

April to June 2016

April: “In Everything by Prayer”

by Rev Dr Tow Siang Hwa



The Rev Dr Tow Siang Hwa, who started the RPG (Read, Pray and Grow) Daily Bible Reading Guide in 1982, is the Senior Pastor of Calvary Pandan Bible-Presbyterian Church. Saved at the age of ten in 1935 during the revival meetings of Dr John Sung, Dr Tow (a gynaecologist by training) has founded more than twenty churches and related institutions in over ten countries. He is author of several books including “Beyond Versions: A Biblical Perspective of Modern English Bibles” and “Footprints in the Sands of Time.”

May and June: “Isaiah the Gospel Prophet (Part 1)”

by Rev Dr Timothy Tow



The Rev Dr Timothy Tow (1920-2009) was the founding father of the Bible-Presbyterian movement in Southeast Asia, after he returned to Singapore in 1950, having caught the spirit of the 20th century Reformation movement in Faith Theological Seminary. He was the pastor of Life BPC (1950-2003) and True Life BPC (2003-2009), and principal of Far Eastern Bible College (1962-2009). A regular contributor to the RPG, he had also written more than 35 books. His RPG writings on “Isaiah the Gospel Prophet” were first published during the years 1983 to 1985.

“PRAYER GEMS”

Minimum of Organization: The ancient church had a minimum of organisation, but a maximum of power. The church today has a maximum of organisation but tragically lacks power. Dr G. Campbell Morgan warned, “One of Satan’s methods today is to start so many organizations in a church that the members have no time for unhurried communion with God. Many Christians are so busy that they can hear only the clink and clatter of church machinery.”

The Shut Door: When the disciples locked the doors, Christ knew He was sure of a welcome. He could not get their ear because of the din and confusion that came through the open doors. Closing the door to the world is opening the door to the Master. Don’t be afraid of shutting the door. It is the best invitation for the Master to enter. (Christian Herald)

Seeing More of Heaven on Knees: “I can take my telescope and look millions and millions of miles into space, but I can lay it aside and go into my room, shut the door, get down on my knees in earnest prayer, and see more of heaven and get closer to God than I can assisted by all the telescopes and material agencies on earth.” (Sir Isaac Newton)

Baby’s Earliest Memories: A caller found a young mother with her babe in her lap and her Bible in her hand. “Are you reading to your baby?” was the humorous query. “Yes,” the young mother replied. “But, do you think he understands?” “I am sure he does not understand now, but I want his earliest memories to be that of hearing God’s Word.” God’s Word is the *“sword of the Spirit.”* Only by His Word are we purified and strengthened to do His will. It is impossible to overestimate the importance of reading the Word all through life.

Mother’s Prayers: “I cannot tell you how much I owe to the custom on Sunday evenings while we were yet children for Mother to stay at home with us, and then we sat around the table and read verse after verse and she explained the Scriptures to us. After that . . . the question was asked how long it would be before we would think about our state; how long before we would seek the Lord. Then came mother’s prayer; and some of the words of our mother’s prayer we shall never forget even when our hair is gray.” (Charles Haddon Spurgeon, adapted)

FRIDAY, APRIL 1

MATTHEW 26:36-41

1 CORINTHIANS 2:12-14

“Ask, and it shall be given you.”

PRAYING DOES NOT COME NATURALLY

The natural man does not like to pray. To him it is tiresome, tasteless and tedious. He would rather lie comfortably in bed, or sit captive before the TV screen, or enjoy himself with the pleasure-mad world. Spending time in prayer is to him foolishness. God’s Word says, *“But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”* So it is with prayer. Prayer is spiritual. It is a striving against the flesh, the *“natural man.”* It is a constant and ongoing struggle. It is part of our Christian experience. We all agree that we ought to pray, but we fail to do so, and we fail miserably. Instead of praying we have wasted many hours in spiritually unprofitable pastimes. No wonder our spiritual progress is at a standstill. The Apostle Paul expressed this sense of failure thus: *“For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do ... when I would do good, evil is present with me”* (Rom 7:19, 21).

What, then, must we do? First, let us agree that we must pray, and pray in the spirit. To be able to pray in spirit and in truth, we must confess our sin, this sin of prayerlessness, of worldliness, of yielding to self and the flesh. Pray for cleansing and forgiveness. We must repent in spirit and in truth. *“... a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise”* (Ps 51:17). Second, we must be prepared to pay the price, for true praying is costly. You must be willing to forfeit some sleep, leisure, unprofitable pastime or anything which draws you away from your communion with the Lord. Third, you must set a particular time (best in the morning before the day’s busyness descends on you) and keep the holy appointment with God.

In Gethsemane, our Lord prayed for us, with sweat (Luke 22:44). To us, He says, *“What, could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak”* (Matt 26:40b-41).

QUESTION: Can I watch with Him one hour?

PRAYER: Lord, watch over me every day in prayer.

LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY

The sons of Zebedee came with their ambitious mother to Jesus one day and said in effect: “Lord, when your Kingdom is established, please let my sons be Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister.” We can sympathise with the mother, but the request was thoroughly selfish and thoughtless. The other disciples were indignant, but our Lord responded tenderly and without rebuke. He understands us too when we make similar blunders. The Spirit gently corrects us when we misuse prayer for our own selfish advantage.

In our zeal to serve the Lord, let us always strive for perfection. To achieve this, we must be prepared to humbly examine ourselves. Have our prayers been self-centered? Let not such a question surprise you, for some Christians and ministers are concerned only with those enterprises which involve them.

If, for instance, there is to be a Family Meeting in their home, they will pray earnestly and fervently for the meeting to be richly blessed. The next month, a similar meeting is to be held in another home. Strangely, their prayers fall silent for they do not seem to be aware of the event. Or, if they are due to participate in some Gospel service, they would pray day and night. But if they are not involved, their interest dies down at once. If their church is organising a Bible conference or a missions convention, then they bubble with enthusiasm and they labour much in prayer for the event. If not, they do not seem to care.

Is this my method of praying? Lord, rebuke me of such hypocrisy. Teach me to pray for others, O Lord! If from our hearts we cry to the Lord in true contrition, a great change takes place in our prayer life. We begin to pray as we ought, for others of like precious faith and of the same persuasion. This is well pleasing unto the Lord.

THOUGHT: How much of my prayer is for others?

PRAYER: Lord, teach me to put Thee first, others next and myself last.

PRAYING ALONE IN SECRET

If our prayer life is to make progress, it is not enough merely to have a definite appointed time each day to commune with God. We must also find a place to be alone with Him. Our Lord said, "*when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret*" (Matt 6:6). We must make a determined effort to shut out the world with its distractions and interruptions, for the world hates the things of God (John 7:7). We cannot enter into deep and serious communion with God unless we exclude the sounds and sights of the world.

Our Lord set us the example. Even though He lived in constant and unbroken prayer fellowship with His Father, nevertheless He found it necessary at times to withdraw from the multitudes and from the hustle and bustle of life in order to be alone with God. The world and its influences are disturbing and destructive toward our communion with God. If the Son of God found it necessary to be alone with God, how much more we, frail creatures of dust!

In our present state we are exposed to external influences, happenings and circumstances. We cannot avoid seeing, hearing and sensing the things around us. Even our dearest (our spouse and children), they distract. Today the media intrudes into our bedrooms and living rooms. The world presses in on every hand. All these influences crowd in and separate us from God. We must take appropriate remedial action to exclude anything that comes between us and God.

But, you say, modern living makes it almost impossible to find a quiet or secret place. Where there's a will, there's a way! Use the pre-dawn hour before the rest of the world gets active! Our Lord rose up a great while before the dawn and went to a solitary place to pray. Can we not get up too and find a solitary place, just to be alone with God?

THOUGHT: Do I think it difficult to find a solitary place?

PRAYER: Lord, make me willing to pay the price to make my prayer life effective.

MONDAY, APRIL 4

MATTHEW 6:5-8

1 KINGS 18:26-29

*Your Father knoweth
your needs before you ask.*

USE NOT VAIN REPETITIONS

Idolatrous and pagan religions use much repetition in their prayers. The Baal priests called on the name of Baal *“from morning even until noon, saying, O Baal, hear us.”* The Buddhists of today are no different. They repeat their rosary prayers over and over. Some employ “prayer wheels” to spin their prayers heavenward; others employ “prayer flags” whose flapping in the wind supposedly sends their prayers heavenward.

The Roman Catholic Church in the year 1090 introduced the pagan rosary worship into its system. Attached to the recitation of “Hail Mary” are many promises eg. “signal graces,” “eternal life,” etc. To those who recite the rosary devoutly on their knees, the Virgin Mary is said to be able to add many indulgences “to every fifty Hail Marys.” The ideal is, the more the better.

Our Lord’s teaching exposes the falsehood behind these empty promises. Jesus said, *“But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.”* The efficacy of one’s prayer depends not on “much speaking” but on our relationship to God the Father who alone hears and answers prayer. If we pray in an acceptable manner, *“in spirit and in truth,”* and in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, our prayers will be answered. This is our Lord’s promise.

But to keep up a recitation of words (like some “magic password”) is not acceptable to God. Furthermore, there is no Biblical authority for addressing any prayer to Mary who was after all only a human being. To pray to a person is to dishonour God. It is blasphemy.

Let us pray without using *“vain repetitions.”*

THOUGHT: Can I repeat the prayer of the thief on the cross?

PRAYER: Lord, teach me to pray *“in spirit and in truth.”*

TUESDAY, APRIL 5

LUKE 11:1-13

ROMANS 8:14-15

Call no man on earth "Father."

“OUR FATHER WHICH ART IN HEAVEN”

What a great blessing it is to learn from God Himself with what words and in what manner we should pray to Him. To pray in any other way is to pray in vain. The “Lord’s Prayer” (or our Lord’s teaching on prayer) deserves our highest respect and attention. It is the complete and perfect prayer and we should use it frequently. As we say, “*Lord, teach us to pray,*” let us consider its opening line.

Our prayer is addressed to “*Our Father which art in heaven.*” This is the first and most important point. The believer, led by the Spirit of God, is a son of God. He has received the Spirit of adoption, which enables him to cry, “*Abba, Father.*” This relationship must first be fully established, for God does not hear all and sundry prayers. He hears only the prayers of His own children.

We on our part, as children, must address our prayers to Him alone, and not to any “saint,” angel, the Virgin Mary, or any priest, or any earthly spiritual “father.” Any man who claims the title of “father” or “Papa” or “Pope” and demands that prayers be addressed to him usurps the place of God, and clearly commits the sin of blasphemy. As a safeguard against this usurpation, our Lord taught His disciples to address their prayer thus: “*Our Father which art in heaven.*” This excludes any self-appointed “Holy Father” on earth.

Our Heavenly Father is also our Almighty Creator and Redeemer. He is omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient. He alone is able to answer our prayers. He regards us His children with an all-embracing and perfect father-love. “*Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him*” (Ps 103:13). But God excels any earthly father, for His gifts are perfect, and He knows all our needs even before we ask Him! Our privilege of sons comes through the “*adoption of children by Jesus Christ,*” not by any church or any man.

THOUGHT: Who on earth claims to be the “Holy Father”?

PRAYER: Lord, teach me to pray to Thee, and only Thee.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 6

LUKE 10:1-11

ROMANS 14:17

*“My kingdom is
not of this world.”*

“THY KINGDOM COME”

This is the first petition in the “Lord’s Prayer.” Our first desire in praying (after giving reverence to God’s name) is for His kingdom to come on earth. This is the whole purpose of our Lord’s coming: to redeem for Himself a people fit for His Kingdom. If this is what caused God to send His Son (He spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, Rom 8:32), we too should make this our prime objective in prayer and in life: we must strive our uttermost to hasten the coming of God’s everlasting Kingdom.

In sending out the seventy disciples (Luke 10), our Lord gave them the assurance: Whether they meet with a kind reception or hostile rejection does not alter the fact that *“the kingdom of God is come nigh unto you.”* The Kingdom of God has already come into the hearts of believing men and women. It is in our midst. We who name the name of Christ today constitute the Kingdom of God. If so, let us live like it!

“Thy kingdom come” should be translated into reality in every Christian home, as it were, where heaven comes down into our homes. This should be the first practical application of our prayers. And, even though we have imperfections and failings, we should strive to make our homes a little paradise on earth.

Then, we must endeavour our utmost to bring others into God’s Kingdom. Recall our Lord’s command, *“Pray ye therefore the LORD of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest”* (Matt 9:38). Who are the labourers but we His disciples? On us rests the glorious commission of bringing in the harvest of precious souls to populate God’s great Kingdom. Think of this the next time you pray the Lord’s Prayer. Let us all translate the words *“Thy kingdom come”* into action.

THOUGHT: How will God’s Kingdom be visibly established?

PRAYER: Make me a blessing to many still outside Thy Kingdom.

WHO CAN FORGIVE SINS, BUT GOD ALONE?

One of the essential elements in prayer is confession of sins. *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”* (1 John 1:9). Forgiveness of sins belongs to God alone, and to no man, or woman. The Pharisees in their spiritual blindness challenged our Lord’s authority to forgive sins. But Jesus proved His divine authority by healing the palsied man, and saying, *“Thy sins be forgiven thee.”* Jesus can forgive sins because He is God the Son.

The sinner who comes to God through Jesus, in contrition of heart and confession of sins, is assured by God’s Word that his sins will be forgiven. This is our only way to peace with God. This is the best news, the Gospel of salvation by grace through faith in our Lord. But there is another gospel being taught by the Church of Rome.

A publication “Mysteries of the Most Holy Rosary” records “that our Blessed Mother said, ‘I want you to know that, although there are numerous indulgences already attached to the recitation of My Rosary, I shall add many more to every 50 Hail Marys ... And whosoever shall persevere in the devotion of the Holy Rosary, saying these prayers and meditations, shall be rewarded for it; I shall obtain for them full remission of the penalty and of the guilt of all his sins...’” Strange gospel! The Virgin Mary, long dead and buried, is now put up as the “Blessed Mother” who is able to grant indulgences (depending on the numbers of “Hail Marys” recited), and to obtain full remission of sins. Even the Pharisees, the hypocrites opposing our Lord, would denounce such teachings as false, for they knew the truth: *“Who can forgive sins, but God alone?”*

Forgiveness of sins comes from God through Jesus, and none other. Sinner, come to God in prayer, through the blessed Saviour Jesus.

THOUGHT: Can anyone work for *“remission of sins”*?

PRAYER: I thank Thee, Lord, for salvation so rich and free.

FRIDAY, APRIL 8

PSALM 89:24-29

JOHN 14:13

*Pray to no one,
but God in heaven.*

ASK IN MY NAME

“And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.” These words of our Lord specifically teach us how we should approach God in prayer. Every prayer must be sealed in the name of Jesus. Our entire prayer experience must derive its inspiration and authentication by the name of Jesus, the name *“which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,... And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father”* (Phil 2:10-11).

You ask, “Why must we pray only in the name of Jesus?” The simple answer is: our Lord Jesus alone reconciled us unto God (Rom 5:10-11; Eph 2:13-17) Without Christ we are without hope. We are strangers from the covenants of promise, enemies, far from God. *“For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father”* (Eph 2:18). Jesus is our mediator, the only mediator between God and man (1 Tim 2:5). Apart from Jesus, we have no way to approach unto God (John 14:6). Therefore, all our prayers and petitions must be authorised by His blessed name.

Some troubled son finds it impossible to approach God in prayer. As he stands in the heavenly light, he is convicted by God’s holy Word. He sees his sins, his past wicked life, his filthy thoughts and immoral acts, and his sin-blackened heart. To turn to God is a fearful thought. He feels a great barrier separating him from an angry God. The holy God will have nothing to do with such an unclean person as he is. To such a son, the name Jesus will give him a safe access to a holy God.

God’s light shines through. The penitent sinner begins to see what the name of Jesus means. With joy and gratitude he enters into God’s presence. There, in Jesus’ name, his prayer is heard and accepted. Jesus! His name will be our song of praise through all eternity!

THOUGHT: Am I praying to God through another name or person?

PRAYER: I thank Thee, Lord, for my one and only Saviour Jesus Christ.

SATURDAY, APRIL 9

PSALM 5

MARK 1:35

*Blessed is he who begins
the day on his knees!*

BEST TIME FOR GOD

While it is true that prayer may ascend to God any time of the day, and at all times “*without ceasing*” (1 Thess 5:17), nevertheless we should not neglect the best time of the day for our prayer devotion. The Psalmist’s words echo the experience of many godly men: “*My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O LORD; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up*” (Ps 5:3).

The best time to converse with God is in the early morning before the world comes knocking at the door. Unless you have this prior appointment with the Lord which you determine to honour, your morning will be so crowded out by the affairs of the world, your morning thoughts concentrating on everything and everybody else, that the Lord will be left out altogether.

Should we thus belittle the God of our salvation?

God deserves our first thoughts, for He first thought of us. We were in His thoughts long before we were born. He thought of us “*before the foundation of the world.*” He planned our redemption before we fell. If we were thus esteemed by God, occupying even His first thoughts, should we not also devote to Him our first thoughts? O let us awake daily to the light of His countenance and the sweetness of His presence. Refreshed with sleep, recharged with His health, let us greet our Saviour each day with the best hour, and let His beauty fill our souls. Thus invigorated we may safely face the world.

All through life George Whitefield was an early riser. His day began at four o’clock and he would retire punctually at ten in the evening. If friends were present, he would courteously end the proceedings, saying, “Come gentlemen! It is time for all good folks to be home.” He wanted to be sure of his morning appointment with God.

THOUGHT: “Cutting short a party makes one unpopular.”

PRAYER: Lord, Thou gave me Thy best. May I give Thee my best!

PRAYER IS FOR THE HELPLESS

Two men went up to the temple to pray. The Pharisee in his self-sufficiency made a speech before God. The publican in his deep consciousness of sin felt totally unworthy and helpless. He pleaded his case, "*God be merciful to me a sinner.*" His prayer was answered, not the Pharisee's, for God is not interested in oratory.

Prayer is for the helpless. It is something deeper than words. It is an attitude of heart and mind. It is our attitude toward God. God in heaven recognises this true attitude of prayer and His heart is touched. It does not take the form of many words, least of all self-exalting eloquence. God is interested in our spiritual condition. If we have no need, we are like the Laodicean Church which said, "*I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing*" (Rev 3:17). To the Lord, this sort of spiritual complacency is spiritual smugness of the worst sort. It is nauseating and disgusting.

The secret of true prayer is the admission of need. We must see our wretched and helpless condition. It is this that drives us on our knees to God. Our problem may be such that we do not know what to do or how to pray. Our mind may be clouded and perplexed, perhaps overwhelmed with sin or some personal problem. Men and circumstances have failed us. Our world has collapsed around us. There seems to be no hope or help in sight. In our desperate struggle our prayers seem to freeze on our lips.

But help is at hand, my friend. Let us be as the publican standing afar off, with head bowed and spirit broken, and cry out to God, "*God be merciful to me a sinner.*" Our helplessness calls from our heart to the heart of God. It speaks more than any carefully cultured speech. God hears the very moment we are seized with helplessness, and He swiftly comes to our aid. God helps the helpless, through our Lord Jesus Christ.

