

EXPOSITORY NOTES ON THE PROPHET ISAIAH

by

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ISAIAH CHAPTER FIFTY-SIX

ENCOURAGEMENT TO RIGHTEOUSNESS

THESE following chapters are of such an exceedingly practical nature, that sometimes we may be inclined to look carelessly over such portions and focus our attention upon passages that speak of great events that are to take place in the future or of God's dealings with His people in the past. But, we repeat, the great object of prophetic ministry is not simply to occupy people with coming events, but so to impress the truths of the future upon the conscience as to enable God's people to live now in the light of the predicted future. It was so of Israel of old and it is so with us, in this present Church age.

Many people have a rather intellectual interest in prophecy, and will flock to hear a series of such messages. They are very important, and any servant of Christ who sets forth the prophetic parts of the Word of God, will find that fewer professed Christians would be lost to orthodoxy if saved preachers gave more attention to the prophetic Word.

People go out into other systems because they are hungry to know the future. That is how the "*Voice of Prophecy*" appeals to so many who hear it over the air, who do not know that it is the radio department of the Seventh-day Adventists. They are specially thrilled when it attempts to open up the future. Then it is suggested that the listeners should take one of their Bible Study Courses. They never announce over the air, "This is the Seventh-day Adventist propaganda." They keep that hidden closely, and not until the student is well on in the Bible Courses does he see what it really is. But thousands of people all over this country have been swept into Seventh-day Adventism annually just because of an interest in prophecy. Properly instructed from the Scriptures, they would not have been in the same danger.

"Jehovah's Witnesses" work on the same principle. They try to hide their real views until little by little hearers listen to their great program for the future. The truth as to the Second Coming of the Lord, particularly in its two aspects, would preserve them from the ridiculous teachings of so-called "Pastor" Russell and Judge Rutherford, that the Lord has already come and has been here since 1874, but is manifesting Himself only to those of special spirituality, and the millennium began in 1914 and we are already in it. Wonderful millennium, is it not? But who that has been well-instructed in clear Bible teaching would be carried away with such vagaries?

On the other hand, it is important that with every message something of an intensely practical character should be incorporated lest its hearers be carried away with the glowing pictures of the future and the visions of such prophecies as set forth in Daniel and The Revelation, while very careless and indifferent as to their lives.

Once when I was asked to give some addresses on the Second Coming of the Lord, a speaker sitting beside me remarked as someone entered before the meeting commenced, "There is one of the most godless men in our community and yet he is always on hand if anyone lectures on prophecy. He is so interested in finding out all about the future."

When I got through preaching, this man came up to me. "Brother," he said, "I'm glad to know that you hold the Second Coming - I hold that too." I asked, "Do you? Does it hold you? It is one thing to hold the Second Coming, it is quite another thing to be held by it. The Word says, '**Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as He is pure.**' Does it have that effect on your heart and life?" He said, "Who has been talking to you about me?" Clearly something was wrong. Many people want to know all about the horns of Daniel and the beasts of Revelation; they do not want you to probe their consciences.

But we get prophetic ministry in the proper proportion in a book like this of Isaiah. Again and again after giving pictures of the future, the prophet comes down to the actual condition of the people at the time when he was speaking.

In chapter fifty-six Isaiah begins a very practical section. He points out the importance of living in a godly way in the then present, and also that in the future it is as the nations learn to seek after righteousness that the blessing of the kingdom will be theirs.

"Thus saith the Lord, Keep ye Judgment, and do justice: for my salvation is near to come, and my righteousness to be revealed" (verse 1).

That gives exactly the same principle. "**Keep ye judgment and do justice**" because these things are soon to take place. In other words, live now in the light of then.

"Blessed is the man that doeth this, and the son of man that layeth hold on it; that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and keepeth his hand from doing any evil. Neither let the son of the stranger, that hath joined himself to the Lord, speak, saying, The Lord hath utterly separated me from his people: neither let the eunuch say, Behold, I am a dry tree. For thus saith the Lord unto the eunuchs that keep my sabbaths, and choose the things that please me, and take hold of my covenant; even unto them will I give in mine house and within my walls a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off" (verses 2-5).

He goes on to show that no one need fail of the coming blessing if he is sincere in turning to God. Certain ones were prohibited from having any part in the services of the Lord in Old Testament times; a eunuch could not have any part in the priesthood and the stranger had no place there.

