

EXPOSITORY NOTES ON THE PROPHET ISAIAH

by

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ISAIAH CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO THE VALLEY OF VISION

THE prophet now turns to deliver a message from the Lord to the people of Jerusalem at a time when it was in danger of being destroyed by the Assyrian armies of Sennacherib and his allies from Elam and Kir. Elam, as we know, is Persia and had been for centuries an enemy of Assyria, but at this very time it had become tributary thereto and sent an army to cooperate with Sennacherib in an attempt to conquer the land of Judah. In the opening verses, Isaiah exposes the true state of those who were professedly the people of God but had forgotten Him and turned aside from obedience to His Word.

“The burden of the valley of vision. What aileth thee now, that thou art wholly gone up to the housetops? Thou that art full of stars, a tumultuous city, a joyous city: thy slain men are not slain with the sword, nor dead in battle. All thy rulers are fled together, they are bound by the archers: All that are found in thee are bound together, which have fled from far. Therefore said I, Look away from me; I will weep bitterly, labour not to comfort me, because of the spoiling of the daughter of my people. For it is a day of trouble, and of treading down, and of perplexity by the Lord God of hosts in the valley of vision, breaking down the walls, and of crying to the mountains. And Elam bare the quiver with chariots of men and horsemen, and Kir uncovered the shield. And it shall come to pass, that thy choicest valleys shall be full of chariots, and the horsemen shall set themselves in array at the gate. And he discovered the covering of Judah, and thou didst look in that day to the armour of the house of the forest” (verses 1-8).

While like many of the passages in this book these words evidently will have a second fulfillment in the last days when Palestine will be exposed to the great Eastern powers that will be seeking to dispossess the Jew and take over their land, they had their primary application to those in Hezekiah's day who, while they dreaded the approach of Sennacherib's armies, nevertheless tried to stifle their fears by mirth and frivolity rather than by turning in heart to the Lord and seeking that deliverance which He alone could give. The condition of His people caused the prophet intense anguish of heart, and as he looked down, as it were, upon the city which some two centuries later was to be destroyed by the Babylonians, he wept over it even as our blessed Lord at a later day looked down from the Mount of Olives upon the glorious temple that Herod had built, and bewailed the fact that Jerusalem knew not the time of her visitation and so must be devoted to destruction.

In Isaiah's day that destruction was deferred because of the faithfulness of King Hezekiah, and later of Josiah, but nevertheless, the prophet recognized the fact that the Holy City was evidently to become the prey of the cruel and covetous Gentile nations.

In the following verses Isaiah speaks of the preparations that Hezekiah made to enable the city to resist the threatened siege.

“Ye have seen also the breaches of the city of David, that they are many: and ye gathered together the waters of the lower pool And ye have numbered the houses of Jerusalem, and the houses have ye broken down to fortify the wall. Ye made also a ditch between the two walls for the water of the old pool; but ye have not looked unto the maker thereof, neither had respect unto him that fashioned it long ago” (verses 9-11).

We read elsewhere of these precautions which demonstrated Hezekiah's wisdom and foresight, but these alone would not have saved the city. It was divine intervention alone which destroyed the Assyrian army and delivered Jerusalem. While on Hezekiah's part there was, as we know, sincere turning to the Lord, it was otherwise with the mass of the people. Even the grave danger to which they were exposed failed to bring them consciously into the presence of God or to lead them to self-judgment that they might be in a position to seek His face and count upon His mercy.

“And in that day did the Lord God of hosts call to weeping, and to mourning, and to baldness, and to girding with sackcloth: and behold joy and gladness, slaying oxen, and killing sheep, eating flesh, and drinking wine: let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we shall die. And it was revealed in mine ears by the Lord of hosts, Surely this iniquity shall not be purged from you till ye die, saith the Lord God of hosts” (verses 12-14).

There seemed to be no true realization either of their danger nor of their lamentably low spiritual condition. When they should have been humbled before the Lord, waiting upon Him with fasting and prayer and other evidences of repentance, they were feasting and rejoicing, living as though life was only intended for merriment and frivolity. Their motto seemed to be **“let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we die.”**

It will be remembered that the Apostle Paul quotes these words when, in the fifteenth chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians, he demonstrates the folly of those who, while professing to be saved through faith in Christ, yet denied the Resurrection. This would leave Christians absolutely hopeless. For Christ's name's sake they gave up the pleasures of the world and yet they would have nothing to look forward to in eternity.

Why not then take the ground of the Epicurean poets, Aratus and Cleanthes, who also expressed exactly the same sentiment as that of the careless, materialistic Jews of Isaiah's day? - for they too wrote, **“Let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we die.”**

To every thoughtful person this is the height of folly. It is a tremendously serious thing to be alive in a world like this and to know that an eternity of either happiness or misery lies beyond.

