

EXPOSITORY NOTES ON THE PROPHET ISAIAH

by

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ISAIAH CHAPTER FORTY-NINE

MESSIAH DESPISED, GOD'S ANSWER

“Listen, O isles, unto me; and hearken, ye people, from far; The Lord hath called me from the womb; from the bowels of my mother hath he made mention of my name. And he hath made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of his hand hath he hid me, and made me a polished shaft; in his quiver hath he hid me; And said unto me, Thou art my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified. Then I said, I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain: yet surely my judgment is with the Lord, and my work with my God. And now, saith the Lord that formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob again to him, Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the Lord, and my God shall be my strength. And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth” (verses 1-6).

IN CHAPTER forty-nine Israel is brought before us as the Lord's servant, but Israel as a nation had failed terribly in that place. And so while it is Israel who speaks and says, **“The Lord hath called me from the womb . . . And said unto me, Thou art My servant,”** it is really the Lord Jesus Christ Himself who takes the place of Israel, the true Israel. The servant here is no longer the nation as such, though it does speak here in these opening verses. But it is the Lord Jesus who takes the place of the nation.

Other scriptures indicate this. In Hosea God speaks of bringing the nation out of Egypt: **“Out of Egypt have I called My Son.”** That prophecy is referred to the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, who as a little babe was carried down to Egypt and brought back to the land **“that it might be fulfilled,”** Matthew says, **“which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called My Son”** (Matthew 2:15).

So that in the first instance the son there was Israel, but it was the Lord Jesus, the true Israel, who was actually before the mind of God. We often use similar language, substituting an individual for the whole people. Louis the Fourteenth, that proud French monarch, exclaimed on one occasion: “France must rule the world, and I am France.” And Napoleon Bonaparte said, “The State must be supreme, and I am the State.”

If uninspired men use language in that way, how much more has Christ the right to say, "I am Israel, the true Israel" The very name "Israel" meant "A Prince with God," and it was He then who was manifested as the true Prince, the servant of the Lord, when Israel, both as a nation and individually, utterly failed.

Next comes a remarkable prophecy of Christ's rejection by Israel and the calling of the Gentiles. Messiah says, "**I have laboured in vain, I have spent My strength for nought**" (verse 4). That is, as far as Israel is concerned, His work seemed a failure on earth. "**He came unto His own, and His own received Him not.**" But He leaves all with the Lord, and declares, "**Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the Lord.**" For He has said unto Him, "**It is a light thing that Thou shouldest be My servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give Thee for a light to the Gentiles, that Thou mayest be My salvation unto the end of the earth.**"

Through Messiah's rejection by Israel, a greater work would be accomplished. The message would go out to the Gentile world.

"Thus saith the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel, and his Holy One, to him whom man despiseth, to him whom the nation abhorreth, to a servant of rulers, Kings shall see and arise, princes also shall worship, because of the Lord that is faithful, and the Holy One of Israel, and he shall choose thee" (verse 7).

While in the Old Testament we do not have the present age brought clearly before us, the Old Testament prophet is like a man looking at two mountain peaks, one some distance beyond the other and higher than the first one, and he was therefore unable to see the valley between them. So the prophets testified of the sufferings of Christ at His first coming and of the glories that should follow the Second Coming. But they do not give us any clear teaching and outline as to all that goes on in between.

We know now from the New Testament that God had us in His heart from all eternity to call out from Jew and Gentile a people to His name, who should be the bride of His Son. So that when the Lord Jesus returns to reign in power and glory, He will not return alone. He will have a bride with Him who shall sit with Him upon His throne.

If Isaiah gives no definite instruction in regard to the present day as yet, it is very evident that such a prophecy does cover the present age as well as looking on to the millennium. It will have its fulfillment in millennial days, when all the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdom of our God and His Christ.

Then the Lord speaks to the One whom man despised, the One whom the nation abhorreth, an expression not too strong for the feeling of Israel toward the Lord Jesus Christ, for terms are used concerning Him in Jewish writings, the Talmud and others, such as the "leper" and the "hanged-one" - the one whom the nation abhorreth. They could not understand. "**Had they known,**" Peter says, "**they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.**" But they did not know.

God will glorify that One whom the nation abhorreth, the kings and princes of the earth will recognize Him and bow down before Him. In a remarkable sense that has been true even during the present age, although unforeseen by the prophets. Because as the gospel went from land to land throughout the early centuries, whole nations were brought to profess, at least, subjection to the Lord Jesus and many kings proclaimed themselves His subjects.