THOUGHT: (Read Psalm 103:13).

PRAYER: I thank Thee, Lord, that Thou art the help of the helpless.

IN TIME OF NEED

To many Christians, their idea of prayer is somewhat like a hospital's Accident and Emergency Department. In my early days I used to work in an A & E Department for a time. It is a place of endless surprises. It could be all peace and quiet for an hour or two, then suddenly the accidents and emergencies come pouring in. Is this your concept of God's "Prayer Department"?

We all agree that we ought to pray regularly, emergency or no emergency. Nevertheless, human weakness is such that most of us tend to neglect God until some emergency arises. It may be the end-of-year examinations, financial disaster, cancer, or some life-and-death situation. Suddenly God is greatly in demand and everybody seems to be praying. This is "crisis praying" which from time to time threatens to turn God's throne of grace into a sort of spiritual A & E Department. Dear reader, is this your style of praying?

Read carefully the passage in Hebrews 4. Our great High Priest, Jesus the Son of God, is seated on high, praying for us. In Hebrews 7:25 we have a most comforting verse: "*Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.*" "*Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need*" (Heb 4:16). Let us come daily, several times a day! Do not wait for emergencies and accidents.

God always comes to our aid "*in time of need.*" Like the A & E Department, He renders all necessary assistance. Multitudes are helped in their distress, but few return to say "Thank you." How many of us who have been helped remember to thank God afterwards? Let our praying be a constant filial relationship and not a sporadic activity only "*in time of need.*" Let us also not forget to say "Thanks."

THOUGHT: Do I know the story of the ten lepers? (Luke 17:11-18)

PRAYER: Lord, may I always come to Thee with a grateful heart.

TUESDAY, APRIL 12

ISAIAH 65:24

REVELATION 3:20-22

*"...if any man hear my voice,
and open the door..."*

"I STAND AT THE DOOR AND KNOCK"

To pray is to let Jesus come into our hearts. He stands patiently outside our hearts' door, waiting with gracious gifts to meet our needs. He knocks gently, desiring to enter. It is not our initiative that moves the Lord Jesus. It is He who moves us to pray. He knocks. Our prayers are the response to His knocking. What a loving and caring Saviour we have. He seeks an entry which we all too often have foolishly denied Him. We shut our heart's door only to forfeit the blessings He wishes to bestow on us. O what folly!

Many Christians think of prayer as a burden rather than a blessing. To take time off from the newspaper and television for prayer seems like an annoying interruption. Drowsy idling in bed, hours of leisure and recreation, but no time for prayer! So the King of glory and Lover of our souls is denied an entry. Our hearts are filled with the world's empty pleasures, but deprived of the Lord's company. Spiritually, we are the poorer for it and for this we have none but ourselves to blame.

To pray is to open up to Jesus and let Him into our needs. To pray is to invite the Lord into our hearts and lives, and let Him share our burdens. As we open the door, Jesus makes a gracious entry and we have a time of intimate and joyous fellowship. He comes with precious gifts. He lightens our burdens and lifts our distress. The name of God is glorified thereby.

The first move in prayer is to be willing to open the door. When we do that, the King of glory comes in and begins a gracious work in our lives. The results of prayer far exceed our effort. They do not depend on the powers of the one who prays, but on the One who knocks. Do you hear His voice of pleading? To open requires no great resources or ability. It is a matter of our will. When we say yes to Jesus and open up to Him, He enters into a close fellowship with us. This blessedness nothing else can give!

THOUGHT: *"... before they call, I will answer..."* (Isa 65:24).

PRAYER: Lord, make my heart Thy royal throne.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 13

PSALM 86

JAMES 4:1-3

“... I will come in to him,
and will sup with him...”

YE ASK AMISS

The natural man approaches prayer with a grave misconception. His selfishness knows no bounds. He looks upon everything around him as agencies or instruments to be utilised for his own advantage. He thinks and acts as though everything was created for the purpose of promoting his own selfish desires. And, he makes no exception of God.

As soon as he encounters God, he immediately looks upon Him as a ready means of gaining his own ends. In coming to God he has just one purpose foremost in mind: “How can I best make use of God? How can my prayers bring me the greatest possible advantage?” We have on more than one occasion come across professing Christians who pray for success in their gambling activities. Their prayers go something like this: “God, if You will help me win this lottery, I will give half of the money to the church.”

How pitiable are these people! They truly do not know the Lord. Neither do they understand what prayer is about. They are like the hypocrites in our Lord’s day of whom Jesus said, “*This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me ...*” (Matt 15:8-9). In vain do they make their prayers. “*Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.*” These people make vain prayers, then drop out of the church. They are disappointed and deeply offended because God did not put Himself at their disposal.

Let all who seek the Lord approach Him with “*clean hands, and a pure heart*” (Ps 24:4). Away with all selfish and ulterior motives! Let every prayer be in spirit and in truth: “*Thy will be done ... Thine is ... the glory.*” To pray otherwise is to ask amiss.

QUESTION: How can we be sure that we do not “ask amiss”?

PRAYER: Teach me Thy way, O Lord; I will walk in Thy truth.

A STILL SMALL VOICE

Prayer is not a one-way street. We speak with God; He also speaks to us. But we must listen! To hear His voice we must be quiet. Hence, the importance of the great solitary place. Elijah had a distressing problem. Because of his loyalty to God he was fleeing for his life. What did the Lord whom he served have to say to him? On the mount of God, Elijah stood. As the Lord passed by, the mountain was violently shaken by wind, earthquake and fire. In none of these did the Lord reveal Himself. But it was after all the commotion had subsided that God spoke. Then Elijah heard. God spoke to him by a still small voice.

The trouble with most of us is: we hurriedly recite our prayers and go our ways. We have no time for God. He is about to speak but we are in a hurry. No wonder we miss the blessing. It is like a visit to your doctor. You tell him all about your problem. He sits patiently listening to all your complaints. He takes note and in his mind formulates the treatment. But as soon as you finish speaking you get up and take your leave! You say, that is impossible! But that is what we do to our Great Physician, most times!

God has multitudes of such patients in His consulting room every day, patients who anxiously recite their pieces and then hurry on their way. Our prayers are really incomplete. We go away just as we came in! God has piles of prescriptions for His ailing children, unused. Does this include you! Strange, if it does not!

Next time you pray, take time to listen. Give God a chance to speak, out of His holy Word. Say with the Psalmist: *“Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting”* (Ps 139:23-24). God speaks by a still small voice. Will you listen?

THOUGHT: How can I be sure that it is God’s voice?

PRAYER: Lord, I promise to make time for Thee, as for necessary food.

PRAY ONE FOR ANOTHER

Selfishness is a serious hindrance to intercessory prayer. We are not aware of this sin except as the Spirit points it out to us, and immediately there is a struggle within. We must face this problem and ask for forgiveness. How does selfishness creep into our prayer life? Largely it arises out of the fact that we live and move within a narrow circle of family and church contacts. We tend to be inward looking, “minding our own business” in a narrow and selfish sense. The result is that we think only of our little circle and our prayers are very circumscribed. There is little concern or zeal for others. The Spirit convicts us of this sin. As soon as we acknowledge and confess our selfish indifference, He saves us from it. The Spirit of prayer will then cleanse our hearts and fill us with holy zeal, and bring to our attention many things for which we should make our poor and humble intercessions. Then once we have begun to pray for others we must continue and persevere, for it is God’s will that *“supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men.”*

In our midweek Prayer Meeting our intercessory prayers should constantly be enlarged, with reports and requests from beyond our own walls and shores. Letters from the missions fields reporting progress and problems read out to the people will help them to pray intelligently. Members departed for foreign lands should not be forgotten (“out of sight out of mind”) but should be kept informed of their “home church.” Any significant development in the Gospel work involving our members and friends may be shared most profitably.

For this cause we in Singapore pray for brethren in ASEAN, Myanmar, India, Australia, Britain, America, etc, for this is the will and commandment of God. When we do, the Lord’s name is glorified.

THOUGHT: Does my church receive regular reports from foreign missions?

PRAYER: Lord, forgive me for my selfish indifference in prayer.

FOR THE GLORY OF GOD

God answers prayer in the best possible way for our benefit and for His own glory. Oftentimes He gives more than we ask or expect. This is out of the richness of His grace. In His dealings with us, He often does so in ways past finding out. We have prayed urgently, but He answers not a word. We were disappointed, not knowing this: if He had given us immediately the things we asked for, we would have missed out on the great blessing which He had in mind.

The story of Lazarus illustrates the point. Lazarus was sick. His sisters sent an urgent message to Jesus. In their thinking, they expected to see the Lord hurry to their aid. But Jesus did not. Lazarus got worse and worse. The sisters' anxiety mounted by the hour. Then their brother died. Could anything be more cruel? Calamity of calamities! For four days Mary and Martha agonised over their brother. Why did Jesus not come? Did He not care for them any more? Did the Lord not understand how much Lazarus meant to them, being an only brother? And now it was too late! His body had already begun to decay.

That was from the human viewpoint. But our Lord saw differently. Jesus had decided from the very beginning to answer their prayer with more than their request. They wanted Him to heal. Jesus intended something far more wonderful. He raised Lazarus from the dead. His answer was slow by human reckoning, but from God's viewpoint, it was perfectly timed. By His "delay" our Lord manifested His divine power, "*for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby*" (John 11:4). God's ways are not our ways. His ways are past finding out. But His ways are the best. His answers are beyond our expectations. We must learn patience and humility. Our prayers must never be for our own selfish interests or our own glory. Every prayer must be "*for the glory of God.*"

THOUGHT: How can I ensure that my prayers are for God's glory?

PRAYER: Lord, grant me deeper understanding of Thy higher purposes.

PRAY WITH UNDERSTANDING

Unless we make a conscious effort to pray “with understanding,” our prayers remain childish, immature and limited. We do not grow or progress. Little wonder, then, that many Christians are unable to pray intelligently even after ten and twenty years. Their prayers always revolve around a little list of mundane and material needs and a little circle of family and friends. God has abundance of wonderful blessings, but these were never prayed for!

O friends, we must mature in our prayers! Think of what we are missing because we do not pray with understanding. Mere recitation of needs in a routine fashion must give way to praying “with understanding.” In the Lord’s Prayer we say, *“Thy will be done ...”* How can we pray this unless we also know what His will is? And, how can we know God’s will? By His Word, of course!

Does this not give you the clue to more effective prayer? We have our Bibles. In our QT (Quiet Time) devotions, let us combine the reading of the Word and our speaking with the Lord. Our prayer communion must not be a “one way speech.” Let us take time also to hear God speak to us through the Word and the prompting of the Holy Spirit. The Word of God is also our best guide to teach us what to pray for. We are lost for words and ideas. Let the Holy Spirit help *“our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us ...”* (Rom 8:26).

Let God’s Word be our daily guide in prayer. Every passage which has a relevant application should become our prayer. Let us pray God’s Word for ourselves, for in so doing we can be sure that we are asking for God’s will to be fulfilled in our lives. This is to pray with understanding. This is God’s will for us!

THOUGHT: Is today’s “praying in tongues” praying with understanding?

PRAYER: Lord, evermore feed me with Thy *“Bread of Life.”*

MONDAY, APRIL 18

GENESIS 32:24-30

EPHESIANS 6:10-18

*Be done with
half-hearted praying!*

FOR WE WRESTLE IN PRAYER

A Christian who says that he has never had to wrestle in prayer truly has not entered into the prayer life. Prayer being the central and vital activity of our spiritual life, it is only natural that the enemy of our souls would direct his most dangerous and hurtful darts at our prayer life, for Satan does not like us to pray. It is said that the weakest Christian on his knees makes Satan tremble, turn and flee.

Satan understands full well that our prayers are our most potent weapons of defence and attack against him. That is why he directs his most subtle attacks at our prayer life. If he can somehow weaken or cripple our devotion to the Lord, he would have scored a crucial victory. Foolishly we are lulled into a sense of false security by his suggestion that we are quite all right. We have not committed any grave sin, we are regular in church attendance and our souls are at peace. Take your ease, therefore. Why all the praying?

Behind our complacency hides the adversary, mobilising everything in his power to destroy our prayer life. He has a ready ally in our old Adam, our old man, the flesh. The carnal mind is enmity against God (Rom 8:7). Our flesh lusteth against the Spirit so that we cannot do the things we would (Gal 5:17). The carnal mind is ever ready to supply reasons for not praying: you are busy, you are tired, you woke up late, you may miss an important appointment, your boss is waiting, your studies are behind, wait for a better time.

Are these strange to you, dear reader? Or are they old excuses? Unless we have a strong resolve, a rock-firm discipline, a sacred hour for prayer, our prayer life will be in ruins even before we start. Everything is legitimate: newspaper, telephone, washing, getting ready for the day's work, but prayer! So we wrestle! God help you.

THOUGHT: Am I losing or winning? Or, am I not wrestling at all?

PRAYER: Lord, I yield myself to Thee. Grant me victory.

TUESDAY, APRIL 19

PSALM 62

JOHN 4:31-38

*Prayer is part
of necessary work!*

MY MEAT ... HIS WORK

In the city of Sychar in Samaria, our Lord taught His disciples a valuable lesson in how He regarded the work of soul-saving more than necessary food. What does it matter if we miss a meal or two for the gospel's sake? Listen to what Jesus said: "*My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.*" His time was limited, the task was pressing. Opportunities for Gospel outreach must not be allowed to go to waste. Our Lord has set us the example. "... *Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already unto harvest.*"

Our Lord's one consuming passion was to do the Father's will and to finish the work. In this work all believers can have a part. You need not be a pastor, a missionary or a full time worker, but you can be a member of the team. You can give vital prayer support. This is work for all of us. Do you see this great truth? Can you say with the Lord, "My meat is to do God's will and to finish His work"? We all can enter into this unseen but indispensable ministry. We all have time for three meals a day: that is our meat. Can we give equal time for prayer as for one meal?

Only the Spirit of God can teach us to labour in prayer. Prayer is our spiritual work. But our natural selves have no taste for prayer, and we excuse ourselves by saying "No time." Pray! Confess our selfishness and sloth, our carelessness and unconcern. We are saved for a purpose: to be labourers together with God, to do His will. And, His will is not grievous, but joyous. The Lord's promise is "*that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together.*" And, he that prayeth also! O my friend, begin today a definite work of prayer for the harvest, for the labourers, for the work! Keep a definite time each day to meet with the Lord of the harvest, for His work is your work too. He prays above, we pray below. We are labourers together with God.

THOUGHT: Do I have a prayer list for each week or month?

PRAYER: Lord, take me into Thy team as a prayer helper.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 20

PSALM 126

MATTHEW 9:35-38

*Did you pray for
your unsaved friend?*

THE HARVEST IS PLENTEOUS

Matthew's record of our Lord's ministry has timely instruction for us today. Read again these words: *"And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching ... and preaching the gospel of the kingdom..."* Our Lord was struck by the multitudes lost, without the gospel. They were like fields of ripening grain which, unless quickly gathered in, would soon rot away. The need for labourers was urgent. *"The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few."*

What was true in that day is even more so today. Unless Christians hear the words of Jesus and respond, the harvest will be lost. *"Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest..."* Prayer is the most important work in the Kingdom of God. We can accomplish nothing without prayer. Our urgent request to God is, "Lord, send forth labourers into the harvest. Precious souls belong to Thee. Let them not perish for lack of labourers!" As we pray, the Lord will call men and women to surrender their lives to Him and engage in the great work.

Let every true church of Jesus Christ arise to meet the crisis of our time. Let every faithful believer pray for their pastors, that the Lord will keep them faithful. Those who have entered into the ministry need our constant prayer support. We must also pray for those who are preparing or training to enter some kind of Christian work. Then, let us not forget to pray for those who have not committed themselves, that they may give their lives to serve the Lord. Gifted young men and women can be mightily used in God's Kingdom, rather than go into some secular profession to serve the world. Let our upcoming young people use their talents for God and let the perishing world go by.

My dear reader, have you caught a vision of the urgent harvest? Are you heeding the Lord's command? *"Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest"!*

THOUGHT: Will I obey God if He calls me to the harvest field?

PRAYER: Open my eyes to the harvest, and to Thy call, Lord.

THURSDAY, APRIL 21

PSALM 37:4-7

PHILIPPIANS 4:6-7

*“How amiable
are thy tabernacles ...”*

REST IN THE LORD

One great hindrance to persevering prayer is impatience. We have made an urgent plea to God. The distress over loved ones and our urgent concern give us much boldness in prayer and even the confidence that an answer will soon be forthcoming. After all, did not the Lord say, “... *before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear*” (Isa 65:24)?

We are not only impatient, but we also fall into another trap. We prescribe the answer we ourselves wish to receive. At the time, it seemed to be the only reasonable way that things should turn out. It seemed so logical as the one thing for God to do. The answer must come soon, nay, it must come immediately since we have prayed so tearfully and hard. And, it must be exactly the way we planned!

So we cry out to God. We arise from our knees. We look for an answer hour by hour, day by day, but nothing happens. The situation does not get better. If anything, it gets worse. God has not heard our prayers. The Almighty has not moved in our direction. Disappointment and discouragement! Weariness descends on our prayer life. Consequently, some Christians stop praying, telling themselves, “Since God does not hear my prayer, I might as well not waste my time, and His.”

Did God hear our prayer? Indeed, He did. The Almighty heard and His response is on the way. It may not be exactly what we expect, but do we not allow that God knows better than we how He should meet our need? And, should we not also realise that God has His own timing, and that His timing is never too soon or late, but always perfectly on time! Listen to the Psalmist’s words: “*Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass... Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him: fret not thyself ...*”

THOUGHT: What is the cure for my impatience?

PRAYER: Teach me, dear Lord, to rest and wait for Thee.

TRAIN UP A CHILD

Parents are ever so mindful of their children’s advancement in every field that they happily study with them, study for them, train them up in various skills and do a host of other things for them. In this respect Christian parents are not behind other parents. Strangely, however, believing parents are neglecting their responsibility in their children’s spiritual upbringing. Some leave it to the church; others leave it to the child. Whichever it is they are failing in their God-given opportunity.

The Word of God clearly lays on believing parents the holy duty of instructing their own children in spiritual things. We must not shirk or shrink from this responsibility nor should we delegate it to anyone else. God’s Word says, *“And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.”* Such is the zeal required of God’s people in the instruction of children in God’s Word. The same zeal naturally applies to the instruction of children in prayer.

Sadly, many modern parents have not been instructed by their pastors of their responsibility. Consequently their children grow up not knowing how to pray or read their Bibles. At meal times they do not thank God for the food. Morning prayers are said hastily. Bedtime prayers become a drowsy formalism and routine. Does this describe your children? I pray not. God’s Word commands all believing parents: *“Train up a child in the way he should go ...”* (Prov 22:6). We are to pray with them, to teach and guide and supervise. This is God’s way.

When should we start? As soon as a child begins to speak. We cannot start too early. Let us read God’s Word to them and teach them to speak to God as they learn to speak to man. This is our joyous and holy assignment from God. So, be faithful!

THOUGHT: Like parent like child! Be fervent, therefore!

PRAYER: Make me a faithful servant for Thee, O Lord.

