

EXPOSITORY NOTES ON THE PROPHET ISAIAH

by

Harry A. Ironside, Litt.D.

Copyright @ 1952

ISAIAH CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

THE SIXTH WOE AND PROMISES OF BLESSING

WE NOW COME to the last of the series of six woes, and this one is pronounced upon the enemies of the people of God, primarily Assyria, but also including the other nations that have sought to destroy Israel and Judah.

“Woe to thee that spoilest, and thou wast not spoiled; and dealest treacherously and they dealt not treacherously with thee! when thou shalt cease to spoil, thou shalt be spoiled; and when thou shalt make an end to deal treacherously, they shall deal treacherously with thee” (verse 1).

In all God’s ways with men the principle abides true that **“whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap”**. This applies to nations as well as to individuals. The powers that have wreaked their vengeance upon Israel unprovoked must in turn be visited with judgment after God has used them for the chastening of His people. As we look back over the pages of history we can see how these words have been fulfilled many times in connection with the different nations under whom the Jews have suffered so terribly. One need only instance Assyria, Babylon, Egypt, and the Roman Empire of old, as well as more modern nations like Spain, Poland, Russia, and Germany. Those who in future days will rise up to oppress the covenant people will be permitted to go only as far as God in His infinite wisdom and justice deems well, then they in turn will be destroyed and Israel delivered.

“O Lord, be gracious unto us; we have waited for thee: be thou their arm every morning, our salvation also in the time of trouble” (verse 2).

This is the cry of the remnant both in the past and as it will be in the future in the days of the Beast and the Antichrist. They are devoted to destruction but find deliverance as they look up to the God of their fathers and turn to Him in repentance. Then He will intervene on their behalf, stretching forth His hand of power to save and comfort.

“At the noise of the tumult the people fled; at the lifting up of thysself the nations were scattered. And your spoil shall be gathered like the gathering of the caterpillar: as the running to and fro of locusts shall he run upon them” (verses 3, 4).

Faith counts on God, and looks at the things that are not as though they are. It is still the voice of the remnant, declaring the might of the Lord and His interference on their behalf.

“The Lord is exalted; for he dwelleth on high: he hath filled Zion with judgment and righteousness. And wisdom and knowledge shall be the stability of thy times, and strength of salvation: the fear of the Lord is his treasure” (verses 5, 6).

The hearts of those who confide in Him are moved to worship and thanksgiving as they see by faith His kingdom established over all the earth. It is surely a grievous misapplication of the scope of the prophetic Scriptures to spiritualize all this and to make Zion mean the Church, the Body of Christ. Throughout all these chapters every sober expositor recognizes the fact that the judgments predicted have fallen or are yet to fall upon the Jews or their oppressors.

Surely then, it is very inconsistent to apply the blessings to the Church of the present age. Certainly the same people who have suffered at the hands of the Gentiles because of their disobedience to the Word of God are identical, nationally, with those who will participate in the privileges of the kingdom of God when it is set up in this world and Mount Zion will be the center of blessing for the whole earth.

“Behold, their valiant ones shall cry without: the ambassadors of peace shall weep bitterly. The highways lie waste, the wayfaring man ceaseth: he hath broken the covenant, he hath despised the cities, he regardeth no man. The earth mourneth and languisheth: Lebanon is ashamed and hewn down: Sharon is like a wilderness; and Bashan and Carmel shake off their fruits” (verses 7-9).

The covenant referred to here doubtless was that which the Jews attempted to make with Egypt in order, as we have seen, to strengthen themselves against the Assyrian; a covenant which was to prove absolutely valueless. But we may also see in these verses a picture of the desolation that shall come in the last days when the covenant made between the Beast and the head of the Jewish State for seven years, as foretold in Daniel 9, will be broken in the midst of the week, and almost incredible sufferings will fall upon the remnant who, in that day, will refuse to worship the abomination of desolation, as predicted by our Lord in Matthew 24. Other scriptures have shown us something of the desolation that will come upon the land because of the apostasy of the mass when the day of the Lord begins.

“Now will I rise, saith the Lord; now will I be exalted; now will I lift up myself. Ye shall conceive chaff, ye shall bring forth stubble: your breath, as tire, shall devour you. And the people shall be as the burnings of lime: as thorns cut up shall they be burned in the fire” (verses 10-12).

No machinations of the apostate mass, the enemies of the Lord in the last days, will avail to turn away the judgments of the Lord. When He arises to shake terribly the earth, His power will brook no attempted interference on the part of men who deny His name. On those also who honor His name with their lips but in works deny Him, His judgments will surely fall.

