

# **July to September 2016**

**July 1 to September 22: “Isaiah the  
Gospel Prophet (Part 2)”**

**September 23 to 30: “Micah”**

by

Rev Dr Timothy Tow

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## **About the Author**

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” and “Micah” were first published during the years 1983 to 1985.



FRIDAY, JULY 1

ISAIAH 13

PROVERBS 18:17-24

“...there is a friend that sticketh  
closer than a brother.”

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## BURDEN OF BABYLON

The “*burden of Babylon*” means “the message of doom” to Babylon, inasmuch as the Hebrew, *massa*, means a “weighty thing.” It is the beginning of a series of doom messages to countries, far and near, big and small, that are vitally involved with God’s chosen people. God is King of kings and Lord of lords (see also Dan 2:21, 4:35). This series of “burdens” against the nations are given not only to confirm God’s Word given elsewhere, but also to console the hearts of the righteous in Judah who would be exiled to Babylon, that they might set their hope in God (Ps 42).

Who are the “*mighty ones for mine anger*” (Isa 13:3) to punish “*the world for their evil*” (Isa 13:11)? Isaiah 13:17: the Medes! At the time when Isaiah uttered this message of doom against Babylon, she was a vassal of Assyria, being controlled by the kings of Nineveh. As the fortunes of Assyria began to wane by the end of the seventh century BC, so arose Babylon to take her place as the next superpower. This brings us to Nebuchadnezzar who destroyed Jerusalem in 586 BC. Babylon lasted but seventy years. And though the City of Babylon occupied an area of 200 square miles and was built on both sides of the River Euphrates, and her “Hanging Gardens” are known as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, the city was overthrown by the Persian king Cyrus in 539 BC. The fall of Babylon is also linked to Darius the Median (Dan 5:31), hence the prophet’s reference to the Medes in verse 17.

Babylon continued under Persian rule until 330 BC when she was destroyed by Alexander the Great. Although she remained an inhabited city, Babylon declined and declined. By the time our Lord was born, Babylon had become totally deserted, as predicted in Isaiah 13:19-22.

**THOUGHT:** God is still on the throne!

**PRAYER:** I praise Thee, O Lord, for Thou art the King of kings, ruling and overruling even the kings of this earth.

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## DIRGE TO THE KING OF BABYLON

While Babylon that took captivity of the Jews would be completely destroyed, Israel would be restored by God’s mercies. The captives now become captors, a picture of Israel’s final victory in the Millennium.

Now Israel could sing this dirge to the defeated and deceased Babylonian king. The whole earth, big and small, rejoices because of the death of her oppressor. The king of Babylon is seen to cause a stir as he enters the lower regions of Hell, while his body is eaten by worms. The one who trampled the nations is now further judged by being literally “*trodden under feet.*” Even his family and relatives will suffer an ignominious death together with him in his overthrow. In modern history we see a similar violent end to Hitler, the persecutor of nations. To confirm that God is the Omnipotent One who will so judge the wicked, Isaiah quoted the case of the dispersal of the Assyrians, whose destruction of 185,000 in one night by the angel of death (Isa 37:36) was well-known to the Jews of his time.

Isaiah 14:12-14, while being addressed to the king of Babylon, seems to have a deeper reference to the spirit that energised him. In these three verses, he who is the bright and morning star still five-fold desiring to ascend above the stars of God, to be “*like the most High*” (there are five “*I will*”s), is seen brought down to the lowest Hell. This judgment of the proud one (condemnation of the devil, 1 Tim 3:6) is vividly pictured in Revelation 19:20 and 20:1-3 in the casting into the lake of fire of the beast and the false prophet, and the binding of Satan in the bottomless pit.

**THOUGHT:** God controls even the future!

**PRAYER:** Humble me to the dust, O Lord.

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## BURDEN OF PALESTINA

The term Palestina was first used by Herodotus (484-424 BC), the great Greek historian, as a designation of southern Syria. This term was used also by the Romans. Originally it applied to the territory of Israel's foes, the Philistines.

When the land of Israel came under British occupation after the First World War (1914-1918), Palestine was the official designation of that part of the Holy Land under her mandate. This embraced much more than the Philistines country. When the Jews returned to their homeland and became a nation, May 14, 1948, Palestine ceased to be used as a national name. It was changed to Israel. But the Arabs, ousted by the incoming Jews, clung to the name Palestine. They claim they are Palestinians, sons of the soil. Their avowed purpose is to liberate their country from the Jews.

Nevertheless, the Palestina in Isaiah's prophecy is Philistines country. The Philistines dwelt on the Mediterranean coast. One of their towns known as Gaza was made famous by Samson visiting her and carrying away the city gates at night to avoid capture (Judges 16:1-3).

In the year that king Ahaz died, ambassadors from Philistia came to Jerusalem to solicit help. This occasioned the prophet's warning against rejoicing over the fact that a king was dead, for a worse one would arise. Philistia was doomed under the continuing Assyrian invasion, but Zion, by God's appointment, shall stand.

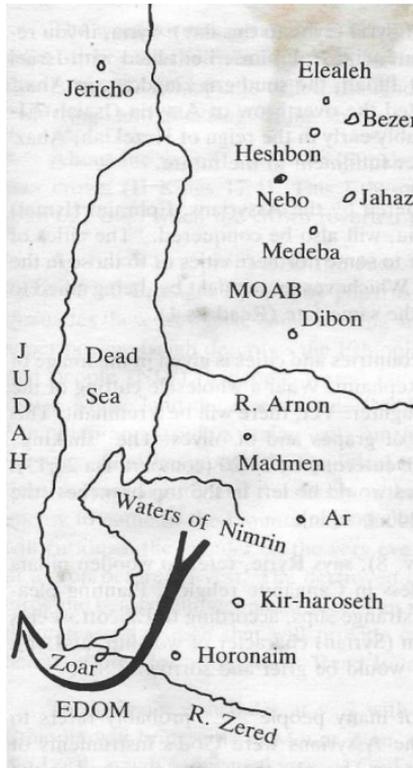
What a comfort to know that nations that trust in the Lord will be saved in a war involving superpowers. Thank God that He cares for His Church by a "particular providence."

**THOUGHT:** *"Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the LORD our God."* (Ps 20:7)

**PRAYER:** Forgive me, Father, for my lack of trust in Thee. Increase my faith in Thee, for Thy Name's sake.

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### BURDEN OF MOAB



Of all Gentile nations surrounding Israel, Moab was most closely linked to Judah. Moab was Lot's son by his first daughter (Gen 19:36ff). Ruth, the Moabitess, became David's great-grandmother (Ruth 4:17; 1 Sam 22:3ff). Yet Moab was hostile to God's people.

Isaiah described in detail the invasion of Moab. Moab was advised to send tribute to Judah as she escaped through Edom (Sela is Petra the capital). Sympathy was expressed by the prophet for the fleeing Moabites. The prophet declared his vision of Moab would begin to be fulfilled in three years.

**THOUGHT:** God is always correct, even to the minutest detail.

**PRAYER:** *“...hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.”* (Ps 42:11)

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TUESDAY, JULY 5

ISAIAH 17

PROVERBS 19:22-29

*“The fear of the LORD  
tendeth to life...”*

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## BURDEN OF DAMASCUS

Damascus is the capital of Syria. Syria was “*confederate with Ephraim*” (Isa 7:2), i.e. allied with Israel against Judah, in Ahaz’s reign. Isaiah had then predicted the overthrow of Assyria (Isa 7:1-16). Isaiah, writing here probably early in the reign of Hezekiah (Ahaz’s son), looked forward to a further fulfilment in the future.

Since Syria would be conquered by the Assyrians, Ephraim (Israel) whose fate was bound with Syria would also be conquered. “*The cities of Aroer are forsaken*” (Isa 17:2) may refer to some northern cities or to those in the south (Jer 48:19; Num 32:34). Whichever these might be, being allied to the wrong party, they suffer the same fate. Read Psalm 1.

The destruction of these countries and cities is given in the image of reaping in the rich valley of Rephaim. What a wholesale cutting of the crop, a picture of the mass slaughter. Yet, there would be a remnant. This is described in the gathering of grapes and of olives. The “*shaking*” (Isa 17:6) followed on the “*beating*” of Deuteronomy 24:20 (cf. Isa 24:13). Even then two or three berries would be left in the top branches (the doctrine of remnants with God’s people).

The “*groves*” and “*images*” (Isa 17:8), says Ryrie, refer to wooden pillars representing the female goddess in Canaanite religion. Planting pleasant plants and setting it with strange slips, according to Ellicott, seems to refer to indulging in foreign (Syrian) character of worship, and of a strange god. The end of it all would be grief and sorrow.

“*Woe to the multitude of many people...*” (Isa 17:12) probably refers to Sennecherib’s army. While the Assyrians were God’s instruments of judgment on Syria and Ephraim (Israel), they were punished at the end because of their crimes. Isaiah 17:14 refers to Isaiah 37:36 where the Assyrians were destroyed by God’s angel in one night.

**THOUGHT:** (Read Psalm 46.)

**PRAYER:** Lord, may I always stand on Thy side.

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WEDNESDAY, JULY 6

ISAIAH 18

PROVERBS 20:1-6

*“It is an honour for a  
man to cease from strife...”*

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## BURDEN OF ETHIOPIA

The Hebrew word for “*Ethiopia*” (Isa 18:1) here is Cush, which is Sudan. As Isaiah talked of “*beyond the rivers*,” the region he referred to included the present-day Ethiopia. Ethiopia is called “*the land shadowing with wings*” (Isa 18:1) because it abounds with insects.

About the year 714 BC, So (Sabako) managed to take the Egyptian crown (2 Kings 17:4). This Ethiopian power over Egypt lasted until 633 BC when the crown reverted to Egyptian nationality.

As Isaiah was a prophet to the Judean court, as he met ambassadors from Ethiopia coming by boats (made of bulrushes) via the Nile River, he dissuaded these who have come seeking an alliance against the Assyrian superpower. Isaiah described the Ethiopians in Isaiah 18:2 as “*a nation scattered and peeled, ...a people terrible from their beginning hitherto; a nation meted out and trodden down, whose land the rivers have spoiled!*” From this address to the Ethiopian ambassadors, Isaiah called on the whole earth to hear God’s message.

God has no need of political manoeuvres. He will take His time working silently and constantly as the seasons. He will wait for the enemy to come to the mountains of Judah (cf. Isa 14:25). There He will cut down the invader on the very eve of victory like the destroying of a crop before harvest. The destroyed crop will be given over to the birds and beasts, summer and winter. This was Isaiah’s poetic description of the carcasses of men that would provide carrion flesh to the birds and beasts of prey for a long time. (Read Isa 37:36.)

The message concluded at Isaiah 18:7 with a look into the future when Ethiopia will bring gifts to Mount Zion, to Jerusalem in submission to the Lord. Isaiah’s universal view of God’s kingdom was expressed in this message as in his other messages.

**PRAYER:** *“I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD.”* (Ps 122:1)

**THOUGHT:** O, Almighty God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

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THURSDAY, JULY 7

ISAIAH 19

PROVERBS 20:7-12

*“The just man walketh  
in his integrity...”*

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## BURDEN OF EGYPT

Egypt was one of the two superpowers with Assyria in the ancient world. Whereas Assyrian power was waxing higher in Isaiah’s days, Egyptian power was on the wane. This was working out according to God’s plan. The time of Egypt’s judgment was at hand! God uses man’s wrath to work out His praises (Ps 76:10). He confounded Egypt (steeped in idolatry) first by civil war and strife. Thus internally weakened, Egypt fell prey to the overspreading Assyrian power, and was conquered by Esarhaddon, the Assyrian king, in 671 BC.

The Chinese saying, “Natural disasters and man-engendered tribulations,” comes true in the process of God’s judgment. Egypt would be overturned politically and physically. The River Nile, the life of Egypt, would fail to overflow its banks. This would cut off irrigation to the thirsty land. The tributaries of the Nile, the smaller rivers and streams, would also dry up. This would devour the nation’s economy, bringing it down to near-famine conditions. Agriculture, fishery and the weaving industry would be seriously curtailed.

With God against Egypt, the wisdom of her wise men would be confounded (Isa 19:14). When God is against a nation, He will send a spirit of gross-misjudgment in her leaders, eg. Hitler’s miscalculations and wrong moves during World War II. Therefore, righteousness is a nation’s strongest bulwark. A nation turned from God, or against God, is bound to lose. But the words of a righteous king are our defence: King George VI called on Britain and the empire to stand on God’s side, rather than pray God to stay on her side.

Isaiah 19:17-25 looks beyond the near-future to the distant-future, to the millennial kingdom of Christ, when the two superpowers will serve the Lord together with Israel in the centre. A first glimpse of the golden peace prevailing on the three countries is given in Isaiah 11:16.

**THOUGHT:** (Read Psalm 46:9-10.)

**PRAYER:** Keep me looking up to Thee, Lord, come what may.

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## A PICKETING PROPHET!

Sargon was king of Assyria from 722 BC to 705 BC. In the year (711 BC) that Tartan, Sargon’s general (2 Kings 18:17) captured Ashdod, a principal port and stronghold of the Philistines, in the course of widespread Assyrian conquests, God had a strange message for Isaiah in Isaiah 20:2. What it amounted to was the stripping of one who had been soberly attired, moving among kings and ambassadors. And for Isaiah to be seen in public in his underwear and barefoot for three years was no small sensation in Jerusalem. Isaiah was the talk of the town.

In order to get the message across to His people, God sometimes has to adopt very unusual means. Thus He told Jeremiah and Ezekiel also to be object lessons like Isaiah, whether in carrying a yoke on the shoulders (Jer 28:10) or lying down in a public place (Ezek 4:4). The sign of a semi-naked prophet walking about Jerusalem, whether going to market, or on an appointment with the Palace, could not be avoided. What was that sign? God said, *“Like as my servant Isaiah hath walked naked and barefoot three years for a sign and wonder upon Egypt and upon Ethiopia; So shall the king of Assyria lead away the Egyptians prisoners, and the Ethiopians captives, young and old, naked and barefoot, even with their buttocks uncovered, to the shame of Egypt”* (Isa 20:3-4). The message was that countries looking to Egypt and Ethiopia for protection against the invading Assyrian forces would be completely let down. Is there a message here to small nations today aligning themselves with superpower blocs? Or should they not rather call on God for protection?

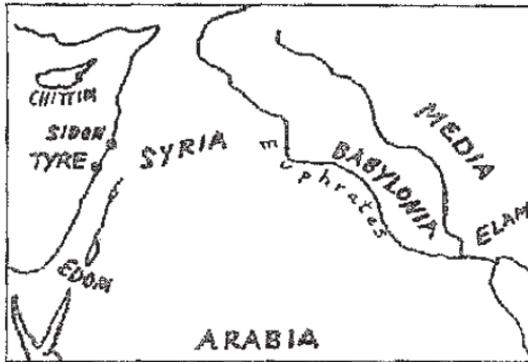
A lesson we can learn from the picketing prophet is that by using such unusual means we can get a message across to the people what a hundred sermons cannot. A modern prophet in the Isaianic tradition is Carl McIntire who was not ashamed to picket single-handedly before presidents and councils. It takes men of courage to do the unusual.

**THOUGHT:** If I have a long Christian heritage, how do I live up to my father’s good name?

**PRAYER:** Lord, grant me courage to do Thy bidding.

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## BURDEN OF BABYLON, NO. 2



That Isaiah should be burdened to speak on Babylon a second time is God’s confirmation that what was determined of Babylon was determined. Hence the repetition, “*Babylon is fallen, is fallen*” (Isa 21:9). Revelation 18:2 takes up this cry and applies it to that end-time godless world system.

The introduction of this message is given in cryptic language: “*the desert of the sea*” (Isa 21:1). This refers to Babylon’s topography, her situation on a great plain which was “intersected by the Euphrates as well as by marshes and lakes, that it floated, as it were, in the sea” (Delitzsch). Elam is ancient Persia, and Media her other powerful arm in the attack on Babylon. The prophet in the vision entered into the visual experiences of a watchman. The figures of horsemen and chariots of asses and camels, and of a lion, all speak of war.

Isaiah 21:10 seems to be an expression of sympathy for Israel, God’s people, who will suffer under Babylon before her overthrow. Remember, Judah was exiled to Babylon for seventy years before the Persians came to their deliverance.

**THOUGHT:** As God’s people living in this end-time Babylon, let us be aware of the evil times that might soon engulf us. Let us await Christ’s coming by daily doing God’s will.

**PRAYER:** May I be found doing Thy will when Thou return.

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### BURDEN OF DUMAH

This message of Dumah was directed at Edom. Edom was also called Mount Seir. There came a voice to the watchman-prophet as of one in a long dark night waiting for morning. Does this question imply a time of suffering with Babylon in her overthrow? In a war of the future, every country will be affected one way or another.

The answer is one of vagueness and uncertainty. Though the morning comes, night follows hard upon her heels. There is a glimpse of light, but it is soon overwhelmed by darkness. Is that not the condition of war? The chaotic conditions of war are expressed in the Chinese saying, "It is neither day nor night." The questioner is requested to ask again. If we are watchful for the coming of the Lord, we will not be wrong!

### BURDEN OF ARABIA

The war that the prophet saw would affect even the isolated caravans in the Arabian deserts. This was dramatised in a warning given to caravans of Dedanites, neighbours of Edom (Ezek 25:13), wending their usual trail through the desert. The enemy was on the ambush! They were marauding and plundering everywhere! Let these caravans therefore make the thickets their camouflage. Let them spend the night under cover. The drama was then enacted by the people of Tema. Let these relieve the refugees with water and bread, acts of mercy with which the Almighty is well-pleased.

The prophet predicted that within one year, exactly the duration of an indentured servant, Arabia would be subdued. This was sure to happen as the God of Israel, the God over all nations as well, had said. This was a review of events, insofar as Arabia is concerned. What a shock to any nation brewing in international trouble!

**THOUGHT:** My God is a God of His word.

**PRAYER:** Lord, help me to be prepared at all times to face any situation.

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MONDAY, JULY 11

ISAIAH 22:1-14

PSALM 3

*"I laid me down and slept; I awaked;  
for the LORD sustained me."*

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## BURDEN OF JERUSALEM

The "*valley of vision*," perhaps some secluded spot of Jerusalem where the prophet received his visions, came under divine scrutiny (Isa 22:10). Jerusalem, where the prophet resided, was also to be judged! Jerusalem cannot escape the world-war of Isaiah's prophecy.

What Isaiah denounced was the abandoned wallowing in sensual pleasures of Jerusalem's rulers, like pigs fattening before their slaughter. The occasion of this senseless revelry was Assyrian king Sennecherib's temporary departure from laying siege to Jerusalem. For this short-lived respite, Judah had to pay a tribute of 300 talents of silver and thirty talents of gold (2 Kings 18:14). What occasion for rejoicing was there for an army that never saw heroic action on the battlefield? These who were literally cowards? Rather, this should be a day of humiliation (Isa 22:5). The prophet, thus provoked, was given a vision of a succeeding invasion in which troops from Elam and Kir (an Assyrian province near Media, 2 Kings 16:9) would take part. The people of Jerusalem, while doing their best to defend their city, in reinforcing the city wall and in conserving water supply, nevertheless, would not look to God.

The unconverted remained unconverted. They adopted rather an Epicurean philosophy, "*Let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we die.*" To such a viewpoint Paul would subscribe if there was no hope beyond this life (1 Cor 15:32). But we who are God's people have a hope beyond the grave. According to Paul's classic exposition of the Christian hope (1 Cor 15), we have the resurrection of the body. We have everlasting life in Jesus Christ.

A senseless and sensual Israel will be judged. So will everyone who has the knowledge of God, but persists in his own folly of unbelief.

**THOUGHT:** "*Let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we die.*"

**PRAYER:** Lord, deliver me from the flood-tide of today's "enjoy yourself" philosophy. Help me to live for Thy Kingdom and glory.

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TUESDAY, JULY 12

ISAIAH 22:15-25

PSALM 4

“...put your trust in the LORD.”

