

EXPOSITORY NOTES ON THE PROPHET ISAIAH

by

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ISAIAH CHAPTER FORTY-FOUR GOD'S UNCHANGING PURPOSES OF BLESSING

God continues this theme in a very precious and wonderful way.

“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, which will help thee; Fear not, O Jacob, my servant; and thou, Jeshurun, whom I have chosen. For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring . . . Fear ye not, neither be afraid: have not I told thee from that time, and have declared it? ye are even my witnesses. Is there a God, besides me? yea, there is no God; I know not any” (verses 1-3, 8).

Then comes His promise to pour His Spirit upon Israel from on high. That has not taken place yet, and is not to be confused with the day of Pentecost. It is the prophecy of Joel (2:28, 29) which we have here. Next comes the Lord's direct word in regard to idolatry.

“They that take a graven image are all of them. vanity; and their delectable things shall not profit; and they are their own witnesses; they see not, nor know; that they may be ashamed . . . He heweth him down cedars, and taketh the cypress and the oak, which he strengtheneth for himself among the trees of the forest: he planteth an ash, and the rain doth nourish it. Then shall it be for a man to burn: for he will take thereof, and warm 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. He burneth part thereof in the fire; with part thereof he eateth flesh; he roasteth roast, and is satisfied: yea, 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 it, and prayeth unto it, and saith, Deliver me; for thou art my god. They have not known nor understood: for he hath shut their eyes, that they cannot see; and their hearts, that they cannot understand. And none considereth in his heart, 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?” (verses 9, 14-20).

The idol-makers are said to be their own witnesses (verse 9) to their own folly. Isaiah satirically pictures a man going out into the forest and finding a noble tree. He cuts it down, takes off all the branches and begins to fashion it with his tools. By-and-by he has the figure of a man, and he gathers up the chips as they fly, the parts that are not wanted to make the image, and he uses them as fuel. He cooks his food and says, "This is fine! I have warmed myself at the fire and have a god to worship, all out of the same tree."

Isaiah's remarkable satire and ridicule show the folly of idolatry. The prophet Jeremiah also uses similar language as to this (Jeremiah 10).

What folly for the people of Israel, after all that God had done for them, to turn aside to dumb idols! Yet how senseless people are! On different occasions the kings in Chronicles - even when the people of Israel or Judah went out against some of their foes and overcame them - brought back the gods of the nations they had conquered and set up shrines for them and worshiped them though those gods had proved powerless to defend their own worshipers.

Idolatry seems inherent in the heart of man. Today, men do not worship idols of gold and silver, and brass and iron, but every man who turns away from God sets up some kind of an idol in his heart. He either worships himself or some folly, pleasure, or fame.

An esteemed servant of Christ spoke aptly when introduced on one occasion as a "self-made man." He said he regretted he had been so termed, though he appreciated the kindly thought, "for," he said, "I've noticed that these self-made men always worship their own creation." He knew that if men do not know the one living and true God, they set up the great god self, and worship him.

"Remember these, 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. I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee. 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 glorified himself in Israel. 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 by myself" (verses 21-24).

God tells Israel what He has in store for them, the Redeemer who was still to come, the forerunner who would announce His coming, the comfort He has for them who believe His word and put their trust in Him. He has foreseen the dangers and sorrows that Israel must pass through - the deep waters through which they will have to go. But where there is real faith on their part, He has promised to be with them in all their sorrows and all their troubles.

Then in the closing words of the chapter there is an abrupt change, and He speaks of one who was yet to come to be the deliverer of Israel from the power of the Chaldeans, calls him by name, though he has not known Him - that is Cyrus, King of Persia.

“That saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid” (verse 28).

Isaiah wrote these words long before the Babylonian captivity of seventy years, so that many decades would elapse before Cyrus himself was to appear. He was foretold so long before that when he did come, Israel would know it was the hour of the Lord’s deliverance.

Sometimes the divisions in the chapters and verses come in the wrong places in our English Bible. Its division into chapters and verses is not a question of inspiration. It was simply a matter of accommodation on the part of human editors who thought it would help us to separate the subjects and define certain passages. And while it has been very helpful to have chapters and verses, on the other hand sometimes it is misleading, and may keep us from getting the full content of the passage if it is broken up in the middle. At times the editors seem to have used poor judgment in doing so.

For instance, take the break between John 7 and 8. The last words of John 7 are: **“And every man went to his own house.”** The opening words of John 8 are: **“Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.”** They failed to translate one little word that should have been rendered **“but,”** and the omission has broken a sentence right in two.

“Every man went to his own house, but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives,” He had no house. He was the homeless stranger in the world His own hands had made. And when others went to their comfortable homes that night, He went out to the mountainside, perhaps to the Garden of Gethsemane, and spent the night there, lying upon the bare ground and communing with His Father.

It is very evident here that there should be no break between the last verse of chapter forty-four and the first verse in chapter forty-five.

~ end of chapter 44 ~

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