PRAY WITHOUT CEASING

An army on the move must keep in constant contact with the commander. God's army cannot do otherwise. If we are to advance we must do so "on our knees," with much prayer. Prayer gives direction and power. "Much prayer, much power. No prayer, no power." Soldier of Christ, are you in constant touch with our great Commander-in-Chief? Except we do so we cannot advance for Him.

Listen to the Psalmist's words: "*As for me, I will call upon God; and the LORD shall save me. Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice*" (Ps 55:16-17). The Psalmist was the great King David, the conqueror of Goliath and the armies of the Philistines, the victor of many hard-won battles. A valiant warrior and a "man after God's own heart," David speaks for all true Christians. Keeping in constant touch with God is more important than one's daily food. Hence David says, "*Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray.*"

How many times do you pray a day? Do you find praying inconvenient or tiresome? It should not be, and it need not be! If you are convinced of the absolute necessity and blessedness of prayer, then I say, "Persevere! Don't ever neglect or give up." Like jogging or aerobics, prayer comes by practice, and practice makes perfect! When I started jogging, I was out of breath within a few minutes. Gradually, with practice, jogging for twenty or thirty minutes poses no problem but is something truly enjoyable.

So it is with prayer. We must take time and pains in prayer. As we said, it does not come naturally. Pray for Holy Ghost power. Say, "Lord, teach me to pray. Help me to pray often: morning, noon and night." The Apostle Paul says, "*Pray without ceasing,*" that is, without giving up. Be in constant prayer communion with the Lord. Keep in touch with our Commander-in-Chief. This two-way communication must be maintained, for our good and for God's glory.

THOUGHT: How many times a day do I pray?

PRAYER: Lord, make my life one of "unceasing prayer."

WITH ONE ACCORD IN ONE PLACE

No great work for God is ever accomplished apart from prayer. Great preaching on Sunday comes only by hours of praying in secret through the week. Spurgeon's pulpit power drew support from three hundred in the basement, on their knees. Thus only could he sustain a congregation of 5,000 weekly for thirty years in London. Pentecost could never have happened if the disciples had not obeyed their Lord, *"that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father"* (Acts 1:4). But they all *"continued with one accord in prayer and supplication."* *"And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place."* After ten days of united prayer, the Holy Ghost came upon the disciples in mighty power. They preached in over a dozen foreign languages, and 3,000 were baptised on that day. Did you ever wonder why our churches are so ineffective and powerless? For an answer, look at the midweek Prayer Meeting. Ask this question: "How many from the congregation are coming to pray with one accord in one place?" We are not concerned in this instance about praying in private, but our chief concern is with the public Prayer Meeting.

Of course, we all should have our own private prayers and nightly Family Worship. That is the normal thing to do. But there is a special place for the Prayer Meeting in church where the people come together with one accord in one place. With Jesus in our midst, He acts as the unifying force as well as the energising power. The church that prays together stays together. United we can accomplish much for God. With the Lord in our midst, we can put 10,000 to flight (Deut 32:30)! Dear reader, you have a part in the "chasing of 10,000." You can be part of the praying people who come together to support the pastor's ministry at midweek, with one accord in one place. Are you?

THOUGHT: Does my church have a good Prayer Meeting?

PRAYER: Revive Thy church, O Lord!

“WHEN I KEPT SILENCE ...”

There must be no slackening of our prayer life. It is akin to exercise: without prayer our spiritual life grows weak, flabby and withers away. Prayer empowers us to resist temptation. “Prayer will keep you from sinning, and sinning will keep you from praying.”

When we were first converted we were filled with the joy of salvation. That “first love” made our seasons of prayer the happiest time of the day. To sustain this sort of fervency in prayer requires utmost diligence and faithfulness. Eternal vigilance is the price which we must pay for spiritual vitality. But sooner or later, temptations assail us. The flesh, the world and the devil entice and attack on every hand. Slowly but surely, some fall victim and prayer begins to lose its flavour and fervour. What was once a joyous and grateful communion, now becomes a burdensome duty.

Sin is a most deadly enemy of prayer. The moment we condone sin, no matter how trivial or casual, our spiritual life begins to suffer. “Sinning keeps us from praying!” Our appetite for prayer and the Word of God begins to die. The Psalmist says, *“When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me ...”* (Ps 32:3-4). When we harbour sin and keep silence, we lose our peace and joy. God’s hand falls heavy upon us. Our praying is not what it used to be.

Keep silence no longer, but say with King David, *“I acknowledged my sin unto thee ... I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD ... If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”* (1 John 1:9). He will cleanse our sin of prayerlessness, and restore to us the joy of believing prayer. *“Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things ...”* (Jer 33:3). Let us no more keep silence!

THOUGHT: How often do I confess my sins?

PRAYER: Lord, keep me fervent in spirit and fervent in prayer.

TUESDAY, APRIL 26

MATTHEW 7:7-11

ROMANS 8:31-32

“... he is faithful and just to
forgive us our sins...”

HE SPARED NOT HIS OWN SON

Our God is the God of all resource, the Giver of every good gift. Like a father He awaits each child to approach Him and seek His favour. He has everything we need and nothing pleases Him more than to impart to us His gifts. And, while earthly parents in their folly or over indulgence may shower their children with things which cause more harm than good; our Heavenly Father always gives His children only the best and perfect gifts.

God's gifts are ours for the asking. He assures us, *“every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened... If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?”* Even more, He spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all! How shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? The argument is powerful beyond dispute. The trouble is we do not ask. *“... ye have not, because ye ask not”* (James 4:2).

The trouble is we do not pray, or we do not pray enough, or we simply forget. The result is, we deprive ourselves of God's wonderful gifts and we remain impoverished, spiritually undernourished and underfed. We remain spiritual cripples and dwarfs, starved and emaciated, with scarcely strength to stand on our feet, let alone fight against sin or serve the Lord. What, then, must we do? O my friend, pray for spiritual eyesight: “Lord, open my eyes to see my own wretched condition and to see Thy abundant resources. Impress upon my mind the great fact of Thy amazing grace and matchless love. Holy Spirit, implant in my heart the seed of prayer.” Teach me to pray, O Lord. He spared not His own Son! For my sake and yours, God delivered Jesus up. He gave us the *“Unspeakable Gift.”* He will surely also freely give us all things. But, we must ask!

THOUGHT: How much time do I spend in asking each day?

PRAYER: I thank Thee, Lord, for Thou givest perfect gifts to imperfect recipients.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 27

PSALM 40:1-5

JAMES 5:16-18

“... and to cleanse us
from all unrighteousness.”

HE HEARD MY CRY

One lesson which we have to learn and learn again is to commit our problems in prayer unto the Lord and then to rest patiently in Him. If we do this, He assures us that His peace “*which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus*” (Phil 4:7).

In prayer, we “make our requests known unto God.” Then we must rest in the confidence that He has heard and He knows best what to do. Let us therefore not make our prayers into a struggle with God, trying to convince Him of our idea of a solution. The situation becomes acute and almost unbearable when God seems to answer the prayers of others and not ours. One zealous couple has won many others to Christ, but not their children, in spite of their earnest and tearful pleading. Why has God not heard their prayers?

The answer is, of course, He has heard. Their prayers have ascended before the throne of grace. “Then, why has God not saved my children? Why does He not do it at once?” So the struggle goes on. To any such parents and others with similar perplexities, we say, “Rest in the Lord. He has heard your cry. Be patient!” Let us try and see beyond our perplexity and with our mind’s eye behold our eternal High Priest interceding for His children in Heaven. He loves these dear children even more dearly than you do. He made them. He died for them. He knows them better than we do. He follows their every move, even while they have strayed from the narrow pathway and are entered upon a life of sin. To you, our Lord says, “Fear not. Continue to pray for them. Pray them back into the Kingdom of Heaven. Only do not become weary and faint-hearted, even if it takes time to pray through.” A little quiet conversation with the Lord will restore our confidence and hope, no matter how dark the present scene may be, for God has heard our cry!

THOUGHT: Have I ever given up praying for any reason and for any length of time?

PRAYER: Help me, Lord, to pray and not to faint.

“I BELIEVE; HELP THOU MINE UNBELIEF”

The answer to our prayer does not depend on our emotions or efforts before, during or after prayer. The case of the afflicted father in Mark 9 illustrates this point. His emotions did nothing to help. The disciples had tried to heal his son but without success. Everything seemed hopeless. Then Jesus came along. He rebuked the people’s faithlessness. The disciples had failed to heal the boy. The father was practically in despair. He said, “... *but if thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us*” (Mark 9:22). The distressed man was not at all certain that Jesus could succeed where the disciples had failed. Our Lord’s words “*If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth*” (Mark 9:23) caused him to despair further. With uncontrolled emotions, he burst out in tears and exclaimed, “... *Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief*” (Mark 9:24). He was torn between belief and doubt. At one moment he had high hopes. The next moment he was plunged into the depths of despair.

Is not this our experience also? We shift and vacillate between doubt and faith. We even doubt the way we pray. We sometimes wonder whether we are praying aright, and whether we are praying according to the will of God. At times we question our own sincerity and earnestness. We doubt that our prayers have ever been heard. We rebuke ourselves for our apparently useless prayers.

At such a time let us cast all doubting aside. Our opening the door to Jesus, our confiding in Him in prayer and leaving our problem with Him tells us that we have acted in faith. Doubts may bother us, but let faith and trust in our Saviour prevail. Let us admit our weak faith and confess our doubting heart. Then, ask the Lord to help us. More striving and mental struggle will not improve matters. Over and above our doubting is the confidence that we should simply let Jesus take charge. We leave our burden with Him and He allays our fears. He lifts our unbelief and gives us peace.

THOUGHT: Should a believer persist in doubting God?

PRAYER: Lord, grant me perfect faith and trust in Thee.

WITHOUT FAITH IMPOSSIBLE

“But without faith it is impossible to please him ...” Without faith there can be no prayer, no matter how great the helplessness. But helplessness coupled with faith makes prayer effective. Without faith our helplessness would raise but a vain cry of distress in the night. Every man and woman of prayer will appreciate this vital aspect of prayer.

God’s Word has important instruction about “faith praying” if we expect to be heard. Our Lord says to us, *“And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.”* *“And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee”* (Matt 8:13). The same hour his prayer was answered. To those making request to God in prayer, James the Apostle says, *“But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering”* (James 1:6).

The question is, “How can we be sure that we are praying in faith? Is there some outstanding or extraordinary thing that we must do to ensure that our prayer is in faith?” The simple answer is, we must “Turn our eyes upon Jesus.” In our helplessness, let us always look to Jesus. Let us turn to Him with our whole heart and mind, casting all our care upon Him, for He careth for us (1 Pet 5:7). Our faith is not in how much we try, but how much we trust. Therefore, look to the Lord! He stands at the door and knocks (Rev 3:20). Our opening the door to Jesus is an evident act of faith. When we invite Him into our hearts, we are committing ourselves to His wonder-working power. But let us not have the false conception that our faith helps Jesus meet our need. Our Lord does not need our help. All He needs is our open door. Our faith is not to make Jesus more attentive to our situation or to become more helpful. Our Lord is always concerned for our welfare, and is always interested in us. He cares, but He cannot gain admittance until we fully open the door. This is our act of faith.

THOUGHT: Does unanswered prayer mean “lack of faith”?

PRAYER: Lord, increase my faith in Thee.

AS A LITTLE CHILD

Our Lord's teaching concerning the Kingdom of God applies in the matter of prayer. We may adapt Luke 18:17 and say, "Whosoever shall not approach God in prayer as a little child shall in no wise be heard." A little child is utterly helpless and dependent on father and mother. For his needs to be fully met, a little child needs merely to be in the state of helplessness, casting himself without condition or reserve on the all-embracing arms of his parents.

Every parent understands this aspect of prayer. So, I speak to you fathers and mothers. Your child utters not a word, yet his cries exceed any adult prayer. His tearful condition melts your heart. Indeed, even before he cries you hasten to his aid. The very sight, nay, even the thought, of his helpless condition speaks to you more than any cry or word. His very dependent estate moves your heart as a silent prayer, stronger than uttered words or the loudest cry. Your child's welfare is your foremost concern.

God, our Heavenly Father, deals with the helpless trusting believer in the same way. You, my friend, are weighed down with an insoluble and unbearable burden. You have been struggling vainly by your own strength and ingenuity. The harder you try the deeper you seem to slip into the quagmire. You have applied all your resources and stretched your imagination to its limit, with no solution in sight. What is the answer?

Our Lord says, "Be as a little child!" You have to give up your self-reliance and self-effort. Recognise your helplessness and God's all sufficiency. See Him as your Father, watching over you in Heaven, able, willing and ready to meet your every need. Night and day He longs to help if you would only look to Him. So our Father cares for us. He does perfectly what human parents can only do imperfectly. But, you must come to Him "*as a little child.*"

THOUGHT: Prayer is for little children.

PRAYER: Lord, I pray for a child-like trusting heart.

INTRODUCTION TO ISAIAH THE GOSPEL PROPHET

Do you know that of the sixteen books of the prophets in the Old Testament, Isaiah is first on three counts? It is first in order. It is first in length (sixty-six chapters). It is first of the prophets in being quoted in the New Testament.

Isaiah is known by his Greek name Esaias in the King James (Authorised) Version. Esaias is quoted sixty times and alluded to twenty-five times. But there is another reason why Isaiah is first among the prophets. Isaiah is the Evangel Prophet or the Prophet of the Gospel. His name means “The Lord is salvation.” It is through Isaiah that the prophecy of the Messiah, the Anointed, the Christ, is given. The virgin conception of Christ (Isa 7:14), His royal birth (Isa 9:6-7), His death, sufferings and resurrection (Isa 53) are foretold in detail by Isaiah.

But a prophet does not merely foretell future events. A prophet is a preacher of righteousness, a forthteller of God’s judgment on an unrepentant people. The book contains many a revival sermon to turn Israel and Judah from their sins. These sermons are most applicable to an apostate Church today. Isaiah was also a prophet to the nations that were involved with Israel and Judah, inasmuch as God, whom he represented, was Ruler over all.

Isaiah prophesied through a pivotal period of Judah’s history. His ministry spread over the reigns of four Jewish kings: Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, as the opening verse of his book tells us. This period coincided with the last days and captivity of the northern kingdom, Israel. Isaiah prophesied in the latter part of the eighth century BC. Samaria, capital of the northern kingdom, fell to the Assyrians in 722 BC. There are therefore recorded in Isaiah the vivid accounts of the Assyrian invasions to the gates of Jerusalem, and of Judah’s political intrigues with Egypt (the other super power of the ancient world). Then there are the intervening invasions from the Syrian coalition.

Isaiah’s mission of speaking to a renegade people was a difficult one. This was forewarned to him at the time of his call (Isa 6:9-10). This warning is quoted five times in the New Testament to reprove the same stubbornness persisting in the Jews in Jesus’ day.

Jewish tradition tells of Isaiah’s martyrdom during the reign of Manasseh (Hezekiah’s wicked son). Hebrews 11:37 which closes the catalogue of persecutions upon the ancient church with “*they were sawn asunder*” can be applied to Isaiah’s martyrdom while hiding in a hollow tree, according to Jewish tradition.

“*But the word of God is not bound*” (2 Tim 2:9). Isaiah prophesied both advents of the coming Saviour. He looked beyond to the millennial kingdom when wars shall cease (Isa 2:1-4), and of a new heaven and new earth (Isa 66:22). Isaiah captured a panoramic view of history.

INDICTMENT

Inasmuch as the opening verse of Isaiah's book declares the prophet to have prophesied through the reigns of four kings of Judah, it may be taken to be an introduction to the whole book. Strictly speaking, it introduces rather the first twelve chapters which directly bear on Judah and Jerusalem, because the vision is stated to concern Judah and Jerusalem.

A prophet's message is called a "vision" because originally a prophet was called a "seer." For a preacher's message to be effective, it must come as a vision, a refreshing insight into some aspect of truth. No vision, no message!

The prophet's message against Judah and Jerusalem in this chapter was cast in the form of a court trial. God was at once Prosecutor and Judge, while the prophet was chief witness. Heaven and earth were called upon to be supporting witnesses, for Judah's sins were known throughout the world. The charge was one of disloyalty, treason and rebellion, the first crime against any sovereign. Treason and ingratitude are most heinous sins! The sin of the spirit is ten times worse than the sin of the flesh.

In point of time, the terror of foreign invasion described in this chapter seems to point to Judah under Assyrian king Sennacherib's assault in 701 BC. This was God's means of judgment of an ungrateful people. (Read Isaiah 10:5-6). All the sham of a religious people, without that humble and contrite spirit of true worship, cannot cover up sin. For the sin of hypocrisy, Judah and Jerusalem must be doubly punished. Nevertheless, there is still hope of redemption when she repents.

THOUGHT: The hypocritical worship of God is a sin.

PRAYER: Lord, deliver me today from the sin of ingratitude that leads to disloyalty and treason. Amen.

WHO’S WHO?

Isaiah was identified as the son of Amoz. Note how it is differently spelt from Amos, the name of the prophet after Hosea. Isaiah’s father, Amoz, was thought to be a prince and by his royal lineage, Isaiah was a cousin of king Uzziah. Isaiah was a prophet who moved in the king’s court.



Note also the kings in this verse were kings of Judah. In the beginning there was only one kingdom under David and Solomon. After Solomon’s death, the kingdom was split into the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. In Isaiah’s time there was rivalry and conflict between the two kingdoms.

Kings are known by their deeds. So they are classified as either good or bad. Scroggie listed Uzziah as unstable, Jotham and Hezekiah good, and Ahaz bad. As we go through the book of Isaiah, these characters will appear on the prophetic stage. Study each king’s character carefully! The biography of great men can inspire us to noble deeds. Their mistakes should teach us not to commit the same. *“Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come”* (1 Cor 10:11).

THOUGHT: There is much for me to learn from history.

PRAYER: Lord, help the rulers of my country to govern justly so that we the people may lead a peaceful life and be used by Thee to advance the Gospel. Amen.

TUESDAY, MAY 3

ISAIAH 1:2-9

PROVERBS 1:17-24

“...I will make known
my words unto you.”

THE GREAT ACCUSATION

As we have noted earlier, Judah and Jerusalem were brought to trial before God (who was both Judge and Prosecutor) and Isaiah (the chief witness) with heaven and earth in attendance.

The charge was treason and rebellion. God’s people, with all the love lavished upon them, should have done better. However, their natural affections could not even measure up to that of animals. *“The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master’s crib (stall): but Israel doth not know.”* They were ungrateful, unfilial children, to say the least. In their backsliding, they have grossly offended the Lord.

The sorry state of the nation after three foreign invasions in Isaiah’s lifetime:

- (1) The Syrian-Israel Coalition (Isa 7)
 - (2) The Assyrians under Sargon (Isa 22)
 - (3) The Assyrians under Sennecherib (Isa 26)
- is vividly portrayed.

Judah was like a man assaulted from head to foot, left to die without any medical attention. Jerusalem was like a lone shack in a vineyard, an abandoned hut in a field of melons. It is by God’s grace that a remnant survived the punishment. Else Judah and Jerusalem would have been wiped out like Sodom, the ancient Hiroshima.

