form and face had ceased to be that of man. Yet none so kind as He.

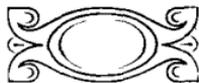
All history testifies to the fact that when men and women run counter to the wishes of those in power, though these people may be found among the meekest and kindest of people, there is no cruelty they will not do. We think of Kings, Emperors, Presidents, Governors, Ecclesiastics, and as we read of the story of the heathen in the past, Russia in the present, the Inquisition, etc., it makes us long for the coming of the Lord, who will surely put an end to cruelty, and mete out just judgement to the guilty.

Knowing the depravity and cruelty the human heart is capable of, and the revelations we get from time to time, it does seem dreadful to think that because people are afraid of losing votes, they do nothing to put things right. It does not concern them that ecclesiastical or any other establishment should be allowed to exist without proper investigation, for no honest person or body is afraid of investigation.

V. 15. "So shall He sprinkle (or startle) many nations; Kings shall shut their mouths at Him: for that which hath not been told them they shall see; and that which they have not heard shall they understand or consider."

This, I think, follows on from the word 'astonied.' As I have noted the use of this word I think it means astonished to the extent that they are overcome by their astonishment in a painful way. Hence I think the word certainly means "startle" (M.). I know nothing of the language, but scholars in their translations put both. Though preferring one to the other, if I can make what to me is sense, I think it well to

take both. The scripture uses sprinkling as a figure of cleansing, as in Lev. iv. and elsewhere. Without doubt Scripture teaches that the Lord's coming will mean the salvation of many. When we look at the R.V. "startle" I think we have but to remind ourselves of the position of affairs at the time that Christ comes to Olivet when the nations of the earth are seeking to get Jerusalem. Read Zech. xii. and xiv. At this juncture I seem to lose Egypt, so I think she must have been worsted in battle. However, the man of sin with his armies in the valley of Jehosaphat had half captured Jerusalem. The Assyrian, *i.e.*, the King of the North, between Jerusalem and the sea; the surrounding countries, Moab, Edom, etc., are in a ferment. Israel is being sifted as wheat amongst the nations. When this is at its height, Christ comes, the One whom the world had publicly renounced. I cannot imagine anything more startling for them. To such an extent is it so that we read the Kings are dumb; they can say nothing. These things they had never heard of, yet they are now to see them and consider them, yea, even understand them.



CHAPTER LIII.

This is not so much a prophecy of Christ directly, but what the Jews will say of Him, as they first recover themselves from the great grief that we read of when they discover who it is that comes to their relief (Rev. i. 7, Zech. xii. 10-14). Through the ages the Jews have hated the Tollah, *i.e.*, the Hanged One, and, in their dire extremity, when they find it is He that comes to their assistance, it nearly breaks their hearts. This is beautifully pictured by the incident when Joseph reveals himself to his brethren.

V. 1. "Who hath believed our report, and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed?"

This is a very difficult verse to understand, and it will be well for us in our meditation to note how it is used in John xii. 37, 38; also in Romans x. 16. When it saith, "Isaiah saith" we must remember that the whole book is his. Some think there are two Isaiahs; I can only say that I have thought about every verse, but I have not as yet seen two, though the question of how many the Holy Ghost used is of little importance if we say the Holy Ghost is its author.

However, here in Isaiah the margin gives to me the better reading, as it fits in naturally with its context, "Who hath believed that which we have heard?" When those look upon Him whom their fathers had pierced, and who, by their

rejection of Him, made themselves responsible; when their eyes are opened to see Him, and their grief has passed away to the extent that they can speak, it does seem to me that their former unbelief would come before them, for I have no doubt that then, as now, the believers would have nothing in common with the rejectors. Hence the question, "Who?" Happy people that could say "I did," for what a pleasure it will be to those who accepted Christ in His rejection.

The arm of the Lord I take to be Christ, for in the redemption of His people He has wrought a work that will, like Himself, remain (Hebrews i. 11).

V. 2. "For He grew up before Him as a tender plant, as a root out of a dry ground; He hath no form or comeliness; and when we see Him there is no beauty in Him that we should desire Him."

The nation had morally and spiritually sunk so low that it is likened to dry ground. But it is said He grew up before Him, *i.e.*, Jehovah, as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground. We know how precious to Jehovah was this tender plant. Alas, for man, he could see no beauty in Him. He had nothing that would attract the natural man. However, moral beauty was in Him. He was the effulgence of God's glory, the express image of His person, but this, as I have said, has no attraction to the natural man.

V. 3. "He was despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and as one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we esteemed Him not."

We can in some measure enter into the sorrow of these Jews even after the great weeping, as they look back and remember not only the dreadful way the Blessed Lord (as He will be to them at this time) was treated down here, but the hatred and contempt with which He has been treated through the centuries since. An outburst of grief does not settle a great sorrow; it becomes quieter. I can imagine that through the Millennium it would be an important factor in a devoted affection for Him. They would seek to show by their lives how much they love Him. Whatever grief we may have in our heart it is the only way now.

V. 4. "Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted."

V. 5. "But He was wounded for our transgression; He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed."

This verse has given rise to much speculative thought, as to the person of our Lord. We can be sure that He had a real humanity. He could get weary. The interpretation of Matthew viii. 17 shows us that such was His intense sympathy that it cost Him more than we can fully realise. Many parents would willingly suffer in the place of their children. When the woman touched the hem of His garment, He said, "Power has gone out of me." This implies loss of some kind. When their treatment so marred Him, we can be sure that the pain was

there, and also when He was on the Cross. Man's treatment and rejection must have hurt His tender heart. This all arises out of Him suffering as a martyr of righteousness, a path that many of His own in some degree have been called to tread with Him. Then apart from all this, there, on the Cross, as He shed His blood, He trod a path that none could possibly share. He died as the "Lamb of God," and it was His atonement for sin, when He bore our sins in His body on the Tree, that healed us.

V. 6. "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way: and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all."

I have frequently watched sheep, and when kept in bounds by the shepherd-dog have noticed their constant tendency to stray. I have noticed how they follow a leader. Let one go through a hedge; the others are almost sure to follow. I wish it were only sheep that strayed. I think that probably through cowardice, many are influenced by one of a strong nature. Then there is self-will. Some will turn to their own way, let the cost be what it may. Yet how blessed is the life that ever seeks to know and to do God's will! How wonderful the love of God is to poor sinners. He gave His Son to die for us, else there could be no salvation.

V. 7. "He was oppressed, yet He humbled Himself and opened not His mouth; as a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and as a sheep that before her shearers is dumb; yea, He opened not His mouth."

He was indeed ill-treated, yet we know He suffered voluntarily. As a man He could have asked His Father for twelve legions of angels and would have got them. As God, the slightest wish or desire for their destruction would have brought about what He desired. He never complained or defended Himself. Then, as a figure, He is likened to a lamb led to the slaughter.

Blessed Saviour, we know that Thou art still rejected by the many, yet we bless Thy name that we have learnt to love and worship Thee.

V. 8. "By oppression and judgement He was taken away; and as for His generation, who among them considered that He was cut off out of the land of the living? For the transgression of my people was He stricken."

This shows what man so frequently is. Right, Goodness, is no argument with them; in fact, this sort hate all that is a reproach to their manner of life.

They will plunder or rob the poorest and most helpless. The long-suffering and patience of God fill me with amazement. What a joy it will be when He reigns!

V. 9. "And they made His grave with the wicked, and with the rich in His death, although He had done no violence, neither was any deceit in His mouth."

I have asked those learned in Hebrew, and certainly one who is a Jew and who does his thinking in Hebrew, and they all agree with Delitzsch that it should be "They assigned His

grave." So it is clear that man intended to make His grave with the wicked, probably with the two thieves who, I expect, would have been buried in Hinnom. God had other views, etc.

The Jewish rulers assigned His grave with sinners. The Romans gave Him to be buried in a rich man's grave. God intended to honour Him directly the breath left His body.

V. 10. "Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He hath put Him to grief, when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand."

It will be well in the reader's meditation on this scripture to consider the marginal references.

What must have pleased the Lord in the Cross, was the devotion of His Son, for without doubt the Lord holds the world guilty for the death of His Son, and they were guilty. Between God and man the Cross of Christ is the crucial question.

From the death of Christ it is a bright picture. Most teachers at their death lose their disciples. This One found His. Though Christ is hated by the world this hatred may have been intensified by the behaviour of many that call themselves His. There is the other side. He has an immense number who consider it their greatest privilege to love and please Him. It is a great joy to know the work shall prosper in His hands, though to us it does not always look like it.

As a believer of fifty-five years' standing, I cannot but think that there has never been a time when the Word of God has been read and loved more than now, notwithstanding the statement that the Bible has become discredited except by a few ignorant people.

V. 11. "He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied : by His knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many ; and He shall bear their iniquities."

What a bright verse is this ! It is not possible to please us more than to have it distinctly told us in God's word, that our Blessed Lord, when He sees the result of His work, will be satisfied. I think we can rest with joy on this. We find this is the last time the Lord is called the Servant in this book, for when He bore our iniquities on the Cross He had fulfilled the work He came to do. See Phil. ii.

"By His knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many." I quite agree that there are two sides to this. I believe that "to know Him is life eternal" and that there can be no salvation till we know Him, but I can only see the other side here, namely, that it is His knowledge that justifies us here. As it is said in Romans viii. 29, "For whom He foreknew, He also fore-ordained to be conformed to the image of His Son," etc. In Romans it is God's knowledge. In Isaiah lii. it is the servant's knowledge. As we are to follow Him, what an obligation is ours to see that by the unction of the Holy One, we ever see that we are seeking to grow in all knowledge and wisdom.

V. 12. "Therefore will I divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong : because He poured out His soul unto death, and made (M. maketh) intercession for the transgressors."

This, to me, appears to give the Jewish and world-wide side to Phil. ii., where I think it takes a higher and more enduring side, as it goes on to the heavenly side of this great outcome of that Blessed One taking the form of a Servant, and His God exalting Him.

Here we get God dividing the portion and spoil with the rulers of mankind, and just as God exalts Him to the highest possible place in the heavens (Phil. ii.) so during the Millennium and on to the New Earth, He will ever have the supreme place. The reason given is because He voluntarily took upon Himself this position of a servant, and the work of Redemption. What a thrill this gives us! When we see all down the ages the dreadful muddle man makes of government it is a real joy to think that this scene of muddle and cruelty will have a time of order and kindness.



CHAPTER LIV.

Here we get back to Israel His servants, and in principle, I think, frequently carries on to all servants.

V. 1. "Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear; break forth into singing, and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail with child; for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, saith the Lord.

My dear reader, this scripture is not easily understood. We have to go slowly. It, however, appears to me that it takes up chapter li. 2, "Look unto Abraham your father and Sarah that bare you." This is used as a figure of what God brings before us here.

We are told to look. What do we see? I can see Abraham full of promises which carried him on to old age, which even strained his wonderful faith, and Sarah, barren and past age. There did seem then, that there could be no prospect. Without any strain, I think we can see that the whole of Israel's life is the outcome, if we may so put it, of the resurrection of Sarah's power to bear.

After the dispersions of Judah for now about two thousand years, and of Israel for a longer period, she then passes through the time of Jacob's trouble and it does look as if there is no

prospect. We have just had Christ brought before us in His suffering, death, and shame, concluding with His exaltation, which could only be the outcome of His resurrection. So this desolate nation is pictured here, and begins at the return of the nation to Jerusalem.

V. 2. "Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thy habitations ; spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes. For thou shalt spread abroad on thy right hand and upon thy left : and thy seed shall possess the nations, and make the desolate cities to be inhabited."

As we read fulfilled prophecy, how naturally and yet how wonderfully the whole thing comes about !

We know the extent of the kingdom promised to Abraham. His seed never possessed it. Here we get suggested the way it all comes about. The Antichrist, the King of the North, the King of Egypt, are all striving after Jerusalem, the land and Mesopotamia. This devastating war depopulates the country. Judah is very small, but Israel is coming back from all parts of the earth, hence this exhortation to stretch out and populate the desolate cities. So God keeps His promise.

V. 4. "Fear not ; for thou shalt not be ashamed : neither be confounded ; for thou shalt not be put to shame : for thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth, and the reproach of the widowhood shalt thou remember no more."

It is always a sin for any of God's saints to fear, for there can be no fear where there is

complete confidence in God. But to fear after any great deliverance makes our sin very serious, and this is the greatest of all deliverances that Israel experiences.

“The shame of thy youth,” suggests the Egyptian bondage; “the reproach of thy widowhood,” the Babylonish captivity.

V. 5. “For thy Maker is thine husband; the Lord of hosts is His name: and the Holy One of Israel is thy Redeemer; the God of the whole earth shall He be called.”

Here we get the strongest possible assurances why they should not fear. After the terrible time they have passed through, it is but human to do so. The mighty deliverance they have just experienced, the overthrow of their terrible enemies, the starting of the new Empire, with all the hope that the Millennium should inspire, would in a measure lose its value if they allowed any misgivings to abide in them; hence this verse.

Here God takes up the figure of a husband. God had selected Israel to be His wife. She had been anything but faithful, yet He would not divorce her. She had, by her own folly, separated herself from Him, and here He accepts the full responsibility of a husband. It is the bounden duty of a husband to make his wife his first consideration. There are two things brought to her notice of what God expects in an ideal husband. There must be the ability to meet his obligations, and the right character to perform them. So God reminds her that her husband is her Creator, that He is Lord of

hosts, that all power is at His service, that the One that has redeemed her is the Holy One, and that He shall be called the God of the whole earth. It is not to be a manifestation at times of His power. There will be no more queries as to whether there is a God or not. His reign will be constant and manifest daily.

V. 6. "For the Lord hath called thee, as a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit, even a wife of youth, when she is cast off, saith thy God."

What tender consideration, notwithstanding all her disobedience to His word, and her hatred of His beloved Son, whom He sent last of all. When He restores her, He does it in the spirit and attitude as though the sin was not hers, but His. The fact is that she had forsaken Him, but He acts as if He had forsaken her. Could any conduct exhibit a more loving heart? Yet, dear reader, this is the God of the Old Testament. No wonder that David said he would rather fall into the hands of God than of man. He had experience of both.

V. 7. "For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. In overflowing (see M.) wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment, but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer."

This small moment as we read the story shows a separation (apart from a general overlooking so as not to let things go beyond her strength) lasting many years. As I read I think of the Apostle Paul who, when thinking of his many

and constant afflictions, said "For our light affliction, which is for the moment, worketh for us more and more exceedingly an eternal weight of glory."

Underlying this small moment, there appears to me to be a great lesson we might learn, even as the Apostle did. He kept in his mind both time and eternity. The latter made his great sorrows in time appear very small; hence his fortitude.

V. 9. "For this is as the waters of Noah unto me: for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah shall go no more over the earth, so have I sworn that I will not be wrath with thee, nor rebuke thee."

What a delight it is to us to have a God to whom the future is as the past! He certainly is not afraid to make promises for the present right on to the remote future. Here He promises that the waters of Noah, *i.e.*, the flood, will never happen again, and that is to be taken as an assurance that when His work is accomplished on Mount Zion, there will never be anything between them again.

V. 10. "For the mountains shall depart, and the hills shall be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall my covenant of peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee."

We are told elsewhere that heaven and earth will pass away with fervent heat, but God's peace and kindness never: whatever we may have to pass through this is worth it.

V. 11. "O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted; behold I will set thy stones in fair colours, and lay thy foundations with sapphires. And I will make thy pinnacles of rubies, and thy gates of carbuncles, and all thy border of pleasant stones."

Here Israel is addressed as one with a sorrowful present. God's invariable method is for comfort to direct the mind to His promises for the future. He gives here a beautiful and desirable picture of the heritage of the servants of the Lord.

He begins with precious stones. There can be, I think, no dispute when one affirms that the various precious stones are among the most beautiful things on earth. Personally I delight to see them. I can truthfully say, in the present fallen state of humanity, that I should not care to own them. What a fruitful cause for crime they have been, and are. Further, it is not the person that wears them, but the one that sees them that gets the benefit. I have seen not only with jewels, but with anything of real value, that the ownership frequently gives more anxiety than pleasure. The covering cherub (Ezek. xxviii. 13, 14), "Every precious stone was his covering." The High Priest on his breastplate. Here we get the Millennial Jerusalem, and, in Rev. the Jerusalem that is above. All have precious stones. I have no doubt that these stones are figures of spiritual values, though at present I do not feel on sure ground as I consider this subject. The great lesson that comes to me is that the heritage of

the servants of the Lord will be beautiful to sight.

V. 13. "And all thy children shall be taught of the Lord; and great shall be the peace of thy children."

Here are two factors in the heritage of the Lord that will make all material prosperity valuable.

The children shall all be taught of the Lord. Man is so foolish and frequently so conceited that this is essential. It is only when taught of the Lord that we can know the true value of things, and keep first things first.

Then we see that the peace of the Lord's children is great. We know there can be no greater gift than the peace of God. So valuable is it, that we are told to let it decide all our problems, *i.e.*, not to injure it. We should do this now.

V. 14. "In righteousness shalt thou be established."

We have ever been told in one way or another that it is righteousness that exalts a nation. We realise how essential this is for individual or nation. Man's covetousness and self-seeking makes it rare. Even now we see it is the only happy path, but alas, till the Lord reigns there is no one to enforce it. However, we can rejoice in the knowledge that the Jew and Gentile, when their heritage is theirs, will have righteousness in all its ways.

"Thou shalt be far from oppression, for thou shalt not fear: and from terror, for it shall not come near thee."

Blessed result, due to the presence of the Lord. I am sure we saints of to-day can get a greater measure of this than we think, as we sometimes sing,

“And should He be ever thus nigh,
I have nothing to wish or to fear;
No mortal so happy as I,
My summer would last all the year.”

It is a great privilege that is ours, that we can by faith live in His presence. Here they shall see Him.

V. 15. “Behold, they may (M) stir up strife, but not by me, whosoever that stir up strife against thee shall fall because of thee.”

I understand this to be that no strife that any nation may have in their hearts will mature, during the Millennial period.

V. 16. “Behold, I have created the smith that bloweth the fire of coals and bringeth forth a weapon for his work; and I have created the waster to destroy.”

This figure that God has His smith to make a weapon for His work gives us the assurance that God will not be like man, lulled to sleep, or caught unprepared. Hence He can give the assurance that

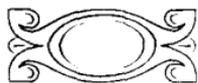
V. 17. “No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgement thou shalt condemn.”

We are told that during the Millennium, certainly outside God's people, the nations will be restrained, and given the most blessed time possible. None dare to form what we now know

as the world. Satan is chained. In order to show under the most desirable conditions man can possibly have, that his unregenerate nature has not changed, God lets Satan loose for a little season, and we find Gog and Magog coming up against the saints with every obtainable weapon, from every quarter of the world. But apart from the lessons God intends to teach, it will surely manifest how true this will be, "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper."

"This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness which is of me, saith the Lord."

This is lovely, is it not? It is enough to make anyone thirsty. God evidently wants everyone to be thirsty, for we can be sure as we read the next chapter that the thirsty only can drink, hence, as I have said before that we are called "the salt of the earth" because our lives should make all thirsty that come in contact with us.



CHAPTER LV.

V. 1. "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat; yea come, buy wine and milk without money and without price."

Not only do we see it is only thirsty that are called, but every one that is thirsty is included. David had a great thirst (see Ps. xlii.), "As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God."

This was a king who was thirsty. He is included in the 'everyone.' As we read our Bibles and come into contact with those whose thirst has been slaked, we find that the great, the learned, the simple, all find God, but this one simple method is adopted. All who really want God will find Him.

We are so thankful to God that He has a heart for us all, and that He has devised so simple a plan that little children can come. How beautiful are these three invitations to come. "Come to the waters; Come, buy and eat; Come, buy wine and milk."

We are invited to come to the waters. These are the Word of God and the Holy Ghost. These can never be separated! The wine is the joy God gives; the milk, the nourishment God gives.

