

EXPOSITORY NOTES ON THE PROPHET ISAIAH

by

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ISAIAH CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

COMING DESTRUCTION AND DESOLATION

THE chapter to which we now turn presents a scene of destruction and desolation unparalleled, and is closely linked with the similar passage in Jeremiah 4:23-31. Many different interpretations have been given to it, some supposing that it pictures the earth in its chaotic state as referred to in Genesis 1:2 after it had fallen from the glory of its original creation. Others again, as for instance Mrs. Ellen G. White, of the Seventh-day Adventist cult, take it to refer to the millennial earth, for she denies the reality of Christ's kingdom during that period and makes the earth to be the bottomless pit into which Satan will be cast to wander about until his final judgment and destruction in the lake of fire. But a careful study of both passages would seem to make it clear that they refer primarily to the land of Palestine in the darkest period of the great tribulation yet to come, and not only to that land but to the prophetic earth as a whole, that is, the region once occupied by the Roman Empire.

Throughout this chapter the Hebrew word *eretz* is translated "land," "world," and "earth." The scholars who produced the Authorized Version were very fond of using synonyms, and wherever a word occurred frequently either in the Greek or Hebrew, they used as many different terms as seemed right to them. But at least in the early part of the chapter, it is not the world as such that is in view but the land of Israel which the prophet sees as empty and desolate because of the terrible experiences through which the covenant people will pass in the last days.

"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 land shall be utterly emptied, and utterly spoiled: for the Lord hath spoken this word" (verses 1-3).

Palestine is often described in Scripture as a land flowing with milk and honey, but here we see it as the very opposite, a land parched and dry, no longer able to sustain its inhabitants who flee in terror because of the judgments of the Lord. Note the expression, "**the Lord . . . turneth it upside down.**"

Everything that unbelieving Israel has trusted in will be broken to pieces. All the hopes in which they have indulged will prove to be but idle dreams because of the fact that Israel will have returned to their own land, even as they are doing now, in unbelief, counting on their own ability and prowess to enable them to build again a great nation in the home of their forefathers. But there are greater disasters ahead of them than they have ever known in the past. Not until they turn to the Lord and look upon Him whom they have pierced will their hopes be realized. Till then they are doomed to one terrible disappointment after another, a disappointment in which all classes of the people shall share.

“The earth mourneth and fadeth away, the world languisheth and fadeth away, the haughty people of the earth do languish. The earth also is defiled under the inhabitants thereof; because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore hath the curse devoured the earth, and they that dwell therein are desolate: therefore the inhabitants of the earth are burned, and few men left. The new wine mourneth, the vine languisheth, all the merry-hearted do sigh. The mirth of 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 for wine in the streets; all joy is darkened, the mirth of the land is gone. In the city is left desolation, and the gate is smitten with destruction” (verses 4-12).

The reason for the desolation here depicted is plainly declared. God’s law has been transgressed, the everlasting covenant referred to in Genesis 9:16 wherein God pledged Himself to show His loving-kindness toward the world, which has been by Israel utterly disregarded. Instead of looking to Him for the mercies of each passing season, they think to avert disaster and procure happiness by their own efforts, thus failing to put their trust in Him who has manifested His unbounded mercy toward a fallen race.

It is a mistake to suppose that the covenant here referred to is that of the law of the ten commandments, given at Sinai, for nowhere is that declared to be an everlasting covenant. It came in by the way, as we know from the Epistle to the Galatians, as a means of the full manifestation of man’s sinfulness and need of a Saviour. Nor can these words refer to the covenant made with Abraham because it is impossible for man to break that covenant, inasmuch as God Himself is the only party to it, unless one might understand the rejection of the promised Seed as the breaking of the covenant so far as man is concerned.

When Messiah came in accordance with the promises made to Abraham and confirmed to David, He was rejected and cut off, as Daniel 9:26 predicted. Certainly Israel then broke the everlasting covenant so far as it was in their power to do it. Later they will enter into covenant with the last head of Gentile power, thus repudiating their allegiance to their own Messiah. That covenant will be for the last week of the seventy and will be broken at the end of three-and-a-half years when the Man of Sin will declare himself to be the only object of worship.

The reference most probably, however, refers to the covenant made by God as the Creator and Sustainer of the universe to bless the labors of men’s hands and give to them fruitful fields and bountiful harvest as they trusted in Him.