Down to the present time among the nations there are rulers who confess the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. The rulers of Great Britain, of Holland, and of Scandinavia are all professed Christians. That does not mean necessarily that they are all born again, but they are all professed Christians and acknowledge, outwardly at least, the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Many leaders in the United States have taken the same place. Franklin D. Roosevelt was a professed Christian, a warden of an Episcopal Church. And President Truman, after his first press conference, asked for prayer, saying he would need it. He professes the Christian faith and, in that sense, he recognizes the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Queen Victoria was very definite in her confession of faith when a heathen African prince came to Great Britain and was presented to her. He inquired, "Your Majesty, to what do you attribute the great prosperity of the British Empire?" She handed him a Bible and said simply, "This Book." He carried this Book back to his people, to tell them that it was that on which the prosperity of the British Empire was based.

Toward the end of her life Queen Victoria once publicly stated, "I am a firm believer in the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. And I have sometimes thought that He has permitted me to reign so long that perhaps I will never lay down my crown until I lay it down at His feet, when He comes again." It was a lovely expression of subjection to the Lord.

Queen Victoria evidently knew Christ as her Saviour. She was accustomed every summer to go to Balmoral, a lovely place in Scotland, and used to visit the Highland women living in the little cottages in the hills around. She became acquainted with all of them and went from one to another to chat with them. Of course, they were delighted that the Queen would take such notice of them. Finally, as she was returning to London, she came to bid one old cottager goodbye. The old lady said, "Well, your Majesty, I may never see you on earth again. May I ask your gracious Majesty a question?"

She said, "Yes; as many as you like."

"Well," she said, "will your Majesty meet me in heaven?"

The Queen replied, "Yes; through the all-availing blood of Jesus."

That was a good testimony from the ruler of a mighty empire. The kings have bowed down before the Lord Jesus Christ. The nation of Israel rejected Him. They did not understand, but God has made His name glorious throughout the world. The passage of course looks on to complete fulfillment in millennial days when all the kings of the earth will bring their riches and glory into the New Jerusalem.

“Thus saith the Lord, In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee: and I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages; That thou mayest say to the prisoners, Go forth; to them that are in darkness, Shew yourselves. They shall feed in the ways, and their pastures shall be in all high places. They shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun smite them: for he that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall he guide them. And I will make all my mountains a way, and my highways shall be exalted” (verses 8-11).

The two parts of this passage are clearly brought before us in the New Testament. “In an acceptable time have I heard thee.” We read in II Corinthians 6:2, **“Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation,”** so that God applies the words at the present time, while the gospel of the Grace of God is going out into all the world.

The latter part of this scripture carries us on to the time of the great awakening when an over the world men will be brought to recognize the Lord Jesus Christ. That is pictured in Revelation 7. After giving us the vision of the 144,000 sealed ones of Israel, John says, I saw **“a great multitude, which no man could number . . . clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands”**; and they stood before the throne of God and of the Lamb.

Many commentators say that these are the martyred saints who will be slain under the rule of the Beast and the false prophet, and that now they are seen up in Heaven. But it seems very evident that is an utter mistake; that this is a great multitude who will form the nucleus of the coming glorious kingdom with the Lord Jesus Christ here on the earth, because one of the elders turns to John and says, **“What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they?”**

John says, **“Sir, thou knowest.”** And so the other replies: **“These are they that come out of the great tribulation,”** - literally there are two definite articles there, **“They come out of the tribulation the great one . . . and washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”** Here is a great blood-washed multitude who have come up out of the great tribulation, not ascended into heaven, but they have gone through all that period of trial and been preserved by God.

The Lord says of them in Revelation 7:16,17: **“They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.”**

The kindred passage in Isaiah will show how exactly the one fits the other.

“They shall feed in the ways, and their pastures shall be in all high places. They shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun smite them: for He that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall He guide them”
(verses 9, 10).

The two passages refer to exactly the same group, an earthly group, who will be saved for the glorious millennial kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ: primarily the remnant of Israel, and associated with them is a great company from among the Gentiles who will be brought to acknowledge the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. The once-rejected Messiah now is their Saviour and their Lord.

So the Spirit of God says, as it were, to the Lord Jesus Christ, "It is true the nation did not recognize you, that you seemed to have labored in vain and spent your strength for nought, but a coming day will show that a tremendous harvest will result from your labors of love when you were down here unrecognized and misunderstood."

~ end of chapter 49 ~

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