What is our attitude upon reading such an arraignment? We should not stand in judgment. We should rather look into our own wretched selves and repent. We have also been ungrateful children to God. Jesus says, *“... except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish”* (Luke 13:3).

THOUGHT: Do I deserve God’s goodness and blessings?

PRAYER: “Out of my bondage sorrow and night, Jesus, I come to thee.” Amen.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 4

ISAIAH 1:10-15

PROVERBS 1:25-33

“...they hated knowledge,
and did not choose
the fear of the LORD.”

WHEN RELIGION BECOMES ABOMINATION

Israel was redeemed from Egypt to become “*a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation*” (Exod 19:6). A full code of worship and ceremonies, sacrifices and feasts were prescribed by Moses in Exodus and Leviticus. Priests were appointed out of the house of Aaron to administer these holy rites in order to instruct the people in sincere worship.

Without heart-worship, Israel’s religion in Isaiah’s time had become an abomination to God. The offering of sacrifices might be done correctly in outward form and keeping of the sacred feasts with meticulous observances, yet without a sincere and contrite heart, these were become “*vain oblations*” (Isa 1:13). Therefore the prayers offered by the priests for the people went unanswered! The people ascended to worship with heavy burdens on their hearts. They returned home doubly laden.

Is that not a picture of the religiosity of our day? There are many who go to church, Sunday after Sunday, who offer even much money to God but, being unconverted, return home unforgiven, unblessed, no better than those who throng Roman churches like the Novena and Chinese temples. It is possible for one to be lost though one goes to church regularly.

Jesus tells of two who went to church (Luke 18:9-14). The first was a Pharisee, a religious leader who could pray well and gave tithes. Yet he was lost. The second was a publican, a tax collector. But he was saved when he prayed the penitent’s prayer.

THOUGHT: Am I more like the Pharisee or the publican?

PRAYER: “*God be merciful to me a sinner*” (Luke 18:13). Amen.

THURSDAY, MAY 5

ISAIAH 1:16-20

PROVERBS 2:1-7

“...the LORD giveth wisdom...”

REPENTANCE IS THE ANSWER

Ceremonial purifications were not enough. Many more were added by the Jews in Jesus' time, such as the washing of hands after going to the market (Mark 7:4), etc. These must be backed by tears of repentance, the washing of the heart by the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5). The way to God's acceptance is a complete change within.

Thus Nineveh was spared when the whole city, from king to serf, repented in sack cloth and ashes. Even wicked King Ahab's sentence was postponed when, upon rebuke by the prophet Elijah, he repented in sack cloth and fasted. By analogy, baptism does not save us until there is the washing of the heart by the waters of the Holy Spirit leading to repentance; until one has prayed the penitent's prayer, with tears!

Isaiah 1:17 seems to direct this message to the leaders of the nation. For who were they who should dispense righteous judgment to the down trodden, to orphans and widows? The king, the prince, the judge, the elder, the priest! What a message to governors of our land and elders of our church! David says, “*He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God*” (2 Sam 23:3).

Isaiah 1:18 is one of the famous verses to memorise. Here, God argued His case with every accused, with the prisoner in the dock, even with the murderer who had shed blood. There is a second chance in God's tribunal not found in a human court of law. Here is offered a clean slate to the bloodily guilty if he will genuinely repent of his foul deed. Such an offer, if rejected, can only bring on severe judgment. The land will be devastated by war again, to be sure!

THOUGHT: Have I truly repented of my sins?

PRAYER: O Lord, turn Thy chosen people to Thyself that we may not be faced with war after war. Amen.

BRIBERY AND CORRUPTION ARE ECONOMIC HARLOTRY

There was a time when all Israel shone resplendent under the rule of a just and good king David. Justice was also dispensed in the earlier part of Solomon's reign. But good kings were few, and far in between. During the period of the Divided Kingdom, only five kings were accounted good from a list of twenty in the kingdom of Judah.

In the days of Isaiah, Jerusalem was no more "*the faithful city*" (Isa 1:21). She was called a "*harlot*." Bribery and corruption in high places of government caused judges to commit judicial murders. Malpractices in commerce led to counterfeiting of money and adulteration of wine. Beware of imitations!

Princes who ruled were in league with the underworld, with thugs and cheats. Corruption like an epidemic gripped every stratum of society, from the highest to the lowest. The weak became the prey of the strong. Those who were most downtrodden were orphans and widows, charged Isaiah again in Isaiah 1:23. All this economic harlotry of bribery and corruption, and oppression of the down and needy were number one public enemies, declared the Supreme Judge, the Great Sovereign of Israel. These state crimes must be thoroughly purged.

From this arraignment of Judah's corrupt government, let those who occupy places of authority learn to be just, honest and clean. Let those who govern the church abuse not their powers for self-gain. From Confucius comes a good saying on human government: "Those who rule must set an example, ruling by the power of a virtuous rule" (以身作则, 以德為政).

THOUGHT: I must pray for "*kings, and for all that are in authority*" (1 Tim 2:2).

PRAYER: O Lord, may my leaders fear Thee and rule justly. I thank Thee for good government that has brought us peace and prosperity.

SATURDAY, MAY 7

ISAIAH 1:25-31

PROVERBS 2:15-22

“...the upright shall dwell in the land,
and the perfect shall remain in it.”

JERUSALEM SHALL RISE AGAIN!

The prophet's message, while condemning the present, looked to blessings in the future. Because God is on the throne, there is hope for better times. What a consolation this is to us living in these turbulent end-times when the Day is fast approaching.

Isaiah certainly looked to that golden age of Christ's millennial rule when Jerusalem will be thoroughly cleansed. Then, the city under just rule as in the day of good king David will regain her title: “*The city of righteousness, the faithful city.*” Virtue, not brute force, right, not might, will prevail.

*Yerushalayim, behold Messiah shall come
To save thy Land, when thou shalt cry to Him.
He comes on clouds, with awesome loud trumpet sound
To judge the earth — peace a millennium.*

*Yerushalayim, God is thy eternal peace.
City of Zion, David's throne rise again.
City of Truth, resplendent in His glory,
Till sun shall rise and moon no more shall wane.*

But before that day comes, there must be a terrible reckoning, a consuming of transgressors and sinners together, a consuming even by fire! Is this a reference to the coming judgment by nuclear fire? With such total destruction, the strong though like the oak tree and the rich like the gardens will perish. So they should not trust in the might and power of this world. We who know the Lord should do likewise. Our hope is in the New Jerusalem, the City of God, not this present world, no matter how peaceful or prosperous it might be.

THOUGHT: “What matters where on earth we dwell, On mountain top or in the dell? In cottage or a mansion fair, Where Jesus is, 'tis heaven there.”

PRAYER: Lord, may I always remember that I am just a pilgrim, passing through this earth on my way to Beulah Land.

THE PROPHET'S PANORAMA



Like a man looking out of his window into the distance, the seer and the prophet, insofar as prophetic history is concerned, can see a panorama of four mountain ranges, as illustrated above. This cross-section shows him looking first at the immediate situation, the times in which he lives or thereabouts. Then, he looks to the first coming of the Saviour, followed by the second coming and new heavens and new earth, with the golden millennium in between.

In the last paragraph of Isaiah 1, the prophet had a first glimpse of that golden age to come. But it is in Isaiah 2:2-4 that it becomes a bright vision of millennial blessing. This millennial peace will reign supreme on earth from Jerusalem the capital.

After describing how all the efforts of warring nations will be transformed into energies for agriculture, in modern language we might say, “tanks will be converted into tractors and howitzers into mowing machines,” the prophet returned to the immediate scene to rebuke God’s rebellious people. After rebuking the same for their misdeeds, the prophet looked again into the future. When Isaiah came to Isaiah 7:14, he challenged the hypocritical King Ahaz with the coming of the Saviour through the conception of a virgin. In Isaiah 9:1, the prophet returned to the immediate situation of an impending invasion of Galilee by the Assyrian hordes, only to glance forward to the day when the Christ shall appear (Matt 4:15-16).

THOUGHT: God sees from eternity past to eternity future.

PRAYER: Open my eyes that I may see, glimpses of truth Thou hast for me. Amen.

MONDAY, MAY 9

ISAIAH 2:1-3

PROVERBS 3:10-18

“...despise not the
chastening of the LORD...”

U.N. SHIFTED TO JERUSALEM!

The United Nations, founded in 1946 soon after World War II with fifty-one nations, has grown to 193. The United Nations headquarters are situated in New York City.

But Isaiah predicted a time will come “*in the last days*” when the U.N. will be shifted to Jerusalem. Israel will be the leading nation, the first nation of the world. The Lord’s House, the Temple of God, will be there instead of the U.N. Tower. “...*all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob...*” (Isa 2:2-3). This prediction is beginning to be fulfilled with more people going on pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

Jerusalem will be the U.N. headquarters, but it will not be a centre for political arguments but a religious and cultural centre, a headquarters for gospel missions to the ends of the earth. For what are “*his ways*” and “*the law*” and “*the word of the LORD*” from Jerusalem?

The Jews today think they are fulfilling this part of Isaiah’s prophecy by sharing their knowledge in different fields with other nations. We believe rather in Jerusalem attaining to this high status in the millennium in the realm of the spiritual. But there is the beginning of Jerusalem fast becoming the centre of the world, if you will see the city for yourself. This is the more vividly perceived if you will also visit Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom. Founded by the will of man, by Omri, Ahab’s father, and further embellished by King Herod, it is however a ruin of ruins. Jerusalem, chosen of God, is an ever growing city.

THOUGHT: “*Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee*” (Ps 122:6).

PRAYER: Lord, help me to always remember to pray for Thy city, Jerusalem.

TUESDAY, MAY 10

ISAIAH 2:4-5

PROVERBS 3:19-27

“...keep sound wisdom
and discretion.”

WAR NO MORE

The U.N. was founded with the avowed purpose of putting an end to all wars after the gruesome experience of the Second World War. Though she has taken for her motto from Isaiah 2:4 (and Micah 4:3): “... *they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more,*” and has striven the last many decades to restrain war between nations, her achievements are far from ideal. Why? Because the U.N. has left out the first part of the verse, which reads, “*And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people.*” They have left out the God of the nations, who alone can administer peace through His righteous rule. Ironically, the truncated text on the wall of the U.N. building was a gift from the Russian government!

There is another reason why the ideal of universal peace cannot be realised by the U.N. This universal peace, wherein all wars shall cease, is possible only when the Prince of Peace shall come to institute His golden millennial rule on earth. This universal peace cannot materialise until Jesus Christ comes the second time.

When will He come? No one knows the day nor the hour. But, from all events now shaping up, it seems His Return is at the doorstep. Our Lord will come not only to judge the nations, but also to save the earth from the ravages of a global holocaust predicted in both the Old Testament and the New Testament.

Before He returns, our duty is to occupy till He comes. Our job is to keep on witnessing the Gospel message to the ends of the earth (Matt 24:14). This means a stepping up of evangelism and missions must be an emphasis of the Church.

THOUGHT: When did my church last open a new gospel station?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to set my affection on things above, not on things on the earth. Help me to do my bit each day without fail while I wait for Thy return.

SUPERSTITION AND WORLDLINESS CONDEMNED

The prophet returned to the immediate situation of Jacob’s sins of superstition and worldliness which had sealed her fate. Therefore “*thou hast forsaken thy people*” (Isa 2:6), “*forgive them not*” (Isa 2:9). A backsliding people, indulging in the practices and pleasures of the world, take note!

The superstitions of the East, the divinations and charms of the Philistines and of other Gentiles invaded God’s House. This is the natural consequence of those who reject the true living God. “Those who slight true divinity are justly given to lying divinations,” says Matthew Henry.

There is nothing wrong in having silver or gold, horses and chariots, but it is the insatiable desire to multiply them that is condemned. The “*love of money is the root of all evil*” (1 Tim 6:10). A Christian who is given to money-making at the expense of his spiritual welfare comes under the same condemnation. Horses and chariots are today’s flashy cars and limousines. Do you make your car serve you or do you serve your car? If you spend so much time polishing and embellishing your car, it becomes your idol. Hence the condemnation: “*they worship the work of their own hands, that which their own fingers have made*” (Isa 2:8). Or it may be a piece of antique, or work of art — when you over-treasure it. Matthew Henry says again, “And though lands called Christian are not full of idols, in the literal sense, are they not full of idolised riches? and are not men so busy about their gains and indulgences, that the Lord, his truths, and precepts, are forgotten or despised?” Assuredly the Lord will not forgive those who persist in abasing themselves to the pursuit of their lusts, and refuse to humble themselves before Him.

THOUGHT: Are there really no idols in my life?

PRAYER: Lord, deliver me from superstitious practices and the worship of modern idols. Keep me from anything that takes precedence over Thee.

THURSDAY, MAY 12

ISAIAH 2:10-12

PROVERBS 4:1-9

“...forsake ye not my law.”

THE DAY OF THE LORD

The Day of the Lord, and other similar words, denote a time when God manifests His power in judgment. The Day of the Lord, in the context of this passage, refers rather to the end-times when God will triumph over His enemies and deliver His people. It will be a time of consummate judgment at the end of this age at His Second Coming, and will include the final judgment (2 Pet 3:10-13). It will remove class distinction such that the uppermost class of the rich and mighty will be levelled to the lowest.

How will it come to pass? We see in the introductory verse 10 that the high and mighty ones will be scrambling for their lives to the mountain caves to hide, to escape capture. (These are plentiful in the hilly regions of Israel.) There the poor will also be running for their lives when war breaks out. This has happened time and again in Israel's history.

During the Japanese bombing of Singapore at the outset of the Pacific War, we had the wonderful opportunity of experiencing this truth. We were working at the Supreme Court as interpreters. Our office was on the ground floor. When the siren sounded and the bombs began to fall just across the road, fourteen of them missing the Courthouse by the width of the road, the din of that bombing was frightening. We thought the house was to collapse on us. Sure enough, in no time we (interpreters, clerks, judges, peons) found ourselves crawled under the counter. There was no class distinction now. The chief justice, who looked so grave and awesome in his wig and robe now humbled himself to mingle with his almost untouchable “Asiatic” staff! His reddish face, usually filled with lordly pride, suddenly paled to a near yellow like his Chinese underlings. How true the description of Isaiah 2:10-11!

THOUGHT: “...behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Cor 6:2).

PRAYER: O Lord, help me to seek Thee while Thou mightest be found, and to call upon Thee while Thou art near.

METAPHORS FOR THE HIGH AND MIGHTY

In China, a tycoon is often likened to a mountain. In Singapore, a financier is called a mountain-base. In this passage, we see the rich and mighty likened also to high mountains and hills of eminence. Furthermore, they are called cedars of Lebanon and oaks of Bashan.

What are the characteristics of the oak and the cedar? The oak tree is a magnificent long-lived tree growing usually alone on high ground. Its leaves are holly-like, glossy green and spiny on the edges. The oak is the religious symbol of long life and strength (Gen 35:8). The oak of Bashan grows in forests on the hillsides above the fertile valleys. A black dye of commercial value is obtained from the acorn cups. The acorns are fed to the swine. The oak has much economic value.



The cedar of Lebanon is a magnificent evergreen which grows to a height of 120 feet and a girth of 40 feet. It exudes a fragrant gum or balsam. Its wood is therefore durable and insect-resistant. Cedar wood was used by King Solomon to build the Temple (1 Kings 5:5-6). For a full description of the cedar of Lebanon, read Ezekiel 31 which likens both Assyria and Egypt, the ancient super powers, to its mighty growth. Lebanon today uses the cedar tree as her national emblem.

The high and mighty in Judah were further called by the palaces and fortresses they lived in — high tower and fenced walls. They were also called the merchants who sailed the ships to Tarshish or Spain. Does the phrase *“all pleasant pictures”* (Isa 2:16) refer to the decorations, the luxury in a rich man’s house or ships? One thing to remember about Isaiah: he uses much poetic language.

THOUGHT: *“Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall”* (Prov 16:18).

PRAYER: Lord, teach me to humble myself lest in my pride, like the high and lofty ones, I shall be abased.

SATURDAY, MAY 14

ISAIAH 2:17-22

PROVERBS 4:19-27

*“Keep thy heart with
all diligence...”*

IDOLS BECOME IDLE, THE IDOLISED SCANDALISE!

In spite of the first and second Commandments, the Jews were an idolatrous people. They worshipped the Lord God, but they also set up idols copied from the surrounding heathen nations. A weird picture of their syncretism at the time of the Babylonian invasion yet to come is given to Ezekiel in Ezekiel 8. Sad to say, this state of affairs is reenacted in the church today when churchmen link up with the heads of human religions to pray and worship together. Idolatry takes over immediately.

With the advent of the Day of the Lord (it seems these verses refer to the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem when Jewish idols began to be abolished), every form of idolatry will be put away. Idols become idle. These dumb works of man’s fingers which were supposed to offer security to their worshippers could not save themselves in the tribulations to come. In desperation the Jews would throw the idols away into the holes of moles and bats, while they scampered to hide in the rock caves. Matthew Henry says, “As God will abolish idols, so their worshippers shall abandon them (*finding they cannot help*) ... Those that will not be reasoned out of their sins sooner or later shall be frightened out of them... Covetous men make silver and gold their idols, money their god; but the time may come when they may feel it as much their burden as ever they made it their confidence...”

The paradox is that these who worship idols and the mammon of silver and gold become idolised themselves. Do not the poor cringe before the rich, even in the church (James 2:1-6)? To be idolised is to be ensnared in sin! But what happens to these who make themselves, as Calvin says, demigods? In that hour of tribulation to come, they will also be cast away as their idols (Isa 2:22).

THOUGHT: (Read Psalm 115.)

PRAYER: Lord, open my eyes to the idols that I may have in my life. Help me to cast them all away and worship only Thee.

FROM DISTANT FUTURE TO NEAR FUTURE

If you refer to the four mountain ranges in the prophet's panoramic view of events to come, you will note that his vision changes vividly as his eyes sweep the near and distant horizons. As we come to Isaiah 3, we have a close-up of Jerusalem and Judah, evidently during the siege by Nebuchadnezzar, a century to come. Isaiah's prophetic vision swings from the distant future to the near future. With this pattern of the prophet's vision in mind we will be able to analyse better who's who, what's what, when's when!

In this regard let us review the times in which Isaiah lived. Remember that the introductory verse of Isaiah 1:1 certifies that the prophet's ministry ran through the reigns of four Jewish kings: Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah. These kings reigned during the last days of the northern kingdom and her captivity (Samaria fell in 722 BC to the Assyrians). Now Assyria's supremacy as the Number One super power of the ancient world lasted for another century until Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, rose in 606 BC.

Now, whereas in Isaiah's time, Assyria was on the lips of every trembling nation, one century after, it was Babylon and Nebuchadnezzar. In Isaiah's days, the Assyrians laid siege to Jerusalem and took many of Judah's cities. One century after it was the Babylonians doing the same to Jerusalem and Judah. Jerusalem was under siege for twenty years from 606-586 BC when the city was taken, the Temple burnt and razed to the ground. The best of Jerusalem's inmates (including the nobility, Daniel and his three friends and Ezekiel) were taken to Babylon. With this war-setting, now read the woeful predictions of Isaiah on the siege of Jerusalem and Judah.

THOUGHT: The Lord God is the sovereign God.