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## SHEBNA DEMOTED, ELIAKIM PROMOTED

Shebna and Eliakim were both high officers in the Jewish government in the days of Isaiah and King Hezekiah. Both were representatives of Hezekiah to negotiate with Sennacherib the invading king of Assyria, and both were sent with Hezekiah's message to Isaiah. Read Isaiah 36-37.

At first Shebna preceded Eliakim in position and dignity. Shebna was “*over the house*” (Isa 22:15), but in Isaiah 36 and 37 and 2 Kings 18, Eliakim took over, while Shebna was then called “*the scribe*.”

Isaiah 22:15-25 tells the story of how the first became last, and the last first. Shebna was denounced by the Lord for feathering his own nest. While in public office, he was making a monument for himself by hewing a rock tomb. And this, at a time of national crisis. Isaiah pronounced upon him the Lord's sentence that he would go into captivity in a far country (Babylon) and die there. That is the end of every selfish, vainglorious politician. To every material and power-seeking professional churchman: Beware of “Personality Cult”!

Eliakim was appointed in Shebna's place and governed the inhabitants of Jerusalem with magnanimity. To him was committed the key of David, the highest authority over the royal household. The key of David mentioned in Revelation 3 in regard to the Church of Philadelphia is a direct reference to this key.

Eliakim would be like a peg in a firm place upon which would be hung vessels of all sorts, from cups to jars. He would be greatly honoured of his family. Isaiah 22:25, however, seems to say of Eliakim's downfall also, when he would be crowded upon by relatives for jobs and positions under his powerful patronage. When nepotism sets in, God's support is removed.

**THOUGHT:** (Read 1 Corinthians 10:12.)

**PRAYER:** Lord, keep our government clean of nepotism and of every other abuse of power.

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## BURDEN OF TYRE

Tyre was the greatest maritime power of the ancient world. Her merchant seamen roamed the seas as far as the Indian Ocean and the English Channel (cf. 1 Kings 10:22). During the reigns of David and Solomon, Hiram (king of Tyre) was on friendly terms with Israel. Hiram supplied Solomon the cedars of Lebanon for the building of God's House. This was the golden age of Tyre.

Because of her pride, Tyre could not escape judgment from the world-war of Isaiah's prophecy. Tyre would be subjugated not so much by Assyria as by the new world-power, Babylon. Inasmuch as the Jews were taken captive to Babylon and abode there seventy years (Jer 25:11), so Tyre was doomed to the same fate (Isa 23:15). The message was dramatised by a lamentation uttered to ships of Tarshish (Spain) coming to Tyre via Chittim (Cyprus). Inasmuch as the Babylonian conquest of the ancient world affected even Egypt (Isa 23:5) with her great river Sihor (Nile), so Tyre would surely be taken. This judgment came from the Lord.

As a result of Babylon's conquest of Tyre, no more would Tyre's ships prosper the Mediterranean countries with her trade (Isa 23:4). Her people would be scattered to distant Tarshish (Isa 23:6) and nearby Chittim (Isa 23:12).

After Tyre's recovery at the end of seventy years of Babylonian rule, the city waxed prosperous again, like a harlot. In later years, Tyre was brought low by the Greeks, and during the Middle Ages, by Saracens and Crusaders.

Tyre (one of the *"merchants of the earth"* in Revelation 18:11) and Babylon are both used in Revelation 17 and 18 for a composite picture of the world-system as seducer and oppressor against the city of God.

**THOUGHT:** Has the burden of Tyre a message for the maritime nations of Southeast Asia, especially Singapore?

**PRAYER:** Lord, may Thou be merciful to bless my country.

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THURSDAY, JULY 14

ISAIAH 24-27

PSALM 6

*“Have mercy upon me,  
O LORD; for I am weak...”*

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## ISAIAH APOCALYPSE — GLOBAL HOLOCAUST ON THE HORIZON

The word “apocalypse” is composed of two Greek words, “apo” = from, and “kalyptein” = to cover. It is the name of the last book of the New Testament containing the “Revelation” granted to the Apostle John. Inasmuch as the Apocalypse of John is the Revelation of the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, so Isaiah 24 to 27 (which theologians call the “Isaiah Apocalypse”) is the Revelation of a global holocaust before the coming of Israel’s God and Saviour. A global holocaust looming on the horizon!

Isaiah had discharged a series of “burden” messages on individual nations surrounding Israel. From Isaiah 24 to 27, the prophet was given an enlarged vision of the whole world in final conflagration because of sin. Yea, even the cosmic powers will be shaken (Isa 24:21) together with *“kings of the earth,”* i.e. with all the contending superpowers.

Out of this gloom of a global holocaust under the judging hand of God, a brighter note was struck! When God comes to put under His feet all the forces of evil, death and all the sorrows of life will also be vanquished (Isa 25:8). Even the mystery of bodily resurrection is revealed (Isa 26:19) which is mentioned but two other times in the Old Testament (Job 19:25-27; Dan 12:2).

All the gloom and despair under the poisonous mushroom of the nuclear bomb jolted millions in Europe to cry for disarmament, but our defence is in the Risen Saviour. Jesus says, *“Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.”* (Rev 1:17-18). Reader, what is your defence in the coming Third World War?

**THOUGHT:** I must take heed of God’s Word.

**PRAYER:** Out of my bondage, sorrow and night, Jesus I come to Thee.

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FRIDAY, JULY 15

ISAIAH 24

PSALM 7:1-8

*“O LORD my God,  
in thee do I put my trust...”*

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## GOD OVER THE GLOBAL HOLOCAUST

The utter emptying and overturning of the earth by fire was described by the prophet in a crescendo at Isaiah 24:6: *“Therefore hath the curse devoured the earth, and they that dwell therein are desolate: therefore the inhabitants of the earth are burned, and few men left.”* Does this description tell of a nuclear war in which (as predicted by military scientists) hundred-millions on either side will sear to death?

While men invent weapons to kill one another, Isaiah saw the higher hand of God in operation from the very outset, *“Behold, the LORD maketh the earth empty, and maketh it waste, and turneth it upside down, and scattereth abroad the inhabitants thereof”* (Isa 24:1).

The theology of war, insofar as man is concerned, is traced always to his sin! *“The earth also is defiled under the inhabitants thereof: because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant”* (Isa 24:5). What brought the Flood? The reason was the same: *“And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually”* (Gen 6:5).

When war comes, Isaiah 24:2 tells us, there will be no difference in social standing between priest and people, servant and master, maid and mistress, etc. All will become one class of refugees. But there will still be a remnant in the (Holy) Land (Isa 24:13). These will sing for the Lord and cry for Him aloud. Yea, even from the uttermost part of the earth we will hear songs to the glory of the Righteous. God has come to deliver His saints inasmuch as He has judged the wicked. Again, Isaiah saw the earth reeling, this time to rise no more. The grand finale is reached when God shakes the cosmic powers and punishes the kings of the earth, and comes in glory to reign in Jerusalem.

**THOUGHT:** “For I know whatever befall me, Jesus doeth all things well.”

**PRAYER:** I thank Thee, Lord, for the consoling thought that Thou art in control of all things.

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SATURDAY, JULY 16

ISAIAH 25

PSALM 7:9-17

“...God is angry with  
the wicked every day.”

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## SONG TO THE GOD OF LIBERATION

Inasmuch as the crossing of the Red Sea is commemorated with a song by Moses, so the deliverance of Israel from the global holocaust by their God is celebrated with a song of liberation to their God. This song is called by some an Old Testament Magnificat. (The Magnificat in the New Testament is Mary’s song of praise in which she magnified the Lord, Luke 1:46).

In this song, Isaiah extolled the miraculous works of God as well as His faithfulness and truth. He has humbled the powerful and mighty ones, and has preserved the poor and needy refugees from the blast of the mighty and terrible. Like a strong wall, God keeps His people safe from the stormy blast. God silences the uproar of the Gentiles, as the heat is reduced by *“the shadow of a cloud”* (Isa 25:5).

In victory God will prepare a sumptuous feast, even a banquet of finest wines, *“in this mountain”* (Jerusalem) for all peoples. On the very *“mountain,”* *“the veil that is spread over all nations”* will be destroyed. Even death itself will be swallowed up in victory (1 Cor 15:54). When God comes down to save Israel through the Person of His Son, then will Israel’s remnants cry, *“Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the LORD; we have waited for him, we shall be glad and rejoice in his salvation”* (Isa 25:9, cf. Rom 11:26). May every Jew say this even now!

In contrast, Moab, a typical enemy of God, under the rule of Jordan’s king, would be utterly trampled upon. Moab, though like a man trying to swim away, will not escape. The Lord shall bring low his pride. Moab, like a fortress, will be completely demolished to the dust, a warning to surrounding Arab nations!

**THOUGHT:** (Read Psalm 46:9.)

**PRAYER:** Save my loved ones and friends who are still outside Thy Kingdom, O Lord.

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## A SONG OF TWO CITIES

After the song of praise to the God of Liberation, the prophet followed with a Song of Two Cities, a horizontal complement to the song in the vertical. Notice this song is to be sung in "*that day ...in the land of Judah*" (Isa 26:1), which therefore has particular reference to Israel in the future. The first city is the City of God, a spiritual and strong city. It is built with walls and bulwarks of salvation. Only the righteous nation which keeps truth can enter in. The second city is the lofty city. God will bring it down to the dust, to be trodden even by the feet of the poor. Apparently the latter is the City of Man.

The just and righteous, living with the wicked in the City of Man, yearned earnestly "*in the night*" (Isa 26:9) for God to come to dispense justice. But the wicked will not repent though given grace by His Majesty. God will vanquish all the tyrants that have lorded over the Jews. What consolation to Israel today, hampered on all sides by hostile nations. Not only will God overpower Israel's enemies, but He will also increase His people. Today, there are over six million Jews in Israel and twenty million in the whole world, despite the extermination of six million by Hitler in World War II. Thus Isaiah 26:16-18 speaks of a time of national tribulation, but Isaiah 26:19 ends with the hope of bodily resurrection. Daniel 12:2 refers to a resurrection of the unjust.

This song concludes with a reiteration of the Lord coming to punish the inhabitants of the earth. It exhorts God's people to endure yet a little while in hiding "*until the indignation be overpast*" (Isa 26:20). "*In that day*" the Lord will "*punish leviathan the piercing serpent, even leviathan that crooked serpent; and he shall slay the dragon that is in the sea*" (Isa 27:1). It is thought that these represent Assyria, Babylon and Egypt, the world powers in Old Testament times. These were all hostile to God's Kingdom. God will deal with the superpowers of the end-times all the same.

**THOUGHT:** God will dispense justice in His own time.

**PRAYER:** I praise Thee, O Lord, for Thou art a just God.

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MONDAY, JULY 18

ISAIAH 27

PSALM 9:1-10

*“The LORD also will be a  
refuge for the oppressed...”*

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## ANOTHER SONG OF THE VINEYARD

In Isaiah 5 is the Song of the Vineyard, a parable of the House of Israel and Judah (Isa 5:7). In that Song of the Vineyard, Israel and Judah were sharply admonished. In Isaiah 27, the Vineyard no doubt is Israel again. Instead of sharp admonition, it is a loving protestation of God’s gentle care for His people. God will *“in that day”* (Isa 27:2) defend her from *“briers and thorns”* (Isa 27:4), i.e. from her enemies. Isaiah 27:6 refers to the return of the Jews to their homeland (officially proclaimed in 1948) and God’s assurance of good success. Israel will not only be established again, but will become a world power!

Isaiah 27:7 shows how God’s special kindness to His own is seen in contrast with His more severe judgment of Israel’s oppressors. But, in Isaiah 27:8, God had to chastise Israel for her good.

Isaiah 27:9 speaks of God’s purging of Israel’s sin of idolatry. This was done through their captivity to Assyria and Babylon.

Isaiah 27:10 and 11 seems to refer to Samaria that fell to the Assyrians in 722 BC. The northern ten tribes were the first to be carried off into exile and the land desolated, for they, *“a people of no understanding”* (Isa 27:11), had rejected God.

After all these chastisements, God now returns to Israel. Isaiah 27:12-13 speaks of a threshing of grain after which is the gathering, a picture of God’s picking up the remnants of Israel one by one. *“From the channel of the river”* (Isa 27:12) refers to the Euphrates. Assyria and Egypt were the two superpowers of Isaiah’s time, typifying the uttermost parts of the earth where the Israelites would be exiled. These POWs (prisoners of war) would return to Jerusalem. Is this prophecy not being fulfilled today?

**THOUGHT:** The global holocaust ends with a happy note because God, not man, is in control of international events.

**PRAYER:** *“Thy will be done,”* O Lord!

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TUESDAY, JULY 19

ISAIAH 28:1-13

PSALM 9:11-20

*“Have mercy upon me, O LORD...”*

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## WOE TO DRUNKEN GOVERNORS AND CLERGY

From Isaiah 28 to 35, we return with the prophet from that vision of a future global holocaust to the times in which he lived. Here are a series of “*Woe*” messages to the Northern Kingdom, the leading tribe of which is Ephraim, with Samaria its capital.

As drinking is one of the chief sins today, so it was in ancient times. This is the third time that the prophet lashed out on intoxicating drinks. Drinkers, take care!

Now Samaria, set on a 300-foot hill above a fertile valley, was an impregnable fortress, a “*crown of pride*” (Isa 28:1). With her rulers swaying aloft also with pride, both will be trodden under feet. The Lord has “*a mighty and strong one*” (Isa 28:2) in the Assyrians’ coming invasion that brought down Samaria in 722 BC. Therefore let the faithful rather look up to the Lord for a “*crown of glory*” (Isa 28:5) and for judgment which was sorely missing from their judges.

Now we switch from Samaria to Jerusalem, the national capital. Are the leaders of the Southern Kingdom better? Even the priest and the prophet (like the professionals in both Roman Catholic and Protestant churches today) are a noisy, stumbling crowd! “O yeah?” comes a retort from the unruly clergy. “Who do you think we are? Little kids just weaned from their mother’s milk? Are you teaching us ABC?”

Surely, replies the prophet. Inasmuch as God’s invitation to “*rest; ... the refreshing*” (Isa 28:12) was rejected by them, He would speak so to them in a foreign language (in Assyrian, the language of the invaders). Since they contemptuously brushed aside the Word of God (“*precept upon precept, line upon line*” = tsav la tsav, qay la qay), as teaching ABC to children, they would have to pay heavily for it. So it is with every self-righteous, unrepentant heart that resists the Word of the Lord through His faithful preachers today.

**THOUGHT:** Scoffing is the last degree of ungodliness.

**PRAYER:** Lord, save me from making scoffing remarks.

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WEDNESDAY, JULY 20

ISAIAH 28:14-29

PSALM 10:1-9

*“The wicked in his pride  
doth persecute the poor...”*

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## EPHRAIM (SAMARIA) A WARNING TO JUDAH

Inasmuch as the Lord would send “*a mighty and strong one*” (Isa 28:2) in Assyria to conquer Israel (Ephraim the chief tribe and Samaria the capital), so will He devastate Judah with the same invader: “*...when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, then ye shall be trodden down by it*” (Isa 28:18). The boastings of the scornful rulers in Jerusalem that they were insured from death by a cunning, secret pact with Egypt (as hinted to the prophet) were no bulwark against the onrushing Assyrians.

In this plight, Isaiah challenged the big bosses of Jerusalem as he had challenged King Ahaz earlier with God’s deliverance. Here is another prediction of the coming Saviour (Messiah) who is often alluded to or quoted in the New Testament (Matt 21:42, 44; Luke 20:17; Acts 4:11; Rom 9:33; Eph 2:20; 1 Pet 2:4-6). Christ will dispense righteous judgment like a builder measuring with line and plummet.

The help Judah thought to obtain would be like a bed too short to stretch oneself in, like a blanket that could not fully cover one’s body. But if they trusted the Lord, He would help them as in the days of their fathers at Perazim and Gibeon (2 Sam 5:20; Josh 10:10). Repent, repent! So let us in all our troubles turn to the Lord. Cease from unholy scheming and alliances.

Isaiah 28:24-29 is a parable of the wisdom of the farmer in the various processes of growing and reaping. He uses all kinds of methods to farm, as God has given him the wisdom. It is God who gives the might and counsel that works wonders — even to us who ask.

**THOUGHT:** *“Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the LORD our God.”* (Ps 20:7)

**PRAYER:** Forgive me, Father, for my unbelief. Grant me faith and trust to submit to and to do Thy bidding.

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THURSDAY, JULY 21

ISAIAH 29

PSALM 10:10-18

“...O God, lift up thine hand:  
forget not the humble.”

---

## WOE TO ARIEL

Ariel, the city where David dwelt, is evidently Jerusalem, more precisely Zion, David’s palace-city. Ariel means “altar of God,” so in the same verse is mentioned the killing of sacrifices. By addressing Jerusalem as Ariel, the prophet hinted of war to come where many, like sheep, would be slaughtered. Jerusalem would be drained so weak that she would whisper like a ghost!

Yet, the Lord would come to her deliverance when, in turn, her assailants, the Assyrians under Sennacherib, would be suddenly pulverised! (Read this miraculous deliverance in Isaiah 37:36). The enemy’s determined assault on Jerusalem vanished like a frustrating dream in the night! What happened to Judah’s enemy occurs again today in Israel’s favour, for God is with His chosen people. “... *If God be for us, who can be against us?*” (Rom 8:31).

A people that go to church by tradition, that worship God with lip-service and not heart-service, fall into a stupor of wilful ignorance. That was the picture of Judah despite the preaching of Isaiah! Now, when we refuse the light, darkness will increasingly engulf us, like one entering into a deep sleep; even prophets and seers who are supposed to be most enlightened, and rulers who are endowed with wisdom. Woe, therefore, to those who take comfort to perpetrate their works in darkness (for their deeds are evil). Reader, do you try desperately to cover up the evil you are secretly doing? You will be overturned like the potter’s clay!

But a better day will soon come to God’s people, as the prophescope turns to the future. Instead of being closed to the things of God, the people will hear and not be deaf, and see and not be blind. The meek and the poor refer to God’s very own. The wicked who work wickedness will be severely dealt with. Jacob, the progenitor of the Israelites, will not be ashamed of his children before God.

**THOUGHT:** Do I believe that a better day will soon come to me?

**PRAYER:** Lord, help me to live a life that brings glory to Thy name.

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FRIDAY, JULY 22

ISAIAH 30

PSALM 11

*"In the LORD put I my trust..."*

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**“CURSED BE THE MAN THAT TRUSTETH IN MAN,  
AND MAKETH FLESH HIS ARM,  
AND WHOSE HEART DEPARTETH FROM THE LORD”  
(Jer 17:5)**

As the Assyrian crisis mounted, Judah hastened to bolster her defence with Egyptian help. The prophet denounced such a policy that left God out completely. They that trust in man lean on a shadow!

Now, when we are caught in a jam, what we should do is to remain calm and pray! Let us listen to words of rebuke by God’s faithful preacher, instead of hearing sweet, professional sermons that tickle our ears! God will go counter to those who walk away from Him.

In order to achieve their end, the delegation to Egypt would hazard their lives through the southern desert, a howling wilderness of lions, vipers and fiery flying serpents. They would carry on the backs of donkeys and camels treasures to the Pharaoh, to pay homage.

But, vain is the help of man without the help of God. It is a grave sin, indeed, which, like a crack in the wall, would result in the wall’s sudden collapse. The effect of such sin is like the smashing of a pot, so there remains not one sherd big enough to rake fire with, or to scoop water from a puddle.

In contrast with Judah at this time, there is our Lord’s commendation on the Church of Philadelphia. This young church, though having “*a little strength*” (Rev 3:8), has kept God’s Word and has not denied His Name. Therefore, God gives her an open door of success.