In the affairs of men to buy is to take possession in the surest possible way ; hence, I think, this is metonymy for God's sovereign grace. As God gives us all in sovereign grace, He, though Almighty, could find no reason to take it from us.

This could not be buying in a material sense, as this, when analysed, comes to be an exchange of labour, which would make it a question of right and not grace.

These things cannot be bought for money or any other method of purchase.

It really comes to accepting freely of that which God gives in sovereign grace.

V. 2. "Wherefore do ye spend your money for that which is not bread ? and your labour for that which satisfieth not ? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness."

What a sad sight do we behold all around us in the constant pursuit after pleasure ; in the substance of so many, worse than wasted ; in the covetous with their advertisements all enticing people on, quite callous of the effect, their time as well as their substance wasted. One would have thought that common sense would tell them that happiness should be the result of right living. Even some Christians who ought to know better are carried away with this pursuit of pleasure to such an extent that we wonder whether they have really heard the joyful sound.

Do I hear a boy or girl saying, "I am young and I do want to live a bright happy life. How

can I hear this joyful sound?" My reply is, my dear reader, that the Lord has graciously told us in the next line, "Hearken diligently unto me." This is the whole of the secret. It is a very big whole, I must admit. Turn from man and listen to God. The Holy Ghost will lead you on, and if controlled by Him, He will surely lead you on. This is "eating that which is good." My favourite way is to take a book of the Bible, begin at the first verse; write it down in an ordinary exercise book. I think about it during the day, converse about it if possible, and then write my thoughts down. Never mind about the extent or quality of these thoughts. Write as well as you can, and this will make you a good writer. It will teach you how to express your thoughts in writing; no mean gift this. It will constantly occupy your mind with the best possible themes it is possible to think about. Then go on to the end of the book; there is no hurry, but do it daily.

You will soon find your soul delighting itself in fatness. Conversation and Bible readings are very good also, though not so good as the first. These really want one as ruler, or call him what you will, but it requires one with sense, in order to see that no one is allowed to convince another. We all think we are right and want to put the other right. When we do, we simply are stepping in the place of the Holy Ghost. He alone is the convincer. All we have to do is to state clearly what we have got, or think we have, and leave it to Him, to put the wrong one right, not forgetting that this may be ourselves.

V. 3. "Incline your ear, and come unto Me; hear, and your soul shall live."

How simple are the terms upon which we can obtain life! To incline the ear and come to Christ is all that is required. To hear always carries with it obedience. One is never said to hear unless one obeys. "And I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David."

This new covenant is said to be the "sure mercies of David." I think this has a backward and a forward view.

We need to compare this with Jer. xxxi. 31 in order to see that this covenant finds its fulfilment in the Millennial reign when Christ the true David, reigns.

We must remember that the Church is composed of Jew and Gentile, and further, that the Jew looked for the City which hath the foundations, so that it does look as though this covenant covers all the work that has been effected through Christ's death, because when He instituted the Supper He said, "This is the New Covenant in My blood."

V. 4. "Behold, I have given Him for a witness to the peoples; a leader (M. Prince) and commander to the peoples."

Here is a statement which clearly shows that it goes, on earth, beyond the Jewish nation. The heathen has become His inheritance, and Christ is Prince over all.

V. 5. "Behold, thou shalt call a nation that thou knowest not, and a nation that knew not thee shall run unto thee, because of the Lord thy God, and for the Holy One of Israel; for He hath glorified thee."

We think of the great Gentile powers that have ruled over Jerusalem. These have in their turn been one power over them. Here, when the Prince reigns, He is over all. The Gentiles, however many kings there may be, will be thought of as one, and Christ as King. "The times of the Gentiles," *i.e.*, their supremacy over the Jews, is now at an end. Their attitude now to the Jew is just the reverse. To use the figure here, "They shall run unto thee." It will be a great pleasure to them to take the second place. It will be because the Lord hath glorified the Jew. It is His work, not theirs.

So it has ever been with them or with us. Every blessing man has, in whatever direction we may look, can easily be traced to Him. Hence the wisdom of the following :

V. 6. "Seek ye the Lord while He may be found; call ye upon Him while He is near."

Here we see that two things are required : to seek Him, and to call upon Him. The one expresses our desire for Him, the other that we recognise our need of Him. So we come back, as ever, to the only terms God makes with us, namely, that we must want Him, or as the beginning of this chapter expresses it, that we must thirst for Him. We are told to do this while He is near. What a dreadful thought this does

suggest. Alas! it is a fact. There will be a day when such grace will not be available. The reason will probably be because it is no longer wanted.

V. 7. "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, and He will abundantly pardon."

I feel sure a young boy or girl would like to ask a question here. Well, what is it? "I thought you said the one thing required of us is to want Him?" "Yes, that is true." "But look at the task that is set before me? I do not think I could do it." "I feel sure you cannot. I am certain I never could. I, when a young Christian, had a book given me called 'I want to be holy,' and I certainly tried hard, and failed miserably."

God's method in Nature appears to be that a seed or plant is set in suitable soil and atmosphere. He sends the rain or dew and causes the sun to shine, and the plant cannot help growing; it simply thrives and enjoys its life, judging by its appearance.

The Lord said none of us could add to our stature by taking thought about it. I think this word "Let" is hard sometimes to get on with. Those who have had a good education will smile at this, but we do not mind this.

When we really want God, we accept His Son and the work He did for us on the Tree. God places us "in Christ," so we see the soil is good. As He is holy, the atmosphere is also good. The

Holy Ghost is like the dew on Mount Hermon, most refreshing, and Christ the Sun of righteousness shines upon us.

The way to forsake sin or wickedness is to be found ever looking unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of our faith. As we look into the glass, *i.e.*, the Word of God, and behold the glory of the Lord, we are transformed from glory to glory. But, like Moses, we shall not know that our face shines; others will. Our troubles are with us, when we are occupied with self, even self-improvement.

Even an advanced Christian begins to get uneasy directly anything comes in between him and the Lord. We cannot go on in any sin, and walk with the Lord.

There is no task about it. It is heaven below, when walking with the Lord in the light of His word, and we are glad to give our testimony that He does "abundantly pardon."

V. 8. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord, For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."

Here we have brought before us the incomparable difference between God's thoughts and man's. What a joy it is, when we recognise this and act upon it! We can gain quite an insight into God's character if occupied with His mind, just as when we look at a beautiful building or anything else man has made, we know we are seeing what was once a thought he had, now

expressed in materials, etc. Even so, when we look at a tree, flower, mountain, landscape or seascape, these are God's thoughts expressed in material things. When the scientist seeks and discovers what he likes to call the secrets of Nature, he is really gaining an insight into God's thoughts. When we think of their labours in this direction, what wonderful things they discover! How becoming it would be, and is, when they speak of God's thoughts and give Him honour and praise.

V. 10. "For as the rain cometh down, and the snow, from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, and giveth seed to the sower and bread to the eater; so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth; it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and prosper in the thing whereto I sent it."

Here we see God's thoughts are brought before us in a moral and spiritual way. He takes as an illustration the rain from heaven. We see it is not the wearisome business that the man that lives under the sun thought it, Eccles. I. 7, 8. Before it returns thither it has a beneficent work to do, and does God's will. So, saith He, My word shall not return to me till it does my will.

When we think of the many great and exceeding precious promises God has given us in His word, it should fill our hearts with joy and gratitude to know that every jot or tittle of His word will stand firm. Hence we can enter into that which follows.

V. 12. "For ye shall go forth with joy, and be led forth in peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree: and it shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off."

We can be sure that if joy is not in our heart and peace possessing us, we have gone astray somewhere, for this is ever the result of confidence in God's promises. All nature seems bright and joyous. The mountains and hills shall break forth into singing, and the waving of the branches of the trees will be like us clapping our hands. The fir tree shall be instead of the thorn, and the myrtle instead of the briar, yet the thorn and the briar are very beautiful and very useful. We have had to put two rows of thorns and two rows of briars to keep trespassers out of our old people's home. They will make an effective protection. This is the sixth sign. It is the gospel based on Resurrection for Jew and Gentile. The curse removed is the thorn and the briar; God's protecting care is the myrtle, Zech. I.

What we owe to the Father for the gift of His Son, to the work of His Son, down here on the Cross and His exaltation above, and to the Holy Ghost as the indweller, teacher, and guide, eternity is required to reveal.

However, only the present is ours. Let us see to it that we enjoy the fruit of the Holy Ghost now.

CHAPTER LVI.

The Sabbath is brought before us in this chapter, and its importance. It is the only commandment that shewed the Jews as Jehovah's man, and it is indeed a sign between God and Israel.

Israel and Jehovah both have an objective standard of righteousness. The keeping of the Sabbath would help Israel. It would prove to God that His word is dear to them. It is arbitrary; its authority is based not on moral and spiritual values, but on what God has said, and, as I have said, it shews that God's word is dear to them.

There are very few things, if any, that can promote moral and spiritual well-being more than this keeping of the Sabbath.

V. 1. "Thus saith the Lord, Keep ye judgment, and do righteousness: for my salvation is near to come, and my righteousness to be revealed."

This command would be considerably affected by the character of the King and his helpers. How responsible is the position of a ruler! We can thank God that He has made it a personal question, and I am sure that the conduct of our leaders will never excuse the individual nor rob him of the real blessing. In times of persecution, when the authorities are persecuting a section of

the people, others do so too, from jealousy, or covetousness, etc.

V. 2. "Blessed is the man that doeth this, and the son of man that holdeth fast by it; that keepeth the Sabbath from profaning it, and keepeth his hand from doing any evil."

This would mean any Jew or proselyte. I, however, know from experience that the young people come to practical questions, and generally ask what about the Lord's Day. I know there are those who would like us to believe it is the day of the Lord. It is not difficult to find the reason for this. However, we are not likely to do this. When a young believer, over fifty years ago, I discovered there was a great difference between the Sabbath and the Lord's Day, *i.e.*, the first day versus the seventh. The subject is too large to deal with here, but we can all meditate upon it, and get all our decisions when before the Lord alone.

The point that was urged upon me was that we are not under Law, but under Grace. I thought that to one that loved the Lord, grace does not mean license, though it does mean liberty, and it should prove a stronger deterrent than Law. I so valued the day, that I thought that I would never if possible do anything that tended to deprive another of this great boon. Further, I should not allow worldly prosperity to be a bait to give it up. So you see in some measure I have sought to honour the day. After fifty years' experience the result has been so satisfactory that I am delighted that I did. There are those who do not. I am not their judge. To

the Lord we have to give reasons for either course, but as I see the result in their lives, I am not attracted.

V. 3. "Neither let the stranger, that hath joined himself to the Lord, speak, saying, The Lord will surely separate me from His people."

This is delightful. Here is God's own nation. This scripture does not view them as joining the nation. He is said to "join himself to the Lord." This is the great error that churches make, especially churches such as the Episcopal, Greek or Roman churches. So do also the exclusive brethren. I was saved by Christ. He said, "Come unto Me." He is Lord. The whole work is His.

It does not matter whatever dispensation God is dealing with; we all have to "sanctify Christ in our heart as Lord."

It is quite a gospel to know He will not separate us. This is the only union that has any value in it. This other sort of union means the giving up of the truth that they came out upon, and comes to this, that they think, "Never mind the truth; let us be united."

"Neither let the eunuch say, Behold I am a dry tree, for thus saith the Lord of the eunuchs that keep my sabbaths, and choose the things that please me, and hold fast by my covenant."

Here we see there is no occasion for the eunuch to regret his position or condition. There can be no situation that the Lord permits His people to be in, but if he observe the following he will find it will turn out a good situation. If he keeps

the Sabbath he takes his position as Jehovah's man. The ruling principle of his life is to please the Lord in all things, and hold fast His covenant, or, as John would say, keep "walking in the truth." He need not have anything to make him really regret. He has secured the essential thing. How could this man walk with a modernist, who only has his own thoughts to walk by? No "Thus saith the Lord."

The following gives us the high opinion Jehovah Himself has of such a man. The day I write this the Methodists have united. I am sure John Wesley would not have any that did not walk according to the truth.

V. 5. "Unto them will I give in mine house and within my walls a memorial and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them (M. or him) an everlasting name that shall not be cut off."

Here is something that will abide, and the reward is sure. There must be reality if a man desires to get the blessing God has to give. Blessed Lord, make us real!

V. 6. "Also the strangers that join themselves to the Lord, to minister unto Him, and to love the name of the Lord, to be His servants; everyone that keepeth the Sabbath from profaning it, and holdeth fast by my covenant: even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt-offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted on mine altar; for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all peoples. The Lord God which

gathereth the outcasts of Israel saith, Yet will I gather others to Him, beside His own that are gathered."

Here the stranger, *i.e.*, the proselyte, one that is not by birth a Jew, but has identified himself with them by desires which has led on to conviction; God wants him to learn that he is really "among" His people, and not "amongst" them. These two words seemed to be used as one, but since I have considered the word I use them as if "among" means to be really of them. "Amongst" I use as if I were to find myself in a meeting of people that I have no affinity with.

This gives me a wonderful conception of God. He indeed is no respecter of persons. The man God looks to, and who is after His own heart, is one who is of a humble and contrite heart. Here he is speaking of the Jewish dispensation, so we see that birth was no barrier, and even the Jew, unless he was circumcised in heart, was, as the Apostle tells us, not of Israel in God's sight. This expression, "that join themselves to the Lord" repeats itself for the same reason that I read John Wesley said he preached over five hundred times on "Ye must be born again," namely, because we must.

Let the reader see to it that he makes no mistake here. It will be serious. It is no Jewish race, or Christian church, or whatever centre God has. It is to the Lord we join ourselves, not to any church or body of men. It is to spend our lives in company with Him. The next thing we must note is that he is to minister to Him, meaning that it is His interests we are serving. I am sure it is the Holy Ghost that can do this, and

He ever does it in the light of the Word. Others may discard it, but we cannot ever separate the Incarnate Word from the written word. Even if an Apostle could come to us with a message in person, we must adopt the noble course the Bereans did in Acts xvii. 10, 11. The next thing is "to love the name of the Lord." This is indeed the sweetest name ever sung, but we must ever keep in mind, especially in Scripture, that that name stands for character. The next thing is that we must be His servants. I think that this takes a more general form than ministry. To me it would cover anything that I may do or say. I must never forget that I am His, and represent Him, as does everyone that keepeth the Sabbath from profaning it. Now we must ever remember that the Lord said, "The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath." We must keep in mind that sabbath speaks of rest, and that the Lord said, "Come unto Me, and I will give you rest," further, "Learn of Me, and ye shall find rest." All we have to see to is that "Christ is All," and that no man or body of men may displace Him. It is we who want to see "Jesus only." We shall find He will satisfy our heart. We shall have this brought before us presently.

This is what God promised to do to such persons. He will bring them to His holy mountain, and make them joyful in His house of prayer. To the Jew this holy mountain, I think, would be where the Temple was built. This was His house of prayer. Worship and praise go on with prayer. But we cannot but notice that it is prayer that is mentioned here. We ask the

reason. It appears to be that we cannot help being joyful in praise and worship, but in the house of prayer is the place where collective prayer is made. This seems to be the red flag, the danger signal. Dear reader, do you love to go to the prayer-meeting? I know what you will say, "I did, but the long tedious prayers are very wearying." I quite agree, but you need not make them so, and we can seek to correct others, if we only have the courage to say "Dear brother, the first half of your prayer was refreshing, but then I got weary." This would have to be done carefully and prayerfully. Remember, the writer is an old believer, and after digging into his own heart, he believes the above is more of an excuse. The reason why we are not joyful in the house of prayer is because we have not faithfully kept the conditions, hence God cannot see any reason for making us joyful. As far as I am concerned, I can only say that it is the result of neglect of private prayer, for I have found that when keen on that, I then must have the other.

Then we see their burnt offerings and sacrifices are acceptable. "For mine house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples." We remember how angry the Lord was when He saw they had made it a house of merchandise. What a dreadful testimony it is when, instead of freely giving, all sorts of devices have to be adopted before they get sufficient money to carry on the work. Let us not be deceived; God will not regard it as giving, but as dishonouring. It is done so as to please themselves. Yet if these would but believe the Lord when He has told us it is better to give than to receive, they would have a keener joy.

Then we see in verse eight, how the Lord tells them that He will not only gather the outcasts of Israel but others also. He would also gather others to Him, *i.e.*, the Gentiles. He has a heart for all, and His house is for all peoples. There is nothing little about our Lord.

This reminds us of John x. 16, where the Church is before us, and where the Lord has the same largeness of heart as with His nation. He says, "Other sheep I have which are not of this fold. . . They shall all be one flock." So we find that His Church consists of Jews and Gentiles also.

V. 9. "All ye beasts of the field, come to devour, yea, all ye beasts in the forest."

This sentence is not so clear to me as I could wish. The margin suggests a different reading from the way I should have read it. I should read it that the beasts of the field and the beasts of the forest both devour, not as the margin has it, *viz.* to call to the beasts of the field to devour the beasts of the forest, though just a little turn would bring the result much the same.

The beasts of the field I understand to be the great powers of the world. The one here is the Chaldeans. Their own nobles were devouring their own people. The beasts of the forest are, I think, the great men who have sought their own welfare instead of the welfare of the people. The picture that is presented to my mind is the State threatened by ruin from the nations without, and intensified by the selfish, hence foolish, behaviour of the leaders of the nation.

V. 10. "His watchmen are blind, they are all without knowledge; they are all dumb dogs, they cannot bark; dreaming, lying down, loving to slumber."

I understand "His watchmen" to mean those who ruled His people with His permission, such as Kings and Priests. It is clear it was God's intention to have a Theocratic State. He was to rule them, *i.e.*, His people, and they were to be a kingdom and priests, to teach the world that had fallen into idolatry that there is but one God, and happy are the people that worship Him. He gave this nation special privileges. Alas! how the people failed! So He appointed the tribe of Levi, who had proved faithful, as priests. A start was made with faithful men. We know how their children did not follow their fathers' steps. There were, however, a few exceptions, for which we are thankful. Then later, we find the people wanted a King, and God gave them permission. We find the same story, till we get to this time, and get this description. Note the description. These leaders who should have known better are said to be blind. They certainly were not wise men who knew the signs of the times and were able to instruct the King as to what to do. They are without knowledge. They did not walk with the Lord in the light of His word, hence their education consisted only of what their schools gave them. That probably would have been useful had they been at one with the fountain. They could not bark, *i.e.*, they could give no warning. They were dreaming, *i.e.*, had plenty of castles in the air, or, as we may say, they had wonderful schemes for the

betterment of the people. Lying down, loving to slumber, they liked what we should call to-day a soft job. If they were not afraid of work, they certainly did not want much of it.

V. II. This gives us the reason, "Yea, the dogs are greedy, they can never have enough." This has seemed to me for many years the most grievous sore we have politically, and, as far as I can see, there is not one section of the people that can throw stones at another, though I recognise that the sections that have power are the most dangerous, or rather, can do most harm. Praise God, like the Kings and prophets, there are some blessed exceptions. May the Lord multiply their number. Let me give one that I never knew till this month. In my old age I took to writing. I think some have been helped, I know I have, and I advise everybody to do it, even if their works are not published, though one never knows what may happen. One of the results have been that I have got in contact by letter, and personally, with many I have never heard of. There is one that I have before me. After exchanging a few letters, I said to my sister, "If ever I loved a man whom I have never seen, it is Mr. X., of the town of ——" A few days after, I had a letter from him saying he would like to know me. I at once fixed up for a week, and travelled over five hundred miles to see him. I met a man working for a company which he found in a small and bad condition. He could not, with his view of things, take up a share in the business, of which I may say none could be more necessary. Through his work,

the company is in a most flourishing condition, employing hundreds. He still lives in a humble cottage, all nice and clean, and though his salary and bonuses amounted to a few thousands per year, he does not save, for it goes out as it comes in, for the benefit of his fellow-man. I found a happy man who walks with the Lord in the light of His word. I should provide for my old age, but the point is that he certainly is not greedy and is content with his wages.