PRAYER: O Lord, grant us peace yet in our time. Help us to hasten on with the Gospel ministry before it is too late.

MONDAY, MAY 16

ISAIAH 3:1-7

PROVERBS 5:9-16

*“Drink waters out of
thine own cistern...”*

WAR OVERTURNS SOCIETY

In Isaiah 3, Isaiah sees Jerusalem at war, a century to come. When the stay and the staff (the daily supply of bread and water) were taken away from Jerusalem under the siege of Nebuchadnezzar, society was overturned. Looting is one ugly aspect of wartime life.

When war comes, there will no more be that high society called the elite. The rich and the mighty, the hero and the warrior, the judge and the prophet, the soothsayer and the elder, the captain of fifty and the man of rank, etc, might hold authority and command respect when power and position were in their domain. Now, with war crashing at the city gates, when the brawn is needed more than the brain, it is no wonder that young people, with greater physical strength, take over. Compared with their grandparents or parents, they are appropriately called “*children*” and “*babes*” (Isa 3:4).

During the Japanese occupation of Singapore, when most of the high and respected lost their jobs, especially judges, lawyers and professors, we saw them walking the town in shorts and T-shirts, also trying to eke out a living by doing a little “black market” business. On the other hand, there were young men, some still in their teens, who swaggered around in cars provided by the Japanese military, because they were their henchmen. These youngsters literally flouted their elders as Isaiah 3:5 says, “*the child shall behave himself proudly against the ancient, and the base against the honourable.*”

And the uneducated, by enterprise and daring, would suddenly mushroom into war-time millionaires, while the millionaires would be reduced to bankruptcy when their properties were commandeered by the military. The luminaries of society receded into the darkness of the misfortunes of war. This was Jerusalem when God would judge her through the Babylonians.

THOUGHT: (Read Psalm 75:7.)

PRAYER: “Lord God of hosts, be with us yet, Lest we forget, lest we forget.”

TUESDAY, MAY 17

ISAIAH 3:8-15

PROVERBS 5:17-23

“...rejoice with the
wife of thy youth.”

WAR COMES AS GOD’S JUDGMENT ON A WICKED PEOPLE

May we not call this the theology of war? Evidently, Judah in Isaiah’s day was given a first instalment of God’s judgment in the invasions of the Assyrians. A century later, God’s judgment was against the elders and princes of the nation, especially. What a responsibility is laid on every leader!

Tables were turned upon these who oppressed the needy, who devoured their substance, and “*beat [the] people, to pieces, and grind the faces of the poor*” (Isa 3:15). Now, not only children, the youngsters, but women also (Isa 3:12), rule over them, to repay them for their past misdeeds. This state of affairs has also become the norm of every “new” society under communist “liberation.” God has used the communists to fulfil His purpose, to overturn an old and corrupt society that we might repent. “*O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation. I will send him against an hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge, to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets*” (Isa 10:5-6). The sin of Jerusalem and Judah was openly identified with that of Sodom: the unnatural lust of the flesh, i.e. homosexuality. To those who live in such sin, it has become their glory rather. Today, homosexuality is called gay-pride. Homosexuals are elected elders in the church and ordained to the ministry. Lesbians, too, are put in important positions in the church, to their greater shame.

But to the righteous in the nation, the remnants (Isa 1:9), “*it shall be well with him: for they shall eat the fruit of their doings*” (Isa 3:10). What a comforting thought. The righteous, in such a dangerous situation as Jerusalem under siege, will be preserved and cared for. If we live a just and holy life, we should not fear though evil should surround us on every side. Read Psalm 91.

THOUGHT: Am I living a righteous life?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to pray each day for my family and people, that none will rebel against Thee.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 18

ISAIAH 3:16-24

PROVERBS 6:1-8

*“Go to the ant, thou sluggard;
consider her ways, and be wise.”*

FROM COQUETTES TO CINDERELLAS

In the day of the Lord’s judgment on Jerusalem, not only will the high and mighty men be brought low, but also their wives and daughters. Isaiah 3:16-24 describes how their women folk are stripped of their expensive make-ups from head to foot to the exposure of their private parts.

Our older generation who lived through World War II under the ravages of the Japanese army readily perceives the implications of this passage. How our young girls had to change into men’s clothes, and crop their hair like boys. No more mini-skirts! How their movements were jealously guarded lest they be snatched by sex-hungry wolves.

To warn women folk of these ravages, Isaiah 3 closes with their men being slain amidst cryings and mournings.

May we be warned that our unconfessed sins will not go unpunished. Man may not see, but God does. Nothing escapes our omniscient God. Why do we want to incur His wrath and suffer the consequences? Our righteous God will judge and it will be a sad time for us when He does. Let us be very sensitive to the sins in our lives, and be quick to confess and repent, for our faithful Lord will forgive. *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”* (1 John 1:9).

Romans 8:6 gives us a stern warning: *“to be carnally minded is death.”* It then goes on with a wonderful promise: *“to be spiritually minded is life and peace.”*

THOUGHT: Have you chosen to be *“spiritually minded”*?

PRAYER: Lord, teach our young people, boys and girls, to fear Thee and to live pure and holy lives.

THURSDAY, MAY 19

ISAIAH 3:25-4:1

PROVERBS 6:9-16

*“How long wilt thou sleep,
O sluggard?”*

SPINSTERS OUTNUMBER BACHELORS SEVEN TO ONE

There were no chapter and verse divisions in the ancient Hebrew manuscripts. Therefore the opening verse of Isaiah 4 could well be the last verse of Isaiah 3. Matthew Henry agrees with this viewpoint. Thus, if we read Isaiah 3:25-4:1 as a whole, we will see 4:1 in its proper perspective. As it is stated that men shall fall by the sword in the war, amidst wailing and mourning at the gates, we must conclude from 4:1 that the ratio of men to women killed in the war is 7:1. It is true of every war that the preponderance of men killed over women is overwhelming.

There is no record of how many men were killed by the Babylonians under the attacks of Nebuchadnezzar, but from the Lamentations of Jeremiah, the prophet who lived through the whole twenty years of siege and final captivity, here are some of his dirges.

“How doth the city sit solitary, that was full of people! how is she become as a widow! she that was great among the nations, and princess among the provinces, how is she become tributary!” (Lam 1:1).

“The Lord hath trodden under foot all my mighty men in the midst of me: he hath called an assembly against me to crush my young men: the Lord hath trodden the virgin, the daughter of Judah, as in a winepress” (Lam 1:15).

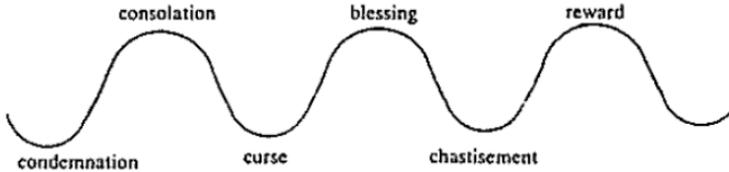
“The hands of the pitiful women have sodden their own children: they were their meat in the destruction of the daughter of my people” (Lam 4:10).

Now as the number of eligible bachelors is so much reduced, girls would have a hard time finding a husband. That is to say: war is a horrible experience!

THOUGHT: Do not leave to tomorrow what you can do today.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to do Thy will now before it is too late.

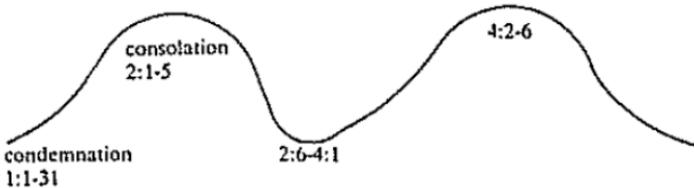
THE PATTERN OF A PROPHET’S SERMON



As in prophetic chronology we have observed the time-table of God’s salvation plan for the ages spread across four mountain ranges, so in the sermonic structure of Isaiah’s message, we can see a continuous up-and-down contour of God’s dealing with His people. It is a wayy line of condemnation and consolation, which we may restate as curse and blessing, chastisement and reward.

For God is Judah’s loving father still, He will not forsake His own. After chastising them with the rod of His anger, He comforts them with the hope of future restoration. Read Psalm 103:8-9.

According to this up-down, hill-valley contour of God’s dealing with His people, the first four chapters of Isaiah may be analysed thus:



Now, following this pattern you can easily analyse the whole book. This up-down, hill-valley contour is one ever-recurring pattern of Isaiah’s sermons. It is a pattern of the dealings of a God who is both father and judge, righteous yet merciful, holy yet gracious, in whom if we will put our trust, we have love, faith and hope, despite our sins and waywardness.

THOUGHT: God is ever loving and merciful.

PRAYER: Lord, keep me from straying from the path Thou hast mapped out for my life.

A SECOND GLIMPSE OF JERUSALEM RESTORED

After Isaiah 1, which is an introductory sermon of God’s condemnation of Judah and Jerusalem, Isaiah consoled the righteous of a day of universal peace when all wars shall cease in Isaiah 2:1-5.

Then comes a second sermon of condemnation from Isaiah 2:6 to 4:1 which is followed by a second glimpse of Jerusalem restored. “*In that day*” of 4:2 seems to look into the distant future of Christ’s millennial rule on earth.

“*The branch of the LORD*” evidently points to the Lord Jesus Christ, even as He is called “*a rod out of the stem of Jesse*” (David’s father), for Christ is “*of the seed of David according to the flesh*” (Rom 1:3). In Zechariah 3:8, He is “*my servant the BRANCH.*” “*Branch*” is better understood if we read the Hebrew which means “shoot of new growth.” Jesus who comes from the royal house of David is the Greater David, a “new shoot full of life.”

After the final chastisement of Israel as recorded in Zechariah 13:8-9, one-third will have survived the War at Christ’s Second Coming. Israel will be purified by the “*spirit of judgment, and by the spirit of burning*” (Isa 4:4) both in the physical and spiritual sense. For unless Israel has gone through the fire of another holocaust (after Hitler’s destruction of six million Jews), she will not repent.

In that day of Israel’s restoration, the Lord’s glory will be a protection to Israel, a cloud by day and fire by night. This is reminiscent of the Exodus when God provided Israel the pillar of cloud and fire (Exod 13:21-22). This would be an assurance to an Israel so much persecuted and harassed these two thousand years of her exile, and even now after her return. Christ will be that Tabernacle of shelter and refuge for all the returnees to Israel.

THOUGHT: My God is a faithful God.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to share the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ with my Jewish friends.

WHAT "SOUR GRAPES"!

"Sour grapes" in the English language means "things despised because they cannot be attained," from Aesop's fable of the fox and the grapes. In Hebrew idiom, we have this saying in Ezekiel 18:2, "... *The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge.*" The Chinese version has it like this: "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are soured numb." "*Sour grapes*" in this context refer to evil particularly in the moral realm. That is to say "when a father commits sin, his son gets the punishment too."

Whether such a principle is just or not, read Ezekiel 18.

In Isaiah 5, Isaiah gives a parable of sour grapes. These grapes were not from a wild vine, but from the choicest strain which is given the utmost attention in cultivation. Out of a good tree that the owner has planted, the fruit he gets is of the vilest. Can this be so?

This happens in every farmer's experience. It can be due to various causes, eg. an attack on the plant by worms and insects, the encroachment on the plant by bigger plants. In our College campus, we have planted the choicest of bananas known as pisang rajah (i.e. king bananas). Owing to the giant angšana trees' encroachments from across the fence, these banana trees could barely survive. When fruit was produced, it was so skinny that almost no flesh could be found. If there was, it tasted sour like some wild bananas.

With this parable of the vineyard and the choicest vine that brought forth only wild grapes, the prophet indicted the backsliding nation on six counts.

THOUGHT: (Read 2 Peter 3:17-18.)

PRAYER: Lord, help me not only to be a fruitful Christian, but one who brings forth sweet fruit.

MONDAY, MAY 23

ISAIAH 5:1-7

PROVERBS 7:10-18

*"...there met him a woman with the
attire of an harlot, and subtil of heart."*

THE POWER OF POETRY AND PARABLE

From Isaiah's love song, let us learn the power of poetry and parable. We need not go into the details of this Song of the Vineyard which are self-explanatory, but note rather the effects this kind of rhetoric produces.

The song brings Isaiah's long overture of four chapters to a strong climax, like a selected hymn to the close of a sermon. A sermon can be forgotten, but not the closing hymn with its haunting music, if it is fittingly chosen. Let us cultivate the writing of verse for climactic effect, but if not, let us develop a sense of poetic appreciation and selection.

The power of parable is best demonstrated in its usage by our Lord Himself who spoke forty parables. Divine truth is clothed in flesh and blood, in concrete and tangible forms. Parables used in the Old Testament number only ten, but each has produced a powerful effect. One of the most famous is Nathan's parable of the rich man who killed his poor neighbour's ewe lamb. By telling that story to David, hitherto floating in a rosy cloud of nuptial lust, the king was aroused to his earthly senses. He sentenced himself of a double crime he had committed, which he was wilfully ignoring. By describing God's lavish love on His people in the form of a pampered vine, and the negative returns it yielded, he got the Jews to acknowledge their own guilt.

We see how the Lord used the same rhetoric to get His opponents, the chief priests and elders, to sentence themselves. Let us therefore use parables for effective speaking. Aesop's fables are a help!

THOUGHT: (Read Ephesians 6:19-20.)

PRAYER: Lord, help me to speak sincerely and effectively, to learn how best to convince those who oppose Thee.

TUESDAY, MAY 24

ISAIAH 5:8-10

PROVERBS 7:19-27

*“Let not thine heart decline to her ways,
go not astray in her paths.”*

THE SIN OF ENCROACHMENT

The Oxford dictionary defines encroachment as: “usurping intrusion on other’s territory, rights...”

This can be done by removing a landmark (Prov 23:10), by forcefully grabbing the land of the fatherless (Prov 23:10), the strong eating up the weak, etc.

This can also be done illegally, eg. building into neighbouring territory, abutting public property by bribery and corruption, etc.

This can be legally done by overwhelming financial power, like the rich buying up the poor, or buying out a competitor. For God’s people to indulge in building their own empire, never so much as looking up to heaven once to reflect on earth’s wretched state, is a sin. These who consider not God’s work but their own enrichment and pleasure will know the answer when war comes! How many a mansion of tycoons and towkays was left standing cold in the wind who fled Singapore in the face of the Japanese invasion. This was Jerusalem’s plight!

Not only the mansions, but also the estates round about were abandoned. Because of neglect through war, *“Ten acres of vineyard shall yield one bath, and the seed of an homer shall yield an ephah”* (Isa 5:10). God judges the sin of encroachment with desolation and leanness. Are you like the rich fool who tried to build bigger and higher, but was small and short in God’s sight?

THOUGHT: Have I committed the sin of encroachment?

PRAYER: Lord, teach me not to set my affection on things on earth, but on things above. Teach me to number my days and to apply my heart unto wisdom.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 25

ISAIAH 5:11-17

PROVERBS 8:1-9

“...be ye of an understanding heart.”

THE SIN OF DRUNKENNESS

Once the drinking habit grips you, you will be indulging in it from early morning to late night!

This sin is aggravated when committed by God’s people who may have backslidden from Him, and who should rather regard the work of the Lord (Isa 5:12).

These are they who leave the church for worldly pleasures, who contribute no more to His cause. Therefore God judges them by putting them into exile, to suffer hunger and thirst in their captivity. Many die along the way. God in so judging them will awake them to His awesome majesty.

It is a grave error to quote the making of wine at Cana by our Lord as an excuse for drinking. The wine at Cana contained a very low percentage of alcohol. Besides, according to Hebrew custom, it was drunk with two parts of water. The drinks that cause a man to be drunk today, like whisky or brandy, have such high alcoholic content that it can almost be used to run a car! But, says Buswell, “Our stomachs are not combustion engines.”

Now read Solomon’s words of wisdom in Proverbs 23:29-34: “*Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine. Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright (swirls around smoothly). At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder. Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things. Yea, thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the midst of the sea, or as he that lieth upon the top of a mast.*”

THOUGHT: Do I give excuses for drinking alcoholic drinks?

PRAYER: Lord, keep me from any alcoholic drinks. Help me to be a teetotaler.

THURSDAY, MAY 26

ISAIAH 5:18-19

PROVERBS 8:10-18

“...wisdom is better than rubies...”

THE SIN OF PRESUMPTION

Matthew Henry says: Woe to those “who are... set upon sin... who draw iniquity with cords of vanity... who exert themselves to gratify their base lusts.”

Those that sin through infirmity are drawn away by sin. In contrast, those that sin presumptuously, draw it to them. Thus they pull God’s judgments onto their own heads. They defy God’s justice. In Isaiah 5:20, these speak like the scoffers of the last days. Like them, they are daring in sin and walk after their own lusts.

The sin of the spirit is much graver than the sin of the flesh. The sin of the will is far deeper than the sin of the emotion.

Let those who know God, like the Jews, and yet defy God, beware! They might commit the unpardonable sin which is blasphemy of the Holy Spirit (Matt 12:31-32). They might sin the sin unto death (1 John 5:16). Hebrews 10:26-29 speak of the wilful sin and its fearful consequences.

As Jesus had the Pharisees and chief priests, scribes and lawyers ganged up against Him, so there were the false prophets and haughty princes and judges who resisted the prophet. And as the Jewish leaders of Jesus’ day were condemned, so were those in Isaiah’s day.

Who in our day collude to defy the Lord? Answer: The ecumenicals, the liberals and modernists, high churchmen, politicians, Romanists, etc. Those who know the truth but resist the truth! Beware of the sin of presumption, which may lead one astray forever. Paul says, “*A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject*” (Titus 3:10).

THOUGHT: (Read Psalm 131:1.)

PRAYER: O Lord, may I always examine my own heart using the searchlight of Thy Word.

THE SIN OF TONGUE-TWISTING

Tongue-twisting is even easier when the tongue is forked, like the snake's. Tongue-twisting was first practised in the Garden of Eden by Satan, the father of lies. To call evil good, and good evil, putting darkness for light and light for darkness, bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter. God meant it good for our first parents, but the Devil made it bad. God wanted them to walk in the light but the Wicked One plunged them into darkness. God planned for them a sweet life but the same turned bitter through that tongue-twisting.

When the master of deceit talks peace, he in fact means war. In an appraisal of Billy Graham in the 1980s, Dr Tow Siang Hwa observes: “Their definition of peace is distinctly different from the Church's definition. They proceed from the conviction that a stage of war exists now. This war is between capitalism and communism and can only end in universal communist victory. Peace, therefore, is the termination of the current universal class war, or to put it bluntly, communist world conquest.”

An example of how the communists have used tongue-twisting to fool the Christian West is their exploitation of Billy Graham. By building up Billy's ego and showing him their window-dressing of the Church in Russia, they tricked Billy into this perverted statement: Billy says of his Moscow visit, “I think there is a lot more freedom here than has been given the impression in the States because here there are hundreds or even thousands of churches open. In Great Britain they have state churches. Here the church is not a state church but a free church.” (BP Banner Sept/Oct 1982). Note how Billy used the word “free” here, which has the double meaning of “not being a state church” and “not restricted.” While the Russian church is not a state church, like Britain's, she is surely not free, but under the control of the KGB (secret police). This fact is confirmed by Solzhenitsyn. Woe to them that say one thing but mean another, the tongue twisters!