**THOUGHT:** “Self help (a little strength) with God’s help is the best help.”

**PRAYER:** Enable me, Lord, to give Thee my all and to trust Thee to bless.

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**"GOD IS OUR REFUGE AND STRENGTH,  
A VERY PRESENT HELP IN TROUBLE" (Ps 46:1)**

There is a saying, "One with God is the majority." In blessing Israel for her close walk with God, the Lord said, "*One man of you shall chase a thousand...*" (Josh 23:10). And also: "*And five of you shall chase an hundred, and an hundred of you shall put ten thousand to flight...*" (Lev 26:8).

When Judah forsook the Lord for Egypt, God's blessing was reversed. "*One thousand shall flee at the rebuke of one; at the rebuke of five shall ye flee...*" (Isa 30:17). "*For the Egyptians shall help in vain, and to no purpose...*" (Isa 30:7).

In spite of Judah's waywardness, the Lord came to her help, like a father his prodigal son (Isa 30:31). The account of the annihilation of 185,000 Assyrians in one night is given in Isaiah 37:36.

Then the prophet looked to greater future deliverance when the Messiah will return to establish His glorious reign in Israel (Isa 30:26). After the Jews have gone through a pogrom (Isa 30:20), God would give them teachers (prophets) who would direct their steps. They would be cured of their sin of idolatry. There would be a revival of material wealth in the land, but this would end in a great war (Isa 30:25). Are not these predictions being fulfilled in Israel today?

This will climax with the coming of the Lord in great power and indignation. He will sift the Gentile nations with a great sieve (a terrible shake up), but Israel will come to the Lord with rejoicing as her Saviour thunders down on her adversaries. The great holocaust to come will reach its grand finale in Tophet, a burning up of the dead bodies by the Lord Himself in a huge funeral pyre. (Tophet was a "high place" in the valley of Hinnom outside Jerusalem, where child sacrifices were made to Molech.) Another view of Armageddon!

**THOUGHT:** (Read Psalm 46:9-10.)

**PRAYER:** Truly, Lord, one with Thee is the majority!

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## **GOD WILL SAVE JERUSALEM DESPITE JUDAH'S WAYWARDNESS**

Isaiah 31 is easiest to understand. It is a repetition of the previous, in synopsis. God is mightily displeased with His own people who wilfully forget Him, who put their trust in human might. Let us quote Jeremiah 17:5 again, *"Thus saith the LORD; Curseth be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the LORD."* An upcountry student who joined a modernist seminary in a metropolitan city related how before he came to school, he was taught by old-fashioned missionaries to ask his pastor to pray before seeing the doctor. Now he was taught by the new-fashioned teachers to see the doctor before the pastor. By the time the pastor was consulted, the patient was already dead!

What is your first reaction when trouble comes? The cleverest doctor is still a man, but the Lord is God. So are superpowers, like the Egyptians in Isaiah's time, men and not God. To rely on human prowess without the Lord is the surest way to destruction.

Nevertheless, for His own Name's sake, for the covenant He had made with Israel's forefathers, God would save Jerusalem anyway. Those who trusted in dumb idols would discard them when God came to their rescue. The miracle that God wrought in destroying 185,000 of the Assyrians in one night could not be denied. God saved Jerusalem also for the sake of those who trusted in Him. He would not destroy Sodom if there were ten righteous men.

Israel today has been victorious over every one of her foes, not because of her righteousness, but because God is working out His purpose. He is fulfilling the promises He had made with the fathers.

**THOUGHT:** (Read Psalm 33:12-18.)

**PRAYER:** Turn my fears to faith in Thee, O Lord, that I may see Thee in my troubles.

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MONDAY, JULY 25

ISAIAH 32

PSALM 14

*“The fool hath said in his heart,  
There is no God...”*

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## UNDER A GOOD KING AND A GOOD GOVERNMENT

Isaiah 32 looks to the distant future, to the Messiah-king with a retinue of good officers. There will be safety and security under His rule. There will be enlightenment and discernment, obedience and eloquence in His subjects, not the rabble-rousers and violent demonstrators that many governments face today. In that age of enlightenment, *“The vile person shall be no more called liberal, nor the churl said to be bountiful”* (Isa 32:5).

In this age of confusion and distorted values, we see, for example, how pop stars are honoured even above Jesus. The rich, the *“vile”* by cunning and subterfuge might become mushroom millionaires. They will be highly honoured, but only until sin finds them out. In that age of enlightenment, only the noble, the good will stand.

In Isaiah 32:9, the prophescope now swings back to the present situation. The high-brow wives of these socialites are rebuked. This harks back to Isaiah 3:16-24. *“They shall lament for the teats, for the pleasant fields, for the fruitful vine”* (Isa 32:12), for thorns and thistles instead would come up. This was a prediction of war for the times in which Isaiah lived.

From Isaiah 32:15 we return with the prophet to better times, when by God’s outpoured Spirit, Israel will be converted. Then only will revival return to the land, and peace reign supreme with righteousness. Then will the people dwell safely and securely. Isaiah 32:19 hints of a time of judgment that will inconvenience God’s people before true peace is obtained. Isaiah 32:20 seems to depict a time of abundance in the land through agriculture, but the people must go forth to develop the land on the principle *“no venture, no gain.”* Honest, hard work is a law to prosperity in God’s Kingdom.

**THOUGHT:** Decentralise, not centralise, is God’s way to prosperous growth.

**PRAYER:** May I labour for Thee and not covet after the wealth that sin can bring.

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TUESDAY, JULY 26

ISAIAH 33

PSALM 15

*“LORD, who shall abide  
in thy tabernacle?...”*

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## ASSYRIA DOWN, JERUSALEM UP!

The historical background of Isaiah 33 is contained in 2 Kings 18:14-17. One city after another in Judah had fallen to the Assyrian hordes. In order to save Jerusalem, Hezekiah negotiated for a tribute of 300 talents of silver and thirty talents of gold. Like a tiger with a whetted appetite after tasting human blood, Sennacherib the Assyrian king demanded more. He sent his generals now to demand surrender. Do bullies keep their word? That was how Hitler conquered the satellite countries around Germany: by trickery and treachery! Yea, he even broke his treaty of peace with Russia. The prophet's opening sermon was a denunciation of such truce-breaking and perjury. In such a national crisis, the prophet cried out for Divine intervention. God answered by scattering the Assyrian forces. A vast amount of war booty fell into Judah's hands. A miraculous victory to Judah without the shooting of an arrow! One lesson we must learn from this great episode is that the Lord is “the stability of our times.” The fear of the Lord, is that your treasure?

Isaiah 33:7-9 leads us to see with the prophet the sad state of affairs. Man's extremity is God's opportunity. God seems to rebuke in verse 11 the futility of the Assyrian scheming. Not only the Assyrians but the “*sinners in Zion*” (Isa 33:14). War has scared some of these hypocrites to fear His judgment. Isaiah 33:15-19 promises safety and security to the righteous, for them who are afraid to sin. Isaiah 33:20-24 looks to the impregnable security of God's city in the distant future. Verse 21 paints a picture of God being a bulwark against any naval assault by the enemy, a picture of great cities built along the banks of rivers, like Thebes in Egypt. Verse 23 paints the picture of a ship lax and unready for war. This was the state of Jerusalem before the Assyrian invasion. With God coming on the scene, the tables were turned, so much so “*the lame take the prey*” (Isa 33:23) of the routed Assyrian army.

**THOUGHT:** Do I have the fear of the Lord in me?

**PRAYER:** In the midst of sufferings, I wait, O Lord, for Thy sure deliverance.

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WEDNESDAY, JULY 27

ISAIAH 34

PSALM 16

*“Preserve me, O God:  
for in thee do I put my trust.”*

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## ANOTHER VIEW OF ARMAGEDDON

Armageddon is the place where *“the kings of the earth and of the whole world”* are gathered *“to the battle of that great day of God Almighty”* (Rev 16:14). Armageddon means the hill of Megiddo which is in the vicinity of the Carmel range, not far from modern Haifa. The final world battle (Third World War?) will end in a bloody holocaust of holocausts in and around Israel!

Isaiah saw this awful climax of history involving *“all nations”* when God will pour His fury *“upon all their armies”* (Isa 34:2). As a result, *“the mountains shall be melted with their blood”* (Isa 34:3). Cosmic disturbances will evidence God’s power unleashed on all flesh. Verse 4 is restated by our Lord in Luke 21:25-27.

Idumea, whose city Bozrah is thirty miles south of the Dead Sea, is the land of Edom, the country given to Esau. Isaiah saw a terrible slaughter here, both of the common people (*“lambs and goats,”* Isa 34:6) and of their rulers (*“unicorns...bullocks...bulls...,”* Isa 34:7). As the Lord’s method of destruction will be by fire, this would include the clash of warring nations with nuclear bombs and God’s “E-bombs” (= earthquakes)! The destruction of Idumea was singled out as representative of all the nations that fight against His Land. (Read Zechariah 12.)

As a result of the fiery blasts upon the land, it will be totally desolated (Isa 34:9). It will be turned into a wilderness to be inhabited by wild beasts and birds. This is determined by God. Thus all of Israel’s enemies today who suffer defeat against Israel are but having a foretaste of the coming destruction. Hence Christ the Messiah must come again to save His own.

**THOUGHT:** “O can we say we are ready, brother (sister), Ready for the soul’s bright home? Say, will He find you and me still watching, waiting, waiting when the Lord shall come?”

**PRAYER:** Help me, Lord, that this glimpse of the future of Thy victory will strengthen my resolve to live for Thee today.

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THURSDAY, JULY 28

ISAIAH 35

PSALM 17:1-8

*"I have called upon thee,  
for thou wilt hear me, O God..."*

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## GLORIOUS REHABILITATION

One great dimension of theological truth is missed by amillennialists who say there is no 1,000 years of Christ's peaceful reign on earth. If we take the description of Old Testament prophets of a golden age to come to Israel as it stands, we cannot help but come to the conclusion that, after Armageddon, God will work a mighty work of glorious rehabilitation wherein, as Isaiah 2:1-4 tells us, all wars shall cease. In the light of other scriptural passages, we believe the Messiah (Christ) shall return before the 1,000 years of peaceful reign can materialise.

Isaiah concluded his many messages of doom and woe with a glorious rehabilitation which he saw will be God's doing in Israel. When God "*will come with vengeance, even ... with a recompence; he will come and save you*" (Isa 35:4). How?

First, "*...the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose*" (Isa 35:1). "*And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water...*" (Isa 35:7). This is wonderfully being fulfilled since Israel became a nation in 1948. As a result of bringing water into the deforested barren hills, eighty-three million trees were planted in the first sixteen years of the new state. With water in abundant supply, over 700 agricultural villages have also been established.

Second, "*the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads...*" (Isa 35:10). Today's Jewish population registered in Israel is over six million. Isaiah 35:5-6 refers certainly to a rehabilitation of the whole person, including the new birth. God's people will return by a safe route called "*The way of holiness*" (Isa 35:8). "*And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it...*" (Isa 30:21). Those whom God will redeem will be provided the means and the way to return to Israel despite many hindrances.

**THOUGHT:** Does 2 Peter 3:12a apply to me?

**PRAYER:** (Use Matthew 6:33.)

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FRIDAY, JULY 29

ISAIAH 36-39

PSALM 17:9-15

“...I shall be satisfied,  
when I awake, with thy likeness.”

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## IN THE DAYS OF KING HEZEKIAH

Although Isaiah said that his ministry ran through the reigns of four kings of Judah (Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah), it is with the last king that the prophet worked the closest. The incorporation of four chapters of Jewish history revolving around king Hezekiah gives the readers the necessary background and a clearer perspective.

The several denouncing messages on seeking an Egyptian alliance find a corroboration in the defiance and derision of the Assyrian envoys (Isa 36:6). The names of Eliakim and Shebna (Isa 22) now stand out in prominence as the king's negotiators with the Assyrian generals.

The Assyrians, though Judah's enemies (Isa 10:5), were God's instrument of vengeance to chastise “*an hypocritical nation*” (Isa 10:6). The sins of Judah (apostasy and idolatry) under Ahaz (Hezekiah's father) could not be atoned by his son. Nevertheless, God was touched by Hezekiah's tears and repentance. Thus came God's promise of deliverance in Isaiah 37:6-7.

The Assyrians, though ruthless marauders, had played a part in God's programme by destroying the idols of her conquered nations (Isa 36:19-20). In the light of this, we can understand why China fell to Mao and shuddered under the Red Guards. While Christians had to go underground, Buddhas and idols were uprooted and smashed. God is supreme, who uses the wrath of man to praise Him (Ps 76:10), but the remainder of wrath shall He restrain.

In this historical interlude, a glimpse is given of Babylon which has figured so prominently twice in the prophet's “burdens.” To have a more detailed picture of Isaiah's times, it is well to read 2 Kings 16-20 and 2 Chronicles 26-32.

**THOUGHT:** (Read Psalm 76:10.)

**PRAYER:** Lord, may my prayers to Thee be from a sincere and contrite heart, and may Thou be pleased to answer.

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## SATAN’S PSYCHOLOGICAL WARFARE ANALYSED

Apart from historical facts, let us learn to analyse Satan’s use of psychology in his hideous attacks on God’s people.

1. Satan uses propaganda through speech making. He uses the Jews’ language to strike more widely and deeply into the hearts of his hearers (Isa 36:11-12). Paul spoke in the Hebrew tongue to his countrymen (Acts 22:2). A missionary to a foreign land should first learn the language of the people.
2. Satan uses truth, quoting the failure of the Egyptians (Isa 36:6) and the destruction of the gods of numerous countries (Isa 36:18-20). This is most effective, because truth defies all arguments. We should always speak the truth.
3. Satan uses ridicule (Isa 36:8-9). Satan falls again from his own pride! “Don’t count the chickens before they are hatched.”
4. Satan uses foul language. Christians should never use foul language since we are holy.
5. Satan uses cajolery (cheating by flattery). How he used this on Eve! Read Psalm 12:2.
6. Satan uses perversion (Isa 36:18-20).
7. Satan used perjury and blasphemy. He made a false claim that Assyria was commissioned of the Lord to destroy Judah (Isa 10:5-7).

We who are preachers of the Gospel also use psychological warfare. But we must use only the truth and proclaim it with faith and humility. We must not stoop to Satan’s nefarious tactics. We should never exaggerate any statement of fact. Let our speech be yea yea, nay nay.

**THOUGHT:** (Read Matthew 5:37.)

**PRAYER:** Grant me wisdom, O Lord, to see through Satan’s tactics.

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## MAN'S EXTREMITY, GOD'S OPPORTUNITY

What so brutally shocked king Hezekiah was that all the thirty talents of gold and 300 talents of silver he had extracted from the Temple to pay off Sennacherib did not last but a few days. Like all the grab Hitler had from the satellite nations did not satiate the German juggernaut. No sooner had the Assyrians gone (Isa 22) then they turned around, demanding now total surrender.

In such extremity came God's opportunity. Hezekiah cast himself utterly before the Lord in rent clothes and sackcloth. In modern times, we had King George VI calling the British Empire to a day of humiliation and prayer at the outbreak of World War II.

In such extremity, when vain was the help of man, Hezekiah had the spiritual understanding to seek God with all his heart. In earnest prayer he spread the Assyrian king's letter of demand before the Lord. In deep contrition, he begged for clemency, and for His own name's sake, the salvation of Jerusalem. Read Isaiah 55:6-7. When will a complacent people prostrate before God in repentance?

God listens to every penitent's prayer. So came the good news from the prophet that God would defend the city for His own sake, and for David's sake (Isa 37:35). The destruction of 185,000 Assyrian troops in one night at Lachish saved the day. All the scare to the Jerusalemites never appeared. Herodotus told the story of an Assyrian army who found their camp at night attacked by hordes of field mice who ate up the bow-strings and shield handles. Could it be that God used these rodents, carriers of bubonic plague, to sweep away the Assyrians in one night? Miracles can occur even through mice and rats, at the command of the Lord.

**THOUGHT:** Hope in the Lord even in the darkest night!

**PRAYER:** Forgive my complacency, O Lord. May I come to Thee daily seeking to do Thy will, and not just during times of extremity.

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## WHAT CAN MELT THE HEART OF GOD? THE TEARS OF EVERY PENITENT

For a fuller account of this episode in the life of King Hezekiah, read 2 Kings 20:1-11. From Isaiah 38:6 we can visualise how the king became doubly burdened — the burden of saving Jerusalem from the Assyrians, and the burden of saving his own life. Hezekiah was thirty-nine years old when he was told to prepare to die of a fatal illness.

What theological lesson can we learn from Hezekiah’s sickness? In contrast with the philosophy of static fatalism, Hezekiah’s sickness and recovery teaches a dynamic theism.

From the testimony of Chew Fook Wah, an effective Bible-Presbyterian evangelist who was a staunch idol-worshipper, he was told by the medium that he would die at fifty-four. The medium said that this was determined by his fate. There was no escape from it. Imagine the mounting agony he went through as he anticipated his date with death. But he has survived that fate by over a decade since receiving Christ. The ways of God are worlds above the determinism of a fateful philosophy, whatever culture it is. God’s dealings with man are dynamic. King Hezekiah had contracted a fatal disease. He had to die. From the prophet’s pronouncement, it seemed this was God’s unalterable appointment. But Hezekiah was not a fatalist. Hezekiah believed God to be a benign Master. He cried his heart out to God. God was moved and granted him a reprieve of fifteen years.

Repentance is the key to God’s favour and merciful kindness. Did not God threaten to destroy Nineveh in forty days? He relented when the king and all his subjects repented. To confirm His promise, God moved the shadow on the sun dial of Ahaz (Hezekiah’s father) ten degrees backward, as if to reflect His pronounced prolongation of Hezekiah’s days. As to the application of a fig-poultice on his boil, that would help Hezekiah’s faith in the recovery.

**THOUGHT:** A Christian must never say “Die.”

**PRAYER:** Creator God, Thou giveth life. Thou also taketh life.

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## HEZEKIAH’S PSALM OF LIFE

What are the sentiments of a man given fifteen more years to live in answer to his pleading? Let us discover Hezekiah from this psalm he has written from that traumatic experience. Let us call it Hezekiah’s psalm of life. What other psalms of life are there for comparative study? Psalm 90 by Moses is the most well-known, being put to English verse in “O God Our Help in Ages Past.” Another psalm of life may be found in Psalm 49. As for Hezekiah’s, we may gather three main points of his feelings.

1. Life is short. It is like the pitching and removing of a shepherd’s tent (in contrast with a permanent home). Like a weaver, how fast is his weaving!
2. The grave, the pit, even death, in contrast with the land of the living, is a negative place. Hezekiah mourned like a dove, chattered like a crane or a swallow when he considered death. He did not go deeper into the judgment or reward after death.
3. Life, though short, is worth living. Hezekiah had the zest for living a God-given life. *“The living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I do this day: the father to the children shall make known thy truth”* (Isa 38:19). He praised God for saving his life and was so grateful that he overflowed in a psalm to be sung to stringed instruments.

Lives of great men all remind us  
We can make our lives sublime;  
And departing, leave behind us  
Footprints on the sands of time.

— Longfellow

**THOUGHT:** Every Christian should live a faithful life of service, and so make the profit of such a life as to render it profitably to the Lord before the Judgment Seat of Christ. A Christian who lives for himself is no friend of king Hezekiah.

**PRAYER:** Make my life count for Thee, O Lord!

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**“A MAN’S PRIDE SHALL BRING HIM LOW:  
BUT HONOUR SHALL UPHOLD THE HUMBLE IN  
SPIRIT” (Prov 29:23)**

If you read further in 2 Chronicles 32:24-31, you will see deeper into Isaiah 39 the lurking heart of a restored saint of God. Can such a humbled man become so conceited? Jeremiah 17:9 is one verse we must always repeat, *“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?”*

After the routing of the Assyrians by God’s miraculous intervention, whereby 185,000 troops were destroyed in one night, Judah suddenly became the superpower of this part of the ancient world. (So had Israel become a superpower in the Middle East in recent years by defeating the combined strength of the Arab countries in five wars.) As a result, Hezekiah’s *“heart was lifted up...”* (2 Chron 32:25). Dear blessed Christian, how does your heart measure before an omniscient God?