Under Noah God set up human government, of which we read nothing in the chapters that deal with antediluvian days. This involves the subjection of the nations to God as their supreme ruler, but this is the very thing which not only Israel but the nations of the Gentiles have failed to acknowledge. The bow in the cloud which was intended to be a perpetual reminder of God's goodness and man's responsibility, has become meaningless because of unbelief and willful disobedience, therefore every effort of men to establish stable government on the earth and peace among the nations is doomed to failure. Our Lord's own words come to mind here. When discussing the horrors of the great tribulation, the rise of nation against nation in bloody warfare, He says, **"Except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved."**

Knowing as we do today the terribly destructive power of modern weapons of warfare whereby whole cities may be blotted out in a few moments of time, we need have no difficulty in accepting these words literally.

Palestine will experience the ravages of warfare perhaps to a greater extent than any other country because she knew not the time of her visitation. But in the day when these judgments are falling upon that devoted land and the contiguous territory, a remnant will be separated from the mass of the people who will return to the Lord and yield glad subjection to His holy will, acknowledging their sins and trusting His word. To them the grace of God will be revealed, assisting and caring for them even as it were in a blazing world, and bringing them at last to their desired haven to dwell in peace in their own land.

"When thus it shall be in the midst of the land among the people, there shall be as the shaking of an olive tree, and as the gleaning grapes when the vintage is done. They shall lift up their voice, they shall sing for the majesty of the Lord, they shall cry aloud from the sea. Wherefore glorify ye the Lord in the fires, even the name of the Lord God of Israel in the isles of the sea" (verses 13-15).

While we like to think of the expression, **"Glorify ye the Lord in the fires,"** as indicating the faithfulness of this remnant during the time when the judgments are falling on the earth, it would seem that it is suggesting that the dark days of the tribulation are after all the harbinger of the coming day of blessing when not only the remnant of Israel, but a great multitude saved out of the Gentile nations, will be brought to the place where they will wait expectantly for the Second Advent of the once-rejected Christ of God and so enter into fullness of blessing in the kingdom age. As the prophet contemplates the sufferings of his people and the desolation of the land during that time of tribulation, he cries out in the anguish of his soul.

"From the uttermost part of the earth have we heard songs, even glory to the righteous. But I said, My leanness, my leanness, woe unto me! the treacherous dealers have dealt treacherously; yea, the treacherous dealers have dealt very treacherously" (verses 16).

Even though Isaiah, with prophetic vision, sees the glory following the desolations, his whole being is stirred within him as he realizes the sufferings his people must go through before they are brought back to God and to their land.

The meaning of the expression, “**My leanness, my leanness,**” is, “My misery, my misery,” as suggested by F. C. Jennings. At any rate, it is clear that the prophet is in the greatest mental anguish as he contemplates the results of departure from God and the breaking of His covenant.

In the verses that follow he reverts to the conditions with which this chapter began.

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 from on high are open, and the foundations of the earth do shake. The earth is utterly broken down, the earth is clean dissolved, the earth is moved exceedingly. The earth shall reel to And fro like a drunkard, and shall be removed like a cottage; and the transgression thereof shall be heavy upon it; and it shall fall, and not rise again” (verses 17-20).

Graphically indeed are the woes of the last days here set forth. Everything that men have considered stable and lasting will be shaken to pieces so that the land will seem to reel to and fro like a drunken man. Indeed, there may be more than seeming in this for it may suggest the great earthquakes which will add to the terror of those days of grief and sorrow. At that time, not only will the misguided rulers of Israel and the nations be dealt with in judgment, but God will deal with those unseen principalities and powers that have sought to dominate the hearts and minds of men in authority so that they are also described in Ephesians 6 as the “**rulers of the darkness of this world**”.

And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall punish the host of the high ones that are on high, and the kings of the earth upon the earth. And they shall be gathered together, as prisoners are gathered in the pit, and shall be shut up in the prison, and after many days shall they be visited. Then the moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed, when the Lord of hosts shall reign in mount Zion, and in Jerusalem, and before his ancients gloriously” (verses 21-23).

The “**host of the high ones that are on high**” evidently refers to those wicked spirits in the heavenlies who attempt to control the minds of men in such a way as to set them in opposition to God and in the vain endeavor to thwart His unchanging plans. They and their dupes, who have given them such willing service, will be shut up together in prison, awaiting the time when the Lord will deal with them in the final judgment.

When the Lord arises to shake terribly the earth, those signs in the heaven to which Christ referred will be followed by the appearing of the glorified Son of Man accompanied by His heavenly saints descending to take over the government of this world and to bring In the long-awaited age of righteousness.

~ end of chapter 24 ~

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