THOUGHT: Being fork-tongued is a sin.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to say yea, yea, nay, nay.

SATURDAY, MAY 28

ISAIAH 5:21

PROVERBS 8:28-36

*"Hear instruction, and be wise,
and refuse it not."*

THE SIN OF SUPERIORITY COMPLEX

The sin of being wise in one's own eyes, of being clever in one's own sight comes from that haughty attitude known as superiority complex. Is this a national sin of the Jews who regard Gentiles as untouchables, even as dogs?

Indeed, it is a sin of every race, each one proud of its own heritage and tradition. There was a time when white superiority looked down its nose on the coloured, but if you visit Africa you will see rising black nationalism turning their tables on the whites.

The superiority complex whereby one becomes wise in one's own eyes is rooted in that sin of sins called pride.

Do you know how sin came into the world? It originated from the heart of that anointed cherub, who, being lifted up with pride, decided to be as God (Ezek 28). But pride goeth before a fall (Prov 29:23). So the anointed cherub was cut down to the ground and consigned to hell (Isa 14:12-15). The Prince of Tyrus, imbued with the same pride that brought Satan's downfall, was similarly cast down by Almighty God (Ezek 28:2). Everyone who exalts himself, in spiritual or academic pride, suffers the same fate.

It is good therefore, as members of Christ's body, for each one of us to heed Paul's admonition, *"And if any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know"* (1 Cor 8:2). *"For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith"* (Rom 12:3). *"For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself"* (Gal 6:3).

THOUGHT: What good have I that did not come from God?

PRAYER: Lord, give me the heart of Jesus, who was willing to humble Himself and become a servant, and do nothing but the Father's will.

CHAMPION DRINKERS AND CORRUPT JUDGES

Those who outdrink others at "yam seng" parties and make a name for themselves as champions are condemned. That drunkenness is condemned a second time in this sermon (re-read Isaiah 5:11), showing that it was a rampant social sin. A Jewish national sin!

One sin leads to another. Drinks not only tip the scales of sanity but also of justice. Drunken judges are they who also take bribes and distort justice. Such corrupt judges are condemned by Exodus 23:6-8 and Deuteronomy 16:19.

Yea, they are ten times condemned for perverting justice, who are commissioned to uphold justice. Psalm 82 is one psalm written to put to shame such gross travesty of justice. Judges are God's representatives on earth. So high are judges held in esteem that to them is given the title of *Elohim* or gods (Ps 82:6). "*But ye shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes*" (Ps 82:7). You who judge corruptly will have a corrupt ending.

If you are a leader in society, a governor of men, you hold a similar high position. Then listen to what King Lemuel's mother says to her son in Proverbs 31:4: "*It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine; nor for princes strong drink: Lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted.*"

Alexander the Great died a premature death at thirty-three. He conquered the world, but failed to conquer himself. The cause of his death was excessive drinking. If you drink, take care, lest you be abruptly overtaken.

THOUGHT: (Read Ephesians 5:18.)

PRAYER: Lord, preserve my country from drunkenness and corruption through the witness of Thy Church.

RESULTANT JUDGMENT

A holocaust is the resultant judgment on the six sins enumerated—encroachment, drunkenness coupled with disregard for God’s work, “tongue-twisting,” presumption, superiority complex and drunkenness unto perversion of justice. Judgment will be as fire burning up stubble and chaff, as rot eating up the root, and as blossom withering like dust. Such sins against society are tantamount to contempt of God’s law and despising of His Word. Those who sin against God willfully, against the light of God’s Word, must suffer maximum punishment. Therefore, *“his hand is stretched out still”* (Isa 5:25).

A manifestation of God’s anger upon His people was the earthquake that took place during King Uzziah’s reign (Amos 1:1; Zech 14:5). The earthquake was of disastrous proportions because dead bodies littered the streets (of Jerusalem), like piles of refuse. That earthquake is mentioned for a warning of the earthquake to take place at Christ’s Second Coming on the Mount of Olives. National disasters cannot be avoided, but when they occur, they are God’s warning to the wicked. But it is not necessary to wait until some disastrous event overtakes us to turn us back to God. When we read of such divine warning to a wicked nation, it is enough to throw us upon our knees. Except we repent, we shall likewise perish. Read Luke 13:1-5.

“Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon” (Isa 55:7).

THOUGHT: Let me learn from the mistakes in history.

PRAYER: *“Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting”* (Ps 139:23-24).

TUESDAY, MAY 31

ISAIAH 5:26-30

PROVERBS 10:1-8

*“Treasures of wickedness
profit nothing...”*

GOD’S INSTRUMENT OF JUDGMENT — THE ASSYRIANS

The Assyrians, evidently, were the subject of this prediction of things to come. Though their motives were for plunder (Isa 10:13), they fulfilled God’s higher purpose. God is seen in this concluding passage as the One who gathered the forces. He is seen as One raising an ensign or banner to rally the invasion armies. He is likened to one hissing or whistling, as beekeepers are known to do, when calling a swarm. At His signal the attacking forces burst into action.

Isaiah 5:27 describes the punch and power of these shock-troops, their perfect harness and battle dress.

Isaiah 5:28 sees them in action, a charging cavalry with bows bent, ready to discharge their volleys of arrows.

Isaiah 5:29 describes the terror of their battle cry like the roar of lions, and the sureness of their catch. There will be no escape from the Assyrians, who have made a name for ferocity.

Isaiah 5:30 compares them to a roaring sea. The Jews, if they were seamen trying to make for the shore in such a boisterous situation would find the land equally foreboding. For *“darkness and sorrow”* await them there also.

A totally gloomy scene, to a doomed people. The hour of total judgment, in the prophet’s view, has come!

THOUGHT: (Read Mark 13:33.)

PRAYER: O Lord, awaken me to a Third World War that is brewing, that can burst on me any day now. My hope is in Thy glorious return.

VISION AND MISSION

This sixth chapter of Isaiah, like the fifty-third chapter, is one we are often referred to, particularly, in regard to God's call. It is quoted at testimony meetings, or when challenges are made at consecration services.

How does God call us into His service? He uses different methods under different circumstances. Insofar as Isaiah was concerned, God called him by a glorious vision of Himself. It was a divine audio-visual, by a vivid revelation of Himself through sight and sound. It was an awesome experience in Isaiah's life which he could never forget. The vision which God had given Isaiah reminds us of a vision He gave to Ezekiel 150 years after (Ezek 1).

When God reveals Himself to man, He humbles the creature to the dust. That is the experience of every servant called of God. Isaiah felt the same miserableness, but he was cleansed by God's act of mercy, and then he was called. A change of the whole being, of will and attitude, must come over everyone who is called of God. As Stephen Hyun, former director of Pocket Testament League, has said, "He must be born the third time." A voluntary decision to answer the call is also an important factor. Unless we are completely yielded to Him, He cannot use us.

Then the mission! Here Isaiah was commissioned to a difficult task: to preach to a wilfully-ignorant, benighted, hard-hearted people. In spite of such a seemingly hopeless task, the Word shall not return unto Him void, for a "holy seed" shall remain according to Isaiah 6:13.

THOUGHT: Do I pray for my Pastor?

PRAYER: Lord, raise up Thy servants for this darkest period of history, when the Church has become apostate. Raise up sons for a 21st Century Reformation Movement.

THURSDAY, JUNE 2

ISAIAH 6:1

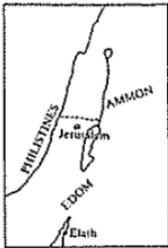
PROVERBS 10:17-24

*“In the multitude of words
there wanteth not sin...”*

WHO IS KING UZZIAH?

In 2 Kings 15:1-7, Uzziah (also called Azariah) was passed over almost unnoticed. It is in 2 Chronicles 26 that a whole chapter is given to a detailed description of his reign.

Uzziah began to reign from the young age of sixteen. To him was given the accolade of being a righteous ruler, though with the qualification that “...as long as he sought the LORD, God made him to prosper” (2 Chron 26:5). Moral strength of a nation is more important than the military and economic!



Uzziah did much to strengthen the nation militarily. He built fortresses throughout the country. He conquered the Philistines on the west and subdued the Ammonites on the east. He fortified Elath in the south which was wrested from the Edomites. His army numbered 300,000.

He excelled also in the art of peace. He had wells dugged for the support of the cattle industry. He cultivated vineyards in the hilly regions, for he “loved husbandry” (2 Chron 26:10).

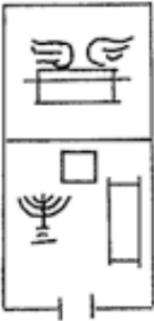
However, 2 Chronicles 26:16 says, “*But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction.*” He intruded into the priest’s office by burning incense in the Temple. Eighty priests of the Temple withstood the arrogant king. When Uzziah angrily brushed them aside, he was suddenly struck with leprosy. According to Josephus, this occurred simultaneously with the earthquake that took place in his reign. “*Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall*” (Prov 16:18). What a gloomy ending to one who started out so brightly. It is good to recall the three rules John Calvin prescribed for the study of theology. The first rule is humility. The second is humility! The third is humility!

THOUGHT: Do I apply John Calvin’s three rules into my life?

PRAYER: Lord, forgive me of the sin of self-righteousness.

THE AWESOMENESS OF GOD UNVEILED

The Temple of Solomon was built according to the pattern God had given to his father David (1 Chron 28:11-19). This theology of Church architecture was not of David’s invention, but was directly inspired of God. The Temple of Solomon surely reflected the awesomeness of God. Unseen to the naked eyes, however, were angelic hosts which were suddenly revealed to Isaiah.



Interpreting Isaiah’s vision of God, Dean Stanley said, “The young Isaiah was, or in vision seemed to be, in the court of the Temple. He stood at the gate of the porch, and gazed straight into the Holy Place and into the Holy of Holies itself. All the intervening obstacles were removed. The great gates of cedarwood were thrown open, the many coloured veil that hung before the innermost sanctuary was drawn aside and deep within was a throne of a King, high and lifted up, towering as if into the sky. What was the form that sat thereon, here, as elsewhere, the Scripture forbears to describe. Only by outward and inferior images, as to us by secondary causes, could the Divine Essence be expressed. The long drapery of His train filled the Temple, as His glory fills the earth.”

Around the throne stood seraphims, angels of God in flaming glory. These sang “*Holy, holy, holy ... the whole earth is full of his glory,*” in triple praise of the Triune God. As they sang antiphonally, the Temple door posts trembled while the house was filled with smoke. How awesome is the sight of God when He but manifests a little of Himself to puny man. The effect of the vision upon the prophet is “*Woe is me! for I am undone*” and a confession of his uncleanness before a holy God. As for John on Patmos Island: “*And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead*” (Rev 1:17).

THOUGHT: How will I, a sinner, stand in the presence of God?

PRAYER: Lord, “*Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin*” (Ps 51:2).

AFTER CLEANSING BY THE CHRIST, THE COMMISSIONING

We have noted how the awful vision of the Divine Majesty and the worship of the seraphims overwhelmed Isaiah with a sense of his abject sinfulness (Isa 6:5). Truly we are undone if there is not a Mediator between us and a holy God (1 Tim 2:5).

Fortunately, the One sitting upon the throne, high and lifted, was the Lord Christ, according to John 12:41. From the Mediator, one of the seraphims was sent with a live coal taken from the altar to cleanse the prophet's lips, and purge away his sins. The sacred fire from the burnt offering on the brazen altar represents the sacrifice of Christ and its effects. The live coal applied to the prophet's lips denotes not only the cleansing effects but also the pardon and acceptance of his work, through the atonement of Christ. It also denotes the Divine grace to rekindle the first love so as to fit him for the Master's use. It is under such overwhelming love of the crucified Christ that a sinner saved is constrained to answer God's call. This is Isaiah's heart condition, or else he would not reply, *"Here am I, send me."* This is Saul's heart condition after the Damascus Road experience, or else how could he straightway preach Christ in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God? (Acts 9:20). And inasmuch as a sinner saved by grace has answered the Master's call to higher service, the same must be willing to go where He wants him to go. Without such a yielded, willing heart, neither can a servant of God be commissioned.

Has God saved you from your sinful, wretched self? Have you heard Him calling you to full-time service? And if you have rejected that call, are you not trying to run away from the constrain-ing love of Christ? Paul says, *"woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!"* (1 Cor 9:16).

THOUGHT: Has God called me and I am not heeding His call?

PRAYER: "Have Thy own way Lord, have Thy own way, Thou art the potter, I am the clay."

MISSION TO A STUBBORN NATION

The work of a prophet is not an easy one, for truth that hurts and pierces the heart of its hearers is not readily received. See how this stubbornness of heart is reflected in Jeremiah's message to the Jews of his day: *"Hear now this, O foolish people, and without understanding; which have eyes, and see not; which have ears, and hear not... But this people hath a revolting and a rebellious heart; they are revolted and gone"* (Jer 5:21-23). *"Since the day that your fathers came forth out of the land of Egypt unto this day I have even sent unto you all my servants the prophets, daily rising up early and sending them: Yet they hearkened not unto me, nor inclined their ear, but hardened their neck: they did worse than their fathers. Therefore thou shalt speak all these words unto them; but they will not hearken to thee: thou shalt also call unto them; but they will not answer thee"* (Jer 7:25-27).

When God's Word is rejected, time and again, God will give up those who reject His Word to their own delusion (2 Thess 2:10-11). This is what is meant by Isaiah 6:9-10. When this wilful rejection of God's Word is carried over to New Testament times, the same condemnation is levelled against the Jews even by our Lord Jesus Christ. The same condemnation is reiterated by Paul (Matt 13:14-15; Mark 4:12; Luke 8:10; John 12:40; Acts 28:26-27; 2 Cor 3:14-15).

Rejection of God by God's people results in their rejection by God. Yet it is not utter rejection, for in His wrath He remembers mercy (Hab 3:2). Insofar as Isaiah's ministry was concerned, his stubborn compatriots would have to go through a devastating war after which they would go into captivity. Nevertheless, a tenth shall return to the land. The doctrine of a remnant persevering through is given at the very outset of Isaiah's sermon, Isaiah 1:9.

THOUGHT: Where would I be without God's mercy?

PRAYER: *"... O LORD, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy"* (Hab 3:2).

MONDAY, JUNE 6

ISAIAH 7

PROVERBS 11:17-24

*“They that are of a froward heart
are abomination to the LORD...”*

IMMANUEL THE ANSWER

There is a gap of two generations of kings between Isaiah chapter 6 and chapter 7. Notice that the event described in Isaiah 7 happened in the reign of Ahaz, grandson of Uzziah. The date is 735 BC.

At this time there was an alliance between Syria and Israel (split with Judah after the reign of Solomon), often called by the name Ephraim, the chief tribe of Israel. This Syrian coalition, having failed to enlist Judah into its camp, had declared war with Judah, now under Ahaz. War having broken out, Judah became fearful and *“...his (Ahaz’s) heart was moved, and the heart of his people, as the trees of the wood are moved with the wind”* (Isa 7:2).

Despite Ahaz being a wicked king, for the sake of His covenant with David, God was on Judah’s side. So He sent Isaiah and son Shearjashub to meet Ahaz *“...at the end of the conduit of the upper pool in the highway of the fuller’s field”* (Isa 7:3). The prophet, given a vision of the future, was to assure the king how the threat of Syria and Israel was empty propaganda. Rezin of Syria and Pekah of Israel were like two smoking firebrands. They were smoke, not fire! Within sixty-five years, Israel (Ephraim) would lose her national identity.

To assure Ahaz of victory by trusting the Lord, Isaiah gave the king an opportunity to ask for a sign (as he later offered to Hezekiah, Ahaz’s son). Ahaz, having made up his mind to seek Assyria’s help, hypocritically declined. When man thinks he is strong enough, he cares not a whit about the things of God. Are you trusting in your own plans or are you submitted to the Lord?

Snubbed by Ahaz, the prophet rose to the occasion to declare God’s plan. Salvation will come in His virgin-born son Immanuel, which means “God with us.” This he said not only to Judah at this time, but to all ages.

THOUGHT: Trust in the Lord, all the way to Beulah Land.

PRAYER: Lord, in peace or war, be Thou my Provider and Defender.

TUESDAY, JUNE 7

ISAIAH 7:1

PROVERBS 11:25-31

*“The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life;
and he that winneth souls is wise.”*

THE STORY OF KING AHAZ (2 KINGS 16)

Ahaz was twenty years old when he began to reign over Judah. His counterpart in Israel was Pekah. Ahaz was an apostate king. He departed from the Jewish faith in the One True God, taking to all the idolatrous practices which had gripped Israel, even the offer of human sacrifices! *“And he sacrificed and burnt incense in the high places, and on the hills, and under every green tree”* (2 Kings 16:4), which was forbidden by Moses (Deut 12:2). Ahaz even sent Urijah the priest to Damascus (capital of Syria) to study the pattern of the Syrian altar. Urijah made a replica of it for the Temple in Jerusalem. Upon this newfangled altar Ahaz offered sacrifices in preference to Jehovah’s altar, which he pushed to the north-side of the Temple. He also *“cut off the borders of the bases, and removed the laver from off them; and took down the sea from off the brasen oxen that were under it, and put it upon a pavement of stones. And the covert for the sabbath that they had built in the house, and the king’s entry without, turned he from the house of the LORD for the king of Assyria”* (2 Kings 16:17-18). God’s House was altered to make way for new idols!

Now why did not Ahaz look to God and ask for a sign as offered by Isaiah? The record in 2 Kings 16 tells us that Ahaz had sent envoys to Tiglathpileser, King of Assyria. By stripping the Lord’s House of its gold and silver and offering it to the Assyrian king, he paid off the Syria-Israel attack with an Assyrian invasion from the back. He did not realize, however, that with Syria and Israel swallowed by Assyria, Judah was now exposed to Assyria, the devourer of nations.

Ahaz *“...reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem, and did not that which was right in the sight of the LORD his God, like David his father”* (2 Kings 16:2). What a sad commentary on the reign of one who might have become a great king had he listened to the prophet Isaiah.

THOUGHT: Do I read and obey God’s Word?

PRAYER: Lord, save me from my preconceived plans. Help me to listen to the preaching of Thy Word and obey Thee.

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 8

ISAIAH 7:1-9

PROVERBS 12:1-9

*“Whoso loveth instruction loveth
knowledge: but he that hateth
reproof is brutish.”*

“IN THE DAYS OF AHAZ”



This sketch map shows the three capitals (each marked with a square) of the three countries at war. The names of kings are listed. In the distance is the superpower Assyria. Today there is one Israel united, but Syria remains her age-old enemy. There is no more Assyria today, but farther north is Russia the new superpower.

THOUGHT: History is His story.

PRAYER: Lord, the omniscient God, may I always trust in Thee.

THURSDAY, JUNE 9

ISAIAH 7:7-9

PROVERBS 12:10-18

“...the tongue of the wise is health.”

“WITHIN THREESCORE AND FIVE YEARS”!