With the defeat of the Assyrians, there was the beginning of a stirring of a small state called Babylon on the distant horizon. Its king Merodachbaladan, with plots of rebellion against his master, sent presents to Jerusalem with more in his mind than wishing its ruler health. Whatever his sinister designs, this was evident from Isaiah’s query of his envoys’ credentials. Why didn’t King Hezekiah ask the prophet’s counsel in time of peace? Is God’s help needed only in war? Moreover, the flattered monarch, in an unguarded moment, revealed all the state secrets to the Babylonian visitors.

The prophescope of Isaiah immediately swung into action. There and then the displeased Lord showed His servant Hezekiah how Judah would be taken into captivity to Babylon. Hezekiah was grateful for this, the Lord’s second reprieve.

**THOUGHT:** *“A man’s pride shall bring him low...”* (Prov 29:23a)

**PRAYER:** Forgive me, Lord, for not seeking Thee in time of peace.

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## PROLOGUE TO MANY MESSAGES OF CONSOLATION

Inasmuch as Isaiah 39 closes with Judah’s coming captivity to Babylon (the culmination of God’s judgment on His wayward children), Isaiah 40 leads us into their restoration. Whereas Isaiah 1 to 39 tells of Old Testament judgments, Isaiah 40 to 66 opens a vista to New Testament times of consolation and liberation. Such restoration of God’s people has a two-fold aspect: 1) The gathering of Israel and the raising again of David’s throne in a golden millennial rule on earth. 2) The spiritual blessings that will come to the whole world through Israel by the sufferings of Christ, the greater David.

Jerusalem is the capital city of Israel. Zion, where king David’s palace was, is situated in Jerusalem itself. Jerusalem, often used interchangeably with Zion, will be the centre from which good tidings, the Gospel, will radiate to other cities of Judah, even to the uttermost parts of the earth. Isaiah 40:3 (which talks of preparing the way of the Lord by making it straight in the desert, etc.) is claimed by John the Baptist to be his ministry of heralding the Christ (Matt 3:3). Isaiah 40:6 (which contrasts the frailty of mankind with the durability of the Word of God) is elaborated by the Apostle Peter as that which is preached by the Gospel (1 Pet 1:25).

It is important for us to see in the writings of Isaiah a two-fold picture in the things to come, viz. Israel and the Church, the Law and the Gospel, the physical and the spiritual.

The first eleven verses of Isaiah 40 constitute a prologue to this remaining portion of Isaiah. It is a message of “comfort” or “consolation” to God’s own children. This is what the Gospel brings to every sin-oppressed soul, to every struggling heart in a world beset with strife and fear, violence and war.

**THOUGHT:** “The Comforter has come, the Comforter has come... O spread the tidings round, wherever man is found, The Comforter has come.”

**PRAYER:** O Lord, may Thy Word make me wise.

---

## HOW BIG IS GOD OUR DELIVERER?

Surely God is not like one of the myriads of graven images found in Babylonia. Not like the Buddhas, gold-plated or silver-plated, you would discover in the hundreds of temples in Bangkok (Isa 40:18-20).

God, our Deliverer, first, of Israel His chosen race, is the Creator of heaven and earth (Isa 40:26-28), its Governor and Supervisor (Isa 40:22-23). The greatness of God in power and wisdom is particularly emphasized. Our God is the Omnipotent, All-powerful One; the Omniscient, All-knowing One; the Omnipresent, the One who is everywhere.

What verses in this portion of Scripture could list under these three headings? The Hebrew word in Isaiah 40:22 has the connotation of the earth being a sphere. Isaiah might not know modern geography and the significance of the particular word used, but God who inspired him to write does.

Though God is so great, so big (in kindergarten language), the complacent Israelites did not know Him. They had yet to experience God in all His power and greatness (Isa 40:27). Therefore the prophet challenged them, and us today in our spiritual lethargy, with the last four verses (Isa 40:28-31). God is ever near to revive us and quicken us who wait upon Him. Did you ever stop to pray when confronted with a problem? These four verses are condensed further into one verse according to Isaiah 57:15: *“For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite (broken) and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.”*

**THOUGHT:** What is God? God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.

**PRAYER:** Open my eyes, Lord, to Thy majestic greatness and glory!

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## **GOD WILL JUDGE THE NATIONS BY A NEW EASTERN SUPERPOWER**

In order to redeem His people from Babylonian captivity (predicted to Hezekiah in Isaiah 39), God would raise up a new superpower from the east. Isaiah 41:25 reiterates that "*he,*" the leader of this new eastern power, will also come from the north. This indicates the encircling movement the emerging power will make in its attack on the Babylonian empire (Isa 41:25). Who is this man "*from the east,*" and "*from the rising of the sun*"? He is not some Japanese conqueror, for the object of conquest is principally Babylonia. The great leader of this new superpower is Cyrus, king of Persia.

Isaiah 41:1 is a summons from the Lord God Almighty, Ruler of nations, to the uttermost parts of the ancient world, even to the islands afar off, to judgment! Following this verse is the prophet's prediction of Cyrus' imminent conquest (Isa 41:2-5). Isaiah 41:6-7 describes the threatened nations resorting to idols for protection. How foolish! The prophet said, "*They worship the work of their own hands*" (Isa 2:8). By way of application, there are Roman Catholic soldiers who wear crucifixes and Mary medallions for protection, while misguided Protestant soldiers are known to carry "bullet-proof" Testaments in their shirt pockets. Let those who are God's own hear what Isaiah said to Israel in Isaiah 41:8-14. Because the Jews are Abraham's seed, God promises to keep them from evil when tribulations come. God gave this guarantee to Abraham, "*And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee ...*" (Gen 12:3).

Isaiah 41:15-16 reveals that God will make Israel like "*a new sharp ... instrument having teeth,*" an all-victorious weapon over her enemies. The recent events in the Middle East which showed Israel scoring victory after victory over her enemies are a fulfilling of this prophecy. God being favorable to Israel, they would be preserved intact in the war between Persia and Babylon.

**THOUGHT:** (Read Psalm 122:6.)

**PRAYER:** I thank Thee, O Lord, that my life is in Thy hand.

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## THE KING OF JACOB (GOD) VERSUS THE GODS OF NATIONS

Not only will Israel be preserved intact in the Persian invasion of the nations, her land will blossom again with the opening up of water resources. This has been fulfilled as Israel irrigates her land with water from Galilee and from the subterranean springs in the Southern desert.

War brings destruction to the people of the land and the land itself. Trees are cut down at random by an impoverished people for livelihood. During the Turks' rule, a tax was levied on every sizeable tree. Those who could not pay the tree-tax had theirs removed. When Israel regained her land in 1948, it was a brown rocky wilderness.

In order to rehabilitate their land, they immediately embarked on a programme of tree-planting (Isa 35). The orange which is not mentioned in Isaiah 41:19 is a transplanted species. Jaffa oranges are a chief dollar earner. Every year more than \$80 million worth of citrus fruit is exported. All these endeavours cannot succeed unless God sends them the seasonal rains (Zech 10:1). The transformation of a deforested country into a fruitful field cannot be achieved but by God's help.

In contrast with the power of the living and true God, the gods of nations are a dumb lot, much less capable of predicting the future. Can they foretell the events of good or evil to come? By no means, for they are less than nothing. But God has predicted the one to come from the east, who will invade from the north (Isa 41:2, 25), identified as Cyrus (Isa 44:28). God is the One who first told it to Zion, who gave to Jerusalem a message of good tidings. But from the false gods, no word or answer is found, for they, these molten images, are wind and confusion.

**THOUGHT:** (Read Psalm 115 for a classic statement on idolatry.)

**PRAYER:** Lord, help me always to worship only Thee.

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MONDAY, AUGUST 8

ISAIAH 42:1-7

PSALM 20

*“The LORD hear thee in  
the day of trouble...”*

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## THE SPIRIT OF THE SERVANT OF JEHOVAH

The title “*servant*” is given in Isaiah first to David (Isa 37:35), then to Israel as a nation (Isa 41:8-9) and finally to the Messiah (Isa 42:1-7). Henceforth, this Servant of Jehovah is described to be ever-increasing in suffering in Isaiah 49:1-13, 50:4-9, 52:13 to 53:12. Let those who enter the Lord’s service learn this first lesson — servanthood and suffering!

This Servant is endued with the Holy Spirit (cf. Isa 11:1-2). His mission is to the Gentiles, to “*bring forth judgment*” (justice). His spirit is one of gentleness and compassion. He is identified by Matthew in Matthew 12:15-21 to be none other than our Lord. He will not break a bruised reed (a tall grass-stalk much used as a yardstick), nor will He snuff out the flickering wick of an oil lamp about to smoke out. Is that not the way our Saviour deals with us, miserable, poor, lost sinners?

Because He is the One the God of the whole creation has called and upheld, He will carry out His mission of dispensing justice to the uttermost parts of the earth with unwavering confidence. His gentleness and compassion are a manifestation of His strength.

“*A light of the Gentiles*” (Isa 42:6) speaks of the world-wide mission of the Gospel. The Gospel has a two-fold purpose. First, the spiritual opening of blind eyes and the setting free of prisoners of sin. Second, the physical, such as were seen in the miracles our Lord performed in the days of His earthly life. (Note: This physical aspect, however, is limited to the time of Christ and the Apostles.) So does the Church continue in this ministry after Him in an unobtrusive way. But those who go forth in Christ’s name, making a lot of noise in the strength of the flesh and drawing attention unto themselves, have not the Spirit of Christ. Read what Paul, a true servant of the Lord, said in 2 Corinthians 4:6. He had the Spirit of Christ, an example for us to follow.

**THOUGHT:** (Memorise 2 Corinthians 4:5.)

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

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TUESDAY, AUGUST 9

ISAIAH 42:8-25

PSALM 21:1-6

*“He asked life of thee,  
and thou gavest it him...”*

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## **“TO GOD BE THE GLORY GREAT THINGS HE HATH DONE”**

The ultimate purpose in the far-reaching mission of the Lord’s Servant is to bring glory to God (idols are condemned again). The prophet therefore called on the whole world from the wilderness to the cities, to the islands of the sea, to praise His Name.

Instead of dwelling on the gentleness and meekness of His Servant, the Lord was seen by the prophet as a warrior charging vociferously into the battlefield. He was seen as a woman moaning in childbirth. He let loose His pent-up feelings against evil. The evil and sin that was uppermost in the mind of the Lord was idolatry (Isa 42:17).

In Isaiah 42:19 is also the mention of a servant. This is not the Servant who is identified as the Christ. This servant is a blind servant and a deaf one: the personification of the backsliding nation of Israel. Israel had been a servant and messenger sent by the Lord to the world. But she was blind and deaf to her charge. She had become blind and deaf by her idolatry (Isa 42:17). Read Psalm 135:15-18. In Matthew 15:14, Jesus rebuked the Jewish leaders of His day as blind leaders of the blind. Israel’s God had done many mighty miracles before Israel, but she was blind to them all. Therefore she was left to be robbed, as a caravan was attacked by marauders in the desert and cruelly imprisoned. Israel had come under such a heavy punishment as being burnt in battle. Yet she did not realise what the cause of her misfortune was. How this applies to present predicaments facing Israel in all the hostilities surrounding her. Does Israel today know the Lord God and His Servant Jesus Christ whom He has sent 2,000 years ago?

**THOUGHT:** How do I respond to difficulties in my life?

**PRAYER:** “Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, Let the earth hear His voice! Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, Let the people rejoice! O come to the Father thru’ Jesus the Son, And give Him the glory; great things He hath done.”

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WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 10

ISAIAH 43

PSALM 21:7-13

*“Be thou exalted, LORD,  
in thine own strength...”*

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## A COVENANT GOD RETURNS TO HIS CHOSEN PEOPLE

In spite of her sins, God (who has made a covenant with Israel as His chosen people) returns to her; like a loving husband to his wayward wife (Isa 54:1-8). The prophet assured the people (whom God loves) a safe passage of return from many quarters to their homeland under the new regime of the Persians. Though Egypt, Ethiopia and Seba would greatly suffer in the invasion, Israel would be kept intact through “deep water and flaming fire,” as the Chinese saying goes.

As the nations had no knowledge of the future, but God is the living and true God who knows the end from the beginning, and Israel whom He had chosen are His witnesses, therefore let all know that He is the Lord and only Saviour, and no one can resist what God will do.

In saving Israel, God would bring down Babylon and the Chaldeans, as He had defeated the Egyptians in the Red Sea (Isa 43:16-17). God would do another miracle, a new thing, by leading His people (out of Babylon) safely through the desert.

But though God was so gracious to His people, they remained so clumsily inert. They did not show their gratitude in offerings that were expected of them. God nevertheless forgave Israel not for any merit of theirs, but rather for His own sake. As for their captivity, they were all to blame. From their first father Jacob they had been a wayward, sinning people.

In this long sermon that the prophet had preached to Israel, do we not see a clear reflection of the sins of the Church and of ourselves in our complacency and hardened ingratitude?

**THOUGHT:** “Some thru’ the waters, some thru’ the flood, Some thru’ the fire, but all thru’ the blood; Some through great sorrow, but God gives a song. In the night season and all the day long.”

**PRAYER:** I thank Thee, O Lord, for Thy great love for me, an undeserving sinner. Forgive me for I have not loved Thee as I ought.

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THURSDAY, AUGUST 11

ISAIAH 44:1-25

PSALM 22:1-6

*“They cried unto thee,  
and were delivered...”*

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## THE REDEEMER OF ISRAEL VERSUS IDOLS AND THEIR MAKERS

Continuing with the message of deliverance of Israel (Jacob is the old name; and Jeshurun, which means “upright,” is another name for Israel), the prophet foresaw God’s Spirit pouring upon His people, which restores them to life, like water to the dry ground. The revival blessings upon Israel will flow to the Gentiles who will confess allegiance to the Lord. These are Gentile converts who will be grafted to Israel (Isa 44:5).

Once again the omnipresence, omniscience and omnipotence of the God of Israel are declared to His people, to strengthen them as God’s witnesses to a heathen world. As Israel (more strictly Judah) would be carried to Babylon, a land filled with idols, and many would be bewitched thereby, the prophet made satire of idols and idol-makers as a means of opening their eyes.

Idol-makers vary between those who work with metal and those who work with wood. The blacksmith who shapes an idol with hammer soon gets tired and hungry. If that is the limited strength of the idol-maker, how much less the idol that is made! As for the idol-maker, how ridiculous these idols are when it is observed that from the same chunk of wood, part of it is made into a god while the rest is used for fuel to bake bread, etc!

When men reject the truth, God gives them up to spiritual blindness. Jacob, or Israel, is once again reminded that they are the people of God, His servants whom He has chosen. Despite their transgressions and sins, God the Almighty will cleanse them and redeem them.

God’s power is manifest not only against dumb idols, but it *“frustrateth the tokens of the liars, and maketh diviners mad ...”* (Isa 44:25).

**THOUGHT:** (Read Psalm 115:4, 8.)

**PRAYER:** Take away all “idols” from my life, O Lord. May I worship none but Thee, the one true living God.

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## CYRUS THE NEW EASTERN SUPERPOWER FORETOLD

One of the arguments the prophet presented against dumb idols and false prophets was their inability to foretell future events (Isa 42:8-9; 44:6-8). But God confirms the words of His prophets and fulfils the predictions of His messengers. A specific instance of God's foreknowledge is Isaiah's prophecy of Cyrus, founder of the Persian Empire that overthrew Babylon. He called Cyrus "*my shepherd*," who would govern His subjects, especially the Jews. Cyrus will "*perform all my pleasure*" (Isa 44:28) in decreeing the rebuilding of the Temple and Jerusalem. He was to be helped by the One who made Israel to go through the Red Sea on dry ground, and divided the River Jordan.

Cyrus, a heathen king is called "*anointed*" (Isa 45:1), because he was appointed by God. In Daniel's words, "*... the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will...*" (Dan 4:17).

How did Cyrus capture Babylon that was such a mighty city and redoubtable fortress? According to Herodotus, Babylon's walls rose 300 feet. On the top of the walls was a military highway that provided speedy movement for soldiers and chariots. As hinted in Isaiah 44:27, Cyrus had the waters of the Euphrates diverted so that its riverbed became dry ground for his soldiers to smuggle into the city. The two-leaved gates that forbade entry above the water-line were then opened from inside to receive the invading hordes. The gates of brass and bars of iron that guarded the national treasuries were the next to be broken. "*And I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places...*" (Isa 45:3). A specimen of these treasures was the sacred vessels of the Jews used by Belshazzar for the feast on the night of Babylon's destruction (Dan 5). Why did God raise up Cyrus? To carry out His salvation plan of the Jews, exiled for seventy years in Babylon. Does God use any modern-day Cyrus to side with Israel in these last days?

**THOUGHT:** (Read Proverbs 21:1.)

**PRAYER:** I praise Thee, Lord, for Thy deliverance in due time.

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## WHAT ISRAEL (WE) SHOULD KNOW OF THE LIVING AND TRUE GOD

Knowledge of “*the living and true God*” (1 Thess 1:9) increases faith.

1. God is One and there is none else. Monotheism is true, not polytheism. He alone is to be worshipped (Isa 45:6).
2. God is the Creator of the universe, man and the earth. He forms both light and darkness. He creates good and evil, evil not in the moral realm (sin), but rather in the physical, such as judgments on the wicked. We see herein the theology of war (Isa 45:7-8, 11-12).
3. God is the Maker of mankind, but Israel has He specially chosen. He is not only the Omniscient but also the Sovereign One. He is the Potter, we are the clay (Isa 45:9-10).
4. God is He who “*raised him up in righteousness,*” i.e. Cyrus, the great Persian conqueror (Isa 44:28; 45:1). He will liberate God’s people and command that the Temple and the City of Jerusalem be rebuilt. Egypt, Ethiopia and the Sabeans will be subdued before Israel by God’s determination (Isa 45:13-14).
5. God is a God of righteousness and salvation, especially to His scattered people in Babylon. He is against idol-makers (Isa 45:15-16, 20).
6. God knows the end from the beginning (Isa 45:21). Salvation is of the Lord. It is given to the whole world, to as many as will turn to Him (Isa 45:22-25).
7. The earth that God has created will not be so destroyed that no man can live in it. God has decreed it to be inhabited. Isaiah 45:18 is of particular consolation to us who live in these end-times of threatening nuclear holocaust. Thus, Jesus at His Second Coming will not only save His own, but will preserve civilisation on earth as well. Dr Carl McIntire in his 1983 Christmas message said of Jesus, “‘I am Alpha and Omega,’ He insisted, assuring the survival of mankind and of His creation.”

**THOUGHT:** (Read Isaiah 40:22.)

**PRAYER:** May I study Thy Word diligently to know Thee more.

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## WHEN BABYLONIAN GODS TUMBLE!

In prophesying the fall of Babylon to the Persians, Isaiah captured a full-lens picture of tumbling Babylonian gods! These who were the awesome objects of worship (eg. the great image erected by Nebuchadnezzar). These who were the guardian spirits of the nation!

Bel is another form for Baal, which reminds us of Elijah's contest on Mount Carmel with the 450 prophets of Baal. Bel was the principal god of Babylon. Nebo or Nabu was his son. The kings of Babylon were surnamed by him like Nebuchadnezzar and Nabonidus.

Isaiah saw the chief gods of the Babylonians went into captivity at the fall of Babylon, like the subjects that were under their protection. Isaiah satired of these gods, standing so rigidly erect in the temples, who were then laid low, piled up (on carts probably), and drawn away by beasts of burden. These idols not only could not save themselves but were also a heavy burden to those assigned to carry them away. These had fallen from their lofty heights where they were worshipped for ages. As the Chinese saying goes, "The clay idols when crossing a stream can hardly keep body and limb together."

In contrast, there is the living and true God of Israel who has protected Israel all the days of their life. How ridiculous it is therefore for Israel to make gods of gold and silver and fall down in worship before them! Israel is called again to return to the One True God. Do Christians need to be called out of idolatry? Is not the mighty dollar our god today? "*Ye cannot serve God and mammon*" (Matt 6:24).