These are said to be dogs, not sheep. If you look up the few times dogs are used figuratively, you see that though thought to be sheep, they are not, and the Apostle Peter in writing of them uses strong language. The Apostle John said, speaking of the New Jerusalem, "Without are dogs." So, dear reader, though one cannot possibly be sure of one's judgement of others, it does seem an important question, when alone with the Lord, to ascertain if a man whose life is a selfish one can be a Christian at all.

"And these are shepherds that cannot understand: they have all turned to their own way, each one to his own gain from every quarter."

We can quite understand the reason why these could not understand, for nothing, as far as I can see, can warp our judgements more than to be occupied with self-interest.

V. 12. "Come ye, say they, I will fetch wine, and we will fill ourselves with strong drink; and to-morrow shall be as this day, a day beyond measure."

I think the italics "a day" are better left out. Read, it so, dear reader, and judge for yourself.

They intended to have a great day to-day and to-morrow, *i.e.*, every morrow that they conveniently can. They are like the rich fool our Beloved told us about. They had got it, and meant to enjoy it, *i.e.*, live a life of self-indulgence. This does not always manifest itself in feasting, but the principle is true, even in the miser who loves to count his hoards.



CHAPTER LVII.

V. 1. "The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart; and merciful (M. godly) men are taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from the evil to come. He entereth into peace; they rest in their beds, each one that walketh in his uprightness."

Whilst watchmen, shepherds, prophets, rulers, without troubling themselves about the flock that they should watch and feed, live in sinful pleasure, the righteous is saved by early death from the judgement. He dies before his time. Before the great tribulation, we are caught up out of it. No one takes it to heart. Here it is clearly taught, "To die is gain" for they enter into peace. So, for the righteous, peace is their portion in life or in death. "They rest in their beds." This is not quite clear, but I can best understand it as the grave, or rather that which is beyond the grave, for the literal rest of the body would be alike with the ungodly. There is nothing to fear for each one that walketh uprightly.

V. 3. "But draw near hither, ye sons of the sorceress, the seed of the adulterer and the whore."

Those who have brought this about are called to draw near hither, *i.e.*, to the place where God

is speaking through His prophet in order that they may hear their sentences. This warning leaves them without excuse. We have shewn elsewhere that the word "sons" speaks of character. Any concordance will shew this. These are those who are given or connected with sorcery. Adulterers are those that have broken their marriage vow, hence they are idolaters. Whores are those who are entangled in worldliness. We have pointed this out before. It is this sort that oppose God's people.

V. 4. "Against whom do ye sport yourselves? Against whom make ye a wide mouth, and draw out the tongue?"

This indeed is a very important point to be clear upon as we pass through this pilgrim scene. Against whom do we direct our opposition? For "it would be better for a man that he had never been born than to make one of His to stumble." When we think of the terrible cruelties that take place where opportunity offers, by the so-called Christian church, we can quite understand that the humble godly are mixed with these people. Ecclesiastics, when directing their attention to these people, are more opposed to such than to the wicked. In Russia we see the wicked do not know how to discern the difference, hence the importance of these two questions.

Here follows a charge of idolatry. We get one phase of idolatry, and we shall examine each verse as we read it. When I examine each phase of idolatry, the root trouble is that we want something we can see. Here it is memorials and images, etc., which speedily brings in the worship

of that which is false, and God is displaced. Later, as I advanced in the Word, I found that covetousness is said to be idolatry, because it has the same effect. God is displeased by the covetous desire for material blessing. Later, I was struck by the statement of our Lord, Rev. ii. 6., "The works (teaching) of the Nicolaitans, which I hate." I felt how important it is to know what it is Christ meant when He uses such a strong expression. I found in conversation that most people had no idea at all. I turned to books. The little I found there was without any evidence worth the name. I carefully examined the Word and studied each compound word in the language with "nike" in front of it. I have never since been able to see it to be any other than clerisy, which divides a brotherhood into two classes. The Nicolaitans make themselves lords in God's heritage. An ecclesiastical bishop is addressed as "My Lord." The Pope's titles are well worth reading. He calls himself "The Vicar of Christ on earth." I cannot imagine worse presumption, for if he is a saved man, he has been taken out of the pit and miry clay like the rest of us, and is dependent on the sovereign grace of God. The Lord, when about to depart, told His disciples that He would not leave us orphans, but would send another Paraclete, *i. e.*, the Holy Ghost, John xiv. and xvi. He is the true Vicar of Christ on earth. This displeases God by veneration for men. Now I think I see why we are told to "cease from man whose breath is in his nostrils," or "have not the faith of the Lord Jesus with respect of persons," etc.

A few months back I read in a book these

words, "Never picture thyself to thyself in a position that thou art not." In conversation with friends, we could not approve of it, as it would appear to check the use of that faculty of the mind known as imagination. In meditation upon this, I have seen that there is much truth in this, and one must be careful, for I am persuaded that most of the castles in the air, as we call them, have self as the Lord, or the chief person, so that this, if we are not careful, is to make an idol of self. This makes four phases of idolatry. We will now turn to the phase we have here.

"Are ye not children of transgression, a seed of falsehood, ye that inflame yourself among the oaks (M.), under every green tree; that slay the children in the valleys, under the clefts of the rocks?"

How full of solemn meaning each word in this verse is! It gives us to see something of what idolatry is. True worship of the living God makes a man true, pure, upright, and gives him a heart full of love which is ever kind. Idolatry inflames a man (see margin) as idolatry is false. We can examine either of the four phases mentioned, and we shall discover it to be true. It makes a man false and cruel even to the extent of injuring his own children, even as this phase is said to do, and the whole history of idolatry confirms this. Let us remember the apostle's words, "Little children, guard yourselves from idols." I. John v. 21.

V: 6. "Among the smooth stones of the valley is thy portion; they, they are thy lot: even to them hast thou poured a drink offering, thou

hast offered an oblation, *i.e.*, a meal offering (M.). Shall I be appeased for these things?"

Jacob at Bethel, Gen. xxviii. 18, and other places, might easily lead us to this, if occupied with the symbol or memorial instead of with Jehovah. This may, beginning with some smooth stones worn by the stream of the valley into special fancy shapes, going on to taking rough hewn stones and polishing and adorning them. What beautiful pieces of work man has wrought in stone! But it is man's work. How many times have we been asked if we have seen the carving in — or, it may be, a fine screen, etc., etc. I have been to various cathedrals, abbeys, etc., and have been occupied with these things, and yet the place has been built, so they affirm, for the worship of Christ, and man's work is there to admire instead. We may find, as here, that God may say, that is thy portion, that is thy lot. Terrible! These here went to the extent of pouring out a drink-offering to these things to express their devotion, or a meal-offering, to express that it should be that which expresses their life. Here God asks a question, "Shall I be appeased for these things?" We can be sure that nothing less than our whole heart and mind will appease Jehovah.

V. 7. "Upon a high and lofty mountain hast thou set thy bed: thither also wentest thou up to offer sacrifice."

V. 8. "And behind the doors and the posts hast thou set up thy memorial, for thou hast discovered thyself to another than me, and art gone up: thou hast enlarged thy bed, and made

thee a covenant with them. thou lovedst their bed where thou sawest it.”

As we have so frequently seen, idolatry is spiritual adultery, hence the figure and kindred ones are so frequently used. I think the reason is that there is no sin that is so universally abhorred by the natural man as the adultery of his or her partner. As this is the true spiritual meaning of idolatry, the Lord would have us hate it, and see it in its true character. Let us ever keep before us the four-fold aspect of it, namely, a false god, material prosperity, men and self, and any other we may discover. At this time and place their worship was carried on, on the mountains and in the woods. This in itself would lend a charm to this false worship, for what can be pleasanter in nice weather than the mountains or the woods. The awful result comes out here in the fact that those that know the truth may become ashamed of it. This is clearly realised by the fact that we have such hymns as “Ashamed of Jesus,” etc. This is what we have here. In Deut. vi. 9, “And thou shalt write them upon the door-posts of thy house, and upon thy gates.” The same is said again in xi. 20. Here they are carried away with this false worship. Its people and modes of worship appeal to them, and so they put their testimony behind the doors and gates. They are ashamed of it, yet do not feel like abandoning it altogether. I have often thought this strange. The Hindu, Moslem, etc., have not the slightest idea of being ashamed (so it appeared to me) of their religion. The world has no shame of its want of any religion, and yet we do find that God’s people have shame

when in uncongenial company, for instance, they omit saying Grace. I have, however, seen ostentatious behaviour that is equally a bad testimony.

V. 9. "And thou wentest to the king with ointment, and didst increase thy perfumes, and didst send thine ambassadors far off, and didst debase thyself even unto hell."

We see here what an impression the conduct of Ahaz made upon Isaiah, or, we may say, upon the Lord. When Syria and Israel conspired against Judah, instead of strengthening themselves and relying on the Lord, they appealed to Assyria for help, see II. Kings xvi. 7. Time has now, at this point, discovered to all what trouble this had brought about. Here Isaiah refers to it.

V. 10. "Thou wast wearied with the length of thy way; yet saidst thou not, There is no hope: thou didst find a quickening of thy strength; therefore thou wast not faint." Here the nation is reminded that the path of sin is a long and wearying journey, yet their times of reviving only led them on so that they did not give up.

V. 11. "And of whom hast thou been afraid and in fear, that thou liest, and hast not remembered me, nor laid it to thy heart? Have not I held my peace even of long time, and thou fearest me not?"

The fear of man appears to have been their snare, and this was responsible for much of the idolatry. These saw that they must please them, or thought they did. They worshipped their gods

in order to please them, and God held His peace, and so they lost their fear of God. We have only to ponder over it, to see what a terrible thing the fear of man is.

V. 12. "I will declare thy righteousness; and as for thy works, they shall not profit thee. When thou criest, let them which thou hast gathered deliver thee; but the wind shall take them, a breath shall carry them all away: but he that putteth his trust in Me shall possess the land, and shall inherit my holy mountain and he shall say, Cast ye up, cast ye up, prepare the way, take up the stumbling-block out of the way of my people."

The people, for fear of man, may turn to idols or anything that displeases God, yet they will not stand in the day of trouble, for Jehovah will make manifest their righteousness that they seek to establish, and as for their works, idol worship, they shall have no profit, for when they cry to them, let the "rabble of idol deliver thee" (M.) a wind shall carry them away.

Praise God, none of these things need be. There is no reason but our own folly, why we should not trust Jehovah. Then these, *i.e.*, the Jews, will possess the land and inherit His holy mountain, *i.e.*, all that Jehovah promised His people. This, though not taking the same form, is ever true in any dispensation. Obedience secures the reward. This verse 14 appears to me to be attached to the next paragraph.

They were to cast up, cast up, to prepare the way, and take the stumbling-block out of the way. Here, I think, a figure is used of a high-

way, by continued effort, giving entrance into the city, and removing the stumbling-block, as in next verse.

This preparation spiritually would mean that we must get right habits of thinking, the basis of which is to obtain God's thoughts of what comes before our minds. The reason for this is,

V.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 also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones."

Here we get the very foundations of the highway that we should be ever preparing to lead us to our heavenly Jerusalem. We must ever seek to get great thoughts of God, the eternity of His being, His essential character, the fact that He is holy. With this we see He is merciful, for though He dwells in the highest heaven He dwells also in the man who is of a contrite and humble spirit. If we are not, this is the stumbling-block that interferes with God dwelling in us.

Blessed God and Father, we do rejoice that in Thy mercy, this greatly-desired companionship is possible. We bless Thee, for Thy Word and the Holy Ghost. We pray thee that we may so surrender ourselves to Him, that sin will ever fill us with contrition, and fill us with humility. Oh, our God, may we realise Thy greatness and how insignificant we are, apart from Thy grace. There can be no reason for pride, for we have nothing but what Thou hast given us. We bless

Thee that in all this it is our revival that is in Thy mind. We ask this in His Name. Amen.

V. 16. "For I will not contend for ever, neither will I be always wroth: for the spirit should fail before Me, and the souls which I have made. For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth with him, I hid my face and was wroth: and he went on frowardly in the way of his heart. I have seen his ways and will heal him. I will lead him also, and restore comforts unto him and to his mourners. I create the fruit of the lips: Peace, peace, to him that is far off and to him that is near saith the Lord: and I will heal him. But the wicked are like the troubled sea: for it cannot rest, and its waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked."

This assures us that the Lord has set a limit on the time. He disciplines His people, before He fulfils His promise. The reason given is that the spirit of His people would fail. This is enough to make us meditate for a long time. The most prominent reason to me is that the Lord's purpose in His dealings with us is to teach us our total inability to come up to His standard, even by dicipline. Further, it would be seen that even if this were possible, there would be the sin of the past, hence we learn that sovereign grace alone can help the sinner or the saint.

V. 17. "Because of the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth with him, and smote him: so the Lord hid His face (or Himself) from him." Covetousness displaces God, which grieves Him, but as it so often does it leads on to iniquity, *i.e.*,

not equity or fairness in our dealings with man. It then makes God angry. Further, it leads on to the worship of self, *i.e.*, the ways of his heart.

V. 18. "I have seen his ways and will heal him : I will lead him also, and restore comforts unto him and to his mourners."

This reveals to us the mercy of our Lord. He says He has seen his ways, and promises to heal him. However man may fail, sovereign grace can meet his case, but sovereign grace does not leave him where the Lord meets him. The Lord says He "will lead him also." This is the true source of comfort down here, namely, the consciousness that God is leading us day by day. Not only does it comfort us but also all those who have mourned about our ways.

V. 19. "I create the fruit of the lips : Peace, peace to him that is far off and to him that is near, saith the Lord : and I will heal him."

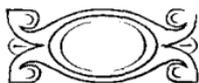
This leads us on to the praise of our mouth or lips, and the peace, peace in our hearts is His work or creating. This goes to Jew and Gentile in the Jewish dispensation, but in the Christian it brings the Gentile into equality, see Eph. ii.

And that he will be healed. Chapter liii. has made this very clear. The peace has been made by the blood of the Cross. A sacrifice was needed. God supplied it.

V. 20. "But the wicked are like the troubled sea : for it cannot rest, and its waters cast up mire and dirt." This verse states the solemn fact that the wicked can never really rest. They

are like the sea; there is always some measure of movement, and as we see on our sea-coasts, it is ever casting up dirt, drift, etc.

V. 21. "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked." This closes the section, as Isaiah xlviii. 22 does. Isaiah takes the personal note, "My God." Dear reader, what is God to thee? Can you say, He is MY God This can only be the ground of peace. For the wicked that cannot say this, God says to them, "There is no peace." This must logically mean for ever in its fullest sense, as we must, being a negative, take its predicate universally.



CHAPTER LVIII.

V. 1. "Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and declare unto my people their transgression, and to the house of Jacob their sins."

What makes this chapter so serious and yet so solemn and profitable to us is that though we have here a terrible state of things, yet we cannot but think that in some measure most of God's children are here.

The prophet is told to lift up his voice like a trumpet, *i.e.*, to be quite certain that all the sections here spoken of hear clearly and plainly. The prophet has been sent to every section of the people, but nowhere do we find He is told to "cry aloud." We seek to find out the reason for this, and are astonished to find that he is sent to the godliest part of the people. Verse 2 will amply prove this. We should have thought that such people would have heard the faintest whisper. So we see there is danger everywhere. How dependent we are on the sovereign grace of God for everything. Everything can become a snare to us, it appears to me. This comes about by our knowledge of the facts stated in verse 2. We insensibly drift into a self-righteous state, so that we can hardly believe that we want messages from God. The cure, I think, must come from at least two directions. We must have a lively

sense of the pit and the miry clay from which we have been digged, and we must also be occupied with the glories and perfections that shine in the Lord Jesus.

May our beloved Lord ever give to us that quality that was so prominent in the apostle Paul. He ever felt, "Not that I have attained, but I follow after." Otherwise, we may find ourselves very much where these were. I have met those who believed that these were hypocrites. To do this we must restrict the meaning of the "My people" to whom this message is sent, then and now. Certainly, if we ever turn our eyes inward, we soon get into despair. We all live in glass houses. If any one of us thinks he is perfection, the impression will be confined to him. If it extends further it will be in the minds of those who do not know him. The message is to declare unto my people their sins, and seek in meekness to receive the lessons.

V. 2. "Yet they seek me daily, and delight to know my ways : as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinances of their God, they ask of me righteous ordinances ; they delight to draw near unto God."

I think as we read this, we must admit that this describes God's real people. We can easily see how this affects the Jew, but we shall all agree, I expect, that God wants each believer of any dispensation to take all truth as far as intended, and apply it to himself. We will do this. We seek the Lord daily. We have our family altar, and would not part with it. We read the Word privately, and if a new truth about God's ways

comes to us or is brought to us, what a delight it is! "As a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinances." This applies more particularly to the Jew, but we have two ordinances, and I am of the opinion that it takes in the customs of our life. All real saints delight in drawing nigh to God in prayer, praise, and worship and companionship. The message is to such. It is a solemn thought.

V. 3. "Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not? Wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge?"

These had fasted and afflicted their souls, but it had failed them, for these things are not anything unless it gives us oneness with God.

To put this in language for us to-day, I will ask the reader if he has, before retiring to rest, knelt by his bedside and said his prayers. "Why yes, of course I have," is the reply. Has he got into bed and felt that though he has said his prayers, that he has not prayed? I am sorry to have to admit my own guilt. I think we can see, can we not, that this is very serious; prayer to God, and God will not hear; I cannot think of anything more dreadful than this. A happy, holy, yet reverent intimacy with God is the only life worth knowing.

Many things will interfere with our happiness in this respect. However, God here gives us four reasons, and any one of these would put a distance between us and God. I remember whilst reading this portion in a conversational Bible reading, that though the friends did not know, the last one hit me very hard indeed. I take the

R.V., which is the reverse of the A.V., which to me does not make sense.

V. 3. "Behold in the days of your fast ye find pleasure, and exact all your labours; behold, ye fast for strife and contention, and to smite with the fist of wickedness; ye fast not this day so as to make your voice to be heard on high."

Now let us examine carefully the reasons why God would not hear when they fast, etc.

(a) "Behold, in the day of your pleasure," that is, in their godly meetings and exercises. This is what we hear as we meet with God's people. "I like the Church of England; the service is so reverent." "I like the atmosphere of the Free churches." Others say, "I like the quiet of the Brethren meeting." Note, that it is "I like, I like." "Ye find your own pleasure."

What we have to do to cure this is to find out what He likes. We can be sure that our meetings will not please God unless they are according to His plan.

(b) "And exact all your labours." The margin has "oppress all your labourers." This takes only one side. The text applies to every one; man, woman, or child. I think it will do us good to ponder over this. I can only think it means that we want plenty for our money. In fact, we should like one shilling and sixpence worth for a shilling. The writer has met those who are not happy unless they have bargains. I remember as a young man, when I first read of Abraham, that when he went to buy a bit of land from the children of Heth, he said he would give a fair

price for the land. I was charmed. I do like the spirit that is willing to give the fair price for the article. I can quite see that there may be occasions when bargains are justifiable, as long as both sides are pleased with the transaction. God certainly will not be pleased if one takes advantage of the other.

(c) "Ye fast for strife and contention." Is this possible at places where prayer and praise is wont to be made? Alas, it is possible. I have many years ago seen bad cases, and I yet hear of others. We must remember that it is a matter of degree, but whatever else it may be if in our own heart there is jealousy, envy, or want of love, there it is. The reason for this is the displacement of God by self—the fourth phase of idolatry at which we have recently been looking. How all these things create unhappiness is but too evident.

(d) "Ye fast not this day so as to make your voice to be heard on high." The A.V. here, to me does not make sense.