To tell someone’s future sixty-five years hence seems remote and irrelevant. People are interested in the here and now. So Ahaz regarded Isaiah’s words as idle. The Syrian-Israelite armies were come to the outskirts of Jerusalem. What was needed was to get rid of them now. But the prophet’s words were not idle words. He had already assured Ahaz to take the situation calmly. He had predicted that the attacks by Syria and Israel would fizzle out like two smoking firebrands. Smoke, but no fire. “*Thus saith the Lord GOD, It shall not stand, neither shall it come to pass*” (Isa 7:7). Isaiah declared Israel’s (Ephraim’s) disintegration as a people within threescore and five years. Henceforth, Israel’s fortune would slide downhill!

When Isaiah foretold this fate to Ahaz, it was the year 735 BC. By 732 BC, Syria was crushed by the Assyrian superpower. By 722 BC, Samaria (capital of Israel) also fell to the Assyrians, in logical sequence.

As the policy of Assyria towards the conquered peoples was to subjugate them through years of deportation and intermingling of races, Israel became totally dispersed in the reign of Esarhaddon, 669 BC. The prophet’s words had come true to the younger generations, who heard what was predicted to Ahaz. They need not wait till sixty-five years after. When Samaria (capital of Israel) fell to the Assyrians in 722 BC, only a little over a decade thereafter, the lesson should have been learnt.

Do you have any warning of evil things to come? With Bible prophecy fulfilling before our very eyes (eg. the re-gathering of Israel as a nation since 1948), do we not realize that the return of our Lord is nearer than we think!

THOUGHT: (Read 1 Corinthians 15:52.)

PRAYER: Lord, help me to be a good watchman, awake to the signs of Thy coming.

FRIDAY, JUNE 10

ISAIAH 7:10-14

PROVERBS 12:19-28

*“Deceit is in the heart of them
that imagine evil: but to the
counsellors of peace is joy.”*

“BEHOLD, A VIRGIN SHALL CONCEIVE”

This famous verse on the virgin birth of Christ is a battle-ground between the faithful and the infidels in the Church of Jesus Christ. The Hebrew word *almah* for virgin here means a virgin plain and simple. Matthew, quoting Isaiah at this point, says, *“Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us”* (Matt 1:22-23). The Greek word *parthenos* used by Matthew corroborated by the Septuagint (Greek translation of the OT), also means *virgin*. Can Matthew and Isaiah both make the same mistake?

If the disbelieving modernist scholars should concede Matthew’s version, but argue against Isaiah, let us then ask them what is the logic of Isaiah’s challenge to Ahaz? Isaiah said this was a sign, and this sign was in the context of God’s power to reveal Himself in some earth or heaven-shaking event. That a virgin should bear a son would be in the realm of God’s power involving both heaven and earth.

Modern versions of the English Bible that try to take away the virginity in Christ’s miraculous conception do so to their own desolation. Thus, the RSV (Revised Standard Version) translates the Hebrew *almah* as “young woman,” so does the NEB (New English Bible). What young woman cannot give birth? What sign can it then be? Then there is the Good News Bible that copies with “a young woman who is pregnant.” What young woman cannot become pregnant? What sign can it be? These modernist versions, RSV, NEB, GNB, NIV, etc which have assailed our Lord’s Deity alienate themselves from every lover of God. *“For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth”* (2 Cor 13:8).

*Late in time behold Him come, Offspring of a virgin’s womb.
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see, Hail the incarnate Deity.*

THOUGHT: Am I using a faithfully translated version of the English Bible?

PRAYER: Lord, open my eyes to Thy truth!

THE MEANING OF ISAIAH’S CHALLENGE TO AHAZ

Ahaz, having made up his mind to align with the superpower Assyria against the Syria-Israel coalition, spurned Isaiah’s offer of Divine help. Turning to the house of David, even to the whole line of kings to come, Isaiah countered that a Saviour must come, not from them, but from the virgin mother who will name Him “God with us.”

Though we know that the event of the birth of Christ through Mary did not occur until 700 years afterwards, the prophet in ecstasy saw it as an accomplished fact. In vivid sequence he saw also the dissolution of the Syria-Israel coalition in a matter of a few years, which is less than the period of early infancy of a child when he should begin to know between good and bad. Within that brief period of time, Isaiah predicted “*the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings.*” As predicted, the Syria-Israel coalition was broken. Pekah, king of Israel, died.

“*Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good*” (Isa 7:15). This verse means that during the first three to four years of infancy the child will not live in a land “flowing with milk and honey,” but rather, as Isaiah 7:20ff tells us, under war-torn conditions. It is a time when cultivation of crops will be disrupted, so that the only food available comes from the milk of domestic animals (not meat, but milk!). Ahaz was warned of hard times ahead!

During the days of Singapore’s surrender to the Japanese, there was an abundance of tinned foods sold in the streets. Milk powder and condensed milk were plentiful, looted from the warehouses. But not fresh food like eggs and vegetables because farming was disrupted by war.

THOUGHT: Where is God when I go through tough times?

PRAYER: O Lord, “*give us this day our daily bread.*”

"REAP THE WHIRLWIND"

"For they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind..." (Hosea 8:7). This saying from Hosea applies foursquare with what Ahaz was faced with. The Assyrians whom Ahaz had bribed to attack Syria and Israel, having crushed Judah's enemies, came right up to the gates of Jerusalem. Never had there occurred a greater national crisis before this since Judah split with Israel (Ephraim is Israel's chief tribe) after the death of King Solomon.

Ahaz's scheming, however, fitted God's higher plan not only to bring in the Assyrians, but also the Egyptians. Like swarms of bees and flies, troops from the two superpowers covered the land. These overran not only Israel but Judah also. They ate of the fat of the land by pillage and plunder.

Assyria was likened to a razor. In the light of Ezekiel 5:1ff, the shaving of the hair from the body of a person, from head to foot, including the beard, bespeaks a total deportation of the inhabitants of the land. Ultimately two deportations came to pass which practically achieved this result. All this came about through Ahaz's hiring of the Assyrians against Syria and Israel, but now it was the Lord who had "hired" Assyria against Judah. Ahaz sowed the wind, but now he reaped the whirlwind.

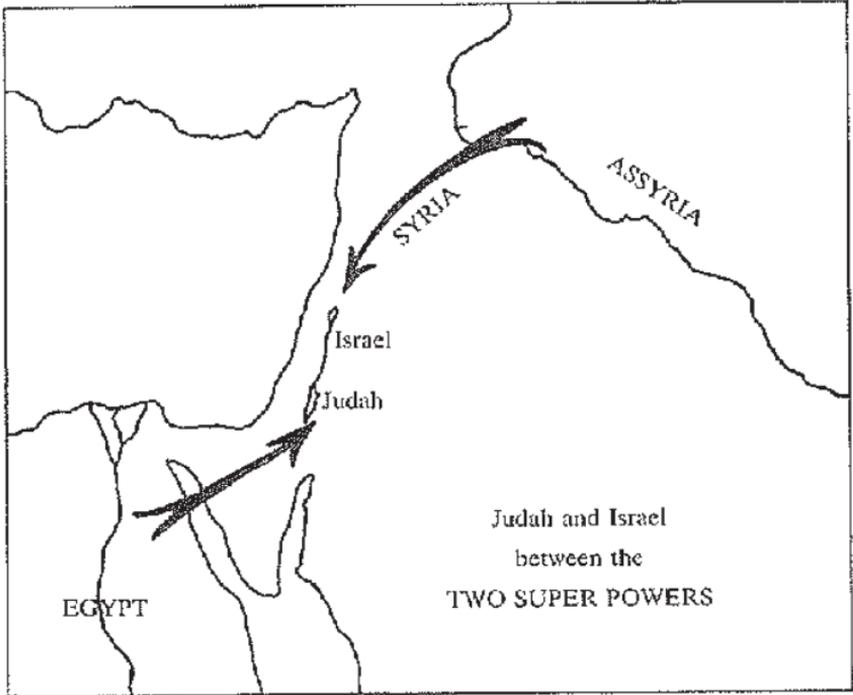
During World War II, the Allies "hired" communist Russia to fight Germany. When Hitler lost out, the Russians drove right into Berlin. They came face to face with the British and Americans. The Allies have paid the price of a split Germany for many decades. *"For they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind"* (Hosea 8:7).

What do we do when faced with problems like Ahaz? Do we rely on our own prowess or do we seek the Lord first?

THOUGHT: Who do I go to for guidance in times of need?

PRAYER: Lord, save me from the sin of Ahaz.

NOW EGYPT COMES INTO VIEW!



Hitherto the superpower Assyria had dominated the prophetic horizon. Then Egypt came into view. Which was the stronger of the two?

Wisdom from Daniel: “... *the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men*” (Dan 4:17).

THOUGHT: Is God really in control of all things, even the political realm?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to truly believe that Thou art the sovereign God.

TUESDAY, JUNE 14

ISAIAH 7:21-25

PROVERBS 14:1-9

*“Every wise woman
buildeth her house...”*

AFTERMATH OF WAR

We have noted that eating *“butter and honey”* in Isaiah 7:15 does not mean living in plenty, but rather the very opposite. These concluding verses of Isaiah 7 explain. According to C H Leupold, the butter and honey would be better understood as: “nothing more than curds and honey. Nor will anybody in the land have access to anything other than this monotonous and meagre diet. As Delitzsch again appropriately remarks, this will be what men will eat to the point of utter disgust.”

If we skip to Isaiah 7:23 and read down to the end we will see the *“butter and honey”* situation in even clearer perspective. The aftermath of war brought a complete dislocation of agriculture in the land. Where vineyards were bringing in good money and vines fetched a shekel each (a good price in ancient days), now what one saw were thorns and briars. Wild beasts roamed these fruitful farms now gone to seed, so that for a man to venture into these wildwoods he must arm himself with bow and arrow. The only form of agriculture left was the keeping of animals, which required much less human labour, for the bulk of the population was taken into captivity. The remnants in the land gathered what animals were left. These they sent to graze on hills that were once cultivated, both oxen and sheep and goats. Hence the people’s diet was restricted to butter (or curds from the animals) and honey collected from the wilds. Note there is no mention of eating beef or lamb, for the animals left in the land could be numbered. Instead of a hundred sheep and ten cattle, a man and his family had only a young cow and two sheep. If they ate beef and lamb, there would not be any butter or curds left!

THOUGHT: *“It is of the LORD’s mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness”* (Lam 3:22-23).

PRAYER: I thank Thee, Lord, for Thy daily mercies in my life. Help me to be always grateful for Thy watchful eye over me.

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 15

ISAIAH 8

PROVERBS 14:10-18

*"He that is soon angry
dealeth foolishly..."*

LIGHT FOR A DARK AND STORMY NIGHT

In the feverish preparations for war with the Syria-Israel coalition amidst flying rumours and counter plots, Jerusalem stood a lone citadel in a dark and stormy night. There were those who sided with the enemy against Ahaz their king, who were an ungodly crowd all the same. There was Ahaz's pact with Assyria to counter the Syria-Israel attack, which relied on the arm of flesh rather than on the help of God. Those of Ahaz's party for alliance with Assyria accused the prophet for conspiracy against his country. Others who knew no better were the superstitious, even among the intelligentsia. These desiring to know the outcome of the present had resorted to mediums and witchdoctors and necromancers.

Because God's mercy was still with the house of David, despite Ahaz's hypocritical decline of Jehovah's help, Isaiah was sent to assure the people of the oncoming Syria-Israel fiasco despite Judah's heavy losses.

In view of the fact that the virgin-born Saviour, Immanuel, was yet to come, God gave to the Jews instead one designated birth of a child from the prophet himself for a sign of victory. His name, Mahershalalhashbaz (the longest of any known Hebrew names), would speak to the nation God's message of the hour.

And inasmuch as Judah spurned the soft-flowing waters of Shiloah, yea, even God's daily provisions, but rejoiced in Rezin and Pekah (kings of Syria and Israel), the Lord would flood them with a great deluge from the Euphrates, i.e. Assyria.

This message from Isaiah's lips spelt doom to the wicked but hope to the faithful. Yes, war has two sides: a side of hope and liberation, and a side of doom and slavery. On which side will you be should war suddenly overtake you?

THOUGHT: (Read Psalm 20:7.)

PRAYER: May I be faithful to Thee, O Lord, always.

THURSDAY, JUNE 16

ISAIAH 8:1-4

PROVERBS 14:19-27

“...he that hath mercy
on the poor, happy is he.”

MAHERSHALALHASHBAZ

This prophecy was not uttered until a year, perhaps, after Isaiah's fruitless meeting with Ahaz at the aqueduct of the Upper Pool. In the meantime, the fortunes of war ran heavily against Judah. 2 Chronicles 28:5-19 relates a crushing defeat of Judah by Syria and Israel in which 120,000 were slain in one day. Besides the fallen in battle, 200,000 men, women and children with much spoil were taken captive to Samaria, until the word of a prophet by the name of Obed moved their captors to release them. These are no exaggerated figures, for there was an overwhelming destruction of the whole country (except Jerusalem) through further invasions by Edomites and Philistines.

To Ahaz and his politicians, their hope of deliverance rested only in Assyria. But this became their greater ordeal as we shall see later. In mercy, God sent Isaiah with the terse word Mahershalalhashbaz (which means “Speed-plunder, haste-spoil”) written on a large scroll. This was witnessed by Uriah the priest (the one sent by Ahaz to Damascus to copy the pattern of its altar) and by Zechariah, son of Jeberechiah, perhaps father-in-law to Ahaz (2 Chron 29:1).

Nine months later, a son was born to Isaiah and he named this boy “Mahershalalhashbaz.” Then the enigma of this word was revealed to be a soon routing of Judah's invaders: *“For before the child shall have knowledge to cry, My father, and my mother, the riches of Damascus (capital of Syria) and the spoil of Samaria (capital of Israel) shall be taken away before the king of Assyria”* (Isa 8:4).

From this message, it must be understood that although Ahaz was instrumental in bribing the Assyrian king to attack his enemies from the back, it was the Lord's sovereign grace to bring it to pass, and it was the Lord's judgment upon Ahaz to release the flood waters of Assyria upon the apostate Jewish king.

THOUGHT: (Read Proverbs 21:1.)

PRAYER: May I fully submit to Thy working in my life, O Lord.

THE PROPHET IS A MAN OF PRINCIPLES

In the world of politics, principles are sacrificed for expediency. The people of Judah, under Ahaz’s tyranny, would side with the invading forces of Syria and Israel. On the other hand, Ahaz sought Assyria’s help against his own subjects no less than against Syria or Israel (Ephraim). In such an intriguing situation where does the prophet stand?

A man of principles, Isaiah could side neither people nor king. “As it is,” says Ellicott, “he sides with neither, and has a warning for each. Each is running blindly into destruction. The prophet could hardly have blamed the people of Syria and Israel for the following their own kings, but it was a strange and monstrous thing for Judah to follow their example. We must remember too that in spite of the weakness and wickedness of Ahaz, the prophet’s hopes rested on the house of David (Isa 11:1), and that Hezekiah (Ahaz’s son) was already old enough to justify that hope.”

In America in the 1980s, we saw the legacy left behind by a China-appeasing Nixon in order to counter-balance the Russians. One lone voice of a modern prophet in Carl McIntire had consistently denounced a godly America playing up to a godless China. A prophet is a man of principles.

Events that followed Ahaz’s short-sighted alignment with Assyria proved the king wrong, for the Assyrians, while swallowing up Syria and Israel as by an overflowing Euphrates, swept through Judah in their path. The waters reaching “*even to the neck*” (Isa 8:8). Judah was plundered all the same, and was subject to the Assyrian tyranny, as lying under the stretched-out wings of a bird of prey.

Isaiah’s hopes must rest in Immanuel (God with us).

THOUGHT: *“Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils:
for wherein is he to be accounted of?”* (Isa 2:22).

PRAYER: Teach me, O Lord, to submit always to Thy will.

SATURDAY, JUNE 18

ISAIAH 8:9-15

PROVERBS 15:1-8

*"A soft answer turneth away wrath:
but grievous words stir up anger."*

“WHO IS ON THE LORD’S SIDE?”

Isaiah 8:9-15 are words not only directed against Syria and Israel but a challenge to all the peoples of the earth, far and near. No plan against the Kingdom of God (of which the house of David was representative at that time) shall prosper. The prophet declared his trust in Immanuel once again, for *“God is with us”*!

Under great stirring of spirit, the prophet was inspired to refute a false accusation of confederacy, the cry of the Assyrian Alliance Party against Isaiah and his followers for treason, such as was afterwards directed at Jeremiah (Jer 37:14). The prophet exhorted his followers not to be cowed by the fear of man but rather to fear the Lord of hosts whom he had seen at the time of his call.

As to God becoming at the same time a sanctuary and a stone of stumbling, Ellicott observed, “To enter into the fellowship of Jehovah, is to enter into the sanctuary. He who stands on the stone which forms the threshold of that sanctuary, has gained an asylum. But to do that requires the clear vision of faith. He who walks blindly (Isa 6:10; John 11:10) without faith, may stumble on that very stone of the threshold and what was safety and life for others might for him bring pain and shame.” So, Peter said that even the head cornerstone is to those who stumble at the word, being disobedient, a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence (1 Pet 2:8).

From a rock of offence to the erring ones of both houses of Israel, Isaiah further described the inhabitants of Jerusalem as animals caught in a trap. It first stumbles, falls into the pit, breaks its limbs and is fastened and powerless to escape.

Are you standing with the prophet? Or against him?

THOUGHT: “I am standing, standing on the Word, though the world change and decay. It shall never, never pass away, I am standing on the Word of God.” (John Sung Chorus)

PRAYER: Keep me, Lord, always standing on Thy Word.

SONS OF LIGHT VERSUS SONS OF DARKNESS

The message of the prophet could not be understood but by a small circle of disciples. The testimony and the law of his teaching was bound and sealed for them, because it was precious to them. These were sons of light who received the instruction. Isaiah the teacher himself must receive the light from the Light of lights. As the house of Jacob had rejected that Light, that Light *"hideth his face from the house of Jacob"* (Isa 8:17), and it remained as it were in the dark. But Isaiah, knowing his Lord, waited for the light of His revelation.

Isaiah and his sons were lights in the dark Jerusalem world. They were signs and portents by the names they bear. Isaiah means "The Lord is Salvation." Will the people look to the Lord to be saved? Isaiah's first son is called Shearjashub, which means "a remnant shall return." Do they have hope in God despite being taken into captivity? Mahershalalhashbaz was the special message attested by two "crown" witnesses Uriah the priest and Zechariah, father-in-law of Ahaz. By this name which means "speed-plunder-haste-spoil," a message on the routing of the Syrian and the Israelite forces within a year of the birth of this second son was given to the people. But did they take courage in God's wonder-working power?

We too should be sons of light. Read Philippians 2:15.

Those who rejected the prophet's message were sons of darkness. These in superstition and desperation resorted to mediums, soothsayers and necromancers, and contacted the underworld of spirits which was forbidden by Moses in Deuteronomy 18. Christians are never to seek the advice of fortune-tellers, not in astrology or palmistry! The *"law"* and the *"testimony"* (Isa 8:20) refer to the Law of Moses in OT times and to the whole Bible in NT times. God's Word is our supreme and only standard of faith and practice, our infallible and inerrant light.

THOUGHT: Am I a child of light? Or a child of darkness?