God knows the end from the beginning as proven by His prediction of Cyrus to be the salvation of Israel. Cyrus is described as "*a ravenous bird*" (Isa 46:11) to denote the swiftness of his blitzkrieg.

**THOUGHT:** (Read Psalm 135:15-18.)

**PRAYER:** Help me, O Lord, never to have any idols in my life.

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TUESDAY, AUGUST 16

ISAIAH 47

PSALM 23

*“The LORD is my shepherd;  
I shall not want.”*

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## FROM MISTRESS TO SLAVE GIRL

The fall of Babylon is described by the prophet in poetic language. In a song of derision, Babylon was likened to a gentle lady now stripped of her fine clothes and made to sit in the dust. A mistress so high and mighty, she then became a slave girl. Clad only in her underwear with her “*shame*” (Isa 47:3) exposed, she was made to grind in the mill. This was God’s judgment on her haughtiness and self-deification (Isa 47:8) and upon her cruelty to His chosen people, the Jews. Though God had delivered Judah to Babylon in chastisement, Babylon showed little mercy to her prisoners-of-war as revealed by Isaiah 47:6, “*upon the ancient (the old people) hast thou very heavily laid thy yoke.*”

Babylon is further described as a widow deprived also of her children. Her destruction came in a moment, in one day, when she least expected. This was literally fulfilled on November 3, 538 BC, as attested by the Cylinder of Cyrus which records Cyrus’ conquest of Babylon: “Without battle and without fighting Marduk (the chief god) made him enter in his city Babylon.”

Isaiah 47:12 taunts Babylon if all her sorceries and enchantments she had practised from the days of her youth, i.e. since the Tower of Babel (Gen 11:1-9), would save her from the sudden destruction. Babylon, the city of merchants, could not escape being burned.

“Though this chapter focuses on the Babylonian Empire that was crushed by Persia,” says Ryrie, “Babylon in the Bible is also a symbol of organised humanity in rebellion against God.” Read Revelation 17 and 18 in the light of Isaiah’s prophecy.

**THOUGHT:** The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines Babylon as “Capital of Chaldean empire; any great empire or vicious city; Rome, the papacy (ref. to Rev. XVII etc.), London, etc.”

**PRAYER:** Lord, men’s kingdoms come and men’s kingdoms go. Only Thy Kingdom is an everlasting Kingdom!

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WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 17

**ISAIAH 48**

PSALM 24:1-5

*“The earth is the LORD’S,  
and the fulness thereof...”*

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## **JEHOVAH’S UNILATERAL LOVE FOR A WAYWARD PEOPLE**

The destruction of Babylon was determined seventy years before, so Jeremiah prophesied (Jer 25:11-14; 29:10). On one hand, Babylon was to be destroyed for her own sake in retribution for her sins. On the other hand, the destruction of Babylon was in order that the Jews might be returned to their homeland. But this was not because the Jews deserved it. Rather, it was the reverse.

Isaiah 48 is Jehovah’s declaration of unilateral love for His wayward children. Though they were called the people of God, and they called on the name of the Lord, at heart they were idol-worshippers (Isa 48:5). They were a treacherous lot (Isa 48:8), willing to give honour to their idols than to the Holy One of Israel, who saved them. Matthew Henry said, “The very calamities they were now groaning under in Babylon, God did from the beginning declare to them by Moses, as the certain consequences of their apostasy from God (Lev 26:31, etc., Deut 28:36, 29:28). He also declared to them their return to God, and to their own land again (Deut 30:4; Lev 26:44-45). Thus he showed them how he would deal with them long before it came to pass.”

God also showed by the prophets new things of their own day. Surely, Jeremiah’s predictions of the Jews’ seventy-year exile and of Cyrus their liberator (Isa 48:14-15) were new predictions only God Himself could give. Had the Jews obeyed God and kept His commandments then their peace would flow like a river. Nevertheless, though now they were an isolated people in captivity, the Lord had come to redeem them out of Babylon and the Lord would provide for all their needs as they took their long journey home through desert lands. But those who remained unconverted would find no peace. What a picture of God’s wayward children in any age! (Read Jeremiah 44.)

**THOUGHT:** (Memorise Lamentations 3:22.)

**PRAYER:** I thank Thee, Lord, for Thy everlasting love.

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## THE SERVANT OF JEHOVAH TESTIFIED OF HIS CALL AND MISSION

We had a first glimpse of the Servant-Messiah in Isaiah 42:1-7. Here we see Him testifying of His call and mission. The “*servant*” here is called Israel (Isa 49:3) and yet He is “*to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel.*” This means He is one outstanding member of the Israelite nation who will revive Israel. Who is He? From such references as His being named while in His mother’s womb (Isa 49:1) and His being made a light to the Gentiles, we can identify this Servant of Jehovah to be none other than our Lord Jesus Christ. Can you find New Testament references to His “*mouth like a sharp sword*”? Isaiah 49:4 seems to speak of the Servant’s discouragement. But in Isaiah 49:7 we are assured of a day when kings and princes will worship before Him. Has not the Gospel conquered the hearts of kings and governors since the Saviour’s coming? (Read Psalm 126:5.)

Isaiah 49:8-12 speaks of His mission. The Servant would restore the land to the Jews. Those exiled to Babylon were to be set free. God would provide for them and make their return journey smooth sailing. While it is true that some 50,000 Jews were the first to return to Jerusalem after the fall of Babylon to Cyrus, the prophet saw a greater deliverance of Gentile believers far beyond this context.

Isaiah saw them coming from the north and west (where no Jews were taken in exile) and from the land of Sinim. Dr MacRae, this writer’s teacher, identified Sinim to be China in his book “The Gospel of Isaiah,” against modern critics who equated Sinim with Syene (Aswan of Egypt). The Chinese translation of Sinim is “the kingdom of Qin.” What can it be but China? The mission of Christ is worldwide.

**THOUGHT:** One report estimated that there were 67 million Chinese Christians in China in 2010.

**PRAYER:** O Lord, grant me understanding to discern the signs of the times.

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### THREE ARGUMENTS AGAINST DESPONDENCY

Despite the wonderful promises to Israel in Isaiah 49:1-12 followed by the doxology in Isaiah 49:13, Israel mourned in despair (Isa 49:14). This is characteristic of humanity. God answered Zion’s despondency with three arguments:

1. *“Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? ...”* (Isa 49:15). Ans: God’s love for His people is greater.
2. *“Shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or the lawful captive delivered?”* (Isa 49:24). Ans: God who is greater will overcome.
3. *“Thus saith the LORD, Where is the bill of your mother’s divorcement, whom I have put away?”* (Isa 50:1). Ans: God has not forsaken Israel. Though He punishes her for her transgressions, His relationship with her, which is compared to that of a husband to a wife, will never be broken.

In addition to these answers, the Lord gave a beautiful glimpse of blessings to Israel in the more distant future (Isa 49:17-23). The children of Zion will be far more numerous than ever before. They are not necessarily natural children. These are new branches grafted into the olive tree (Rom 11:24). This looks to the extension of the knowledge of the true God throughout the world (MacRae).

As to God’s superior power to man’s (Isa 49:25), this verse should give great comfort to Christians living in Communist-dominated lands, where meetings for prayer and worship are brutally disrupted, further observes MacRae. He observed also that chapter and verse divisions are not in the original. Isaiah 49 should conclude at Isaiah 50:3 whereby the three arguments are grouped together.

**THOUGHT:** (Read Psalm 103:8-9.)

**PRAYER:** Lift me up when I am down, O Lord my God.

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## THE SERVANT OF THE LORD SPEAKS OF HIS DOCILITY AND HUMILIATION

The Servant was first introduced in Isaiah 42:1-7. We saw Him again in Isaiah 49:1-12. This is the third time He comes into view.

He speaks of His prophetic ministry. He is *“learned,”* which being a passive participle in Hebrew, shows He is well-trained. He has been trained to hear God’s Word. MacRae saw in this word *“learned”* His very close relationship with His Father (John 8:28). Do preachers speak what they have been taught of the Lord through His Word? Or do they *“steal my words every one from his neighbour”*? (Jer 23:30).

Isaiah 50:5-6 reminds us of His trial before the crucifixion.

Isaiah 50:7 is enacted in Luke 9:51, where we see the Lord *“stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem.”*

Isaiah 50:8 sees Him encouraging Himself in the Lord though opposition stood in His way.

Isaiah 50:9 shows His confidence of victory in the Lord, but His adversaries would decay like a worm-eaten garment.

The Servant concluded His soliloquy with an invitation to the godly (who are going through a dark situation in their life) to look to the Lord. Has not He shown them the example?

But the ungodly who struggle vainly to find the light by lighting their own fire have only so much of light as sparks coming out of their own efforts. They can only end up tired out. They will lie down in sorrow. Their end is death.

Having heard the Servant’s testimony of His humble learning from God and of His humiliation, have you put your trust in Him? Or are you striving fruitlessly on your own?

**THOUGHT:** (Memorise 1 Peter 5:5.)

**PRAYER:** Keep me always humble and obedient to Thee, O Lord my Redeemer and King.

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## A MESSAGE OF COMFORT TO THE FAITHFUL

No matter how dark the apostasy of God's people, there is always a remnant of the faithful. To them is sent this message of comfort. In as much as God had called Abraham and Sarah their ancestors and blessed them, so will He continue to bless His own. Zion, the holy city of the land they love, will see a restoration from the barrenness of a desert to the greenness of Eden. Yea, the blessings will flow beyond the nation of Israel *"to the isles,"* i.e. to the ends of the earth. Light will shine on those afar off from His law and judgment.

The faithful are reassured of God's everlasting mercies upon them, that though the universe that He has created will pass away and all who dwell therein, His salvation shall be forever. When they look upwards to God they will not be afraid of men and their reproach. For who are these who oppose the faithful of Zion? They will surely perish, and when they die they will be eaten of worms. What a comforting message is Isaiah's for the faithful remnant of God's people today. Where is Stalin? Where is Hitler? These arch-enemies of God's people have perished forever, but God's kingdom marches on.

Isaiah 51:9 introduces us to a responsive prayer by God's faithful ones calling on Him to save as He had done in ages past. God's arm had cut Rahab, a poetic synonym for Egypt (Ps 87:4), and the dragon is in reference to Pharaoh (cf. Ezek 29:3). Isaiah 51:10 describes how God had delivered Israel through the Red Sea when He executed judgment on Egypt.

In Isaiah 51:11, with assurance from God's mighty acts of salvation in the past, the Lord's redeemed will surely return to Zion with joy.

**THOUGHT:** God will deliver us who trust in Him from every danger and despair.

**PRAYER:** O Lord, keep me ever faithful through every trial and tribulation.

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MONDAY, AUGUST 22

ISAIAH 51:12-52:6

PSALM 25:19-22

*“Let integrity and  
uprightness preserve me...”*

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## **GOD’S THREEFOLD ANSWER TO THE FAITHFULS’ PRAYER**

In answer to the faithfuls’ prayer, *“O arm of the LORD, awake”* (Isa 51:9), there comes a threefold reply from God.

The first answer is from Isaiah 51:12 to 16. *“I, even I, am he that comforteth you.”* When we draw near to God, we will not be afraid of man. Knowledge is power, knowledge of God gives overcoming power. Let us remember He is the Creator of heaven and earth, the Worker of miracles even over natural forces. He is the God of revelation, and the God of providence. What is it for Him to set them free from captivity and to provide them bread to eat?

The second answer is from Isaiah 51:17 to 23. Hitherto Jerusalem has suffered like a mother whose sons are brought low by warfare and famine. Her sons are like an antelope caught in a net, Jerusalem is made to drink the cup of God’s fury to the last dregs. But the time will come when God will remove this cup of fury and trembling of her punishment and give it to her oppressors.

The third answer is from Isaiah 52:1-6. Here God exhorts His people to be strong, to clothe herself in beauty and holiness. She will not only be freed from captivity but also from uncleanness. Recalling Isaiah 50:1 when they were sold for their iniquities and God received nothing from that sale, so will they be redeemed without money. Salvation comes as a free gift, it cannot be bought. Isaiah 52:4 looks back to the hard days of Egypt and the oppression under Assyria. Under subjugation, God’s people passed their days in agony while they heard the Name of their God blasphemed. But now God has come to put an end to all this. They will hear God’s voice again, and not the threats of their enemy.

**MEMORISE:** *“It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the LORD.”* (Lam 3:26)

**PRAYER:** As for me, I will call upon Thee; and Thou shall save me.

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TUESDAY, AUGUST 23

ISAIAH 52:7-12

PSALM 26:1-6

*“Examine me, O LORD,  
and prove me...”*

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## THE RETURNEES COME HOME!

This is a poem in exaltation of the Second Exodus. These who had been cooped up in Babylon were now set free. These first of the returnees to Jerusalem, bringing good tidings of the Lord's salvation, received a chorus of joyful singing from the watchmen, those faithful ones who had been looking for the redemption. Paul applied Isaiah 52:7 to the itineration of preachers of the Gospel.

As the returnees arrived back in Jerusalem, more song would break out because she was now being restored. This is like the joy a captive city like Singapore experienced when the Japanese masters were overthrown and the Allied forces landed to liberate the people.

The return of the Jews from Babylon would not be a stealing away, but would be as a great and honourable event to all nations. Those who saw this would recognise that God was with His people, yea, even through Cyrus the new power that toppled Babylon.

Isaiah 52:11 contains a command to the returnees to purify themselves: *“Be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the LORD.”* The sacred vessels and utensils that Nebuchadnezzar had captured from Solomon's Temple as trophies of war would now be returned by new royal decree. Hence the need to cleanse themselves. (Read Psalm 24:3-4).

Isaiah 52:12 reaffirms their honourable return under the decree of Cyrus. Moreover, the Lord promised to lead them in front and protect them at the back. The returnees were promised journeying mercies for their Second Exodus.

**THOUGHT:** “Anywhere with Jesus I can safely go, Anywhere He leads me in this world below. Anywhere without Him dearest joys would fade, Anywhere with Jesus I am not afraid. Anywhere, anywhere! Fear I cannot know! Anywhere with Jesus I can safely go.”

**PRAYER:** Lead on, O King eternal! May I follow Thee all the way.

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## INTRODUCTION TO THE SUFFERING SERVANT

It is unfortunate that Isaiah 52:13-15 should be detached from Isaiah 53, which is the heart of the Gospel Prophet's message and one of the most famous chapters of the Bible. As a result, these introducing verses to Isaiah 53 are left out in the reading. But in the original manuscripts there were no such chapter and verse divisions.

These few verses are an introduction and summary of the life and work of the Suffering Servant. Here is God's endorsement of the Servant's work that it will "*prosper*" (MacRae). It reminds us of David, His ancestor according to the flesh (Rom 1:3), that "*David went on, and grew great, and the LORD God of hosts was with him*" (2 Sam 5:10). It will not only "*prosper*," but will also be highly exalted, as God Himself is "*high and lifted up.*" What name today is as great and honourable as Jesus?

But the Servant must stoop to conquer. Before exaltation, He must go through humiliation. Previous passages on the Servant have given us glimpses of His humiliation (Isa 49:4, 7; 50:6). Isaiah 52:14 describes the cruel lashings He underwent in His sufferings (Matt 26:67-68; 27:27-30) so much so His facial features were distorted. He was spat upon to take away our loss of face, and the crimson of our shame!

Isaiah 52:15 concludes this introductory paragraph by summarising the results of His humiliation. He will "*sprinkle*" (i.e. "cleanse") many nationalities by His precious blood. This "*sprinkling*" is an Old Testament ceremonial practice, such as the sprinkling of blood and water for purification which Peter had in mind when he wrote of "*Elect ... unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ*" (1 Pet 1:2). By His death whereby His precious blood was shed, many people from many lands will be saved. Kings will marvel at this "*new and living way*" (Heb 10:20).

**THOUGHT:** The New Testament counterpart in Philippians 2:5-11.

**PRAYER:** Truly, the Bible is Thy Word, O Lord! May I treasure it.

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## THE LOWLINESS OF THE SERVANT DESPISED

The following is an adaptation of Matthew Henry’s exposition: The prophet here foretells, with wonder, the unbelief of the Jews, notwithstanding the notices they had of the Messiah. Observe here, 1, The contempt put upon the Gospel of Christ, v.1. To this day, of the many who profess to believe this report, few cordially embrace it and submit to its power. They do not discern, nor will acknowledge that Divine power which goes with the Word. While unimportant reports are eagerly received, the authentic and most important report, of salvation for sinners through the Son of God, is disregarded. 2. The contempt they put upon the person of Christ, because of the meanness of His appearance, v.2, 3. The low condition He submitted to, and His appearance in the world, were not agreeable to the idea the Jews had formed of the Messiah. He was the Son of David, but He sprang out of this royal and illustrious family when reduced and sunk. This is meant by His being a root out of dry ground.

...The manner of His appearing in the world had nothing of outward glory. His gospel is preached, not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but with plainness. He was a man of sorrows acquainted with grief... We never read that He laughed, but often that He wept.

Carnal hearts see no excellency in the Lord Jesus, nothing that should induce them to desire an interest in Him. Men whom He came to save rejected Him, and His sufferings mean nothing to them. Christ, having undertaken to satisfy the justice of God for man’s sin, did it, not by divesting Himself of the glories due to an incarnate Deity, but by submitting to the disgrace due to the worst of men and malefactors. Thus He glorified His Father... But alas, by how many is He still despised in His people, and rejected of men as to His doctrine and authority.

**THOUGHT:** “The way of the Cross leads home.”

**PRAYER:** “Take my life, and let it be consecrated, Lord, to Thee.”

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## THE SERVANT SUFFERED IN OUR STEAD

Modernist and liberal theologians teach that when Christ suffered, He was merely setting us an example. While it is true we should follow Him in His sufferings, it must be emphasized that His sufferings were in our stead, “*For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit*” (1 Pet 3:18). His sufferings were substitutionary and vicarious, i.e. in our stead. But do we understand this? Surely He suffered not for His own sake, but for our sakes. “*Christ died for our sins*” (1 Cor 15:3), not for any sin on His part. Yes, it is by His substitutionary sufferings that we are exempted from suffering the penalty of our sins. By the pains He bore on the cruel tree, we are spared the punishment of hell justly due to us. The “... *chastisement of our peace...*” (Isa 53:5) is a re-statement of His substitutionary sufferings. “...*with his stripes we are healed*” (Isa 53:5) does not teach an automatic healing power through His sufferings though. If it pleases God, we are healed in Jesus’ Name.

Christ suffers our punishment not only for our wilful sins, but also for many careless transgressions we commit, like sheep going astray. He saves us to the uttermost. There is no merit that we can claim. The merit is all His, by His saving act through suffering in our stead. And “...*all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags...*” (Isa 64:6).

In these verses we have a perspicuous picture of the doctrine of substitutionary atonement. The substitutionary atonement, which is attacked by modernist and liberal theologians as a “denominational” doctrine, is being refuted. It is a universal doctrine, a cardinal doctrine, of the whole Church. Any denomination denying the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ is cut off from His saving grace!

**THOUGHT:** “For me, for me, He shed His blood for me; He bore my sins at Calvary. ‘Twas for me Jesus died — For me, for me.”

**PRAYER:** I thank Thee, Lord, for Thy great sacrifice for me.

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## STEP BY STEP TO HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION

Here is a marvellous description of how the Suffering Servant was led to His death step by step. Isaiah 53:8: *“He was taken from prison and from judgment...”* MacRae renders it “an oppressive judgment” which gives the sense Jesus was the victim of judicial murder. We have Pilate’s triple declaration: *“...I find in him no fault at all”* (John 18:38; 19:4, 6). It is by such unjust judgment that we are released from condemnation. In order to achieve our release, He allowed Himself to be accused without a murmur (Isa 53:7).

*“...who shall declare his generation?...”* (Isa 53:8) is a rhetorical question on His having no posterity, for was He not cut off at such a young age? For our sakes, He was cut out of the land of the living. For our transgressions He was stricken. His substitutionary atonement!