But in the future, no matter what one's physical condition, or nationality, if his earnest purpose of heart is to seek the Lord and to do the will of God, he will have the same place in the kingdom that anyone else can have. It will be open for everyone. So this chapter emphasizes the importance of practical righteousness.

“Also the sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the Lord, to serve him, and to love the name of the Lord, to be his servants, every one that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and taketh hold of my covenant; Even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon mine altar; for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people” (verses 6, 7).

These are the words of the Lord Jesus Christ, when He drove the money-changers out of the temple. **“Is it not written, My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer? but ye have made it a den of thieves”** (Mark 11:17).

Our Lord thus gives us the key to the practical application of this passage. It was God's word not only to Israel but to assure the Gentiles that they, too, might come into blessing if they would seek His face and take hold of the Abrahamic covenant: In thee **“and in thy seed shall all the nations. . . be blessed.”** As long as the Jewish dispensation lasted, in the days of the Great Tribulation, and on into the millennium, the observance of the Sabbath will be an outward sign of allegiance to the Lord and the recognition of His authority.

We, today, do not recognize the Jewish Sabbath. Why? Because it was part of that Law which was done away for us in the Cross of Christ. The Lord took it out of the way, nailing it to His Cross. So the Word says, **“Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holy day, . . . or of the sabbath days: which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.”** The light of God of old was shining upon Christ, and Christ cast His shadow before He came - and the Sabbath was one aspect of this shadow - rest at the end of a six-day period of labor. The Lord Jesus was the glorious fulfillment when He said, **“Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”**

Instead of the Jewish Sabbath we now have the Lord's Day. Some object to applying the term **“Lord's Day”** to the first day of the week. Where John in The Revelation says, **“I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day”** they insist that the **“Lord's day”** and **“the day of the Lord”** are the same thing. And we might take it for granted that the two expressions mean the same - the day of the Lord and the Lord's day. Now if it were thus exactly translated, then that might be so, but the term **“Lord”** is not in the possessive case there, but an adjective is used, formed from the word for **“Lord.”**

It is the Lordian Day - just as you have an adjective formed from the word **“Christ,”** when we speak of a **“Christian”** spirit, a Christian church, a Christian atmosphere.

It has been translated **“lordly,”** which does not give the thought since that suggests a superior day to others. It is the Lordian day - the day that brings before us the resurrection of our blessed Lord from the dead.

The early Christians knew better than we in the twentieth century the meaning of some of those cryptic expressions in the book of Revelation. All down through the centuries from the earliest days, the first day of the week was recognized by Christians as the Lord's Day, the Lordian Day.

The only name that the Greeks have for it is *kuriakos*, the Lord's Day; the Latins called it the Dominical Day, the Lord's Day, which is the same thing. And it has been so known down through the centuries. If we were in the White House and looking at its furniture, and the guard said, "That is the President's chair," or, "That is the chair of the President," the words would mean the same thing. But if we speak of the "Presidential Chair" there is something altogether different.

The "Lordian Day" is that which the Christian Church, from the very beginning, has kept and - mark this - voluntarily, voluntarily, in memory of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. It's very voluntariness gives it value in the sight of the Lord.

If some loving friend gives you a birthday present its special value is that it shows his kindly thought. If you had written to say, "I am going to have a birthday and will expect a present from you," it would lose all its value. So the Seventh-day Adventists challenge us, "Show us a commandment in the New Testament telling us to observe the first day of the week." We say, "There is no commandment. We are under grace, not law." They ask, "Why do you do it?"

"Because of the gratitude of our hearts to the Lord Jesus who rose from the dead on the first day of the week." The first day of the week has been given a special place in the Book of the Acts, and the First Epistle to the Corinthians. That special place has been marked from the beginning of Christianity to the present time.

As Israel of old by their recognition of the Sabbath manifested their love to the Lord, their reverence to His name, so by the observance of the Lord's Day we manifest the same thing. Christians should be very careful about the use of the Lord's Day, and never should allow themselves to treat it just as a common day, and be indifferent to its claims. Suppose it were taken away from us. Suppose this country became like Russia and every day was a secular day and there were no special privileges such as we have enjoyed. How we would miss them! How bitterly we would rue the memory of ever having treated that day carelessly.

We have a spiritual lesson out of this - that for Israel of old it was absolutely legal - we are told that the righteousness of the law is fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit. While we are dead to the law in the body of Christ, yet every righteous requirement of the law will be fulfilled in us as we walk in the power of the Holy Spirit.

~ end of chapter 56 ~

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