This last clause put the writer under very severe discipline. We were reading several years ago this portion at a conversational Bible reading, and though no one but myself knew what was going on, I did, and shall never forget it. We had a hymn, prayer and hymn before we started the conversation. We came to this verse. Like a dart, the question came to me, "Did you sing those two hymns to Me, that I may hear them on high?" I said, "Lord, I approve of the words of the hymns; they are beautiful; I liked the singing and the tunes." "That is not the question," came the reply. "Did you, or did you not, sing

those hymns definitely to Me?" I said, "Lord, forgive me; I am afraid I did not, but Thou shalt have the next hymn." This lesson I have not consistently carried out, but it is ever with me. Praise His Name!

I think, boys and girls, we can ponder over this point for a season. It comes to this. If we worship contrary to His plan, or if we are selfish and greedy, or if we have a spirit of strife and contention, or if we in our prayers and praises do not present them definitely to God, He will not hear us. I think we must all see it would be absurd to expect anything else.

Now we get what a true fast is. We get it first negatively, then positively, in order that we may not make mistakes. I have known those that will not eat meat on Friday. If this is true, to have fish, etc., makes it absurd to call this a fast. I used to have fish on Friday for years, because it was more abundant then, where I lived. I had it for a pleasant change. In Africa they keep the fast of Ramadam all day and have a feast at night. Mystics reduce their bodies to the last point of strength. It does seem to me that where there is feasting, for the sake of health there must be fasting. In days of mourning or sorrow we generally go off our food, so that nature tells us the same story as scriptures do. I can hardly see that when a Christian has the sense of His presence, and rejoices in the Lord, that fasting is wanted. But when in sorrow it is done without ostentation, just between ourselves and the Lord, it may be wise to do it. If happy with the Lord about the course we adopt, that is all that is required.

I have felt that a life of self-denial every day is the true fast.

V. 5. "Is such the fast that I have chosen? The day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head as a rush (M. bulrush) and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the Lord?"

I think, dear reader, to these three questions the answer is "No."

Why is this not a day for a man to afflict his soul?

There are times when this appears to have been the right thing to do, but not this day, because, as we read on, we see that there are wrong things to be righted. It will not do for the Lord, to afflict your soul and yet injure another. The duty is obvious. Put things right first, then, if inclined, you may afflict your soul for ever having put things wrong.

"Is it to bow the head as a rush?" I have said I know nothing of Hebrew. "Rush" is a general term, and would include the bulrush. Many rushes have no head, but the bulrush has a beautiful head. Hence the A.V. gives more sense to me.

It will be well to find out when we are said to bow the head as a bulrush. When we go into a meeting it is the custom to bow the head, if the heart goes up to God in real prayer. That is not bowing the head like a bulrush; anything less than reality is. It is the same at meals or at any other time.

“To spread sackcloth and ashes under him.” All these attitudes are quite right and proper if there is reality, for that is what God will have. I remember when at Brighton I went to a prayer-meeting. There were three other brethren and three sisters; I made the seventh. However, I was a stranger to them. As they were all elderly, they did not attempt a hymn. They all got on their knees before God, and the three brethren took the full hour. It was a severe tax on my knees. The two first prayers were beautiful, but the last brother said simply, “Oh Lord, we know that Thou wilt have reality. Oh Lord, make us real.” He said this in every possible way, and nothing else for twenty minutes or more. What with my knees, and the constant repetition, I groaned in spirit and kept longing for him to leave off. But one thing was present with me, and that was that God will have reality. Years have passed away. I have forgotten the first two prayers, but the third stands out in all its power to-day. I thank and bless God for the experience. When I hear God say, “Wilt thou call this a fast, an acceptable day unto the Lord?” it reminds me of the experience. Now God speaks positively.

V. 6. “Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the bands of the yoke, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?”

I have no doubt the sin that aroused God’s anger against His people at this time is the same as we get in Jeremiah xxxiv., namely, that those who from poverty or any other reason were bound

six years as bond-servants, the rich and powerful made perpetual slaves. Nothing arouses God's anger more than oppression, whether it is Israel in the past or Russia in the present, and, dear reader, this will take in the small people too. If a mistress has a maid taken from an orphan home, or she is simple and cannot defend herself, or if an employer has a workman who has many children or a sick wife, and they hold the whip over them in any form; depend upon it, in God's time and way, it will be dealt with. Woe to the nation or the person that by their conduct render others unhappy. We must be just.

This also goes further. To the extent of our ability, we should seek to break every yoke.

V. 7. "Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? When thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?"

What we are asked to do is to have practical sympathy, first, with our own flesh, then to others.

We must remember that it is not what we cannot do but, what we can, that God expects. I know that the way people squander their substance in all sorts of indulgences often shuts the pocket, and it would only aggravate matters if it did not, but this is no excuse for selfishness. Real cases must be sought out, and experience will confirm what I say, that it will make life down here a heaven below if we do. At any rate, we command the blessing when we act with a little common humanity.

V. 8. "Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thy healing shall spring forth speedily; and thy righteousness shall go before thee: and the glory of the Lord shall be thy rearward."

What a beautiful figure is the rising sun, especially where there is mountain and sea! This is the figure to represent true faith expressing itself in works.

"And thy healing shall spring forth speedily." What a wonderful God we have. There is no delay with Him. He is like the father that ran to meet the prodigal son and threw his arms around his neck. This is what we have here; there is no course of probation. God is only too glad to see us right. Let me illustrate. I said earlier that I promised the Lord that He should have the third hymn, and so He did. As I sang I could feel all the healthy impulses running through me, and I knew we were at one. This is not a theory; this is a fact, and one that any believer can prove. Should he backslide to any extent, let him return with a penitent heart, and he will find a Father's smile. What a difference between God and us! If we have a feeling we must forgive; we do not always feel we can forget so easily.

The latter part of this verse appears to be a military figure. There is the vanguard and the rearguard.

"And thy righteousness shall go before thee." This is the advance guard. It has been my privilege to hear of some of God's dear people, long before I have got to know them, and when

I have, I have felt the Saviour was with them, and truly the glory of the Lord became their rearward. Of this word "glory" I do not know the meaning in Hebrew, but in Greek it comes from a word "I think." I had to ponder this for some time, till it was given me to see that I can bring no glory to God unless my words and deeds raise the thought of God in the minds of others. To put this into practice is most important. Blessed God and Saviour, we remember that Thou hast told us that we are Thy witnesses. May the Holy Ghost so enable us to live that the effect may be, on those with whom we have to do, that their thoughts of God be raised to a higher level.

V. 9. "Then shalt thou call, and the Lord shall answer; thou shalt cry, and He shall say, Here I am."

What a remarkable effect does a little practical sympathy have! There is no more saying our prayers only to find we have not prayed. Unless we exercise a common humanity, God does not care to walk with us.

What a cheering thought it is, is it not, dear reader, to be quite conscious that God hears our prayers, and that when we cry He says, "Here I am." This, indeed, is heaven below. I know of no joy so keen as the sense of God's presence. We see that God knows our foolish hearts, and does not want us to miss the blessing, so with great kindness he re-states the conditions.

"If thou take away from thee the yoke, the putting forth of the finger, and speaking wickedly :

V. 10. "And if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry (see M.) and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in darkness, and thine obscurity as the noon-day."

In a word, there is to be no oppression, no scorn, no unkind or untrue speech. We are to do our part in helping those in want, and, as I have said, God never wants more than we can do. No man can satisfy all. In my own favourite phrase—when we are happy with the Lord about it, we can be quite sure He will let us know when He is not happy with us. When this is true, our darkness shall become light, and the obscure things become clear.

To illustrate this, I will state in a few words a story I read. It was, I think, a German town; at any rate the coinage had thalers in it. A sceptical notary met the pastor. He said, "Well, pastor, been showing the people the way to heaven lately?" "Yes," replied the pastor. "Do you know anyone who has been there?" "Yes," replied the pastor, "I was there this morning." "What!" said the startled notary, "do you mean to say that you were there this morning and have come back?" "Yes," replied the pastor. The notary said, "Can anyone go? I would like to try it, if I could be quite sure I could come back." "Certainly you can," was the reply, "only it will cost you a few thalers." "Well," said the notary, "I will certainly try it."

The pastor said, "Do you see that white cottage up there? There is an old lady there who has scarcely any food, light, or warmth. Take her some groceries, meat, wood, etc. You must

take it yourself; you cannot go to heaven by proxy."

When the pastor met him next time, he said, "Did you go to heaven the other day?" With tears in his eyes, he replied, "I did, Pastor, and by God's grace I will go again."

This has necessarily been cut short and told in my own words, but anyone can test it for himself. It is one of the many things we can prove. Sometimes darkness and even doubts take possession of us, but a little pure religion (see James) will soon drive the darkness away.

V. 11. "And the Lord shall guide thee continually."

What a charm it is, as we look back at the pilgrim path we have traversed, to see the good hand of the Lord leading, guiding, and directing. Even before we knew the Lord, we see that some of the painful experiences have been just the training we wanted. It is truly wonderful.

"And satisfy thy soul in a dry place." I remember for two and a half years the path of duty took me into a very dry place, and truly, just between me and Him, He did satisfy my soul. But mark, it was in the path of duty. If I had gone for pleasure, He would not satisfy. Note that I said the path of duty took me there.

"And make thy bones strong." I can only think that just as a strong frame is essential and would be a wonderful support physically, what we have before us would make a strong spiritual framework.

“And thou shalt be like a well-watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not.”

The Lord is showering His blessings upon us, and the Holy Ghost within is springing up into all these things.

This was spoken directly to the Jewish nation, but as we can only have a sound whole if each part is sound, this is equally true of the Church to-day.

V. 12. “And they that shall be of thee shall build the old waste places: thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of paths to dwell in.”

I have no doubt the first meaning refers to the time of their return to Jerusalem. This was about 140 years later. We know how that failed because of their failure to walk in the path of practical godliness. We can be sure that such truths as our faith being full of works of love would restore many of our waning assemblies. It would, indeed, repair the breach, and restore the assembly that we could dwell there in love and comfort.

V. 13. “If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, and the holy of the Lord honourable, and shalt honour it (M. or Him) not doing thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words.”

Here we see the services of good works are sanctified by the services of worship. These two can never be separated. All true faith leads to

Christ and the worship of Him as God and Saviour. This brings a living faith; it must be expressed in works. As we read our Bible, as boys and girls, we can easily see that the keeping of the Sabbath united and sustained Israel as a religious community.

Now note the wondrous promise. If thou wilt not seek to do thy pleasure on the Sabbath day, and here I think business is included, nor speaking thine own words :

V. 14. "Then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord; and I will make thee to ride upon the high places of the earth: and I will feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it."

Then we delight in the Lord. There is no other way. "Faith issuing forth in works" alone will suit our loving Lord. The closer we walk with Him in the way He walked, the greater our delight.

Then God re-states the promise to place them foremost among the nations of the earth; in a word, to give them the imperial position he has ever intended to give the Jewish nation. The reason for this is "For the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it." This is solid ground. It is the only solid ground to me. We quite see that this is the Jewish blessing, but we Christians, if we live according to the principles laid down here, we shall be "blessed in every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places." For surely we love the Lord's day as much as they should have done the Sabbath.

CHAPTER LIX.

V. 1. "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither His ear heavy, that it cannot hear: but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, and He will not hear."

The prophet, when dealing with the first half of the book, lays a historical basis for the great truths He brings before them in the latter half of the book. We must remember that right from the beginning of the Jewish nation, even so far back as the call of Abraham, God called Abraham that in him all the nations of the earth should be blessed. He was to form a nation that should be a pattern and a lesson for all the nations. All who blessed Abraham would be blessed, and all who cursed Abraham were to be cursed. He was to be God's agent for blessing, and it was, and is, perilous to interfere with God. History testifies to this. If we think of the present time, 1932 A.D. we find that the world is in a state of fear, and that distress abounds. What can we expect, when men are chosen to govern who promise most, and who do not object to any course of robbery and oppression in seeking to fulfil their promises, instead of making character the ground of their choice. Our iniquities will ever separate us from God. His hand is not shortened, nor has He lost His hearing.

What a boon was the revival in the times of Wesley and Whitefield. It is generally accepted that it saved this country (England) from revolution. There is no question but that the world is hopeless, where Christ is not Lord. What a boon the great fact is that God's hand and ear are ever open to those that own Christ, or Jehovah (for it is the same) as Lord. Till the Lord comes, the Gospel is all we need. For over half a century I have associated with God's people, and we have gathered together to read His Word and converse about it. Only last night I gathered with about one hundred, all bright and happy. Most of them were young men and women, full of mutual love and help. The only trouble is that which I have read John Wesley said to his friends who were worshippers with him. He said, "I am afraid for you. Your habits of thrift and industry will make you rich. There will be your danger."

The only method I would suggest here is that every Assembly ought to have some definite plan to meet human need, however small the Assembly may be.

V. 3. "For your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies, your tongue uttereth wickedness."

As we read the history of God's people, we see how this is. The Lord had a remnant of men who were faithful and true, but alas, the majority were not out to please God. These people were by birth Jews, so that blessing does not come that way. With the Church it comes by the new birth. But alas! As so many writers have

warned us, ungodly men have crept in unawares, for the lucrative positions or love of power, so that Christendom has as terrible a history as anything else.

V. 4. "None seeth (*M. calleth*) in righteousness, and none pleadeth in truth; they trust in vanity, and speak lies; they conceive mischief, and bring forth iniquity."

What a terrible picture of social and judicial wickedness we have here! As a young man it would have been hard for me to believe such a strong statement. We have but to read our newspapers, if we cannot credit it. All sections of the people are affected by this mad rush for material gain, pleasure, power, etc.

V. 5. "They hatch basilisk's eggs (*M. adders*) and weave the spider's web; he that eateth their eggs dieth, and that which is crushed breaketh out into a viper."

The point is here that their food is wrong. They certainly did not come, as chapter iv. exhorts us to, with three blessed "Come ye" to the waters for wine and milk. These never appear to be meditating as to how they can be a blessing, but are ever thinking and planning things for selfish interest. And woe betide those who eat them. It is loss to them. Generally, these people, when they seek to hatch adders' eggs, attract them by an appeal to people's cupidity. I think our food is that which we meditate upon. For years I have thought of meditation as "chewing the cud."

V. 6. "Their webs shall not become garments, neither shall they cover themselves with their

works; their works are works of iniquity, and the act of violence is in their hands." We are all weaving garments. Garments used as a figure of speech stand for character. We must all stand before God clothed. With Adam and Eve it was a fig-leaf garment of their own weaving, but they could not stand before God till He provided the garment. Here it suggests to me spiders' webs versus linen clean and white. Spiders' webs are the selfish works of wicked men; linen clean and white are the self-denying works of those who love God. Actually spiders' webs are woven to catch flies.

V. 7. "Their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed innocent blood: their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity desolation and destruction are in their paths."

We get many descriptions of these in Ps. xiv., liii., Romans iii., etc. We see that their thoughts are the root of the trouble. "For as he reckoneth or thinketh within himself, so is he," Prov. xxiii. 7.

V. 8. "The way of peace they know not, and there is no right (M.) in their goings: they have made them crooked paths; whosoever goeth therein doth not know peace."

There is only one straight path: "Is it right?" I seem to see that there is a distinct decline in men's point of view. In times past I used to think that if I could convince a man that it was not just, the last word had been said. Now it appears to me that I have to shew him what he will get out of it. Yet the Lord said it is more

blessed to give than to receive. We have but to keep our eyes open to see that the straight path only leads to peace; that crooked ways not only lead to being a stranger to peace, but that all sorts of troubles attend the crooked way. There can be no greater possession down here than peace with God which issues forth into the peace of God and is crowned with the fellowship with the God of peace.

V. 9. "Therefore is judgement far from us, neither doth righteousness overtake us: we look for light but behold darkness; for brightness, but we walk in obscurity."

What a terrible Nemesis follows the wrongdoer; the man that lives for self! This and other verses fully shew this, and how true it is! They lose their judgement; self so looms up before their eyes that it is impossible to come to a right conclusion. How can righteousness attend the path of a selfish person? Whatever they may profess, it is clear they know not the Lord. And it is the Lord who is our light, and it is He that makes our lives bright and happy. Sin and self bring gloom and obscurity. Hence we read,

V. 10. "We grope for the wall like the blind, yea, we grope as they that have no eyes: we stumble at noonday, as in the twilight: among them that are lusty we are as dead men."

We in London know something about fogs. We are practically without eyes. To make for the wall is the first thing we seek to do. Here is a picture of the wicked. All seems to go well for a time, but it breaks out sooner or later and is manifest.

V. 11. "We roar like bears, and mourn like doves : we look for judgement, but there is none : for salvation, but it far from us."

According to a note I have made in my Bible these figures of the bear and dove are impatience and melancholy.

V. 12. "For our transgressions are multiplied before Thee, and our sins testify against us ; and as for our iniquities, we know them."

How true this last expression is ! As I have passed through my pilgrim journey, men who have held their heads high and have sought a reputation have come to me for advice when trouble, and sometimes dishonour, have come upon them. They have said, "I have opposed all that I knew in my heart to be right, but I could not give up my sins." They practically repeat verse 13.

V. 13. "In transgressing and denying the Lord, and turning away from following our God, speaking oppression and revolt, conceiving and uttering from the heart words of falsehood."

We have seen by the previous verse that the people know their sins, and in times of trouble when they confide in others, they say so. But alas ! this verse tells us that many persist in transgression, etc. If we ponder over this verse carefully it is clear that the whole man is sick ; his heart, his mouth, and his head. Each section of society appears to have a different trouble, though all the body gets affected. What is the outcome of this ? Having refused to follow God, *i.e.*, His Word, those who are scholars, if

their heart is wrong, soon, according to the Levitical figure, suffer from leprosy of the head, and it is not long before they devise plans, schemes, combines, unions, and I know not what. But let a man stand against these interferences with his liberty, however righteous he may be, he will become a prey, as we see in the next verse.

V. 14. "And judgement (*i.e.*, justice) is turned away backward, and righteousness standeth afar off; for truth is fallen in the street and uprightness cannot enter."

What a dreadful picture this is! How true this is of Russia at the present time! They have no desire to please God, and have no desire for Him in their plans of betterment, etc. Persecution to torture and death is frequently the result. But we know there is another side to this; let them say and think what they will.

V. 15. "Yea, truth is lacking, and he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey."

In such times when those rule who should be in prison for their crimes, one cannot believe a word they say, and when one seeks to stand for truth or righteousness he is crushed if possible.

"And the Lord saw it, and it displeased Him, that there was no judgement, (*i.e.*, justice)."

This is the foundation of comfort that a believer has. We cannot understand, but the knowledge that He sees and knows is indeed a comfort. Hence the prophet reminds his countrymen that there was much injustice then, but he further tells that God is displeased when He sees injustice.

V. 16. "And He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was none to interpose (M.)" This thought of God wondering is akin to where it says, "Jesus marvelled." I think it is so put that we should have our attention called to it, in order that we should wonder. I have heard that when a funny story was told, a person who received it with silence was asked, "Why don't you laugh?" With a little explanation, he was enabled to do so.

I have wondered, and I expect boys and girls do, as they begin to grow up, why it is that mankind allows such wickedness, or rather cruelty, to exist. We think of the inhuman treatment given in Russia to innocent and harmless people by those who have usurped authority over them. Their ostensible reason is that they will all be able to get their bread and butter under better conditions. I expect the real reason is love of power, with access to all they desire. We think of the disordered state of China, etc. We come to our own beloved land, and the crime that is tolerated is terrible.

Some nations have testified their dislike to it. This nation in return seem bent on bringing disorder and trouble everywhere, and we wonder why it is allowed. With some it may be called callousness or indifference, but I am inclined to think it is the fear of consequences; they think that if they are left alone they will not suffer for others. When we read our papers and note the leniency of the sentences for brutal and intolerable crime, we can only assume the same reason. But the marvel to me is that we allow our police who are protecting us to be stoned. Truly, as it

has so often been said and written, "Man's inhumanity to man has made countless millions mourn." Here comes our comfort.

"Therefore His own arm brought salvation unto Him, and His righteousness upheld him." You will note the capitals tell the way I read this verse. It is the Lord's arm and righteousness that brings salvation and support to the injured one.