Isaiah 53:10 reveals that the Servant’s suffering in the above manner is according to God’s plan. This truth is expressed in Revelation 13:8: *“...the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.”* His sacrifice was a sin (guilt) offering for our sakes, which once again emphasizes the sinfulness of sin. No one can cure this spiritual cancer except this Suffering Servant by the shedding of His precious blood. The generations and generations of His spiritual descendants are here declared of all who will come to trust in Him. The seed of the Christ are the Christians!

*“...he shall prolong his days...”* (Isa 53:10) refers to continuing life in Him, that He would not die like men, but will rise from the dead, i.e. the Resurrection! This was given infallible proof by His appearances to the disciples for forty days before He ascended on high.

**THOUGHT:** “Hallelujah, Christ’s ascended, Seated now on God’s right hand: Salvation by Him perfected, From the dead He rose in triumph!”  
(Chia Yu Ming)

**PRAYER:** May I always remember Thy sufferings and death for me.

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## WHAT SATISFACTION? WHAT KNOWLEDGE?

An adaptation of Matthew Henry's exposition of Isaiah 53:11-12 follows:

He shall Himself have abundant satisfaction in it, v.11. He shall, with prospect of His sufferings, have a prospect of the fruit. He shall see it accomplished in the conversion and salvation of sinners.... Faith is knowledge of Christ, without knowledge there can be no faith. Knowledge of Christ and that faith in Him, by which we are justified, have reference to Him, both as Servant to God and Surety for us. He that is Himself righteous, for He could not have made atonement for our sin if He had sin of His own to answer for, is made of God to us Righteousness, the Lord our Righteousness (*Jehovah Tsidkenu*, Jer 33:16). We must know Him, and believe in Him, as one that bore our iniquities — saved us from sinking under the load by taking it upon Himself.

He shall have the glory of obtaining victory and universal dominion, v.12. Sin and Satan, death and hell, the world and the flesh, are the strong foes He has vanquished. Much of the glory with which Christ is recompensed, consists in the vast multitudes of willing, faithful subjects that shall be wrought on by the grace of God, to give themselves to Him, to be ruled, taught, and saved by Him; hereby He shall reckon Himself abundantly recompensed for all He did and all He suffered. What God designed for the Redeemer He shall certainly possess. I will divide it to Him: the spoil the Father divided to the Son, He divides among the followers; when He led captivity captive, He received gifts *for* men, that He might give gifts *to* men. Through Him we are more than conquerors; He has divided the spoils, the fruits of His conquest, to all that are His: let us then cast in our lot among them.

**THOUGHT:** "When free grace awoke me by light from on high, Then legal fears shook me, I trembled to die; No refuge, no safety, in self could I see, Jehovah Tsidkenu is all things to me."

**PRAYER:** How I praise Thee, O Lord, the Conqueror of death!

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MONDAY, AUGUST 29

ISAIAH 54:1-10

PSALM 30

“Sing unto the LORD,  
O ye saints of his...”

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## FROM HUMILIATION TO JUBILATION

If humiliation is the word for Isaiah 53, jubilation then fits Isaiah 54. As a result of the suffering unto death of the Servant Messiah, exuberant life breaks forth in His forlorn spouse. Israel in exile is likened to a barren woman, a wife of youth forsaken by her husband, Maker and God of the whole earth (Isa 54:5). “*The shame of thy youth*” which commentators think refers to Israel’s bondage in Egypt and “*the reproach of thy widowhood*” to captivity in Babylon, will be forgotten when the Holy One of Israel, emerging from His momentary anger (because of Israel’s sin) pities to take her back because of His ever-abiding love and to His ever-constant faithfulness.

When God expresses His love to Israel as a loving Husband to an estranged wife, then Israel will become a fruitful mother again with many children. These children comprise both the physical and spiritual. They are the increased numbers of the Israelite nation in her future restoration (today they number over six million in Israel alone) and the greater multitudes of the engrafted from the Gentiles.

In the circumstances Israel was instructed to increase her habitat, to extend the canvass of her tent. God’s saving plan, working out of Israel, will bring in many spiritual children from the Gentile nations. William Carey, father of modern missions (1792) quoting Isaiah 54:2-3, stirred a slumbering England to foreign missions with these words: “Expect great things from God. Attempt great things for God.”

Does this passage from Isaiah challenge us to greater endeavours for God? What is your vision in the work of the Lord? Too many church leaders today are confined in the ivory towers of their profession. Too many church-goers see no further than the four walls of their sanctuary. We need the vision of Wesley who said the world was his parish. We need the spirit of Carey to do greater exploits for God.

**THOUGHT:** (Memorise Carey’s famous words.)

**PRAYER:** Enlarge my vision and use me, Lord, to do greater works for Thee.

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TUESDAY, AUGUST 30

ISAIAH 54:11-17

PSALM 31:1-6

*"In thee, O LORD,  
do I put my trust..."*

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## FROM TENT TO TEMPLE

In the first part of Isaiah 54, the prophet used the figure of a tent for a dwelling place of the restored wife and her children. In the same vein, he then advanced from the tent to a temple, from a mobile to a more permanent abode. What further comfort was given to the estranged wife of the Holy One of Israel!

"Now she (the Jewish Church) is in disgrace, but God promises that which will be her beauty and honour... Also that the glory of the New Testament Church shall far exceed that of the Jewish Church; not in external pomp and splendour, but in those gifts and graces of the Spirit which are infinitely more valuable? Things which the children of this world lay up in their treasuries, and often in their hearts, the children of God make pavements of, put under their feet, the fittest place for them" (adapted from Matthew Henry).

Do not the precious stones mentioned by Isaiah here find a counterpart in Paul's instruction to the church in Corinth? "*Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest...*" (1 Cor 3:12-13)? And do we not see them reappear in Revelation 21?

"But its meaning is translated into non-pictorial terms in vv.13ff where the 'righteousness' of v.14 and the impregnability of vv.15-17 are rooted in the fact of universal personal discipleship (v.13; cf.8:16; Jer 31:34) which is one of the marks of the new covenant. This is the true strength of God's city, which is promised not immunity from attack, but the unanswerable weapon of truth (v.17; cf. Lk 21:15)." (New Bible Commentary, Revised)

**THOUGHT:** "*Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?*" (1 Cor 3:16)

**PRAYER:** "*My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise.*" (Ps 57:7)

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## FROM ONE TO ALL

Here the prophet looked beyond Israel to the whole world, from one to all! This is the Gospel invitation to everyone who despairs of the futility of life without God, who begins to thirst and yearn after Him.

The Gospel is the good news of the Saviour Jesus Christ. He is water, living water that gives everlasting life (John 4:14). From Him comes *"the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby"* (1 Pet 2:2). He is the Bread of life, *"which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die"* (John 6:50). Wine, the fruit of the vine, was used at the Last Supper as His blood, for as He gave the cup to His disciples, He said, *"Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins"* (Matt 26:27-28). Wine which was used by the Good Samaritan with oil to bind up the wounds of the victim of robbers bespeaks the healing from the ravages of sin by our Saviour Jesus Christ. The Lord is given to us freely (being priceless, it cannot be bought with money). He is offered to us by the means of grace, through the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper — to everyone that thirsts, that imbibes of His love.

How do we eat of Him? Not so much with our mouth, but, as John Sung said, by our ears. *"Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live"* (Isa 55:3). *"So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God"* (Rom 10:17). In this regard, we see how important preaching as a means of grace is! *"...and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?"* (Rom 10:14). This Gospel invitation is to be broadcast to all inasmuch as it is reiterated by our Lord before He left this earth: *"Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature"* (Mark 16:15). In the work of extending the Gospel let us pray that God will raise up more preachers (1 Cor 1:21). The most effective way of giving out the Gospel invitation to everyone is from mouth to ear.

**THOUGHT:** (Read 2 Timothy 4:2.)

**PRAYER:** Use me, O Lord, to share the Gospel with the lost.

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## HE WHO INCURS WILL ALSO SECURE!

God not only spreads the Gospel feast at a great price paid by Himself, He also promises to secure it for us. The Gospel invitation is assured with *“an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David”* (Isa 55:3). God promises, on His own initiative to bestow us, miserable lost ones, the mercies of David’s Greater Son, Jesus Christ. All His mercies are covenant mercies. They are dispensed to us by His death (Acts 13:34). They are very sure because in Christ the promises are yea and amen (2 Cor 1:20).

“Now, we know not how to find our way to the waters, but Christ is given to be a Leader. We know not what to do that we may partake therein, but He is given as a Commander to show us what to do, and enable us to do it. We have spiritual enemies but we have a good Captain: a Leader and Commander to put us in possession of the land of promise. Christ is a Commander by His precept, and a Leader by His example. Our business is to obey Him and follow Him” (adapted from Matthew Henry).

The feast shall be furnished with guests. Who are these guests? The Gentiles, hitherto seen afar off in the distant horizon. Today the Gospel has been received by many nations. Gentile nations that have received Christ are accepted as Israel, God’s chosen nation. Has not God promised His Son? *“Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen (nations) for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession”* (Ps 2:8). What message do we derive from this promise? We are commissioned to go and teach all nations (Matt 28:19). How many nations has your church evangelized thus far?

**THOUGHT:** If we go forth with these covenant mercies of Christ, He will be with us always to the end of the world.

**PRAYER:** Indeed, Lord, woe is unto me if I preach not the Gospel.

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**“WE COME TO THEE WITH EMPTY HANDS,  
WITH CONTRITE AND LOVING HEARTS”**

As it has been stated by the prophet Isaiah in the introduction of this sermon, the salvation offered in the Gospel feast cannot be obtained by payment of a fee (Isa 55:1). Hence the abomination of indulgences as practised by the Roman Catholic Church. These indulgences, translated “forgiveness tickets” in Chinese, were a means whereby the Pope had used to enrich the Church. This sparked off Luther’s protest and the nailing of his famous 95 theses on the door of the Church at Wittenburg. Says Professor Philip Schaff in his “History of the Christian Church”: “The idea of selling and buying by money the remission of punishment and release from purgatory was acceptable to ignorant and superstitious people, but revolting to sound moral feeling. It roused, long before Luther, the indignant protest of earnest minds...” (Vol. VII, p. 148). When rich members of the church persisted in their immorality by giving money to the church, Luther denounced them to perish with their money in hell. Have you also given to the church with the idea of buying your way into heaven?

Our coming to terms with God is not cash, but contrition — broken hearts in repentance. The salvation offer, freely without price, is to everybody, to every sinner, to the Christian backslider, to the unconverted. Christians need to repent when they fall into sin. The unconverted can never enter God’s Kingdom without a turning away from their wicked ways and a forsaking of their evil thoughts. Have you ever knelt down to God to pray the penitent’s prayer, “God, be merciful to me a lost sinner”?

**THOUGHT:** (Memorise Isaiah 55:6-7.)

**PRAYER:** “We come to Thee with empty hands, No merit of our own we bring, Simply to Jesus’ cross we cling, Our cries attend. With contrite and with loving hearts, We seek Thy pardon and Thy grace; Joy of salvation and of praise to us impart!”

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## **“O THE HEIGHT AND DEPTH OF MERCY”**

The height of God’s salvation plan can never be reached by man’s puny reasonings. Nor can the fullness of His redemption be measured or fathomed.

God’s salvation plan is made known to a lost world by the preaching of His Word. His Word when it was declared first by His holy prophets and apostles in times past, and expounded by preachers today, is bound to yield lasting results. It works on men’s hearts as rain on the earth. It is powerful to cause parched lives to spring to life, as rain will make the ground sprout and bear fruit. Preachers of the Word must have this assurance of a bountiful crop before they can declare God’s Word in power. Unless the preacher has faith in the Word he preaches, how can the hearer find faith in the Word whom he preached? As it is written, *“from faith to faith”* (Rom 1:17).

Like the Jews being liberated from Babylon to return to their homeland would be greeted with fanfare by sons of the soil so that hills and mountains would echo to their singing and the trees also to their clapping, so will messengers of the Gospel be resoundingly welcomed by those to whom they bring the good news. *“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good...”* (Isa 52:7; Rom 10:15).

The Gospel transforms lives. The earth now well watered brings forth fir trees and myrtle trees, instead of thorns and briars. From dwarfish meanness to towering benevolence, *“that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified”* (Isa 61:3). Is your life a thorn bush that causes wayfarers hurt and annoyance? Or a tree that gives shade and shelter, even to birds and animals? (Matt 13:31-32)

**THOUGHT:** How has the Gospel transformed my life?

**PRAYER:** (Use Ephesians 3:18-19.)

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### **“WHEN JESUS COMES”**

What must we do when the Saviour comes? Those who are His own are expected to “double your guard against sin” (Matthew Henry). We are to be honest and just in all our dealings. Observance of the Lord’s Day is a test of our communion with Him. The blessing of keeping the Lord’s Day holy is strength and direction to do our work during the week. Those who are not blessed by the Lord on His Holy Day become restless and desultory during the week.

As for those who are strangers, *“aliens from the commonwealth of Israel”* (Eph 2:12), Gentiles such as we once were, the Lord extends a cordial welcome. Similarly to the eunuch. Every eunuch was barred from joining the Israelite congregation (Deut 23:1), but now he is given a permanent place and a good status in God’s house with absolute guarantee, if he takes hold of God’s covenant and obeys Him, keeping His Sabbath. Is this not a picture of the degraded of mankind being given a place in God’s family when they turn to Him in repentance?

Strangers, sons of strangers, Gentiles, and the most dejected ones are given joyful participation in worship in God’s house because of their humble reception of the Gospel message. Their sacrifices will be accepted upon His altar inasmuch as our love-offerings today are a sweet-savour sacrifice before His throne through Jesus’ Name.

The Temple in Jerusalem, while being confined to the Jews, but abused in New Testament time so that it became *“a den of thieves”* (Matt 21:13), in fact, was a forerunner to the Christian Church, where all people, of every nation and tongue, may worship. Today, there is not the restriction as in olden days to worship only at one place appointed by the Lord (Deut 12:5-14), but everywhere, so long as they come through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

**THOUGHT:** (Memorise Isaiah 45:22.)

**PRAYER:** Lord, may I always remember that it is a privilege to worship Thee on the Lord’s Day.

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MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 5

ISAIAH 56:9-12

PSALM 33:6-11

*“By the word of the LORD  
were the heavens made...”*

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## JUDGMENT ON PROFESSIONAL PASTORS

While the Lord is ever merciful to the repentant and conscientious, He cannot condone those servants who forget their commission and neglect their duties. He is against the shepherds of Israel, the priests and the prophets turned professional. Micah, who lived in the time of Isaiah, thundered, *“The heads thereof judge for reward, and the priests thereof teach for hire, and the prophets thereof divine for money...”* (Mic 3:11).

These shepherds were worse than the sheep dogs they reared to help watch over the flock. Hence they were called blind, ignorant, dumb dogs that could not bark (Isa 56:10). They took their job for a sinecure, so that during working hours they would be lounging around, falling into siesta. And when they woke up they would acquire a good appetite. They were called greedy dogs, never satiated. They were called shepherds that could not understand, but they knew how to enrich themselves. They got drunk and got others drunk together with them. A devil-may-care attitude pervaded this frivolous fraternity of blind professional watchmen over the house of Israel. Ezekiel 34:1-9 has a scathing indictment against the shepherds, yea the pastors, of his day. Bishop J.C. Ryle noted that the great majority of the clergy of his day knew little beyond the Name of the Christ they preached. They were a similar, accursed race, who occupied a holy office but made it thrice unholy by their professionalism. So it is with our day. The churches abound with false pastors.

As a result, the sheep without proper care or nurture are scattered. In judgment God sends them wild beasts to devour them. So, as the Church provides little to feed the flock, the flock scatters, eaten up by the wolves of temptation and lust. And who is to blame? The blind shepherds, the Dumb Dogs (D.D.), notwithstanding their titles by the same initials! Church leaders, pastors, session members, beware!

**THOUGHT:** I must pray for the leaders in my church.

**PRAYER:** (Use John 6:27.)

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**“IT IS OF THE LORD’S MERCIES THAT  
WE ARE NOT CONSUMED” (Lam 3:22)**

Further to the indictment of professional pastors, Isaiah 57 now takes on the people. The emphasis is shifted from the shepherds to the flock (though there is always a remnant of the faithful).

The *“righteous”* will not meet with calamitous death that overtakes the wicked, such as war and pestilence. The *“righteous”* will be relieved of such torment by dying a peaceful death (Isa 57:1-2).

Who then are the wicked in this context that deserve punishment? These are catalogued in Isaiah 57:3-13. The abominations listed here fit into the reign of Manasseh (2 Chron 33:1-10). The chief sins catalogued here are sorcery, falsehood, idolatry, child-sacrifice, “stone worship.” Involved in all these heathen cults was the Canaanite fertility cult. The allusion to *“bed”* (Isa 57:7) hints at the connection between idolatry and adultery (temple-prostitution). *“Behind the doors”* (Isa 57:8) suggests the setting up of some idol in private, house worship, as against the sacrifices made *“upon a lofty and high mountain.”* In verse 9, *“the king”* in Hebrew could mean Molech, the chief of the Ammonite gods (1 Kings 11:7). Costly perfumes were used by those who undertook long “pilgrimages” and were willing to debase themselves unto hell or “make obeisance to Sheol.” These deluded idolatrous children of Israel would wear themselves out in their pursuit of idols, which they thought would help them. Read Jeremiah 44:15-19 for an understanding of Isaiah 57:11. For all these abominable practices, the wayward ones would be scattered, but the faithful shall be established. Isaiah 57:15 expresses a wonderful condescension from the everlasting, holy One to every humble spirit. It was so in old times, it is so today. For those who persist in their wickedness, Isaiah 57:20-21 warns that they will be like the troubled sea, without any peace.

**THOUGHT:** I must choose to be humble, not wicked.

**PRAYER:** (Use Psalm 139:23-24.)

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## RELIGIOSITY IS A DIFFERENT KIND OF RELIGION

From idolatry, the prophet turned to a more deadly sin that plagued God's people: the hypocrisy of religiosity. What religiosity? That of feint-fasting (Isa 58:1-12) and sabbath desecrating (Isa 58:13-14).

Fasting was practised in the Old Testament. The Day of Atonement was a Fast Day in which *"ye shall afflict your souls"* (Lev 23:27). Occasions when Israel fasted as a nation before the Exile to Babylon are recorded in Judges 20:26, 1 Samuel 7:6, 1 Kings 21:12, Jeremiah 36:9. After the Fall of Jerusalem, those who were taken to Babylon began to observe certain Fast Days to commemorate the disasters the nation went through (Zech 7:3-5; 8:19). These Fasts were instituted by man, not by God.

Whatever Fast the prophet was denouncing in Isaiah 58, it was the insincerity of their observance that was denounced, i.e. the hypocrisy of their religiosity. If a fast is to be kept pleasing to the Lord, that vertical line of devotion must be complemented by the horizontal line of caring for the poor and needy. Read James 1:27. Or as Shakespeare has it: "My words fly up, my thoughts remain below; Words without thoughts never to heaven go" (Hamlet, Act III, Scene 3). Religiosity is a different kind of religion.

The Sabbath is here mentioned a second time, which shows how much this Day of Holy Rest had been desecrated. Resting from our work and pleasure to go to church on the Lord's Day, which is the Christian Sabbath, cheerfully and not wearily, is a good test of our love for God. If we love Him indeed, we will love His day. Let it be emphasized that the whole of the Lord's Day, from 6 am to 6 pm by Jewish reckoning, should be spent for Him and His Cause alone. We should refrain from "all needless works, words, and thoughts, about our worldly employments and recreations."

**THOUGHT:** (Read Hebrews 10:25.)

**PRAYER:** I love Thee, Lord. May I love Thy Day as well.

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## WHY OUR PRAYERS GO UNANSWERED

James said, *“The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much”* (James 5:16). Conversely, Isaiah said, *“But your iniquities have separated between you and your God ... that he will not hear”* (Isa 59:2). Is there anything in your life that short circuits the line of communication between you and the Lord?