PRAYER: (Use Psalm 43:3.)

THE PLIGHT OF SONS OF DARKNESS

Those who reject the light of the prophet but seek rather the darkness of mediums and soothsayers are likened to a band of people wandering through a burning desert, without food or drink.

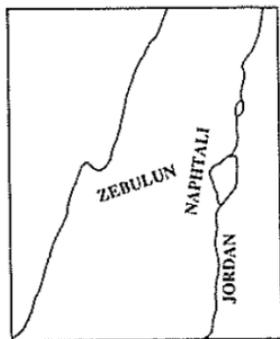
Matthew Henry says, "Those that go away from God go out of the way of all good. They shall be very uneasy to themselves, by their discontent and impatience under their trouble ... their vexation shall prey upon their own spirits; for fretfulness is a sin that is its own punishment ... when they find all their measures broken, ... they ... will treasonably curse their king and blasphemously curse their God, ... quarrel with his providence, and reproach that, as if he had done them wrong. The foolishness of man perverts his way, and then his heart frets against the Lord, Prov 19:3 ... They shall ... despair, and ... see no probability of relief ... heaven shall frown upon them ... how can it be otherwise when they curse their God? They shall look to the earth but what comfort can that yield to those with whom God is at war? ... their ... fears, which represent everything as black and frightful. Those that shut their eyes against the light of God's word will justly be abandoned to darkness."

This may predict the miseries of many during the troubles which came upon the Jewish nation, but the whole passage leads the thoughts forward to the coming of Christ, and the judgements to be inflicted on those who rejected the Divine Testimony concerning Him.

THOUGHT: "Those that go away from God go out of the way of all good" (Matthew Henry).

PRAYER: "Out of my bondage, sorrow and night, Jesus, I come, Jesus, I come; Into Thy freedom, gladness and light, Jesus, I come to Thee. Out of my sickness into Thy health, Out of my want and into Thy wealth, Out of my sin and into Thyself, Jesus, I come to Thee."

AFTER DARKNESS LIGHT!



This slogan of the 16th century Reformation may well describe the coming of the Saviour to a land of darkness — the tribal districts of Zebulun and Naphtali bordering the Sea of Galilee. During Ahaz’s reign, Isaiah had seen how this northern region was the first to be invaded and devastated by the Assyrian hordes. As he looked to God for the salvation of the people who were afflicted in these regions, the Lord showed him the dawning of a bright day to come.

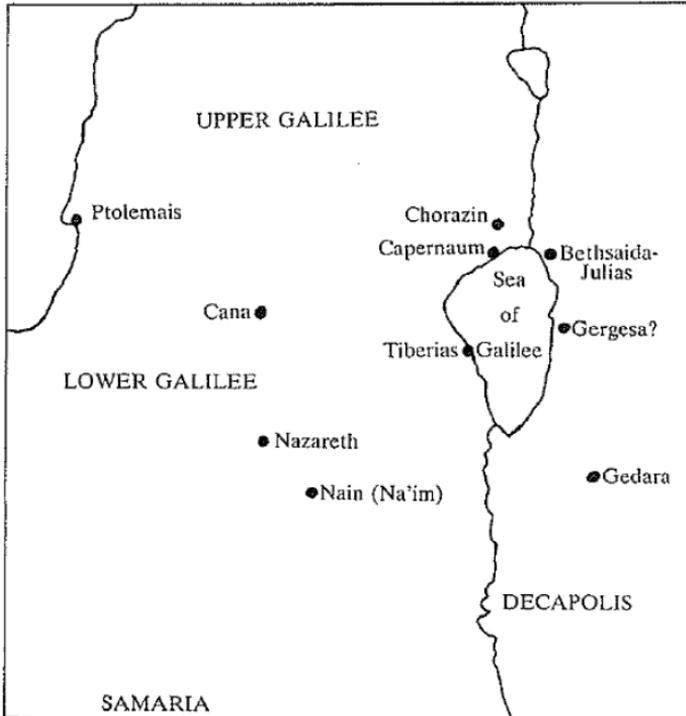
Seven hundred years after, when our Lord left Nazareth to dwell in Capernaum *“which is upon the sea coast, in the borders of Zabulon and Nephthalim”* (Matt 4:13), Matthew observed this was the fulfilment of Isaiah’s prophecy (Matt 4:14-16). Jesus who declared Himself the light of the world and the light of men shed His light of salvation on a land which was once in physical darkness and now in spiritual darkness still. Every land that has not heard the Gospel is in the same darkness, until we bear the light of the Gospel to them. This Gospel light is classed with other great passages of the Bible like Genesis 3 and John 1 which also speak of the coming of the Light.

*“There’s a call comes ringing o’er the restless wave,
Send the light! Send the light!
There are souls to rescue, there are souls to save,
Send the light! Send the light!
Send the light! The blessed Gospel light;
Let it shine from shore to shore!
Send the light! The blessed Gospel light; Let it shine forevermore.”*

THOUGHT: Have I myself received the light of the Gospel?

PRAYER: Grant me, O Lord, love for those who are still in spiritual darkness, that I will go to them with the light of the Gospel.

**“THE PEOPLE WHICH SAT IN DARKNESS SAW
GREAT LIGHT” (MATT 4:16)**



Isaiah the Gospel Prophet saw in his vision a great light on the land of Zebulun and Naphtali by the way of the sea (Via Maris) beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles. Matthew identified this prophecy with the appearance of Jesus, after He left Nazareth to make Capernaum His spiritual capital.

THOUGHT: Can I identify each town on this sketch map with some miracle our Lord had done in His earthly ministry?

PRAYER: I thank Thee, Lord, for Thy great love for sinners that Thou came to earth to save us.

THURSDAY, JUNE 23

ISAIAH 9:3-5

PROVERBS 16:9-16

*"How much better is it to
get wisdom than gold!"*

LIGHT BRINGS PROSPERITY AND JOY

Inasmuch as it is the Father that sends the Son to bring light of salvation and life to a people walking in darkness, He it is who also multiplies the nation and increases the joy.

Josephus reported that, in Jesus' time, Galilee was dotted with numerous prosperous villages. This land that once was stripped bare by the Assyrians was then teeming with life. And the Light of life that was then shed abroad over this erstwhile darkest northern region must bring an increase of joy.

This joy is likened to reaping a harvest. *"They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him"* (Ps 126:5-6). Is salvation joy like this?

Secondly, this joy is likened to that of dividing the spoil, an exultant feeling of victory at war. For these people, hitherto enslaved both by a foreign conqueror and by sin, have now been released from a burdensome yoke. Were not these prisoners of war made slaves by their conquering masters? In this connection, the ignominious past of the Israelites under Midianite domination is recalled, with Gideon as their liberator. The Psalmist says, *"I rejoice at thy word, as one that findeth great spoil"* (Ps 119:162). Is salvation joy like this also? Isaiah 9:5 describes the joy of deliverance finally in terms of clearing up the debris of war. A fire is started to burn up all the bloody garments of the soldiers fallen in battle, and every other relic of war that contaminates the land. The joy of salvation is a purifying joy!

As the Lord appeared in Galilee preaching the kingdom, healing the sick and casting out devils, did He not bring prosperity and joy to the Galileans?

THOUGHT: *"... the joy of the LORD is your strength"* (Neh 8:10).

PRAYER: I thank Thee, Lord, for the joy that Thou hast put in my heart.

FRIDAY, JUNE 24

ISAIAH 9:6-7

PROVERBS 16:17-24

*"The heart of the wise
teacheth his mouth..."*

A FULLER VIEW OF THE VIRGIN-BORN SON

Isaiah, having had a first glimpse of God's Saviour in Isaiah 7:14 to be One virgin-conceived, whose name is to be called Immanuel (God with us), rose in even greater ecstasy as the Lord showed him the attributes of His Person. From his view of the Galilean hills, of the light that shone on Zebulun and Naphtali and beyond Jordan, he was suddenly turned southwards to the throne of David in Jerusalem. So this Child to be born must come from the house of David! He will be the King of kings, ruling over the Jewish nation. He will be the hope of all Israel where Ahaz had been such a disappointment!

From the titles of His Name we see Him invested with the highest honour and power. He shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. The people must worship Him who is arrayed with such Divine titles. He is Wonderful because He is both God and Man. He is wonderful in His life, death and resurrection. Great was the mystery of godliness concerning Him. He is Counsellor because He is intimately acquainted with the counsels of God from eternity. He is God Almighty too because He is able to save to the uttermost. He is The everlasting Father to the people He has saved, in tender care of all their needs. He is The Prince of Peace because He is the author of our reconciliation to God the Giver of Peace, who commands His subjects to live in peace with each other and with all men. Under His rule, when His kingdom is fully established, men shall learn war no more. He shall bear the burden of His Government, an increasing government, whereby His kingdom is enlarged while the kingdoms of the earth will dwindle. He shall rule by love in the hearts of men. His kingdom is now established on earth through the Gospel preaching of the Church, but will be under His visible administration from Jerusalem, when He raises again the throne of David. That millennial rule of a golden age when universal peace shall reign and all wars shall cease has been foretold in Isaiah 2:1-5.

THOUGHT: Do I really believe that the Lord is returning soon?

PRAYER: Even so, come Lord Jesus!

FROM FIRST COMING TO SECOND COMING

Isaiah 9:6-7 leads us to see not only the first coming of the Messiah but also the full establishment of His kingdom in the Second Coming. *“Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom...”* bespeaks the restoration of the Israelite nation under their King over the nations of the earth. In the light of Isaiah 2:1-5, let the coming Kingdom of Christ be expressed in singing to the tune of “My Ole Kentucky Home” as follows:

SONG TO THE NEW JERUSALEM

The summer sun shines o'er new Jerusalem:
Golden days of peace so divine.
Messiah has come to this war-torn earth from Heav'n,
Besto'ing rest to weary mankind.

Chorus: Weep no more, O Israel:
O weep no more today.
We will sing this song to the new Jerusalem,
To the new Jerusalem for aye.

The autumn showers freshen new Jerusalem:
Happy feasts are held o'er the land.
We worship Messiah the Prince of Peaceful Realm
Who makes roses bloom across the sand.

The spring rains drive winter's biting cold away:
Wheat and barley, olive and grain.
Ten thousand flowers in the balmy breezes sway,
While young men and maidens praise His Name.

The Sun of Righteousness shines o'er earth's Dark Night:
No more war, nor hunger, no pain!
Christ Jesus reigns till Right triumphs over Might,
All-resplendent in Jerusalem.

FROM THE MESSIANIC FUTURE BACK TO THE MESSY PRESENT

The prophet left off viewing that golden future when the Messiah shall reign to focus once again on the messy present.

He rebuked the northern kingdom of Israel for deriding his prediction of defeat with the retort of a grander post-war reconstruction. The prophet reinforced his rebuke with the prediction of an Assyrian invasion which would include Israel's ally, the Syrians (now under Assyrian occupation) and the Philistines. This two-prong attack was God's judgment on Israel's apostate leadership, including false prophets, who made the people err. The judgment was so drastic that no mercy was left for the young, the widows and orphans.

The vision of darkness and famine mentioned in Isaiah 8:21-22 returned to the prophet's scope. Wickedness will burn like a forest fire. Though Ephraim and Manasseh were brothers, being the two sons of Joseph, they would tear at each other under war-famine conditions. The only tie that bound them was their enmity towards Judah, the southern kingdom. How similar are the foibles of those Jewish parties in Jesus' time, such as the Pharisees and Sadducees, who rivalled one another but were only united against Christ.

Isaiah 9:8-21 continues into Isaiah 10:1-4. The formula with which this section opens reminds us of Isaiah 5:8, 11, 18, etc that suggests the prophet was speaking of Israel including Judah. The evils denounced here are the same as those in Isaiah 1:23 and 5:23. *"And what will ye do in the day of visitation?"* Had those corrupt judges asked themselves how they would face up to the Supreme Judge? Another aspect of the theology of war! *"Without me"* these wicked judges were doomed to exile and death. *"For all this..."* that has tolled in Isaiah 9:12, 17, 21 now tolls at Isaiah 10:4 for the last time. Doom, doom, doom, doom!

THOUGHT: (Read Psalm 104:35.)

PRAYER: I am but a worm, be merciful to me, O Lord!

BURDEN OF ASSYRIA

Remember, God is in absolute control of the nations. Daniel says, "... *the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men*" (Dan 4:17). As Isaiah's "prophescope" turned to the heavens, he saw the Assyrians as God's rod and staff of judgment against "an hypocritical nation." Assyria is also described as God's axe and God's saw (Isa 10:15).

Though God used the Assyrians in their rapacity against the nations, He did not vitiate their will, for the Assyrian kings had no knowledge of Isaiah's God nor of His decretive will. They conquered merely to satisfy their spirit of territorial expansion and self aggrandisement. In their imperial haughtiness they boasted, "... *By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom; for I am prudent...*" (Isa 10:13). Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, boasted too: "... *Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?*" (Dan 4:30).



This sketch map shows the superpower Assyria with capital at Nineveh and the cities taken as listed in Isaiah 10:9.

God used the Assyrians to strike down the idols of each conquered city and nation.

Howbeit, after God had used Assyria to punish even idolatrous Jerusalem, Assyria in turn would be judged for her crimes.

THOUGHT: (Read Psalm 96:5.)

PRAYER: Lord, help me to be prepared to face any situation.

TUESDAY, JUNE 28

ISAIAH 10:20-34

PROVERBS 17:22-28

*“A merry heart doeth
good like a medicine...”*

“A REMNANT SHALL RETURN”

As for Israel, the prophet was reminded by his first son’s name, Shearjashub, which means “a remnant shall return,” that God’s people, though heavily chastised, will be restored (Rom 9:27-28).

“... the consumption decreed shall overflow with righteousness” (Isa 10:22) means the finished work, i.e. God’s judgment on Israel, was at once punitive and corrective. As this was from God, the people were not to panic as in the days of Ahaz (Isa 7:2). Under a new Assyrian assault led now by Sargon or his successor, God’s people must persevere for *“a very little while”* for His anger shall cease.

With Isaiah 9:4 still in mind, the prophet recounted how Oreb and Zeeb, the Midianite chiefs, were slain under Gideon, and applied the account to Assyria. They were also reminded of God’s rod that delivered them from the sea and Egypt. And Israel would grow so prosperous that the yoke would no longer go round his neck.

ASSYRIAN INVASION OF JUDAH UNDER SARGON

The prophescope turned now to a scene of Assyrian king Sargon’s march against Jerusalem. This was to alert a terrified Jerusalem, to describe the route the attackers were taking and also to comfort them that their advance would be checked. The route of attack passed from Aiath (probably the ancient Ai), through valleys to Migron, and to Michmash where the baggages of war were left to give the army swift movement. Now the Assyrians quickly advanced from this halt to Ramah and Gibeah to the terror of the local inhabitants. The panic spread rapidly to Ramah (Samuel’s home), then to Laish and to Anathoth (birthplace of Jeremiah). It spread to Madmenah, Gebim and Nob (one of the Tabernacle’s resting places in Saul’s time). The Lord would lob off the lofty branches of the cedars of Lebanon (i.e. Assyrian chieftans) at this point. Read Isaiah 37 and Jeremiah 5:22.

THOUGHT: God is in control of even the little details in my life.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to live for Thy Kingdom and glory.

THE MESSIANIC KING AND KINGDOM

From the preview of the Wonder Child of Isaiah 9:6-7, the prophet's vision of the same was enlarged. The King of the future was identified as one sprouting like a branch from the stem of Jesse (father of King David). This King to come from the house of David could not be any good king. He is the Perfect King, endued with sevenfold wisdom, best illustrated by the seven-branched candlestick. With the central stem representing the Spirit of the Lord, we can see clearly the spirit of wisdom on the innermost spirit of understanding. In progressive order, the left branch continues to the innermost right as the spirit of counsel to the spirit of might. And lastly, the spirit of knowledge to the spirit of the fear of the Lord. Who can this king be but the Christ, *"for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him."*

This King will transcend ordinary kings in judgment because He will see through every human veneer and subterfuge. That He will smite the earth with the rod (sceptre) of His mouth means He will speak with authority (Rev 1:16). As in Ephesians 6:14, Paul spoke of loins girt about with truth, Isaiah used a similar figure of righteousness and faithfulness as girdles, symbols of complete equipment.

All these qualities the Christ manifested in His first coming. From Isaiah 11:1-9, we leap across to the day of His Second Coming when He will introduce the golden millennium. This is corroborated by Peter in his second Pentecostal sermon in which he referred to *"the times of restitution of all things"* (Acts 3:21). This is "Paradise Regained" wherein even the creation would be restored to its former perfect condition (Rom 8:19ff). We take the literal view that *"the lion shall eat straw like the ox"* (Isa 11:7) since the same statement is repeated in Isaiah 65:25. O, what a Day, under the reign of the Prince of Peace when not only man will cease warring with man (Isa 2:1-5), but the animal creation will not maul each other as well!

THOUGHT: Am I looking forward to a better place beyond earth?

PRAYER: (Use Revelation 4:11.)

THURSDAY, JUNE 30

ISAIAH 11:10-12:6

PROVERBS 18:9-16

*“The name of the LORD is a
strong tower: the righteous
runneth into it, and is safe.”*

HOW THE KINGDOM WILL BE SET UP

The root of Jesse that will become an ensign or banner for the people is Christ. The nations that believe in Him are they who will rally to Him. This is the Gospel age of the Kingdom. To lead into the Millennial age of the Kingdom, wherein the Messiah will restore the throne of David (Isa 9:7), the dispersed tribes of Israel must be brought back from the four corners of the earth. This prediction of a “*second*” time (the first time was the return from Babylon) was literally fulfilled on May 14, 1948 when Israel in diaspora for 2,000 years regained her land and independence. By 2013, Jews in Israel numbered over eight million!

Isaiah 11:13 which predicts the reunion of the northern and southern kingdoms was fulfilled also on May 14, 1948 when Israel was so named for the whole nation.

Isaiah 11:14-15, which follows the national restoration, looks to a war between Israel and her neighbours. This was marvellously fulfilled in the Six-Day War in June 1967. How Israel took the Gaza strip (Philistines) with a walkover is well known. How they mauled the Syrians (them of the East) is another epic story. Jordan which today occupies the ancient territories of Edom, Moab and Ammon was sheepishly subdued. With God’s almighty wind (Israel’s airforce being thus helped), the Jews smashed Egypt across the tongue of the Red Sea, yea, even across its extension, the Suez Canal. The Israeli armoured divisions would have driven right on to Cairo in the 1973 Yom Kippur War as well, but they halted.

Isaiah 11:16 referred to the exodus out of Egypt. This was followed by Isaiah 12, a song of salvation, which begins with “*thine anger is turned away*” (Isa 12:1). When the Lord finally returns that Day, when war shall be no more, Israel can certainly shout and sing of the greatness of the Holy One of Israel.

THOUGHT: (Read Psalm 30:5.)

PRAYER: May I live today with Thy future plan in view, O Lord.

To: **The RPG Ministry**

Calvary Pandan B-P Church

201 Pandan Gardens, Singapore 609 337

Tel: (65)-6560 1111 Fax: (65)-6561 1861 Email: rpg@calvarypandan.sg

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