All through the word of God we are fully assured that the Lord notes and sees all, and will deal with it in His own time. We are to realise that it would not be tolerated at all, but that the Lord in His wisdom has included all that His own suffer, and this will be found among the things that work together for good to them that love Him.

It is interesting to compare this armour with Ephesians vi., where we have to put it on. Here it is the Lord who puts it on.

V. 17. "And He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and an helmet of salvation upon His head; and He put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as with a cloke."

There are certainly four points in this verse that should be a comfort to us. The first is that all will be done in righteousness. He will never be unjust. He loves that which is right. When the last judgements are poured out, we have seen in Revelation that He comes to judge the quick, *i.e.*, those that are alive. When He comes He is on a white cloud. Then, after the Millennium, the dead, *i.e.*, those that are wicked. He is on a white throne. This assurance shows us, like

this text here, that all He does is right. The breastplate covers the heart; the helmet covers the head, shewing that His intention is salvation. The whole earth will be free from sin and sorrow. He has ever told us not to avenge ourselves, for vengeance is His. His love of right does not want us to go beyond the judicial vengeance laid down in the word for our guidance. Lastly, as far as this verse is concerned, though the delay is trying to us, we are assured He is clad with zeal. There is no delay. In due time it will be done.

V. 18. "According to their deeds, accordingly He will repay fury to His adversaries, recompense to His enemies; to the islands or coastlands He will repay recompense."

As we have been so often reminded that none will be judged beyond that is just, before the great white throne the books are opened that each man may be judged according to his works.

V. 19. "So shall they fear the name of the Lord from the West, and His glory from the rising of the sun." This means right round the world, for if two men could travel direct, and they start their journey, one going east, the other west, they would meet. And it is the Lord they fear. (Always the Lord).

"For He shall come as a rushing stream which the breath of the Lord driveth." This can be read in two ways, I think. The pronoun "he" could, I think, be "He," *i.e.*, the Lord. With verse 20 I am inclined to follow the margin, though the effect comes to the same thing.

V. 20. "And a redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the Lord." The time is come, the Redeemer of Jacob is here. At this point, and as far as Jacob is concerned, I gather that there will be no transgression, *i.e.*, the Jew will have thoroughly learnt his lesson. Though we read that some will yield a feigned obedience, with my present information I have to restrict this to the Gentiles.

V. 21. "And as for Me, this is my covenant with them, saith the Lord: my Spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the Lord, from henceforth and for ever."

I do like the expression, "And as for Me." The Lord says, this is where He is in this matter. Dear reader, this is the all-important factor on any question, is it not, *i.e.*, what is the Lord's attitude or mind on the question before us? We are told what it is here, namely, that the Holy Ghost will ever be upon Jacob, and His word in his mouth and to his seed for ever. I have been taught to believe that a negative predicate must be taken universally, so it means to me that the Lord has had enough of failure, and that He will keep them from it for ever. Praise His name, it does not stop with Jacob. See other scriptures. But this is good. It is at this point, *i.e.*, the coming of the Lord to the earth, true of His Christian saints, for when He comes we come with Him, and, as we know, His heart wants, and will have the Gentiles also.

CHAPTER LX.

V. 1. "Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee."

Note that Jacob is told to do two things, *i.e.*, "to arise." There is no more going to sleep over the Lord's work. He is to arise and "shine." His walk is now to correspond to his state. The Apostle would describe us as sleeping when we walk indifferently (Eph. v. 14). "Wherefore He saith, Awake thou that sleepest and arise from the dead, and Christ shall shine upon thee." The reason is that his light, *i.e.*, the Lord, is come. We often sing, "The Light of the world is Jesus."

V. 2. "For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people, but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and His glory shall be seen upon thee."

Here we see Zion is to shine, and the glory of the Lord will shine on her, and so Zion becomes full of light, and she exerts such an attractive force that nations walk in her light.

V. 3. "And nations shall come to thy light, and Kings to the brightness of thy rising."

We shall see as we read on what a wonderful influence the Jewish nation will exercise over the Gentile nations.

What a joy to us that have accepted Christ that our light is come ! We have realised in a wonderful way that if we walk with Him, there can be no problem in our lives but He can make it clear.

V. 4. "Lift up thine eyes round about, and see : they all gather themselves together, they come to thee ; thy sons shall come from far, and thy daughters shall be carried in the arms."

In verse 3 we have seen that nations and kings are attracted to her, but here we have her sons and daughters coming from far, evidently referring to the time when Israel comes home to Judah. We know from elsewhere what an affecting scene that will be, see Jer. xxxii. 41.

V. 5. "Then thou shalt see and be lightened, and thine heart shall tremble and be enlarged ; because the abundance of the sea shall be turned unto thee, and the wealth of the nations shall come unto thee."

It was not without reason that God selected the position of Palestine. It is the hub of three continents, and now there is nothing to interfere with the benefits accruing from its position. Beyond all this there is the directive will of God that this should be so. Wealth flows into the land from all nations. I have no doubt it is this immense wealth that after a thousand years excites the cupidity of the nations when Satan is loosed for a little while (Rev. xx. 3). Praise His Name, the effect upon His people is, their heart shall tremble and be enlarged. Their heart trembles because they realise the immense responsibility wealth brings with it. It is enlarged.

This can only be true when it is used unselfishly. Accumulation is no heart enlargement, but sharing is.

V. 6. "The multitude of camels shall cover thee, the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah, they shall all come from Sheba, they shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall proclaim the praises of the Lord."

Surely the abundance of wealth could not go in a better direction. We note that the wealth is not taken or sent, they bring it. Let us remember that it is not a delusion that has come over the people. They are quite intelligent, but they are quick to see that the best use of wealth is in God's service, for then all are remembered. When we use our wealth thus, our hearts, as theirs, delight in proclaiming the praises of the Lord.

V. 7. "All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered together unto thee, the rams of Nebaioth shall minister unto thee, they shall come up with acceptance on mine altar, and I will glorify (M. beautify) the house of my glory (M. my beautiful house)."

Here we see that those that make good use of their wealth with enlarged hearts will have the resources of Arabia for the supply of their altars, and these will be accepted, and He will glorify or beautify the house. This can be done when the worshippers are right. This makes all the difference. As we see, the beauty of the Christian church depends upon the moral beauty of its members representing their Head.

V. 8. "Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows?"

I believe it is generally answered by saying that the people are returning in large numbers, and that their ships would come in as the doves return to their windows. In these days we think of airships, and it seems to add colour to the scene, when sea, land, and air vie with each other to bring them home to the land and others with them, for we must not forget it is the name of the Lord that is the attractive force.

V. 9. "Surely the isles shall wait for me, and the ships of Tarshish first, to bring their sons from far, their silver and their gold with them, for the name of the Lord thy God, and for the Holy One of Israel, because He hath glorified thee."

It is indeed a most wonderful picture. The attention of the whole world seems directed to glorify the Lord and bless His people, because the Lord had glorified them. I cannot see why Tarshish should be first unless it is that Spain with Russia holds a bad record for persecuting the Jews, hence they are first to make amends.

V. 10. "And strangers shall build up thy walls, and their kings shall minister unto thee: for in my wrath I smote thee, but in my favour have I had mercy upon thee."

When we think of the intensity of the struggle for Jerusalem just before the Lord's coming, the damage must be immense. We can get some idea from the devastation in the North of France as a result of the war of 1914-1918. Here the

change of mind is so great owing to the coming of the Lord that reparations are fully made and are done heartily, because they see the Lord is with them. How differently are the reparations being made now! When we bring the Lord into any scene or condition it makes all the difference.

V. 11. "Thy gates also shall be open continually. They shall not be shut day nor night: that men may bring unto thee the wealth of the nations, and their Kings led with them."

The reason for shutting the gates of a city is for protection. There is no need here, for there is no foe, foreign or civil. We think we are much wiser than our fathers. We laugh at the idea of enclosures, and burglars laugh too, for they can easily get away. Apart from the gates of London, our fathers had enclosures called inns, such as Grays Inn, Lincolns Inn, etc., which could be shut at night.

Further, gates are an interruption, gladly put up within a place where crime cannot be successfully met, but now in the Millennium they interfere with the blessing coming in.

What is this blessing? Wealth, material wealth. We are fully assured that the spiritual tone of the people will be very high, so that we are brought to see that wealth (if not an incentive to crime) is a blessing, if used unselfishly and not over-valued.

V. 12. "For that nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish: yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted."

I think it is evident that these nations will deserve all they get. For there is not the slight-

est evidence that I know of, that at this time the Jews will be selfish. The whole plan is devised by God that Jerusalem should be a centre of blessing for the whole earth, so that if any nation opposes so beneficent a plan, their hearts must be corrupt.

V. 13. "The glory of Lebanon shall come unto thee; the fir tree, the pine, and the box-tree together: to beautify the place of my sanctuary, and I will make the place of my feet glorious."

This is attractive. It is to be a garden city, and an ideal one, for the word "together" suggests abundance, and to beautify suggests taste; but what will make it the Millennial city is because His sanctuary is there. We have garden cities, such as Bournemouth, etc., but the centre and attraction is not God's sanctuary. I have been in the camp meetings in the forests of America, where Christians gather together for the Word, praise, and prayer. The spot is ideal. The accommodation is very crude, but that did not trouble them; they were together, and Christ is all. The only difference I can see is that the spiritual tone will be of the highest in all, and the accommodation will be the very reverse of crude.

What a beautiful picture is Psalm 99 of this time!

V. 14. "And the sons of them that afflicted thee shall come bending unto thee; and all they that despised thee shall bow themselves down at the soles of thy feet, and they shall call thee, The city of the Lord, the Zion of the Holy One of Israel. Those that afflicted them, I have no

doubt, will receive the fruit of their wicked works, except those who repented (if any) and came to God. Here we are told that when God is manifestly at work, their son's minds will be changed towards them, and they will be delighted to honour those whom God honours, because it is as clear as a sunbeam that the Lord is with them and that He is holy.

V. 15. "Whereas thou hast been forsaken and hated, so that no man passed through thee, I will make thee an eternal excellency, a joy of many generations.

This suggests that it goes beyond the thousand years, possibly into the new earth, certainly a joy all the time.

V. 16. "Thou shalt also suck the milk of the nations, and shalt suck the breast of kings : and thou shalt know that I the Lord am thy Saviour, and thy Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob."

The figure here is that of a child, not of a vampire. It is a joy to a mother to suckle her child. So that, when the attitude of the world is as a mother to her children, it will indeed give them a knowledge of God as their Saviour and Redeemer in a wonderful way.

V. 17. "For brass I will bring gold, and for iron I will bring silver ; and for wood brass, and for stoues iron. I will also make thy officers peace and thine exactors righteousness. Violence shall no more be heard in thy land ; desolation, nor destruction within thy borders ; but thou shalt call thy walls Salvation, and thy gates Praise."

The thought of verse 17 to me is that every thing will be most desirable. There will be no need to have anything made of any material but that which is most suitable. Though this is so, it will produce no pride or any other dreadful thing in their minds, for all their officers will make for peace and righteousness.

V. 19. "The sun shall be no more thy light by day ; neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee : but the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory (or beauty M.). Thy sun shall no more go down, neither shall thy moon withdraw itself : for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light and the days of thy mourning shall be ended."

When we turn to Rev. xx. and xxii. we see the picture of the Heavenly Jerusalem. We saw in reading Revelation that in the things of God there is to be no need of Sun and Moon. In this picture of the earthly Jerusalem we get a similar picture, if not so vivid. It could hardly be literal in the Millennial city, but if the Jew is to be on the New Earth we might take it so. We can, however, be sure that spiritually it will be true in the Millennial reign of Christ, or in the new heavens and earth.

V. 21. "Thy people shall be all righteous, they shall inherit the land for ever ; the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified."

Here again we get the thought that though some give feigned obedience it is not the Jew, as they will be all righteous. There is no reason

therefore why they should forfeit the land, so that it will be theirs for ever.

V. 22. "The little one will become a thousand, and the small one a strong nation : I the Lord will hasten it in its time."

At this time the Jews will possess the land originally promised them. We have but to look at the map in order to see its immense size, and it will be well populated. We are cheered and comforted by the last expression. "I the Lord, will hasten it in its time." We often say "How long, O Lord?" especially when we see the cruelty and callousness of the world. The Lord sends this as a message to us. There will be no delay. He will hasten it in its time. Just as we are promised, "He that cometh will come and will not tarry."



CHAPTER LXI.

“The spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings to the poor, He hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison (M. eyes) to them that are bound, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.”

When reading the life-story of our beloved Lord, we read in Luke iv. 16 that He came to Nazareth, the place where He was brought up. Think of this expression. Think of the Creator, a little boy in Nazareth, being brought up: His custom was each Sabbath to go into the synagogue (*i.e.*, the Jewish name for the Assembly), and He stood up to read, with a view to ministry, as the Apostles often did, and as we do in our own Assemblies on the Lord's day. What a wise custom for all to have! He selected this passage, and when He had read it, He said, “This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears,” and all bare Him witness and wondered at the words of grace which proceeded from His mouth.

To us who believe in His Name, they are indeed words of grace. The Lord told us elsewhere that “The poor ye have always with you.” Here, nearly two thousand years after, it is true to-day in spite of all the politicians may do. We do not despise their labours; wise and good laws

are good, but alas, how few realise the value of the gospel to the poor. Russia will not have it at all, and fourteen years have passed, nearly three five-year plans, and how dreadful the state! Should they accomplish their aims, we can see (if they do) that men may have material wealth, but will be bound in dreadful fetters and living lives that decent people to-day would blush to live.

The writer has seen large numbers among the poorest accepting Christ. They become sober, industrious and thrifty to such an extent that as I have said before somewhere, the fear of John Wesley for his people was that they would grow rich, and then would come their testing-time. All true reform must come from within, else it is a disappointment. Seeing this, many beloved brothers and sisters in Christ earn their own bread, and spend practically all their leisure in making the good news known. This is indeed a happy life to live. We all strongly recommend it.

This blessed gospel binds up the broken heart. Those who seek to make the good news known come across not only broken-hearted people, but the sick and the dying. Without refusing anything that may help, we realise that to give effective help we must open the Book, and it is the result we see that makes us so happy in the work. This blessed Gospel proclaims liberty to the captive. I have read somewhere something to this effect, "Stone walls and bars do not a prison make." Bad habits do. What a joy it is to meet those who have been slaves to sin or bad habits, and to hear their testimony. If any

doubt this, let them call on the London or any other City Mission. It would be a revelation to them.

The Blessed Gospel opens the eyes of the blind. This here is the prison to them that are bound. The margin has Luke iv. 18. I have put "blind" because the previous verse deals with their being captive, but I do see that to be literally blind a man is really in a prison. So, take it to be a figure of those that cannot see the true significance of things and their values.

When a man is born from above he can then see to read his Bible, which gives the only true insight into the values of the things that we have to do with, for it reveals God's mind about everything.

The blessed Gospel proclaims the year of the Lord's good pleasure. What an insight does this give us into His character! For what a person delights in is indeed an index to the man himself. Here we see that the Lord's acceptable year is when His salvation is a fact of history.

We praise His Name, for He does give every gospel-worker many instalments as he passes along his pilgrim journey. Here the Lord stops. Why? We shall try to see the reason.

"And the day of vengeance of our God."

Our beloved Lord closed the book at the sentence before this, because this had not yet come, and has not yet come. This leaves time, dear reader, for you, if you have not fled to His beloved Son for salvation. Do it at once, for when it does come it will be sudden.

This church age, which began at Pentecost, when the Holy Ghost came down and formed this present church, "a new man" as it is described in Ephesians, will be caught up with all the dead in Christ (I. Thess. iv.). This is a parenthesis, one of several in the Scriptures. This particular one is found in Daniel ix. 24-27. In verse 24, seventy weeks, or seventy sevens are decreed upon *thy* people. Verse 25 divides it into seven and sixty-two. Verse 26 tells us that after sixty-two weeks the Messiah is cut off, and shall have nothing. "They all forsook Him and fled." Sixty-nine times seven equals 483. These are clearly years, easily proved by Scripture. This is the year from the time given in verse 23 that Christ was crucified. If we count it up with paper and pencil, we may find it four years out. I think Sir Robert Anderson fully accounts for these four years.

What could God do with a world that crucifies His Son but pour out His wrath upon them? But He stopped the clock of this prophecy in His mercy, and formed the new man at just the point in which the Lord stopped reading. But before His day of vengeance comes, there is the one week to be disposed of, and we find the most detailed account of this week in Revelation iv. and v. in Heaven, in chapters vi. to xix. on earth. This is the time of the great tribulation, known as the time of Jacob's trouble. Hence we get the phrase, "to comfort all that mourn." The time this refers to, I have no doubt, is this great tribulation, for they will need it. We, however, from other scriptures and from our own experience know what a comforter the Lord is to us in our

time of grief or perplexity. "To give unto them a garland for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He might be glorified."

What a beautiful picture is this; the key to it all is the "oil of joy." We have here a beautiful figure of the Holy Ghost, but one common to scripture. Where oil, ointment, unction, is used as a figure, I believe it always refers to the Holy Ghost. Joel ii. 28 is what I think is referred to. At Pentecost, when the Holy Ghost came down, the Apostle Peter said in Acts ii. 16, "But this is that which hath been spoken by the prophet Joel." I do not know anyone who thinks Pentecost has exhausted that of which Joel prophesied. When the Church is gone, it will be necessary for a fresh outpouring of the Holy Ghost. However, the great lesson for us to learn is not so much the prophetic side, valuable as that is, but it is the "oil of joy." This teaches us that real lasting joy can only be obtained by indwelling of the Holy Ghost. We must have the oil. Read Acts, which fully confirms this, and so can our own experience. When filled with Him (what a figure!) we find we are bright and happy, as the apostles were. However, to get the real article, our joy will ever make its boast in the Lord, and as the Apostle Paul tells us in Phil. iv., it will make us "rejoice in the Lord always."

V. 4. "And they shall build the old wastes; they shall raise up the former desolations of many generations."

We might think that this is a reference to the return from Babylon, but as we read the following verses, we have to come to the commencement of the Millennium.

V. 5. "And strangers shall stand and feed your flocks, and aliens shall be your plowmen and your vine dressers." These are the Gentiles, and I have no doubt that they will consider it a great privilege to work for them whom God has so highly honoured. Further, their treatment, so just and kind, will be an attraction. Though these positions are lowly ones, we know that they are essential ones, and in our present condition of things, my experience teaches me that they are the happiest occupations.

V. 6. "But ye shall be named the priests of the Lord."

We see that these are Priests, so we see that in the Millennium there will be a priesthood again, as we read elsewhere that the Lord has consistently kept to the Levite as priests on earth. Ezek. xlv. 15 tells us that these priests will be of the sons of Zadok. Why? I. Chron. xxvii. 17 tells us the sons of Zadok have come down from Aaron. This is the reason why Christ Himself was not a priest on earth (Heb. viii. 4, vii. 14, R.V.). Nor could Paul, Peter, etc., have been priests on earth.

"Men shall call you the ministers of our God":

Their great purpose will be (as the Christian's should now be) to make God known. I have personally no doubt but that the Gentiles who are

saved will proclaim the joyful sound, for we read that there will be no need to say "Know ye the Lord" for they all shall know Him, from the least to the greatest, so that we see indeed the work must be well spread. I think they will learn the truth that so many of us Christians lose sight of: the fact that "From whom all the body is fitly framed and knit together through that which every joint supplieth" (Eph. iv., 16). "Ye shall eat the wealth of nations, and to their glory shall ye succeed." (M.)

The Apostle Paul says in Romans xi. 12 that the setting aside of the Jew is "Now if their fall is the riches of the world, and their loss the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fulness?"

The method is this, "Ye shall call the wealth of the nations" appears to be as in Romans xv. 27, "For if the Gentiles have been made partakers of their spiritual things, they owe it to them also to minister unto them in carnal things."