The catalogue of evil deeds the prophet published before a rebellious people reads like Paul’s arraignment against a guilty mankind before God’s Tribunal, concluding with that final sentence, *“There is no fear of God before their eyes”* (Rom 3:10-18).

The wicked plots conceived and carried out by these desperadoes of the Jews were likened to the hatching of cockatrice’ eggs and the weaving of spider’s web. Those who ate these snake eggs, who succumbed to their nefarious schemings, ended in death. Take the case of wicked king Ahaz. His plan of bribing the Assyrian king against the northern kingdom of Israel backfired. The Assyrians who brought temporary relief to Jerusalem by invading Samaria suddenly overflowed to the gates of the Holy City. This also was vividly illustrated by Isaiah in metaphor, *“that which is crushed breaketh out into a viper”* (Isa 59:5).

Spiders’ webs, that are cunningly woven to catch flies, portray the lies uttered by the unscrupulous to snare the unwary. But these who prey on others are caught under the searchlight of truth. When wicked men who are likened to snakes and spiders rule, judgment and justice are thrown to the winds. Instead of the light of truth that should be shining bright from the City of Truth (Zech 8:3), their wicked reign brought a pall of darkness over the whole nation. God shall destroy every holy institution that has turned to wickedness and falsehood. Yea, even the end-time Ecumenical church of Revelation 17. Why do our prayers go unanswered?

**THOUGHT:** God is still on the Throne, whatever wicked men do.

**PRAYER:** (Use Isaiah 56:6.)

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**“WHEN THE RIGHTEOUS ARE IN AUTHORITY, THE PEOPLE REJOICE: BUT WHEN THE WICKED BEARETH RULE, THE PEOPLE MOURN” (Prov 29:2)**

In Isaiah 59:9, judgment and justice were cast away from the people. In the verses following, an oppressed people complained against a bad government. Now, Micah, a contemporary of Isaiah, more openly declared, *“Hear this, I pray you, ye heads of the house of Jacob, and princes of the house of Israel, that abhor judgment, and pervert all equity. They build up Zion with blood, and Jerusalem with iniquity. The heads thereof judge for reward, and the priests thereof teach for hire, and the prophets thereof divine for money...”* (Mic 3:9-11). Out of such a situation we can derive a word of wisdom from Solomon, *“When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn”* (Prov 29:2).

As a result of an avaricious, oppressive government, the people became like the blind who groped for the wall, who stumbled at the height of the noonday sun. What a picture of imposed hardship against the common people. These had no way out of their predicament. Their lot was desolation. Is this not a picture of certain places today? O that a good and honest government might continue to prevail over us!

The wicked perpetrators did not realise that what they schemed were exposed by the Lord as lies and plain rebellion against God (Isa 59:15). Do evil rulers realise that sooner or later God the Ruler of nations will catch up with them? This principle is clearly taught in the ups and downs of the kings of Israel and of Judah. It can also be demonstrated from a study of secular history.

One reason why governments go astray from their original good intentions is unbridled power. As the saying goes, “Power corrupts. Absolute power corrupts absolutely.”

**THOUGHT:** (Memorise Proverbs 29:4.)

**PRAYER:** Be merciful to grant us good governments, O Lord.

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### IN TIMES LIKE THESE

In times like these when “*the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn*” (Prov 29:2), “*he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey*” (Isa 59:15), i.e. the righteous will suffer persecution. So it is said that the prophet had sealed his testimony with a martyr’s death, being “*sawn asunder*” (Heb 11:37) according to Jewish tradition. In history, faithful Korean Christians who refused to bow before the Shinto shrine were put into prison by their Japanese masters. Such persecution displeases the Lord.

In times like these the Lord expected someone to rise up and speak out. But He was disappointed. Godly prophets were few and far between. Where can we find another like John Sung? If there is to be another, God Himself must raise him up. “*When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the LORD shall lift up a standard against him*” (Isa 59:19). Isaiah is one that the Lord had raised up. Whom will the Lord raise for our age? One like Isaiah who saw God and heard His call? One like Isaiah who answered obediently? No matter what the situation, no matter where the arena, it is important that the one entering God’s service must experience God’s call. Pastors who leave the sheepfold easily for another should examine themselves if they are hirelings. Preachers who interpret Scripture with grammatical precision but bear no burden for the crying needs of the people can speak only like the scribes.

The Lord will judge His adversaries, enemies of the Gospel, by manifesting His power from east to west. Therefore we shall not despair even when the darkness of an apostate church covers the earth, for darkness must yield to dawning light. Hence in the thickest darkness of the sixteenth century, God burst on the scene like the noonday sun by raising the Reformers, and the Reformers’ watchword was “*Post tenebras lux,*” i.e. “*After darkness light.*”

**THOUGHT:** (Read Isaiah 59:19.)

**PRAYER:** Lord, use me also to lift up a standard against the foe.

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## THE REDEEMER SHALL COME TO ZION

Hebrews 1:1-2 in substance said Christ the Son is the final One to speak after the prophets had variously prophesied in times past. Isaiah 59:20, spoken through Isaiah an Old Testament prophet, confirmed. Isaiah looked forward to the end-times when the Redeemer-Christ shall appear. The prophescope is turned to the far-distant horizon.

In the last days, Christ the Redeemer of Israel shall come and save His people. Christ truly qualifies to be the Redeemer, inasmuch as He being the son of David according to the flesh, is a near-Kinsman. Therefore He has the honour to redeem Israel according to Levitical law (Lev 25:48; Ruth 4:4-6; Jer 50:34).

Now, as to the timing of the Redeemer's Second Advent, this was revealed by Paul to be conditional upon the completion of the redemption of the Gentiles. He said, *"For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins"* (Rom 11:25-27).

Although Israel has returned to her land in 1948, and she has won many a victory against her enemies, the Redeemer of Israel has not yet revealed Himself. This event will not take place until His visible Second Coming to save the Church and to judge the world. The climax of that event is given in detail in Zechariah 14. Let us neglect not to pray for the salvation of the Jews nor forget Israel in our missionary outreach. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob shall yet save Israel His firstborn.

**THOUGHT:** Do I long for the Return of my Lord Jesus Christ? Why?

**PRAYER:** (Use Psalm 122:6.)

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## HOW SHALL THE PEOPLE BELIEVE THE PROPHET?

As Isaiah told the people to look to the day when *“the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob”* (Isa 59:20), how did he know his hearers would believe? Had he not been warned at the beginning of his ministry that the Jews would not take him at his word (Isa 6:9-10)? They would be so dull of hearing and blinded and their hearts so weighed down with fat that God would give them up. Of course this refers to the unconverted and doubly hard-hearted, to the lost and the reprobate. *“Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God,”* said our Lord in John 3:3. For the Jews to see, they need to be converted and illuminated by the Holy Spirit. The prophecies of Isaiah, and for that matter the whole Word of God, cannot be believed until the Holy Spirit has worked a work of grace in the hearers (or readers).

Calvin said therefore that the same Spirit who spoke by the mouths of the prophets should penetrate our hearts, to convince us that they had faithfully delivered the oracles which were divinely entrusted to them. And this connection is very suitably expressed in Isaiah 59:21, as He has covenanted with them. As the Holy Spirit had moved the prophet to speak and remained with the prophet, so He will cause His spiritual descendants to communicate in the same spiritual language. As Isaiah has told us by his prophecy under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, so will we read it with illumination by the Holy Spirit.

It is an undeniable truth, concluded Calvin, that they who have been inwardly taught by the Spirit feel an entire acquiescence in the Scripture. Only those illuminated by Him can believe in the Scripture’s divine origin. How shall the hearers believe? By the same Spirit who caused the prophet to speak and caused the people to hear. If you are led by the same Spirit you will believe Isaiah’s words.

**THOUGHT:** (Memorise 2 Peter 1:21.)

**PRAYER:** Grant me, Lord, the illumination of Thy Spirit that I may fathom the deep truths in Thy Word.

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### “AFTER DARKNESS LIGHT”

In Isaiah 60, the prophet gave a detailed description of that glorious time that shall come to Israel, which he had earlier seen, on and off, such as at Isaiah 2:1-4, when wars shall cease, and Isaiah 11:6-9 when the world of animals will be restored to its original bliss in Eden.

When the Redeemer of Zion comes, Israel will be fully regathered from the Gentile nations among whom she had lived in exile. They will return in plenty with tributes from these Gentile nations. They will come not only in ships but literally fly in (Isa 60:8). A prophetic glimpse of the jet-age? The Gentile nations will contribute to rebuild Jerusalem which will become the capital of the world. Men come to Jerusalem without any hindrance or visa barriers. Indeed, they who come will come to pay homage to the King, who aforesaid were persecutors of the Jews.

Jerusalem will be enriched with all the mineral resources of the world. Her mansions will be embellished with cedar-wood of Lebanon and of hard-wood firs. There will be no more war or outbreak of riots and uprisings. The glory of the Lord who rules over Zion will outshine the sun and the moon. The prophet is here looking beyond the golden millennium to the eternal state. For a thousand years of Messianic rule, Israel will be a land inviolate, belonging to God’s ancient chosen people. Israel will be the ruler of nations instead of being ruled because the Lord has returned to her. How the world now under an increasing pall of nuclear and terror threats must long for that day! But the world cannot enjoy this peace until it comes in full submission to the Christ.

To all the world, read Acts 3:19-21 for the Gospel message.

**THOUGHT:** (Read Psalm 30:5.)

**PRAYER:** I resolve, Lord, to live daily for Thee, my Great Redeemer, and not for the corrupt and perishable things of this world.

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## THE PREACHER BEFORE THE PRINCE

In Isaiah 60, we saw how, when the Lord, the Prince of Peace, will come to Israel in His Second Advent, the nations of the world will pay homage to Him in Jerusalem. In the beginning verses of Isaiah 61, the prophet returned to the Messiah in His First Advent, when His mission was that of a Preacher.

In Luke 4:17-21, Jesus applied this passage to Himself. His preaching was energised by the Lord God by the unlimited anointing of the Holy Spirit. The word "*anointed*" (Luke 4:18) is "Messiah" in Hebrew and "Christ" in Greek. As the Messiah, the Christ, He is sent by God to announce the good news of salvation to the meek, the humble. His message is one of gracious healing to the broken-hearted, one of liberation to the bound ones, yea, even from the prison of sin. His message is not for the self-righteous, but for those who confess their guilt, for the poor and downtrodden who earnestly look up to Him.

An adaptation of what Matthew Henry said follows:

Though the gospel is proposed for all, yet it will not appear glad tidings to any but the convinced, humble sinner.

He was to be a Deliverer. He was sent as a Prophet to preach, as a priest to heal, and as a king to proclaim:

- 1) Peace to His friends... This is the Gospel proclamation, it is like proclaiming the great year of release, (Lev 25:9-40);
- 2) War against His enemies. Christ proclaims the vengeance He takes on sin and Satan, death and hell... Christ triumphed over all these on the cross...

**THOUGHT:** What an example of a preacher is Christ. Is our preaching accompanied by all the graces of a loving Saviour? Do we practise what we preach?

**PRAYER:** I thank Thee, O Lord, for Thy gracious healing of my soul, and the liberation of my soul from sin.

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## ISRAEL THE PREMIER NATION OF THE NEW WORLD

The prophescope, after a brief focus on the Messiah’s First Advent, which our Lord has claimed was directed at His preaching ministry, then turned again to His Second Advent and Millennial rule.

Under the Messiah’s earthly reign, the Jews will restore not only the cities that had fallen into ruins during the exile, but also those that had been lying waste for generations. Gentiles will be employed in subordinate positions on the land, as herdsmen and farmhands, but Israel will be priests and ministers of God. Israel, having suffered much in her checkered history, will be doubly compensated. God will deal justly, and honour those who seek Him in sincerity and in truth. For His covenant’s sake, He will exalt Israel again so that she will be acknowledged by the whole world as God’s chosen people.

In the concluding two verses of Isaiah 61, the ideal Servant of Jehovah spoke again. He identified Himself with the people and slaves in being also clothed with the garments of salvation and the robe of righteousness, an imagery which is the same as that given in Isaiah 59:17 and Isaiah 61:3.

While the earth will be physically and economically restored, we must not forget the spiritual dimension, without which the physical will not last. That is the same principle that will sustain Israel as the premier nation. Psalm 122:1-4: *“I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD. Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem. Jerusalem is builded as a city that is compact together: Whither the tribes go up, the tribes of the LORD, unto the testimony of Israel, to give thanks unto the name of the LORD.”*

**THOUGHT:** “The summer sun shines o’er new Jerusalem, Golden days of peace so divine: Messiah has come to this war-torn earth from heaven, Bestowing rest to weary mankind.”

**PRAYER:** Turn my heart heavenward, O Lord, that it will have no more taste for this world

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## ANOTHER ASSURANCE OF ISRAEL’S RESTORATION

Isaiah 62 reads like Isaiah 54. The Messiah here seemed to be the speaker. He reassured Israel, the forsaken land and people, a day of restoration. In that day when Jerusalem will become the holy city indeed, shining forth in righteousness and dispensing salvation to the nations, she shall be called by the new name Hephzibah (“My delight is in her”) and Beulah (“married”). No more will she be desolate as in days past, no more forsaken like a widow.

As the Jews regard marital bliss the highest blessing on earth, so the prophet here used this figure of speech to describe the joyful rehabilitation of the land when her sons will be regathered to her. The land is the bride, the people the bridegroom. Notice the same metaphor is used in Isaiah 54 of God the Husband and His people *“a wife of youth”* (Isa 54:6).

To doubly emphasize the certainty of that Day of Restoration, watchmen (i.e. prophets) will be raised up, which could include those of the Christian Church, who should herald the Gospel incessantly until Jerusalem becomes *“a praise in the earth”* (Isa 62:7). This is finally sealed by an oath from the Lord Himself who swears by His right hand that Israel in that Day shall be secure from all harassment by her enemies. A picture of millennial peace is expressed in Micah 4:4 as: *“But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the LORD of hosts hath spoken it.”*

The conclusion of this prophecy is dramatized by a calling to the heralds to go forth and summon the exiles to return to the restored City. The call is extended with the lifting of a standard to the people or peoples, even the Gentile nations, *“unto the end of the world”* (Isa 62:11).

**THOUGHT:** Am I prepared to meet my God?

**PRAYER:** Help me, Lord, to watch therefore: for I know not what hour Thou doth come.

## ISAIAH'S VIEW OF THE DAY OF VENGEANCE

*"The day of vengeance,"* first introduced in Isaiah 61:2, is here seen by the prophet in the figure of the lone Messiah-Avenger emerging triumphantly out of Edom after a great struggle.

Edom, the country given to Esau, is traditionally Israel's enemy (Bozrah, a city of Edom). The Edomites had carried off Jewish prisoners as slaves (Obad 10-11). They had allied themselves with the Assyrian invaders and had attacked Judah in the days of King Ahaz (2 Chron 28:17). The prophet, with such a background of a hostile neighbour, was taking Edom as the representative of Israel's surrounding enemies. As he meditated on this state of affairs, he passed into an ecstasy of exultation as he beheld Israel's Saviour return victorious in His battles with the enemy.

The prophet saw Him as one coming out of a winepress, His garment all stained with the red of the vine. Yes, He has done His job trampling on the grapes, a picture rather of His wreaking judgment in righteous anger upon Israel's enemies. This was the Day of Vengeance upon Israel's enemies but the Year of Redemption of God's people.

A preview of God's judgment and day of vengeance is given in Isaiah 2:10-22. A post-view of this Edom slaughter is revealed by John in Revelation 19:11-21. This will be the climax of the welter of earthshaking events that must come to pass before that Day of Golden Millennial Rule can dawn on this war-torn earth.

**THOUGHT:** "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."

**PRAYER:** Lord, keep me faithful till the very end.

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## A PSALM OF THANKSGIVING FOR DELIVERANCE

As the Crossing of the Red Sea is commemorated with the Song of Moses (Exod 15), it is appropriate that the triumph of the Messiah-Avenger is extolled with a psalm of thanksgiving for deliverance.

The psalm began with an acknowledgement of God's lovingkindness as from a father to his children (Isa 63:16). How wonderful to know that God to the redeemed ones (are you one?) is a loving Father. God saved them by *"the angel of his presence"* (Isa 63:9). What an assurance as we are also promised by our Lord, *"And, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world"* (Matt 28:20). After praise came confession of sin. When we come before God, measured in His righteousness, we are totally undone! God cannot condone sin.

As Israel remembered God's past acts of deliverance by Moses, she prayed for renewed mercies. She claimed God to be her Father. Though Abraham and Israel were their fathers, they could not answer their supplication, for they were men.

In Isaiah 63:17, there is a plaintive cry of being judicially cast aside, like Pharaoh whose heart being hardened meant there was no hope for him. But Israel did not lose hope. They argued that they were God's inheritance, so God must save them against Israel's enemies who were never called by His Name, i.e. they were aliens.

This psalm surely fits with Israel of the end times. How ignorant Israel still is of God, not knowing Jesus Christ to be His Son. They will have to acknowledge their sin of waywardness and rebellion before God can save them. This psalm befits every Christian who has backslided and needs repentance, and having been saved, let him praise God for the same lovingkindness He has shown to Israel.

**THOUGHT:** Have I acknowledged my sin and rebellion before God?

**PRAYER:** (Use Psalm 116:12, 14.)

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## FROM THANKSGIVING TO SUPPLICATION

The prophet asked Jehovah not only to *"look down from heaven"* (Isa 63:15), but also to *"rend the heavens, that thou wouldst come down"* (Isa 64:1). And how all the mountains would melt as He comes in consuming fire (cf. Ps 68:8, Exod 19:18).

On Isaiah 64:4 Ellicott commented, "The sense is not that God alone knows what He hath prepared, but that no man knows (sight and hearing being used as including all forms of spiritual apprehension) any god who does such great things as He does. St. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 2:9, applies the words freely, after his manner, to the eternal blessings which God prepares for His people."

In contrast with God's wrath as manifested in His coming to judge the world, God's people, who humble themselves and acknowledge their unworthiness and their sins, are spared. As Israel comes to God as her Father and Maker, and acknowledges she is but the work of His hands, she can expect mercy and pardon.

Isaiah 64:10-12 is a prophetic view of the coming destruction of Jerusalem in the days of a later prophet, viz., Jeremiah. This is cited in support of Israel's supplication to God for mercy.

**THOUGHT:** *"But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away."* (Isa 64:6)

**PRAYER:** "Have Thine own way, Lord! Have Thine own way! Thou art the Potter; I am the clay. Mould me and make me after Thy will, While I am waiting, yielded and still."

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## GOD ANSWERS HIS PEOPLE

As Isaiah supplicated on Israel's behalf, so he was then inspired to answer on God's behalf. Yes, Jehovah condescended to answer though His people did not seek Him. They sought Him only when trouble came, while God was seeking them everyday, all the way!

Isaiah 65:1-7 tells of the complete departure of a people from their God, eg. they sacrificed not to the Lord God, but in gardens, under trees after Canaanite rites. They burned incense on "*altars of brick*" (Isa 65:3), literally "on the bricks," possibly on the roofs of houses (Jer 19:13). They went to the graves and monuments, most probably to pray to their dead ancestors, which can be seen today if you visit Rachel's Tomb at Bethlehem or the Tomb of Abraham and the Patriarchs at Hebron. They ate pork and unclean food in sacrifice, which was prohibited by Mosaic law. They adopted a Pharisaical attitude over the common people. They became a people consumed in the fire of Divine wrath.

But in the impending judgment the faithful would be preserved, as one cluster of grapes of a fruitless vine would induce the farmer to spare the tree. For the faithfuls' sake the land would be inhabited from Sharon the coastal plain to Achor the Jordan valley. But the faithless will be utterly cut off (Isa 65:11-15). What a picture of two types of people: the humble and meek who tremble to hear God's Word, and the wayward and rebellious, whose end is destruction.