“Hear, ye that are far oft, what I have done; and, ye that are near, acknowledge my might. The sinners in Zion are afraid; fearfulness hath surprised the hypocrites. Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?” (verses 13, 14).

The sinners in Zion are those referred to above who, while professing reverence for the name of the Lord, manifest their unbelief by the godlessness of their lives. When God arises to deal with them, their religious pretensions will fail them and they will learn at last that the hypocrite’s hope shall perish. Only that which is real can abide the Day of the Lord.

The questions of verse 14 have, I think, often been misunderstood. The prophet is not speaking here of that which Scripture clearly teaches elsewhere, namely, the everlasting punishment of the finally impenitent. The **“everlasting burnings”** are not the fires of hell but the holiness of God, before which no unrighteous man can stand, whatever his pretensions to piety may be. The verses that follow give the answer to the passage. **“Our God is a consuming fire”** (Hebrews 12:29). They only can abide before Him who have judged themselves in His holy presence and are seeking now to walk before Him in truth and uprightness.

“He that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly; he that despiseth the gain of oppressions, that shaketh his hands from holding of bribes, that stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood, and shutteth his eyes from seeing evil; He shall dwell on high: his place of defence shall be the munitions of rocks: bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure. Thine eyes shall see the king in his beauty: they shall behold the land that is very far oft” (verses 16-17).

Here we have the only possible answer to the question of the verses above. This is in full accord with Psalm 15:1-3. While in every dispensation all who are saved will owe everything for eternity to the propitiatory work of our Lord Jesus Christ, yet the proof that one has really been born of God and justified before His face is seen in a righteous life and in humble submission to His holy will. To the remnant, who will be characterized by subjection to God and integrity in their dealings with their fellows, these promises will be made real. These shall behold the King in all His beauty and glory when He returns to fulfill prophetic scripture. They shall behold the land, that is, the land promised by God of old to Abraham’s seed, far extended. From the River of Egypt to the Euphrates, all will be the inheritance of Israel when restored to God.

“Thine heart shall meditate terror. Where is the scribe? where is the receiver? where is he that counted the towers? Thou shalt not see a fierce people, a people of a deeper speech than thou canst perceive; of a stammering tongue, that thou canst not understand” (verses 18, 19).

It will be remembered that the Apostle Paul quotes part of these words when he is expressing the limitations of the human mind in regard to divine ministries (I Corinthians 1:20). Who, unaided by the Spirit of God, would ever have understood His purpose of blessing for that nation which refused His Son and called down upon their own heads the awful malediction, **“His blood be on us, and on our children”**?

In spite of all their waywardness, His counsels shall stand and He will bring them at last into blessing, not only for the millennial age but throughout eternity.

No matter what they may be called upon to suffer in the interim through the fierceness and hatred of the persecuting nations, they will emerge at last triumphant over all their foes and be brought into fullness of blessing when the Lord Jesus descends to vindicate every promise that God has given. No longer will those who revere His name be called upon to endure reproach and suffering because of their faithfulness to Himself.

“Look upon Zion, the city of our solemnities: thine eyes shall see Jerusalem a quiet habitation, a tabernacle that shall not be taken down; not one of the stakes thereof shall ever be removed, neither shall any of the cords thereof be broken. But there the glorious Lord will be unto us a place of broad rivers and streams; wherein shall go no galley with oars, neither shall gallant ship pass thereby. For the Lord is our judge, the Lord is our lawgiver, the Lord is our king; he will save us. Thy tacklings are loosed; they could not well strengthen their mast, they could not spread the sail: then is the prey of a great spoil divided; the lame take the prey. And the inhabitant shall not say, I am sick: the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity” (verses 20-24).

Glorious is the prospect here presented. Jerusalem, so long a city of strife and warfare, will become a peaceful habitation, for the Prince of Peace will dwell there and His law go forth to all the world. Isolated as Jerusalem has been, with no close seaport, in that day the Lord Himself will be its defense and will be to the people of the Holy City as a broad river, but a river wherein no enemy ship shall ever sail but where God will be the protector of His people.

Sorrow and sickness will flee away and the weakest of the children of God will be stronger than the most powerful foes of the past. It is those who recognize their own lameness and insufficiency who overcome, because of their reliance on almighty power.

While we should be careful not to take such a passage as this out of its setting and give it direct application to the Church of the present age, nevertheless, it has spiritual lessons for us from which we may well profit. It tells us what Scripture elsewhere ever emphasizes, that vain is the help of man but that he who relies upon the living God need fear no foe, whether human or demonic. Faith is ever the victory that overcomes the world, the flesh, and the devil.

~ end of chapter 33 ~

<http://www.baptistbiblebelievers.com/>