V. 7. "For your shame ye shall have double, and for confusion they shall rejoice in their portion: therefore in their land they shall possess double: everlasting joy shall be unto them."

The Jews have through their history been a dreadfully wronged people, especially by some nations. The point that will be considered will be their behaviour to Christ's brethren, *i.e.*, the Jews. This time here is when on this point wrong things will be righted. They will have double for the loss that they have sustained in all the shame and confusion they have passed through. Everlasting joy shall be unto them;

there will be no repetition of their former troubles.

“For I the Lord love judgement; I hate robbery with iniquity or a burnt offering.” There are two ways I have had brought before me as to the reading of this expression. One is that God hates the sacrifices of the wicked, the other is with reference to the robbery that Israel had suffered at the hands of the Gentiles, especially of the Chaldeans. Reading from my English version, I do not accept either. The argument appears to be that though all the blessings that the Lord has promised shall be to the Jews, everything will be on just lines, because the Lord loves justice and could not accept their burnt-offerings if injustice had been done. From the Millennium onwards I think we can be sure that a Jew will not take advantage of any man, for the Lord states “I will give them their recompense in truth, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.” This forms the basis of the promise.

V. 9. “And their seed shall be known among the nations, and their offspring among the peoples: all that see them shall acknowledge them, that they are the seed that the Lord hath blessed.”

Their prosperity will be obvious to all, equally, so will be their integrity and uprightness, so that all shall acknowledge that these people indeed are “the seed which the Lord hath blessed.”

My dear reader, what a blessed state is this! I think you will agree with me that this should

have been the result of their lives from the first. The New Testament over and over again makes it abundantly clear that it is God's intention for us in our dispensation that we should so live.

V. 10. "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God: for He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, He hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with a garland, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels."

I have long since seen that the secret of a bright and happy life of usefulness is to rejoice in the Lord. This, in a very real sense, is brought about by valuing the work the Lord did for us to enable us to have this robe of righteousness. As we ponder this, the more wonderful we see it to be.

V. 11. "For as the earth bringeth forth her bud, and as the garden causeth the things that are sown in it to spring forth: so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before the nations."

This reminds us of cause and effect. The seed sown in good soil, the rain, the sun, etc., all produce the desired results. To have a keen appreciation of Christ's work for us and to enter into His great purpose concerning us becomes to us a delight. It is the formative cause through the work of the Holy Ghost in forming Christ in us.



CHAPTER LXII.

V. 1. "For Zion's sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her righteousness goes forth as brightness, and her salvation as a lamp that burneth."

Some think this is Isaiah, and that having given himself up to praying for and preaching to the people, he would not rest until it is accomplished. I have no doubt the spirit of the text was Isaiah's purpose, but the word "until" gives me to think that Isaiah is expressing the intention of Jehovah. What a grand intention! Israel will be so righteous that it will shed its brightness abroad as a lamp, and her salvation will be like one that burneth. Israel has (till this time) had her candlestick removed, so has many a church and many a person.

V. 2. And the nations shall see thy righteousness, and all the Kings thy glory. Unless the nations saw it, there would be no testimony. The nations, however, will see it, and the sight will be such that there is no word in their vocabulary to express it. So wonderful is it that Jehovah finds a new name for it, so that they will be able to express it. "And thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord shall name." It is fine to meditate upon this. However, this is not all.

V. 3. "Thou shalt also be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God."

We see that the crown and diadem are held in His hand. This suggests that it is not the eternal crown and diadem that has ever adorned the brow of Jehovah, but those that He has wrought in time. It is the fruit of no peace or rest UNTIL as in verse 1.

When we think of the power and resources of Jehovah, and call to mind the wonderful land, sea, or cloud scapes that we have seen, we can imagine something of its beauty. Beyond all that, when we read the Word, and, by the help of the Holy Ghost, think of the beauties that even now we have seen in the face of the Lord Jesus Christ, and remember that these will shine as His reflection, we begin to be able to get some glimpse of the meaning of the verses that follow.

V. 4. "Thou shalt no more be termed "forsaken" neither shall thy land any more be termed desolate: but thou shalt be called Hephzibah, and thy land Beulah: for the Lord delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married."

Here we see a wonderful change. All is brought about by Israel becoming Hephzibah. This was the name of Hezekiah's wife (II. Kings xxi. 1), and must have been known to Isaiah. It means, "My delight is in her and her land." "Beulah," *i.e.*, married. Probably the prophet had Jehosaphat's mother "Azubah" in his mind, which means "deserted."

Jehovah is the bridegroom. Other scriptures bring this before us as a restored wife. Here it is more the feeling that characterise it, hence the following illustration.

V. 5. "For as a young man marrieth a virgin, so shall thy sons marry thee : and as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee."

So we see amid all the grandeur and beauty of this occasion that joy will be the predominant feeling.

V. 6. "I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem : they shall never hold their peace day nor night : ye that are the Lord's remembrancers, take ye no rest, and give Him no rest, till He make Jerusalem a praise in the earth."

The watchmen possibly are the rulers, prophets, etc., that had the responsibility laid upon them. Some think they are angelic beings, and that they have the position of guardians. By the latter part of the verse I cannot accept the angel view, but have to think that it would include any that have the oversight of the Lord's ancient people. Personally I can go further and think it would include any person who, seeing the dreadful state of things brought about by the apathy and the disobedience of the Lord's people, supplemented by the lust for conquest of the surrounding nations, would call to mind the promised coming of the Messiah, and would collect these promises and take no rest day or night, but continually remind the Lord of His promises till He come.

Every dispensation ends in failure. Nothing is so clear to the one who walks with the Lord and meditates on His word. How utterly incapable a man or a nation is, to do properly anything that really matters! Yet nothing is so sure to the natural man than what wonderful creatures we are! From his point of view, when he thinks of the inventions and discoveries he has made, he can see that there is ground for it, but when we are born from above and seek to walk with the Lord in the light of His Word, man's boastings remind us of the frog and the cow in Aesop's fables.

We now ask ourselves where are we in respect of this? We are now in the Church dispensation, and have privileges beyond those wonderful privileges God gave the Jew. Amongst their promises was the coming of the Messiah. He came, and was rejected. Instead of bringing down the judgements due to them, the Lord brought in this dispensation, for before His departure, and reiterated by His apostles and prophets over two hundred times, we are looking for a coming Lord (I. Thess. iv.). Revelation closes with, "Surely I come quickly, Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

We remember in this dispensation that we are not taught to expect world conversion, but that the Lord is taking out of them a people for His Name (Acts xv. 14).

But when we look at what claims to be His Church, we see failure as bad as the Jewish dispensation, and most of us long for the time when He comes.

Meditating on this line of things, I think we cannot do better than to fill the mind with the promises He has given us, so that when presenting our petitions before the Throne we may continually remind Him of His promises. A powerful argument at any time is the reminder of a promise.

V. 8. "The Lord hath sworn by His right hand, and by the arm of His strength. Surely I will no more give thy corn to be meat for thine enemies; and strangers shall not drink thy wine or vintage, for the which thou hast laboured: but they that have garnered it shall eat it, and praise the Lord: and they that have gathered it shall drink it in the courts of My sanctuary."

It is clear that God can only swear by Himself, for there is none so great as He. The figures He uses here, His hand—ability, His arm—strength, will be directed to make sure that having sought first the Kingdom of Heaven, all these material blessings are added.

The trouble with the world is that they seek only material blessing. The trouble with the Lord's people is that we are so prone to put material blessing first.

There is a great principle here that should guide all politicians. There is nothing for the idler, but the worker should have fairly that for which he has laboured.

Here he does, and with joy can enter (at the harvest home) into the Lord's house and eat the first-fruits there.

V. 10. "Go through, go through the gates; prepare ye the way of the people; cast up, cast

up the highway : gather stones ; lift up an ensign for the peoples.”

V. 11. “Behold, the Lord hath proclaimed unto the end of the earth, Say ye to the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy salvation cometh ; behold His reward is with Him, and His work (M.) before Him.”

V. 12. “And they shall call them the holy people, the Redeemed of the Lord : and thou shalt be called, Sought out, A city not forsaken.”

There probably is a reference to the first return from Babylon here, but certainly it has the final scene in view. We cannot but see that in the midst of their great joy, there will be plenty to do. God never intends idleness to exist. I cannot think it would be the Millennium, for there is a keen joy in being busy, especially if we realise, as these certainly will, that their work is acceptable to the Lord. They are to prepare a highway in order that they may go through the gates into the city. Note that it says they are to lift up an ensign to the peoples so that they will not go in alone. All nations are invited.

Verse 11 gives us the message to Zion, “Behold thy salvation cometh.” We always, I think, have the word “behold” when our attention is to be given to it. The delight will be in the “cometh.” It will be the continuous present, if I may so express it, ever with them. We have a blessed foretaste of this now, for when we first saw the Lord what a joy it was ! But as we walk with Him in the light of the Word and bring this light to bear on the path we daily tread, it is in a very real sense we note that our salvation

cometh. It makes living a delight, though certainly it will always be better in front. We also firmly believe that the Jews as a nation are rewarded in the Millennium, but personally, as we are, when the Lord comes, He brings the wages with Him. He pays us now with delight as we enter into His work. This is where the saints have the advantage over others. The work we do to pay our expenses and meet our responsibilities can be done unto Him, and becomes a delight. When our duties are over we can spend our money and our leisure in what we may call His service. So we can always be at work. Work is safety; idleness is dangerous; even resting wants watching. In verse 12 we see that in the Millennium the whole world will see what a holy people they are, and that truly they are redeemed of the Lord. They will seek them out, and get there as much as possible. We must remind ourselves that this is what the Lord wanted from the first.



CHAPTER LXIII.

It is well to remind ourselves in the reading of this chapter that it was the Lord's intention that Jacob should have the blessing. Isaac, however, intended Esau to have it. Rebecca meant Jacob to have it. I think both sides did so from their own point of view. The Lord was not consulted, so it appears to me. We find Jacob obtaining that which the Lord intended him to have, by fraud. Had he allowed the Lord to bring it about, the Lord would have done so in a happy way. Jacob's method aroused the anger of Esau. His descendants ever viewed the land as theirs by right, and became through the ages Israel's malignant foe, ever seeking to destroy them till the Lord, as here, blots them out. To get the other side, we should read prayerfully Obadiah, also Amos i. 11. Personally I have pieced events together at this time like this (It is for the reader to check it for himself, as I do not want more than the privilege of increasing your interest). When the Lord comes to Olivet, the Antichrist is brought to nought by the manifestation of His coming, and he, with his false prophet, are thrown alive into the lake of fire.

The Lord puts things straight in Jerusalem, then destroys the armies of the Antichrist in the valley of Jehoshaphat. He then proceeds to deal with Edom, Moab, etc., then last of all, deals

with the King of the North between Jerusalem and the sea. The King of the North is cast into Tophet, which I understand to be another term for the lake of fire, making in all three cast alive there before the Millennium.

V. 1. "Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this that is glorious in his apparel, marching in the greatness of his strength? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save."

If I am right in the way I understand these scriptures, we have come to the time when the affairs at Zion are all settled, and the Lord has just finished His work on Edom. The question is raised, "Who is this?" Whoever He may be, He is said to have His garments dyed red, *i.e.*, with the blood of the slain. His description follows: "glorious in apparel, marching in the greatness of His strength." Note the reply, "I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save."

What can comfort us more than that when He speaks it is in righteousness? It does not alter because it is in judgement. In fact, righteousness in judgement is all essential, and mighty to save. Strength is what we want for salvation. There can be but one that can answer to the question, for there is but one Saviour. Here comes another important question.

V. 2. "Wherefore art Thou red in thine apparel, and thy garments like Him that treadeth in the winefat?"

This figure here is that of one treading the grapes. This is that which we know as the vin-

tage judgements, which I understand to be part of the judgement of the quick, *i.e.*, the living; that part, that when He comes, is caught in the act of oppression. The others come before the judgement of the nations. The wicked dead after the thousand years at the great white throne (Rev. xix. 15). It pictures a warrior emerging from a sanguinary battle. Notice the warrior's reply.

V. 3. "I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the peoples there was no man with me: yea, I trod them in mine anger, and trampled them in my fury, and their life-blood is sprinkled on my garments, and I have stained all my raiment."

We note here that He claims to tread the wine press alone; this must of necessity be true, for none other can speak in righteousness or is mighty to save. There can be but one Judge. In settling the great question of our sins He did it alone on the Tree.

Of all the dispensations, the conditions are most favourable for man to be able to do something. Yet we see how even the Millennium fails. Satan must be loosed for a little season (Rev. xx.). How manifest does this become! However, in every dispensation, God's purpose failed, because man was used as a factor. All failed because of this. In Ephesians, when Christ works out that "dispensation of the fullness of the times," when He works out God's purposes in each, Ephesians i. makes it clear that we do not help. He does it alone. We can be sure, boys and girls, when we start eternity, one

great lesson we shall have learnt is that "Christ is all." Oh, to learn more of this now.

V. 4. "For the day of vengeance was in my heart, and my year of redemption is come" (M.).

God has always rebuked man taking vengeance. He has ever said, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay."

This does not affect the balance of truth; it does not shut out ordered human judgement as laid down in the Word.

But it means all oppression or cruelty will meet its just reward, carried out in strict righteousness by One that never slumbers or sleeps. We cannot see this now, but what we do not know now, we shall know, and all will be as it should be. The particular case here is Edom. See Obadiah.

V. 5. "And I looked, and there was none to help; and I wondered there was none to uphold: therefore mine own arm brought salvation unto me; and my fury, it upheld me. And I trod down the peoples in mine anger, and made them drunk in my fury, and I poured out their life-blood on the earth."

The patience and long-suffering of God is past explaining. The oppression and cruelty by man to man is, and has been, terrible; we know the wheels of God grind slowly, but they do grind. However, the great tribulation with its cruelty beyond all else, arouses God's anger to prompt action.

V. 7. "I will make mention of the loving-kindnesses of the Lord, and the praises of the

Lord, according to all that the Lord hath bestowed upon us; and the great goodness toward the house of Israel, which He hath bestowed on them according to His mercies, and according to the multitude of His loving kindnesses.”

When the year of the redeemed is come, and their final deliverance is brought to pass, it is very interesting to note the effect it has on the prophet. As he contemplates it, it sends his mind back to the Lord's dealing with His people. So he begins to count their blessings. As we go through the chapter, we see he names them one by one. It, however, does not stop there; he declares that he will make mention of them. Notice the measure he uses, “according to.” When we note the effect of the contemplation, what will be the effect when it becomes history?

There is no better cure for any morbid feeling than this. The prophet was surrounded with gloom enough to depress him, but it did not. In our church dispensation, we can do the same. We are passing through, as the prophet, troublous times. Let us, boys and girls, take his measure “according to” and prayerfully read chapters one and two of Ephesians, and note how the Apostle uses the measure “according to.” As we contemplate our portion, we, like the prophet, will be full of praise for the loving kindness of our God, and will make mention of it. We can use this also very profitably in times of trouble in our personal lives. Look back at the way He has led us, and contemplate His purpose towards us. Our hearts will soon be full of praises, and we too will want to make mention of them.

V. 8. "For He said, Surely they are my people; children that will not deal falsely: so He was their Saviour."

This is indeed a wonderful verse. It reminds us of verse two of the second chapter of Jeremiah. As we read their history, we find that early in the history of His people, the Lord put in the mouth of Balaam (Numbers xxii. 31) "He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath He seen perverseness in Israel." Verse 19 gives us the reason. God hath given promises to those whom He hath saved in sovereign grace, and He is not a man that He can repent. He can find no reason for altering that which is so given. So, when in discipline they were in trouble and at a certain point, He saved them. This certain point, I think, must be when they repented of their sin.

V. 9. "In all their afflictions He was afflicted, and the angel of His presence saved them: in His love and in His pity He redeemed them, and carried them all the days of old."

How wonderful! They bring sorrow into their lives by their wilfulness, and the Lord is afflicted when He sees them afflicted. I think all true parents who have wilful children know a measure of this, but cannot redeem, bear, or carry them in any real and effective sense of the word. But praise His Name, He can.

V. 10. "But they rebelled, and grieved the Holy Spirit: therefore He was turned to be their enemy, and Himself fought against them."

It is strange, the perversity of human nature;

it rebels against the kindest of fathers in our human life. The result is that they are grieved. Here, remembering that there is but One God, it brings before us what we are told in Eph. iv. 30, to "grieve not the Holy Spirit of God in whom ye are sealed unto the day of redemption."

We cannot grieve an influence. We can grieve a person.

What a blessing that we have the following verses to explain to us what is meant by "He turned to be their enemy" and fought against them!

V. 11-15. "Then His people (M.) remembered the days of old, Moses and his people, saying, Where is he that brought them up out of the sea with the shepherd of his flock? Where is He that put His Holy Spirit in the midst of them? that caused His glorious arm to go at the right hand of Moses? that divided the water before them, to make Himself an everlasting name? That led them through the depth as an horse in the wilderness, that they stumbled not? As the cattle that go down into the valley, the Spirit of the Lord caused them to rest: so didst thou lead Thy people, to make Thyself a glorious name. Look down from heaven, and behold from the habitation of Thy holiness and of Thy glory: where is Thy zeal and Thy mighty acts? the yearning of thy bowels and thy compassions are restrained before me."

In sovereign grace God is always and wholly for His people, but in Government it does not always look so. We have seen in verse 10 when the Holy Spirit was grieved, that He turned to

be their enemy and fought against them. As their troubles multiplied it was evident to them that the Lord did not come to their assistance. They ask God a series of questions, as though the fault was not with them, but I think that each one in his heart knew it was.

This, however, shows us that these people were quite aware of what God had done for them. These questions prove this. What they must have thought was that God would help them, whatever their conduct might be. This is indeed presumptuous sin, and we can quite see that God in government must deal with it.

These people were well aware of the mighty deliverance effected at the Red Sea, and they realised that the Holy Spirit guided them by the cloud and pillar of fire. They realised that it was God's strength that enabled Moses to carry out the plans which enabled them to say that God made to Himself a glorious name, because everything was carried out so perfectly.

They then appeal to God to look down from heaven, which they declare is the habitation of His holiness and glory. It hardly seems possible that they realised what this meant, for they ask: "Where is Thy zeal and Thy mighty acts?" The first question should be, when we lose the sense of God's presence, and realise we have lost the sense of His compassion is, "What have I done or what am I doing, to suffer this loss?" We see in chapter lxxv. 2 the Lord's answer to these things.

V. 16. "For Thou art our Father, though Abraham knoweth us not, and Israel doth not

acknowledge us : Thou, O Lord, art our Father ; our Redeemer from everlasting is Thy name."

This is a very difficult verse for me to read, but I remember what one of the Lord's servants I met in a train said, when talking about the Old Testament, and how difficult some parts are to read. "I remember it is written in a language I do not know, and further, that it was spoken many hundreds of years ago. They were intelligent men, and everything they said meant something." Then a purpose I made when I began to write was that I would try to make something of every verse, and I am encouraged by the thought that though I may not be approved by the reader, yet the Lord may so use it that it may help the reader to the true reading. I have often been helped by reading that which I could not accept, for it made me ponder and think in order to get a true reading. I look at this verse : I notice two names are used, Abraham and Israel : the first known to us as the father of the faithful ; the other is known to us as one that wrestled with God and prevailed.

At present this verse tells me that they insisted on this ; that the Lord was their father, that a man of faith would not know them, and that a prevailing wrestler with God would not acknowledge them, yet they were His. It is true they were children of Jacob, the supplanter, etc. O Lord, Thou art our Father, and our Redeemer.

V. 17. "O Lord, why dost Thou make us to err from Thy ways, and hardenest our heart from Thy fear ? Return for Thy servants' sake, the tribes of Thine inheritance."