The rebellious will leave behind a cursed name (Num 5:21; Jer 29:22-23). What does the mention of your name bring to the mind of the hearers? Association with good or association with evil? "A man's name is his second life," says a Chinese proverb. As to the faithful or obedient they will acquire a new name, eg. Jacob's was changed to Israel. These will speak the truth by calling on the God of the Amen.

**THOUGHT:** (Read Ecclesiastes 7:1.)

**PRAYER:** "Take my life and let it be consecrated, Lord, to Thee."

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## A GLIMPSE OF THE GOLDEN AGE TO COME

The new heaven and the new earth which God will create will come in the form of the Millennial Kingdom. Then, the physical world will be restored to a similar state as when God first created it. But sin will still be present. The capital of that kingdom of God will be Jerusalem.

During the Millennium, how will the human race go on propagating itself? As the curse is lifted, life expectancy will be immensely lengthened, perhaps to a thousand years, like the years of a tree (Isa 65:22). For to live up to 100 years would still be an infant. To die for one's sin at 100 would be considered a curse. The sinful state seems to remain but greatly subdued. As peace will reign supreme, the people will live in full security. Not only in security, but also in happiness and prosperity, many generations together. One's prayer would be quickly answered.

There would be a restoration of the animal kingdom as well. Literally wolves and lambs will live together in peace, because if the lion shall eat straw like the bullock, much more the wolf will revert to its herbivorous state. Even the serpent shall find food in the dust in which he crawls, so he will not strike death, being harmless. Romans 8:22: *“...the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now,”* but then travail and pain will be a thing of the past (compare Isa 65:25 with Isa 11:6-9).

Dear Reader, are you hoping for that day to come? Then, they *“shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea”* (Isa 11:9).

**THOUGHT:** (Read Revelation 20:6.)

**PRAYER:** I thank thee, Lord, for the hope that I can have beyond this world.

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**WHO SHALL ASCEND INTO THE HILL OF THE LORD? ... HE THAT HATH CLEAN HANDS, AND A PURE HEART (Ps 24:3-4)**

Worship is the mother of all virtues, said St Augustine. When worship is formalistic and hypocritical, it makes a mockery of God and His House. Does God who inhabits heaven and earth need man's house to dwell in? God is pleased rather to make His abode with the humble who fear Him and obey His commandments.

Therefore, it is to no avail for those who come to the temple to sacrifice a bullock when in their heart they are plotting murder. To sacrifice a lamb as if they would brutally kill a dog. To offer a grain offering, but it is as abominable as offering pig's blood. To burn incense, but they are no better than praying to idols. Isaiah put it earlier this way: *"For I the LORD love judgment, I hate robbery for burnt offering..."* (Isa 61:8). One way of measuring our devotion to God is how we treat our fellowmen, especially the poor and downtrodden.

God is speaking to His children when they come before Him, but do they listen? Do they respond in their heart to the message they hear from the preacher? Since they persist in their blind errors, He will let them wander in their own delusions. This is judicial blinding of their heart, as the hardening of the heart in Pharaoh's case.

But the humble and sincere who *"tremble at his word"* (Isa 66:5), and those ostracized from high and haughty religious society, the Lord will bless. Their enemies will be openly put to shame. How will the Lord do it?

God uses the rebellion of men to mete out judgment, yea, even fightings inside the Church. *"Surely the wrath of men shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain"* (Ps 76:10).

**THOUGHT:** (Read John 4:24.)

**PRAYER:** May my devotion to Thee, O Lord, be seen in the way I love all my brethren.

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## THE REBIRTH OF ISRAEL AND GLOBAL JUDGMENT TO USHER IN NEW HEAVENS AND NEW EARTH

The climax of history will be the rebirth of God’s people, when “*all Israel shall be saved*” (Rom 11:26) at the second coming of Christ. Israel has been restored as a nation since 1948, but her salvation and rebirth will not come until her King and Redeemer appears.

But Israel’s rebirth cannot come but through fire and sword. This will devour all the unclean and polluted practices, such as “*eating swine’s flesh... and the mouse*” (Isa 66:17). Before Israel is to be delivered by the coming of the Lord on the Mount of Olives, Zechariah tells us that two-thirds will be killed (Zech 13:8-9), because Israel today as a nation is far away from their God.

After Israel’s deliverance from a global holocaust, she will be sent out as missionaries into all the world, to such far off places as Tarshish (Spain), Put (Libya), Lud (Lydia, Asia Minor), Javan (Greece). Israel will go to “*the isles afar off*” (Isa 66:19) to share the Gospel. As a result of this preaching of the Gospel to the remote tribes, many will be won to God. These will come on “*swift beasts*” (Isa 66:20) in an endless stream to worship the Lord in Jerusalem (Isa 2:1-4; Zech 14:9-21). Gentile converts will serve the Lord as Jewish converts, “*for priests and for Levites*” (Isa 66:21). As worship is the mother of all virtues, it will eternally remain the chief occupation in the new heaven and new earth.

But “*the men that have transgressed*” (Isa 66:24) will burn and suffer eternally in hell. What a solemn conclusion to a happy ending of God’s salvation plan. What Isaiah brought to a climax by his prophescope is reflected in John’s concluding chapter in the book of Revelation. Reader, what is the position of your soul before God as you conclude the study of Isaiah, the Gospel Prophet?

**THOUGHT:** (Read Isaiah 25:9.)

**PRAYER:** Even as I thank Thee, O Lord, for saving me, please save my loved ones and friends, too.

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## THE SUPERScription

Superscription means that which is written above or on the outside. By this superscription, Micah 1:1, Micah gave us a clear picture of his person, his ministry, and the times in which he lived.

Micah called himself the Morasthite, i.e. he came from Moresheth (southwestern Judah near the border to the Philistine territory). It is also called Moresheth-gath to pinpoint its location as near to Gath, a Philistine city. Can you find it on the map? As Moresheth-gath is mentioned but once in the Bible, in Micah alone, it must be an insignificant place. But God is no respecter of places, nor of persons. God can use you even if you come from the jungles of Borneo.

*“In the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah”* (Mic 1:1) circumscribes Micah’s ministry within the longer one of Isaiah, whose ministry preceded Micah’s by one king, viz Uzziah.

We can be certain that he delivered his message in Samaria before the fall of this capital city of the Ten Northern Tribes of Israel, 722 BC.

We are strengthened by Micah’s boldness to speak to the highest authorities in both Samaria and Jerusalem. If he a nobody from some country farm had courage, under God, to testify to governors and kings, to withstand the hierarchy of false priests and prophets, let us be strong in our witness even to the leaders of our nation. There is a ministry to the poor, the common people. There is also a ministry to the rich and the powerful. Before God they are the same, of a lost mankind.

Our Lord had warned His disciples: *“And ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles. ... And ye shall be hated of all men for my name’s sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved”* (Matt 10:18, 22).

**THOUGHT:** The Gospel is for all, no one is to be left out.

**PRAYER:** Lord, help me to endure and suffer for Thy name’s sake.

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## MESSAGE OF DOOM TO SAMARIA

Though Micah belonged to the Southern Kingdom of Judah, he had a message from the Lord to Samaria, capital of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. He was so indignant at what was going on in Samaria that he called to earth and heaven to witness against them. He called upon the Lord God Himself who would pour out His wrath on a hypocritical nation. God would send, said the prophet, such terrible punishment that would leave the land utterly desolate. The description of the coming destruction is that of an earthquake, of a volcano and avalanche (Mic 1:4).

Why such a holocaust? Israel was judged for her sin of apostasy from her monotheistic faith. Instead of worshipping Jehovah, the living and true God, Samaria had become a den for all kinds of graven images and idols. The importation of Baalism into Samaria since Ahab's reign had persisted like a cancerous growth to Micah's day. Neither could Judah escape this indictment. So Jerusalem got a side-jab from the prophet at this point as well.

Idolatry was spiritual harlotry (Mic 1:7). Judgment on these idols was sure to come in the impending Assyrian invasion. These idols, unable to save their worshippers, much less themselves, would be taken by the Assyrian king Sargon. He said, *"Shall I not, as I have done unto Samaria and her idols, so do to Jerusalem and her idols?"* (Isa 10:11). The destruction of Samaria was further described as a heap of ruins (Mic 1:6), though Jerusalem was spared until 150 years later. In the light of the impending Assyrian invasion, the prophet saw himself *"stripped and naked"* (Mic 1:8), but would his warning be seriously taken by his hearers?

*"... but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish"* (Luke 13:5).

**THOUGHT:** (Read Isaiah 55:7.)

**PRAYER:** Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner.

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## MESSAGE OF DOOM TO JERUSALEM

Having denounced Samaria in the strongest possible terms, Micah's prophescope then swung over to Judah and its capital city Jerusalem. But the invasion of Judah described here did not coincide with that by the Assyrian. It was something yet future. It took place 150 years later under the sway of Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian hordes.

In this prophecy of a later time, the prophet saw twelve Judean cities and townships in the vicinity of his home town, Moresheth, taken.

*"Declare ye it not at Gath, weep ye not at all"* (Mic 1:10) was the lament after David's mourning of King Saul (2 Sam 1:20), lest the Philistine enemies of Judah rejoice. "Lachish was the most important of the cities enumerated. It was fortified by Rehoboam, and was sought as a refuge by Amaziah from the conspiracy formed against him in Jerusalem. After the capture of the Holy City by Nebuchadnezzar, Lachish alone remained, with Azekah, of the defenced cities of Judah. It appears, from its position as a border city, to have been the channel for introducing into the kingdom of Judah the idolatry set up by Jeroboam in Israel" (Ellicott).

Now, on the names of each of these towns there is a word-play, for example, Aphrah (Mic 1:10) rhymes with the Hebrew word *aphar*, meaning dust. So to the people of Aphrah came the prophet's taunt to roll in the *aphar* (dust). Then for Achzib there is the Hebrew word *achzab*, meaning deceptive. So the people of Achzib were denounced to be a lie to the kings of Israel. It is not necessary for us to go into the word-play in each name of the twelve towns. It is enough to know that such word-play is a form of effective rhetoric in the prophet's message. The concluding verse (Mic 1:16) saw Judah going finally into captivity, naked like the bald head of vultures.

**THOUGHT:** (Read Psalm 42, a psalm for those going into exile.)

**PRAYER:** I thank Thee, Lord, for Thy Word. It is *"a lamp unto my feet."*

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## INDICTMENT AND DELIVERANCE

Micah having denounced both Samaria and Jerusalem for their idolatries then proceeded to indict them on other counts. The crimes were exposed here for our admonition:

1. Plotting and conspiracy night and day (Mic 2:1).
2. Encroachment by force and fraud (Mic 2:2).

To these devourers of the weak, God answered with poetic justice. When the Assyrian captors came into the land, would they not do the same to these wicked landlords who had swallowed up others? It would be a day of brutality over the brutal.

In Micah 2:6-7, the scornful reply to the prophet's threat: Don't prate to us with such idle talk. We would not be embarrassed. Jehovah won't be so impatient to do such things. Had He not promised to deal with Israel graciously, whose ways were upright? Micah countered: "You strip the garments off the back of unsuspecting peaceful wayfarers like taking booty in war. You drive women away from their children. For a tiny thing you exact an exorbitant pledge" (Mic 2:8-10). Such demands were like the Shylockian pound of flesh (Shakespeare).

What a contrast was Micah's message with the false prophet's talk of wine and strong drink. Can a drunkard speak God's Word?

Despite the condemnations, the prophet saw a day when God the Good Shepherd will gather His children like the sheep of Bozrah (a sheep centre). The Messiah in the role of "*the breaker*" (Mic 2:13, that butts open the door) will demolish every obstacle. Jehovah will go before His flock to lead them to peace. What grace, what mercy, that cannot be manifested but by a loving Father. So does He deal with His wayward Church today.

**THOUGHT:** "Thy Blood was shed for me."

**PRAYER:** Thou hast died for me. My life belongs to Thee, O Lord.

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## **PROFESSIONAL PRINCES, PRIESTS AND PROPHETS**

Micah’s indictment which began with powerful landlords grasping lands and houses (Mic 2:2) and leading on to peeling garments off the backs of visitors to the land (Mic 2:8) then climaxed with the flesh of the people being eaten (Mic 3:3, 5). Here we see the law of the jungle being enacted, dripping red by tooth and claw. Who are these beasts of prey that eat up God’s people?

First on the list were the false prophets. A false prophet need not be one who teaches heresy. A professional prophet, whose God is his belly (Phil 3:19) and, said Calvin, “whose religion is his kitchen,” is also a false prophet. We find plenty of them in Micah’s day, in Paul’s day, and in our day. Upon such prophets or preachers in our day, God sends darkness while it should be day. “...ye shall not have a vision...” (Mic 3:6) and “...they shall all cover their lips; for there is no answer of God” (Mic 3:7). No wonder there is no power from many a pulpit today. The reason behind this is that gluttonous eating and drinking have brought drowsiness and drunkenness. As for Micah, he could testify of that pent-up divine power in him that could not be contained. He must release it against the transgressions of the heads of the house of Jacob.

Next on the line were the princes who took bribes and the priests who would not perform their duties until they got paid. Similarly, the prophets “...divine for money...” (Mic 3:11). Hypocritically, they claimed the Lord to be among them. They relied on a make-believe security. They were victims of their own deception.

For the sins of the leaders of Israel, yea, even of Zion (Judah) retribution must come. The land would be devastated and deserted through the ravages of war. Let every nation take note. Let Christians pray for their government. (Read 1 Timothy 2:2.)

**THOUGHT:** (Read Isaiah 56:11.)

**PRAYER:** Work in the hearts of my country’s government, O Lord.

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TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 27

**MICAH 4:1-5:1**

PSALM 49

*“...God will redeem my soul  
from the power of the grave...”*

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## **A GOLDEN AGE TO COME AFTER THE BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY**

One characteristic of Old Testament prophecy is that the prophet, while lamenting over the evils of his day, would invariably look forward to that day when restoration shall come to this sin-cursed earth. Of particular prominence are the glowing terms by which that Golden Age is described in Micah. Micah 4:1-3 = Isaiah 2:2-4 almost word for word. Micah's description transcends even that in Isaiah with Micah 4:4. This verse is reflective of the zenith of prosperity attained by Israel in the earlier part of Solomon's reign, which was a foreshadowing of the Greater Solomon in His millennial rule. New Bible Commentary (pg 756): “This indicates that the final world order will not be any kind of socialist or Marxist state ownership of all property, but every man will remain undisturbed in the enjoyment of his own personal property.”

Before the Golden Age comes, Israel must go through many sufferings, even into exile after exile, when the Lord will come to their rescue and be their King. Before the final regathering, however, Judah must be taken into captivity by the Babylonians (Mic 4:10).

The prophet leapt forward into the distant future again where he saw many nations gathered against Mount Zion. God who is Israel's secret defence will equip Israel with “iron horns” and “brass (bronze) hoofs” (Mic 4:13), with such powerful offensive and defensive weapons that would repel their invaders. The many wars Israel had won against her enemies since her independence in 1948 are progressive fulfilments of this divine guarantee.

In view of the fact that regathered Israel today is fast fulfilling the Messianic prophecies, do you not realise how momentous are the days in which we live? The coming of our Saviour is so near. Are you ready to meet Him? What have you done for His Kingdom?

**THOUGHT:** “Prepare to meet thy God.”

**PRAYER:** Lord, impress upon my heart the nearness of Thy return.

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## BY THE ADVENT OF THE KING OF KINGS

The prophet saw a national crisis in which the judge of Israel was smitten. Zedekiah the last Jewish king was thus humiliated by the Chaldeans (2 Kings 24). Possibly Micah 5:1 was fulfilled when Aristobulus the Jewish king was defeated by Pompey in 63 BC. In contrast with this vanquished king, a new Jewish Ruler was seen to arise from Bethlehem (ancient name, Ephrathah, of Gen 35:19; Ruth 1:1-2). This new ruler is no ordinary human being for His origin is from everlasting. Who is this other than Jesus the Babe of Bethlehem?

Since this Ruler was to save His own people, God would for the duration give up the Israelites for disciplinary judgments. The seed of the woman promised in Genesis 3:15 was to be born in travail, from the womb of the Virgin (Mic 5:3). Christ would defend His people against their enemies, Assyria being the representative in Micah's time. And Christ would defend His people with seven shepherds and eight principal men (the heroes of faith in sacred and Church history).

The end times appeared in the remaining verses of Micah 5. Assyria was symbolic of the area formerly held by the hostile world power. Nimrod was the first founder of Assyria.

The true believers of Israel will be a blessing to all mankind as refreshing showers upon the grass, as they disseminate the Gospel in that Day (Mic 5:7). The victory of Israel over the Gentile powers will not come from the arm of flesh. All their horses and chariots (armoured cars and tanks today) and fortifications will not count in their victory through the power of God (Mic 5:8-11). God's people will also be cleansed from all idols and heresy. The climax is reached when the wrath of God will be rained down upon a rebellious world, such as the world had never seen before.

**THOUGHT:** “From heaven he comes, the Son of God, In clouds of heaven to save His own.”

**PRAYER:** Thou art the Sovereign God who controls all events.

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## REPENTANCE PREREQUISITE TO RESTORATION

This section calling for repentance from their many sins is addressed both to Judah and Israel. While the mention of Omri and Ahab (Mic 6:16) had direct reference to Israel, nevertheless, through Athaliah the daughter, Baalism was spread also to the Southern Kingdom.

The mountains and hills had witnessed God's mercies upon His people from the days of the Exodus to the present. So they were called to testify as the prophet remonstrated with his generation. Their apostasy in yielding to the wiles of Balak and Balaam was one ancient sin mentioned here against them — idolatry and fornication.

Sacrifices costing much money and expense cannot take away sin without repentance. Interestingly Micah 6:8 was chosen by Jimmy Carter at the time of his installation as President of the United States. And what is the use of giving to God on the one hand and cheating on one's neighbour on the other (Mic 6:11-12)?

On behalf of true Israel, Micah further confessed her sins before God, while there was a mourning for fruitlessness.

Morality and integrity had so degenerated as to disappear from the scene. Crime and intrigue ran rampant. Princes and judges were corrupt, and he who bribed well was covered up. The best specimen in the community was no better than a brier and a thorn hedge. The watchmen, i.e. the prophets, warned against their wickedness but in vain. No one could be trusted, not even one's wife. In the family there was strife between the older and younger generations so that a man's enemies were the men of his own house (Mic 7:6).

With this confession the prophet could look to God for salvation. Entrusting himself to God he could face his enemies and their ridicule.

**THOUGHT:** (Read Isaiah 1:8.)

**PRAYER:** I thank Thee, Lord, for Thou art an ever-forgiving God.

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## THE RESTORATION

Micah’s preaching is herewith concluded with another glimpse of the end-times that lead to Christ’s Millennial rule on earth.

In that day when the walls of God’s Kingdom will be built, its boundary will also be extended. God’s Kingdom on earth in Micah’s time will be extended far beyond the borders of Palestine. Her widely scattered exiles from sea to sea will return. Converts from all over the world will join with believing Israel.

There will be a terrible destruction of the earth because of the deeds of her inhabitants. After the destruction of the rebellious world powers, the Shepherd will take charge of Israel, now converted. (Israel today is in deep trouble because she still rejects Christ.) Israel will have full enjoyment of her land, the good land of Bashan and Gilead as in olden days, and not be shut up in Carmel.

God will perform miracles to save Israel as He did in Moses’ day. All the Gentile nations will be reduced to the dust before the manifestation of God’s mighty power.

Remembering his name Micah, the prophet exulted, “*Who is a God like unto thee?*” Not so much in respect of power, but rather of mercy. So the prophet declared his confidence in His compassion. God will “*cast all their sins into the depths of the sea*” (Mic 7:19). God will do this because He is a covenant-keeping God, who has sworn to Abraham and Jacob. This is the Gospel of the Kingdom, the everlasting Gospel unto the end of days.

**THOUGHT:** “All knees before Him bow! The King of Kings, the Lord of Lords will save you now! Repent, Believe; Give Christ your heart. Before His throne all knees shall bow.”

**PRAYER:** Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

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