Surely then every sensible man would recognize the fact that life is not given to be frittered away in pleasure-seeking, but to be used sensibly and in the fear of God, “with eternity’s values in view.”

The last part of the chapter is of an altogether different character.

Now our attention is directed to two men, both of whom held positions of trust in Hezekiah’s government. We read of them again in chapters thirty-six and thirty-seven of this book. Shebna was what we might call Hezekiah’s Premier and also Chancellor of the Exchequer, or, to use a term more common in our land, Secretary of the Treasury. But he was evidently a man of selfish character, greedy, crafty, and ambitious, using his office for personal enrichment and self-glorification. This comes out clearly:

Thus saith the Lord God of hosts, Go, get thee unto this treasurer, even unto Shebna, which is over the house, and say, What hast thou here? and whom hast thou here, that thou hast hewed thee out a sepulchre here, as he that heweth him out a sepulchre on high, and that gaveth an habitation for himself in a rock?” (verses 15, 16).

Shebna had caused a grand mausoleum to be built, or cut out, for himself, in the limestone rock where the kings of Judah were buried. He desired in this way to perpetuate his memory in years to come. But God, who sees not as man sees, discerned the worthlessness of his character and was about to deal with him in judgment. He was to be removed from his office and carried into captivity, to die in a distant land. Who then would occupy the sepulcher he had prepared for himself?

Many think of this man as a type of the antichrist of the last days and it may be that this interpretation is correct. At any rate, the characters of the Man of Sin and that of Shebna are akin one to the other, and the judgment of the one, in each instance, gives place for the recognition of another who will fulfill God’s purpose. The successor to Shebna was Eliakim, who is manifestly a type of our Lord Jesus Christ who will take over the reins of the government of this world when antichrist has been destroyed.

“Behold, the Lord will carry thee away with a mighty captivity, and will surely cover thee. He will surely violently turn and toss thee like a ball into a large country: there shalt thou die, and there the chariots of thy glory shall be the shame of thy lord’s house. And I will drive thee from thy station, and from thy state shall he pull thee down. 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 girdle, 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; so 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 glorious throne to his father’s house. And they shall hang upon him all the glory of his father’s house, the offspring and the issue, All vessels of small quantity, from the vessels of cups, even to all the vessels of flagons” (verses 17-24).

Eliakim was a trustworthy man, a true statesman, and loyal servant of Hezekiah. He was a statesman, not a mere politician. He was motivated by sincere love for his country and characterized by the fear of God. He was to take the office vacated by Shebna. To him was to be committed the key of David, that is, the key to the royal treasury, over which he was given authority to open and close as he saw fit. In this we see a very dear type of our blessed Lord, who uses the very expressions which we have here when He addresses the Church in Philadelphia, Revelation 3:7: **“These things saith He that is holy, He that is true, He that hath the key of David, He that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth.”**

To those who look up to Him as their divinely-given Guide and Protector, He opens the treasure-house of divine truth, revealing to them the precious things which God has stored away In His Word. Eliakim was to be as a nail, fastened in a sure place. The reference is to the wooden peg, driven into the supporting post of a tent. Upon this peg were hung vessels used in camp-life and the garments of those dwelling in the tent. So upon Eliakim would depend the means of refreshment and comfort which God had provided for His people.

We may see in this figure an illustration of the security of those who have put their trust in Christ for salvation.

He is, indeed, a nail fastened in a sure place, and upon Him may be hung the various vessels, from the little cups to the large flagons. Their safe-keeping consists not in their own ability to cling to the nail, but in the fact that they are hung upon that nail so that they remain in security so long as the nail itself abides in its place, and for our blessed Lord there will never be any failure. While the old creation fell in Adam, the new creation stands in Christ, upon whom all the glory of the house of God is suspended.

The last verse evidently reverts to Shebna. It could not by any possibility refer to Eliakim as it would be a direct contradiction of what has just been declared concerning him.

“In that day, saith the Lord of hosts, shall the nail that is fastened in the sure place be removed, and be cut down, and fall; and the burden that was upon it shall be cut off: for the Lord hath spoken it” (verse 25).

The expression **“In that day”** refers definitely to the day spoken of above when Shebna would be set to one side and Eliakim would take his office. Thank God, the day is not far distant when all that is of Satan will be annulled and destroyed and only that which is of God will remain. Then our Lord Jesus will take over the authority conferred upon Him by the Father and all things will be subjected to His will and sustained by Him.

~ end of chapter 22 ~

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