Here we get the permissive will of God. It could never have been the Lord's direct will for His people to be estranged from Him or to walk in ways of wickedness. It is well for us to distinguish between these, but it does look as if even in this, we must be careful, for, as we shall see presently, we shall look upon it as though we are as God made us, whether wicked or good. It does us good to revel in God's sovereign grace, but great harm not to recognise our full responsibility, for we are certainly judged for our sins, and even the saints are brought under discipline. Their prayer is to the Lord to return. Whether it is Old or New Testament, I can only see that it is for the prodigal to return and surely the Father will run to meet him.

V. 18. "Thy holy people possessed it but a little while: our adversaries have trodden down Thy sanctuary. We are become as they over whom Thou never barest rule: as they that were not called by Thy name."

As we read this book we cannot fail to see that what provoked his thoughts were their own immediate experiences. Yet so many things said are with the future in view, and, as we seek to follow his thoughts, this to me becomes apparent. We take this present time, A.D. 1932. Then we see indeed that they only possessed it for a little, and yet we read that the covenant the Lord made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob was for a thousand generations, *i.e.*, about thirty thousand years. See I. Chron. xvi. 14-17, also Deut. vii. 9. I have heard and read a little as to what is called "hyperbole," *i.e.*, exaggeration,

but in a covenant, that is the last place to look for it.

As we look around us to-day, apart from the Word of God, it does look as if they had never had a place or land at all.



CHAPTER LXIV.

V. 1. "Oh that Thou wouldest rend the heavens and that Thou wouldest come down, that the mountains might flow (or quake) down at Thy presence."

The prophets in the days of the Jewish dispensation, just as the saints of the Christian dispensation, could see, as they saw the wickedness of the world and realised their own failures, that nothing can put this world right but the coming of the Lord. We know that the language describes just what will happen when the Lord comes to Olivet to deliver His ancient people. With our dispensation, the Lord comes to the air to take us out of it, before He goes on with the last week or seven years of Daniel, to conclude the prophecy of the ninth of Daniel. We, in thinking of this, can see it is most improbable for the Lord to have two centres of gathering, and our promise is that it will be sudden. Rev. xxii. 20, "Yea, I come quickly, Amen : Come, Lord Jesus." Till He comes to take us out of it, and comes later to take His rightful place in the world, we have the greatest gift God can give us, namely, the written word of God opened to us by the Holy Ghost.

V. 2. "As when fire kindleth brushwood, and the fire causeth the waters to boil : to make Thy name known to Thine adversaries, that the nations may tremble at Thy presence."

We all know how rapidly fire spreads when applied to dry brushwood. The water is soon brought to the boil, *i.e.*, the purpose of the fire is accomplished. This is the figure used of this event. When the Lord's feet touch Olivet, one event after another passes with such rapidity that when Christ has accomplished all His work on Mount Zion He, last of all, deals with the Assyrian, *i.e.*, the King of the North (Isaiah x. 12, and Daniel xii. 11-13). He will not take long. He will not want a series of five-year plans, as Russia does to-day. None of these plans up till now has matured, nor ever will, till they are right themselves. There is no question in my own mind but that Russia and its confederacies will be the King of the North. Their method to-day is to destroy the name of God from the earth, and death to those that proclaim it, whereas Christ magnifies the name, hence a real Millennium.

V. 3. "When Thou didst terrible things which we looked not for, Thou camest down. The mountains flowed down at Thy presence."

This appears to me to be an allusion to Mount Zion (Ex. xix. 16-24). That scene must have been a most solemn experience. It is good to think about it, but, as I have thought of the event of the coming of the Lord, by the descriptions given in the Word, it will exceed the scene on Sinai.

V. 4. "For from of old men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen a God beside Thee, which worketh for him that waiteth for Him."

What an encouraging verse this is! We can be sure that this is a statement that includes any saint in any dispensation. Enoch of old prophesied of His coming. These people are asking the Lord to return. We know His return for us is just the event we desire. Here the prophet asserts that the Lord worketh for such. As we look back at our own lives and trace the way we have been led and helped, we are sure of it. If we look around, or at others, we are not so clear. I expect it is for lack of sure information. I remember, many years ago, claiming the promise that Hanani the Seer gave to king Asa: "For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him" (II. Chron. xvi. 9). I had to rest upon my perfection in Christ, and I can say the Lord did prove Himself strong on my behalf on several occasions, so this became a very precious text to me. The satire as to men of old seeing or hearing of such a God is because there is none except the One.

V. 5. "Thou meetest him that rejoiceth and worketh righteousness, those that remember Thee in Thy ways: behold, Thou wast wrath, and we sinned, in them have we been of long time, and shall we be saved."

God in His dealings with men, would meet with them who rejoiced and worked righteousness, but alas! these had been walking in the path of sin for a long time, and raise the question whether we shall be saved, suggesting by the query that it could not be expected.

V. 6. "But we are all become as one that is unclean, and all our righteousnesses are as a polluted garment : and we all do fade as a leaf ; and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away."

Here the people admit their desperate condition. They could see how helpless they were, and their moral condition, *i.e.*, their iniquities, led to them being dealt with. It does seem to me that this has to be the position we must ever take up, before the Lord can deal with a sinner.

V. 7. "And there is none that calleth upon Thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of Thee : for Thou hast hid Thy face from us, and hast consumed us by means of our iniquities."

Had this been the language of the people generally, there would have been a return to the Lord, but the godly, knowing their own weaknesses, have ever identified themselves with the nation, or, in our own case, with the Church, in our confessions before the Lord and in our writings, for, without question, all the saints that I know or have known admit that they have fallen short.

I think it important to recognise this, because the effect it has upon us is a real revelation to us of our own character. The Lord's advice to us is, "Seek ye My face." My heart said unto Thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek" (Psalm xxvii. 8).

If we are still wearing any polluted garments of our own righteousness just mentioned, we will make an effort of improvement or self-punishment. It will be an evidence to us that we are not

enjoying the Lord's face, *i.e.*, real consciousness of His presence, for if we were we could not go on with iniquities, *i.e.*, unjust dealing. Hence we should cast ourselves on God's sovereign grace which alone can effectively suit the sinner or the saint.

V. 8. "But now, O Lord, Thou art our Father : we are the clay, and Thou our potter : we are the work of Thy hand."

What blessed lessons we do learn if we walk down with Jeremiah to the house of the potter ! To get the full advantage the walk will give us, we must surely learn Isaiah's lesson here, for we see here the reason why the first vessel Jeremiah saw was marred in the hands of the potter.

We see here that God can do nothing with us, *i.e.*, the clay, whilst we have any self-righteousness in our make-up. He certainly cannot save the sinner, and cannot make the saint the vessel He intends to make. He, praise His name, will however, not be frustrated in His purpose towards those that are thirsty. We know His purpose is to conform us to the image of His Son, and John tells us that when we shall see Him face to face, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

What are we to do in the meantime ? We see what they did here. They admitted the terrible muddle they had made of their lives and cast themselves on His compassion.

V. 9. "Be not wroth very sore, O Lord, neither remember iniquity for ever : behold, look, we beseech Thee, we are all Thy people."

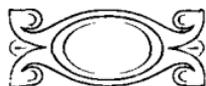
Isaiah must have had a very keen insight into the character of God to write thus. What better argument could a disobedient people use than to claim that they were His people, even though their conduct deserved His chastisements? They then appeal to His sympathies.

V. 10. "Thy holy cities are become a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation."

V. 11. "Our holy and our beautiful house, where our fathers praised Thee, is burned with fire; and all our pleasant things have become waste. Wilt Thou refrain from these things, O Lord? Wilt Thou hold Thy peace, and afflict us very sore?"

We know by the Word that Zion and Jerusalem were very dear to God's heart. The Temple wherein their fathers praised God burned with fire, with all the pleasant things, *i.e.*, the furniture and fittings of the Temple.

In verse 12 they ask two questions, "Wilt Thou refrain Thyself for these things?" We remember that when Joseph saw the distress of his brethren who had treated him so badly, he could not refrain himself, etc. These people thought these things must appeal to their God. Hence they ask, "Wilt Thou hold Thy peace and afflict us very sore?" We get the reply in the following chapter.



CHAPTER LXV.

V. I. "I am inquired of by them that asked not for me; I am found of them that sought me not; I said, Behold me, behold me, unto a nation that was not called by my name."

Only in a general sense can this apply to the Gentiles. The nation that the Apostle Peter refers to, fits exactly (I. Peter xi. 9). "But ye are an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that ye may shew forth the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light."

I have no doubt in my own mind that the Jews, having no idea as to the church that was to be formed at Pentecost, would take this in a general way as applying to themselves in a future date. When, however, the Holy Ghost came down and formed the new man made up of Jew and Gentile (Eph. ii.) they recognised the real thing when it was before them.

It is true that amongst the nations of the earth, this is what the Lord intended the Jewish nation to be, and will yet carry out His intention, during the Millennium, of this new man being caught up out of the way.

In old days, the thirsty among the Gentiles became Jews by being proselytes, which appears

to be similar to our modern idea of being politically naturalised.

As we have just seen, their last question was at this point. "Wilt Thou hold Thy peace and afflict us very sore?" We, at this present day, see that this time has already been, from the murder of His beloved Son, and will be, until we are caught up out of the way, in order that He may take up the last seven years of Daniel ix. How strongly emphasised is God's displeasure with His beloved people by the fact that when He does take up with them, He permits the great tribulation known as the time of Jacob's trouble.

We can quite see, knowing God as we do, that He would never allow all these years to pass by with no provision for the thirsty in any part of the world. So we see the formation of the Church at Pentecost was a logical necessity, for the comfort of God's own heart, apart from His marvellous provision for the thirsty. When He was about to drown the world, He saw He had a grain of wheat on the earth (Noah) and made provision. It has always been a great joy to me to see that our God has a heart to save all that are saveable, just as it is to know that before we settle down to eternity He will shake all that is shakeable. We can look at this verse about this nation, if I am spared to take up the epistles of Peter.

V. 2. "I have spread out my hands all the day unto a rebellious people, which walketh in a way that is not good, after their own thoughts."

Here we see that Jehovah states that His attitude toward His people had been the spreading out of His hands toward them, *i.e.*, a pleading

attitude, even though their attitude toward Him was one of rebellion. Hence, the path in which they walked was not good, the reason being that they did as they thought.

What can be more important than right and clear thinking? I think it would help every boy and girl to get a logic primer, by Jevons, a most valuable little book which will help all. I have, however, noticed that unless we have God's mind on the subject before us, even though we had a University education, we should go astray. In fact, I have noted in the newspapers, whenever there is a rebellion in any country of the world, that the ringleaders generally are University students. If they have rebellious hearts, their heads are soon full of wild-cat schemes, and dreadful damage is done.

How kind of God gradually to raise up men from every walk of life, kings, labourers, etc.; fill them with the Holy Ghost, and give us the Bible, *i.e.*, the Book. I regard it as the most valuable gift in the world. It comes to this, boys and girls, that whatever situation in this world God has placed us in, there is plenty of room for us to live useful and unselfish lives. If this does not satisfy us, then there is soon trouble. This takes all sorts of directions. Note the following.

V. 3. "A people that provoketh Me to My face continually, sacrificing in gardens, and burning incense upon bricks :"

As we read their history, how true it has been all through. They have provoked God every step of the way. Truly, the patience of the Lord

is beyond understanding. Here two directions are given, namely, "sacrificing in gardens and burning incense on bricks." It will be wise to read Ex. xx. 24-26 here.

We see it comes up in scripture that God can only accept sacrifice where He has recorded His name. I have felt that the disobedience in this respect has led on to the various forms of idolatry. The very essence of worship is to exalt the name of the Lord. But man wants a place, hence we see they offer their incense on bricks, *i.e.*, something made by man. We can quite see how offensive in worship it must be to God who saves an undeserving sinner on the ground of sovereign grace, to find him intruding something that he has done. It is born in us in some way or other, to seek to establish our own righteousness. Let us beware, for it does not finish with burning incense on bricks.

V. 4. "Which sit among the graves, and lodge in the secret places or vaults: which eat swine's flesh, and broth of abominable things is in their vessels."

Here we see a dreadful side of idolatry, for this verse brings us into the occult side of things, *i.e.*, the hidden, mysterious, invisible side of things. Read Ezekiel viii.

In the festivals of the idolaters we see there that all sorts of abominable things were eaten. In the Middle Ages it took the form of alchemy, magic, necromancy. We still have the latter with us under the name of spiritism, or as they like to be called, spiritualists. All this scripture makes clear that it is the plain, simple man that

gains God's approval. This brings contempt in their eyes; they want to be somebody, hence we get,

V. 5. "Stand by thyself, come not near to me, for I am holier than thou." This is Pharisaism. We meet it everywhere. We must, however, wait upon God and be vigilant that it does not appear in our own hearts. I know we can understand this better if we can illustrate our meaning. I met a dear brother who was very grieved. He belongs to what is known as a brethren meeting. One of their members left them to join (to take his place in, as they would say) a very exclusive meeting. He was not allowed to break bread with them, but had to sit back till they were sure he had lost the leprosy of the previous meeting. We go to the other end, and the supposed correct way to address the leader is as "His Holiness." I also knew a man who was a very nice man to talk to, who told me he had not sinned for six months. I told him I should like his wife's opinion. But what does God say to all this: "These are a smoke in my nose, a fire that burneth all the day." So we can be quite clear that none of this is incense to God, but smoke. The human heart is desperately sick, and will be, till we can be fully assured in our very thinking that we can only give incense to God when we are in accord with the position, namely, that we are saved and kept by His sovereign grace. We then shall not be occupied with self, and the Holy Ghost, unknown to ourselves, will form Christ in us.

VV. 6-7. "Behold, it is written before me : I will not keep silence, but will recompense, yea, I will recompense in their bosom, your own iniquities, and the iniquities of your fathers together, saith the Lord, which have burned incense upon the mountains and defied (M.) me upon the hills : therefore will I first measure their work into their bosom."

The justice of God cannot rest till it is satisfied. The sinner may think God forgets, as he sees no movement, but God says here, "it is written before me." All these are put down in His book of remembrance, and the recompense is personal, *i.e.*, in their own bosoms, whether it is themselves or their fathers. The margin gives us clearly to understand that disobedience really is to defy God.

V. 8. "Thus saith the Lord, As the new wine is found in the cluster, and one saith, Destroy it not, for a blessing is in it : so will I do for my servant's sake."

This is a figure of how God in His mercy deals with His people. Just as a gardener who may be thinking of destroying a vine sees perhaps just one or two clusters of grapes upon it, and spares it for something better that may follow, so God will suspend His judgement till it is manifested. We remember Abraham pleading on this line for Sodom. Also Jer. v. 1. Jeremiah is to search Jerusalem to see if he can find a man that doeth justly and seeketh truth, and God will pardon her. How reluctant God is to punish !

V. 9. "And I will bring forth a seed out of Jacob, and out of Judah an inheritor of my moun-

tains : and my chosen shall inherit it, and my servants shall dwell there.”

Jacob appears to be used for Israel. There is to be a seed out of Jacob or Israel. After their being carried away, and years having gone by, they are frequently spoken of as the lost ten tribes. Here, the Lord said a seed shall come out of them, and Judah is said to be an inheritor of “My mountains,” so it is not only Zion but all the hills, and the servants shall dwell there.

V. 10. “And Sharon shall be a fold of flocks, and the valley of Achor a place for herds to lie down in, for my people have sought me.”

This means that the western to the eastern boundary shall be used for the purpose needed by them. When we read of Achor, we cannot but think of Achan and his sin and punishment. However, it ends all right. What a blessing it is to remember that even God’s people may spoil the journey. The end, however, God keeps in His own hand, so that is all right, and the way will provide much valuable instruction in the ways of God.

V. 11. “But ye that forsake the Lord, that forget My holy mountain, that prepare a table for Fortune, and that fill up mingled wine unto Destiny : I will destine you to the sword, and ye shall all bow down to the slaughter : because when I called, ye did not answer ; when I spake ye did not hear : but ye did that which was evil in mine eyes, and chose that wherein I delighted not.”

This is indeed a difficult verse for us to understand. It is clear that there can be no blessing

to them that forsake the Lord. These are said to "prepare the table for Fortune," probably an idolatrous feast. I turn, as advised by the R.V. margin, and discover that the name means "fortunate." I thought it meant "a troop cometh," and this thought still appears to be in it. These people worshipped the god of Fortune or Good Luck, and drank to genius, or destiny.

Having turned from God, there is no knowing to what extent of folly man is not prone.

The last word, however, rests with the Lord. They drink to Destiny. Jehovah destines them to the sword, because they would not hear or seek to please Him, but delighted in evil ways. It may be thought a bold thing by some, to take one's own life into one's hand and live independently of God, but how different it will actually be then!

V. 13. "Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold my servants shall eat, but ye shall be hungry: behold, my servants shall drink, but ye shall be thirsty: behold, my servants shall rejoice, but ye shall be ashamed: behold, my servants shall sing for joy of heart, but ye shall cry for sorrow of heart, and shall howl for vexation of spirit. And ye shall leave your name for a curse (M. an oath) unto my chosen, and the Lord God shall slay thee, and He shall call His servants by another name."

Here we see God's verdict on the aspirations of the natural man. Having shut God out of their minds, their object in life has been to live upon the material riches, which is just what the

natural man enjoys. We, *i.e.*, those born from above, find these things necessary, but we find our satisfaction in receiving them from His hand, and though grateful for the gifts, we love the giver. I have often thought this to be the real way of enjoying these temporal mercies God gives us.

V. 16. "So that he who blesseth himself in the earth shall bless himself in the God of truth" (M. The Amen) *i.e.*, the God who turns what He promises into the yea and Amen (see II. Cor. i. 20). He then becomes to us in a very real sense the faithful and true witness (see Rev. iii. 14). It is because of not entering into this that the Laodicean church loses her way. This would have been very different had she possessed eternal life, for this gives a knowledge of the true God (John xvii. 3). So we, as we pass along our way are among those who having "received His witness, hath set his seal to this that God is true" (John iii. 33).

"And he that sweareth in the earth shall swear by the God of truth : because the former troubles are forgotten, and because they are hid from mine eyes."

Swearing has undoubtedly been used by the best of men. We have, however, noted that there are degrees in oaths. Our Lord Himself is said by some to swear in Matthew xxvi. 63, 64. I can see the High Priest put Him on oath. He, however, simply said, "Thou sayest." Paul is said to take an oath when in Romans i. 9 he said, "God is my witness, etc." My own plan

through life is to do nothing, by God's help, that would make me uncomfortable with the Lord. The affirmation, that I declare this to be the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help me, God, has never tried my mind, for if swearing means to state that we are telling the truth, and ask the Lord to help us, then I should be swearing all the time, for I consider it an ideal state to look to the Lord for help in all we do, say, or think. However, when I have been asked to say "I swear by Almighty God" I have declined to do it. The Lord, in Matthew, says, "Swear not at all."

This has been construed by many good men to mean not to use oaths in a light way in our common speech. This, I admit, would be a bad thing to do, but with such a strong negative statement I cannot see that we may limit the predicate.

I can quite see that whatever is meant by swearing is best left alone, as it leads others on. Elisha, conscious of God's presence, says, "As the Lord liveth." Gehazi said the same. However, we can go on reasoning about it till we get into a tangle.

These at any rate had no instructions from the Lord, as in Matthew. We can understand this, for the Lord often does allow evil to manifest itself before dealing with it.

The latter part of the verse appears to mean, and especially so as we read the next verse, that all their former sins are forgotten, never to be remembered against them any more. Hence we read,

V. 17. "For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth : and the former things shall not be remembered, nor come into mind."

As we read what follows, we see it is clearly a Millennium scene. This would lead me to interpret this word "I create a new heaven and a new earth" in a moral sense rather than literally. When the present heavens and earth pass away with fervent heat, etc., I believe there will then be a moral and a literal new creation.

V. 18. "But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create : for behold I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy."

V. 19. "And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people."

As we read this, it does seem by the language used that both sides are satisfied. The Lord finds joy in His people ; I can only conclude that in the land nothing that defileth will be allowed to enter till Satan is loosed for a little season, and that the small measure comparatively that we read of is outside the land.

"And the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying."

If this does not take in the whole land, it certainly does take in Jerusalem. This is a strong negative statement. I can quite believe that after a thousand years' experience of this, when Gog and Magog enter the land and encamp against the beloved city, it will not make any cry or weep ; such will be their confidence in the Lord.

V. 20. "There shall be no more thence an infant of days."

So it will be good bye to all the societies of one kind or another. As for children's welfare centres, there will be no need of any.

"Nor an old man that hath not filled his days."

To make this a satisfactory statement would require more than mere existence. It would have to be a full life as well as days. I, however, think this is implied.

"For the child shall die a hundred years old."

When a person is cut off he will have lived a long time. He will have had a large experience of the most delightful state on earth since the fall, and full possession of his intelligence. There will not be a shadow of an excuse for him.

"And the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed."

We must remind ourselves that Satan is shut up in the Abyss, and that there will be no more world, as we now understand it. There is, for him, only the flesh, namely his natural state. We learn from this that the birth from above is still essential, so that if these conditions do not provoke thirst in his soul, his days of grace are finished.

V. 21. "And they shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat the fruit of them: they shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat: for as the days of a tree shall be the days of my people, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands."

“They shall build.” “They shall not build.” Here is the same thing stated affirmatively. This may include exceptions. But it is stated negatively. This admits of none. Only God can promise anything like this. Further, to secure this end, they are promised that their days shall be as the days of a tree. Some trees last a thousand years, so we are told. This brings us back to pre-deluge times. The result of length of days in those times meant “evil only, evil continually” (Genesis vi. 5). The reason for this marvellous difference is that Christ is ruling. It is no wonder as we see this sort of thing so definitely promised, that we exclaim, How long Lord?”

V. 23. “They shall not labour in vain, nor bring forth for calamity : for they are the seed of the blessed of the Lord, and their offspring with them.”

We are very grateful to the Lord that even in those days we find His people are cared for in a wonderful way. Most of us find that godliness is profitable in the life that now is. Calamity does come now, but not when He rules the earth. What a cheering promise this is !

V. 24. “And it shall come to pass, before they call, I will answer ; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear.”

We in these times have frequently to wait for the answer to our prayers. There will be no need for the delay in the Millennial times.

V. 25. “The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the ox :

and dust shall be the serpents' meat. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the Lord."

Some say this is figurative; others say that it will be literally true. We see pictures of this happy condition. Either way comes to practically the same thing. At the present time all Nature exists by living on one another. Life depends on the death of another. I have heard say that Nature proclaims in principle the Atonement. Whether that is God's intention or not, I would not venture any opinion. This verse does teach that instead of Nature being in a state of discord, there will be harmony.

There is the question as to the ground the term "Holy Mountain" is intended to cover. Mountain, politically, is used for a great state; religiously, of Mount Zion or at the Millennium, the Oblation (Ezek. xlv. 1). It is a delightful picture. See Isaiah lxvi. 20.



CHAPTER LXVI.

V. 1. "Thus saith the Lord, the heaven is my throne, and the earth my footstool : what manner of house will ye build unto me? and what shall be the place of my rest?"

I think that Isaiah is bringing before us the rebuilding of the Temple in the time of Ezra, which was then yet in the future. As we saw when writing on the book of Ezra, that Temple building is one thing that affects us in this Christian dispensation very much, for God's eternal habitation in which He will dwell is the Church (Ephesians ii. 21, 22).

We have seen that the building of this temple was full of instructions for us, so we may note the truths brought before us here, and apply them to our own dispensation.

Here the Lord reminds them of the majesty of His being. Heaven is His throne; earth is His footstool. He then asks them two questions concerning the house they propose to build. There is much for us to meditate upon here.

What kind of house are we intelligently seeking to build, and will it be such as He can rest in?"

V. 2. "For all these things hath mine hand made, and so all these things came to be, saith the Lord : but to this man will I look, even to

him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at my word.”

Whatever sort of house they may decide to give to the Lord, they are reminded that He is the Creator of all they can give. This is so even with our moral and spiritual qualities. We know where the Lord found us, and any good thing that may be found in us is of His giving, hence we can only offer up that which we have received. So we can readily see that the Lord can only regard with favour the man that is poor, *i.e.*, the man that has nothing to give, really, that has sorrow for sin, and that regards His word with reverential awe. This appears to be the root virtue in gaining grace with the Lord. It is folly to expect otherwise, even in our dealings with man.

V. 3. “He that killeth an ox is as he that slayeth a man : he that sacrificeth a lamb, as he that breaketh a dog’s neck ; he that offereth an oblation, as he that offereth swine’s blood : he that burneth frankincense as he that blesseth an idol : yea, they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delighteth in their abominations.”

This brings us back to chapter one. In the wonderful temple built by Solomon, enriched by the devotion of many of the best of God’s saints, we see the dreadful picture given there. With the prospect of this temple being destroyed and another to be built later, we get these warnings.

The first appears to mean that man has no right to take an animal’s life wantonly. To kill an animal and not use it for food or without a good reason is sin.

How cruel are fox-hunting, deer-stalking, bull-fighting, etc. It is indeed a revelation of the callousness of man when they find their pleasure in it.

But as we have seen in chapter one, and on through the book, when this is introduced into their worship, what an abomination it is to the Lord! What snares do those escape who delight to obey God's word.

Their trouble is the idolatry of self-worship. We note the Lord says, "They have chosen their own ways." It is what they think, and that ought to please God. He ought to accept the worship or the life that they are pleased to give, or live, but alas for all such, God's choice is the final one. We should note carefully the following.

V. 4. "I also will choose their delusions, and will bring their fears upon them; because when I called none did answer; when I spake they did not hear; but they did that which was evil in mine eyes, and chose that wherein I delighted not."

We note, "They have chosen their own ways." The Lord says here, "I also will choose their delusions." The Lord has given us the power of choice. How solemn this is! These delusions are brought about because they chose that which was evil in the eyes of the Lord. Even though He called and spake to them, they would not hear.

As we pass through life we are constantly called upon to make a choice on all sorts of things and ways. We often find how foolish our choice

has been, as the necessary consequence manifested itself. All these things, we see, come about generally because of the permissive will of God. What a difference is the following!

V. 5. "Hear the word of the Lord, ye that tremble at His word." To those that do hear when He speaks, He undertakes to see that all will be well at the end.

"Your brethren that hate you, that cast you out for my name's sake, have said, 'Let the Lord be glorified that we may see your joy'; but they shall be ashamed."

One of the consequences to those that follow the Lord and delight in His word, which though profitable is far from agreeable, is the fact that those who make a profession of His name are to be found among our most bitter opponents. "Narrow," "bigoted," etc., and such like terms are used of us, and the history of the Church teaches that their persecutions have been and are where possible, as cruel as the pagan persecutions.

At this time they taunt them and say, "Let the Lord be glorified" (by saving you from us) "that we may see your joy." The Lord Himself was served thus. He certainly was crucified, the priests taking the predominant part. "In like manner also the chief priests mocking Him, with the scribes and elders, said, He saved others, Himself He cannot save. He is the King of Israel: let Him now come down from the Cross, and we will believe on Him" (Matt. xxvii. 41).

Let us encourage ourselves by the assurance given here. "But they shall be ashamed."

We rejoice in the encouragement the Lord gives those that tremble at His word, and especially in the deliverance we shall be reading about. I, however, sometimes am inclined to think we bring some of it on ourselves. I am not speaking of any one I have read about in or out of the Bible, but of my own friends whom I love and delight to be with. We, as it appears to me, forget in some measure the Lordship of Christ. We claim it for ourselves, but often speak of them in a way as though we are their judges, and others gather from our ways that we think we are more faithful than they are. I do not think it is so, but I am afraid this is the impression we often give. It does not seem possible for a man that is firmly grounded in the fact that his salvation rests on God's sovereign grace to have big thoughts of self.

Blessed God and Father, we do pray Thee to enable us to walk the narrow path as near to Thee as it is possible to do, but do keep us from judging others. May we fully, in the most complete way possible, leave them to Thee, for we have no doubt many are really Thine. Amen.

V. 6. "A voice of tumult from the city, a voice from the Temple, a voice of the Lord that rendereth recompense to His enemies."

Boys and girls, I hope you are pondering over these things and do not accept anything till you are happy with the Lord about it.

I remember that when the Lord comes to those that are alive and that are left, and to raise the

dead in Christ, it says, "For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, etc." (I. Thess. iv. 16). Here we have Him coming to Jerusalem to recompense His enemies. Other scriptures tell us the dreadful state of Jerusalem, see Zech. xiv. 1-5, which helps us to understand the expression, "A noise of tumult from the city." We further remember the Temple built by the Jews at the beginning of the last seven years. Rev. xi. We see there the Lord had the inner shrine measured, though not the outer court. This would be sufficient for the Lord's people to lift up their voices in supplication in such dire peril. Then we remember the voice of the Lord as He comes to Olivet to render recompense to the enemies of His people.

V. 7. "Before she travailed she brought forth; before her pain, she was delivered of a man-child."

Notice the word "before" occurs twice in this verse. Yet some think this man-child is Israel.

Before she travailed, before her pain, she brought forth the man-child. The birth of the true Israel of God is at the end of her travail. Rev. xii. clearly shews me the Lord Jesus as the man-child. He was born before the great tribulation. The church period is a parenthesis. Then comes the trouble, then comes the bringing forth of a nation in a day, etc., etc.

V. 8. "Who hath heard such a thing? who hath seen such things? Shall a land be born in one day? shall a nation be brought forth at once?"

for as soon as Zion travailed she brought forth her children.”

Four questions and one statement in one verse! Nor can we wonder at it. Till this time comes there will be nothing like it. We need not mind mentioning truths again and again, seeing that God does.

It is a well-known story how the Jews as a nation served their Messiah. They crucified Him. All down through the ages they have hated Christ, and have spoken of Him as the Tollah, the hanged one.

I can hardly wonder at it at times, for those we read of in verse 5 have served the Jews as cruelly as the Christian; that does not admit their authority.

I have often thought of this scene. All through the centuries they have hated the Christ. They are now passing through the greatest trouble human beings ever know on this earth. At the direst point in their experiences when Jerusalem is half captured and the condition of the people is terrible, Christ comes to Olivet. The mountain is split in twain. They escape through, and when they discover the one that comes to their relief, it is the Tollah (the hanged one). It says in Rev. i. 7, “Behold, He cometh with clouds: and every eye shall see Him, and they which pierced; and all the tribes of the earth or land (*pasai ai phulai tēs gēs*), shall mourn over Him. Even so, Amen.”

It says they mourn over Him. Their conduct breaks their heart. We get a beautiful picture of this when Joseph makes himself known to his

brethren. The Egyptians are turned out of the room, yet they hear their weeping.

What a lovely description of the great grief they experience when they remember their conduct toward Him, see Zechariah xii. 10 to the end of the chapter. Dear reader, please do read this again; it is very touching. Sorrow and joy are mixed in a wonderful way.

V. 9. "Shall I bring to the birth, and not cause to bring forth? saith the Lord: shall I that cause to bring forth shut the womb? saith thy God."

It is very pleasant to us for the Lord to put it this way. He takes the figure of a woman travailing with child. Shall I that cause to bring forth shut the womb? The answer is obvious. Hence we learn that in all the discipline and suffering His people may and will have to go through, His object in permitting it all will be certainly carried out.

V. 10. "Rejoice ye with Jerusalem, and be glad for her, all ye that love her: rejoice for joy with her, all ye that mourn over her."

Here is a call to them who have loved Jerusalem and rejoiced in her joy, and mourned in her sorrows. They will have good reason to, for in Matthew xxv. 33-46 our blessed Lord has told us beforehand about how the nations will be judged according to the way they have treated His people. There we find how He and His people are one, as truly as Saul found on his way to Damascus. There can be no safer or richer position in any dispensation than to identify oneself with the people of God.

V. 11. "That ye may be satisfied with the breasts of her consolation, that ye may milk out and be delighted with the abundance of her glory."

These people will indeed be satisfied. They will hear the Lord say, "Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." Matthew xxv. 34. They will not only be satisfied, but they will be delighted with the abundance of her glory.

V. 12. "For thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the nations like an overflowing stream, and ye shall suck thereof; ye shall be borne upon the side, and shall be dangled upon the knees."

Here is a mighty peace to be given to Israel and to those Gentiles who have been in sympathy with her. It is pleasant to note the gratitude of the Jews to those who have rejoiced and mourned with her. How gladly they share their blessings with them!

V. 13. "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you: and ye shall be comforted in Jerusalem."

This is the God of all comfort that is promising this. We have already had some experience of what He can do in this direction.

V. 14. "And ye shall see it, and your heart shall rejoice, and your bones shall flourish like the tender grass: and the hand of the Lord shall be known to all His servants, and He will have indignation against His enemies."

We here get eyes, heart, and bones brought before us. The promise is definite "Ye shall see it." As I ponder over this and remember that when the Millennium starts here, the dead in Christ have been caught up, and that when He comes we shall come with Him (Rev. xix.), it teaches me that this tremendous event will be shared in some sort of way by all the saints of all dispensations. I know we of this dispensation are so full of the great blessings that we are promised, that as far as I am concerned I do not enter as much as I should into these other glories that will be Christ's. We, I feel sure, should have the keenest possible interest in any of the honours that will be His, especially as we shall be coming with Him to share it with Him in some way.

"Your heart shall rejoice." This is the symbol of the inner life of man. We shall all be filled with joy."

"Your bones shall flourish." This is the symbol of that on which our bodies or manifested life is built. The condition will be all that can be desired.

"The hand of the Lord," the symbol of executive power. This is exercised in care to His servants and indignation to His enemies. We can understand the indignation when we think of all God's love, patience, long-suffering, and His not wishing any should perish. The way man treats God is dreadful. We often get indignant with but a small measure of ingratitude.

V. 15. "For behold, the Lord will come with fire, and His chariots shall be like the whirl-

wind, to render His anger with fury, and His rebuke with flames of fire. For by fire will the Lord plead, and His sword, with all flesh : and the slain of the Lord shall be many.”

We have no space here to enter into the details of when the Lord does come. We know His judgements will be terrible. We are told earlier in this book, that when they are upon the earth the inhabitants will learn righteousness. We are thankful that the Lord has definitely promised that this wickedness cannot go on for ever.

V. 17. “They that sanctify themselves and purify themselves to go unto the gardens, behind one in the midst, eating swine’s flesh, and the abomination, and the mouse : they shall come to an end together, saith the Lord.”

This appears to refer to the apostates who sought to mix the worship of Jehovah with heathen ritual. We see this perhaps worst of all in Manasseh’s time.

The Authorised has “Behind one tree in the midst.” It is true in Deut. xvi. 21 that Israel was forbidden to plant a tree beside the altar, but it is not clear to me. It is clear, however, that these were involved in idolatrous practice, and all scripture on this point is clear that this time is the finish of idolatry.

V. 18. “For I know their works and their thoughts : the time cometh that I will gather all nations and tongues ; and they shall come and shall see my glory,” see Matthew xxv. When this judgement takes place the decisions will be just and true, for He knows not only what they have done but what they think. All will see His

glory. We know in Philippians ii. 11 that "every tongue and knee shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

It requires much pondering over before we can get any proper conception of this scene, especially verse 15. All the forces of the world are straining to gain Jerusalem, which has indeed become a cup of trembling, Zech. xii. 2. The experience of God's people is the worst they will ever know. Verse 15 in a few words describes His coming to deliver His people. The nations indeed do get an experience of His glory. Yet amidst it all the Lord does not go an inch further than He intended, for we read,

V. 19. "I will set a sign among them." This is the seventh sign in this book, and tells of the final gathering of the Jew and Gentile which will be in happy fellowship, for God could work for nothing else. This is how He brings it about. He allows some of each nation to escape. "And I will send such as escape unto the nations, to Tarshish, Pul, and Lud, that draw the bow, to Tubal and Javan, to the isles afar off, that have not heard my fame, neither have seen my glory : and they shall declare my glory among the nations."

What a story they will have to tell. The Queen of Sheba could go back and tell of the wisdom and riches of Solomon. These will go back to declare the resistless might, majesty and glory of the Saviour of the Jews. Notice the effect it has upon them. They had been sifting the Israelites amongst them, whatever form of suffering they put upon them. They can see it

has to stop, and the most profitable thing for these nations to do is to make an offering.

V. 20. "And they shall bring all your brethren out of all the nations for an offering unto the Lord. Upon horses and in chariots, and in litters, and upon mules and upon swift beasts, to My holy mountain Jerusalem, saith the Lord, as the children of Israel bring their offering in a clean vessel into the house of the Lord."

And so the Lord brings about the union of Israelite and Jew. What a gathering of the ransomed that will be!

I can quite understand the feeling of the nations. They had persecuted the people. Now they have had a real experience of what it means to have Christ against them. With what zeal then, do they throw themselves into the work of offering to the Lord His people. Every available means of transport is taken advantage of. The way the Egyptians helped the Israelites to depart from them, falls, I think, far short of this.

The children of Israel themselves bring their offering in a clean vessel into the house of the Lord. I can quite see the most acceptable offering the Gentiles could possibly make to God is that of His own people. I am not clear myself at present as to what their offering is, though I know some think it is the meal offering of Lev. ii. 1, 2, so that the strongest point to me is that whatever that offering is, it is brought in a clean vessel. This is imperative.

V. 21. "And of them also will I take for priests and for Levites, saith the Lord."

I can only believe that it is from them who have been offered to Him, namely His own people.

We know from elsewhere that the priests will be of the house of Zadok (Aaronites). Our Lord Himself, Peter, Paul, John, etc., were not priests on earth.

I firmly believe that none but God can do this, for as we look around us we see how all traces of the tribes have broken down. It appears to me an impossible task. If man had to do it, they would, I expect, begin with all those whose name is Cohen, namely priest. This, however, will be no difficulty to Him.

V. 22. "For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, saith the Lord, so shall your seed and your name remain."

One has to be careful here, as the word new is ambiguous, *i.e.*, it has more than one meaning. We see in the following verse "one new moon to another." This means the same old moon, but we have lost sight of it and it comes into view again.

We talk of a new year, new clothes, but this is rather different. We say, this is something new, meaning there has been nothing like it before. I quite think that in a lesser sense the Millennium can be said to be new, but the way it is worded that it "shall remain before Me," brings Hebrews *i. before me*. The Millennium lasts a thousand years. What we have before us is to me the new heavens and the new earth after these have passed away. If this is so, it seems to settle a question that has often been in my mind. The

Jew has an earthly inheritance, the church an heavenly. In the new heavens and the new earth, do these dispensations still exist? "So shall your seed and your name remain" looks very much like it.

V. 23. "And it shall come to pass, that from one new moon to another, and from one sabbath to another, that all flesh shall come to worship before Me, saith the Lord."

I think this is referring to the fact that during the Millennium the nations will continually come up to Jerusalem to worship. Those who think it refers to eternity will see then that the prophet views it as an endless succession of time.

V. 24. "And they shall go forth, and look upon the carcasses of the men that have transgressed against Me : for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched : and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh."

When we think of the terrible destruction brought about by the coming of the Lord, we can quite see how they would go to the valley of Hinnom and see the extent of the Lord's triumph over His enemies. There the preying worm, and the burning fire could be seen, not, of course, in the same spot, as that would not be compatible with a material state. However, we can be sure that in a material state the fire does get quenched, and the worm does die. But here are both given in the negative, and so logically, must be taken universally. Being in the negative, therefore, it forbids the fire to be quenched or the worm to

die, so that the prophet is taking this to be a figure of the state of the lost, of the finally impenitent.

This is the way our Lord uses it, see Mark ix. which should be read with this.

I have been asked what this preying worm is. The best reply I have heard up till now is, Remorse. To have salvation freely offered on the ground of sovereign grace, and to obstinately refuse it, is enough to make any one never forgive himself.

W. H. KNOX.

