Synopsis of the Books of the Bible

Isaiah

John Nelson Darby (1800-1882)

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Chapters 9:8 to 12

Israel's chastisement by the Assyrian rod: the destruction of the rod

In Isaiah 9:8 the Spirit, having given the great leading facts as to Messiah, Immanuel, resumes the general history of Israel without any special introduction of the Messiah till towards the end. This prophecy closes with Isaiah 12. Although the pride of Ephraim is mentioned, yet Jacob or Israel is looked at as a whole. The different phases of chastisement or of distress are in verses 8-12, 13-17, 18-21, and Isaiah 10:1-4. The Assyrian then re-appears, as being properly the rod of Jehovah; and it is announced, that when God shall have accomplished all that He had determined with respect to Zion (an accomplishment not here revealed), He will break the rod that He has used, and then the remnant shall seek Jehovah, and shall "stay upon" Him. This is the final act of the great drama of God's dealings with respect to Israel. There is a consumption decreed of God for the land. But when at length the Assyrian lifts up his hand, Jehovah comes in and smites him. And the indignation of Jehovah, and His anger against Israel, which till now had never been turned away, will come to an end in the destruction of this rod that magnified itself against the Lord who used it. Verse 25 is in contrast with Isaiah 9:12, 17, 21, and Isaiah 10:4. Sennacherib was a type of this. But it is a prophecy of the destruction of the Assyrian in the last days, when the indignation against Israel shall cease.

Messiah and the millennial reign

Consequently we have, in Isaiah 11, 12, the Messiah and His reign, the source of the millennial blessing of the people of God. The first verses of Isaiah 11 give His character; afterwards it is the effect of His reign.

Introduction

The whole circle of God's thoughts as to Israel given by Isaiah

Isaiah takes the first place; and in fact he is the most complete of all the prophets, and perhaps the most rich. The whole circle of God's thoughts with respect to Israel is more given here. Other prophets are occupied with certain portions only of the history of this people.

The moral bearing of the book

We will give here the division of this book into subjects. There is in the beginning an appearance of confusion; nevertheless it helps to explain the moral bearing of the book.

And here what a scene presents itself to our view! — sorrowful in one aspect, yet at the same time lovely and glorious, like the first glimmerings of dawn after a long and cold night of darkness, telling of the bright day which soon will rise over a scene, the beauties of which are faintly perceived, mingled with the darkness that still obscures them — a scene that shall be vivified by the sun that will soon

enlighten it. One rejoices in this partial light: it tells of the goodness, the energy, and the intentions of that God who has created all things for the accomplishment of His purposes of grace and glory. But one longs for the manifestation of the fulness of this accomplishment, when all will repose in the effects of this goodness.

The two characters of prophecy

Such is prophecy. It is sorrowful, because it unveils the sin, the ungrateful folly, of God's people. But it reveals the heart of One who is unwearied in love, who loves this people, who seeks their good, although He feels their sin according to His love. It is the heart of God that speaks. These two characters of prophecy throw light upon the two-fold end it has in view, and help us to understand its bearing. First of all, it addresses itself to the actual state of the people, and shews them their sin; it always therefore supposes the people to be in a fallen condition. When they peacefully enjoy the blessings of God, there is no need of displaying their condition to them. But, in the second place, during the period in which the people are still acknowledged, it speaks of present restoration on their repentance, to encourage them to return to Jehovah; and it proclaims deliverance. And in this, the law and so the blessings connected with it, have their place as that to which they should return. Of this the last prophetic word from God (Mal. 4) is an expressive instance. But God well knew the hearts of His people, and that they would not yield to His call. To sustain the faith of the remnant, faithful amidst this unbelief, and for the instruction of His people at all times, He adds promises which will assuredly be fulfilled by the coming of Messiah. These promises are sometimes connected with the circumstances of a near and partial deliverance, sometimes with the consummation of the people's iniquity in the rejection of Christ come in humiliation. It is important to be able to distinguish between that part of a passage which refers to those circumstances which were near at hand, and that which speaks of full deliverance shewn in perspective through those circumstances. This is the difficult part of the interpretation of prophecy.

The use of figures in prophecy

I would add that, although the subject of prophecy is not a figure, yet figures are not only largely used, but they are often intermingled with literal expressions; so that in explaining the prophetic books one cannot make an exact rule to distinguish between figure and letter. The aid of the Holy Ghost is necessary, as is always the case in the study of the sacred word, to find the true sense of the passage. What I have said is equally applicable to other parts of scripture, and in the most solemn circumstances. Psalm 22, for instance, is a continual mixture of figures, which represent the moral character of certain facts, with other facts recited in the simplicity of the letter. There is no difficulty in understanding it. "Dogs have compassed me; the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me, they pierced my hands and my feet." The word dogs gives the character of those present. This way of speaking is found in all languages. For instance, it would be said, "He drew a fine picture of virtue." Drew a picture is a figure. I say this in order that a difficulty may not be made of that which belongs to the nature of human language.

The contents and divisions of the book

I come now to the contents of this important book of prophecy. It is thus divided: — The first four chapters are apart, forming a kind of introduction. The fifth also in itself stands alone. It judges the people in view of the care that God has bestowed upon them. But we shall find this judgment resumed in detail in Isaiah 9:8. In Isaiah 6 we have the judgment of the people in view of the Messiah's coming glory; consequently there is a remnant acknowledged.* Isaiah 7 formally introduces the Messiah, Immanuel, the Son of David, and the judgment upon the house of David after the flesh; so that there is an assured hope in sovereign grace, but at the same time judgment upon the last human support of the people. In chapter 8 we have the desolating Assyrian who overruns the land, but also Immanuel (previously announced in chap. 7) who finally brings his schemes to nought. Meantime there is a remnant, separate from the people, and attached to this Immanuel; and the circumstances of anguish through which the apostate people must pass are alluded to, which terminate in the full blessing flowing from Immanuel's presence. This closes with Isaiah 9:7; so that we have here in fact the whole history of the Jews in relationship with Christ. In verse 8 of chapter 9 the Spirit resumes the general national history from Isaiah 5, interrupted by this essential episode of the introduction of Immanuel. He resumes it from the time then present, pointing out the different judgments of Jehovah, until He introduces the last instrument of these judgments — the Assyrian, the rod of Jehovah. And here the immediate deliverance is presented as an encouragement to faith, and as prefiguring the final destruction of the power that will be the rod of Jehovah in the last days. Jehovah, having smitten the desolator, presents (Isa. 11) the Offspring of David, at first in His intrinsic moral character, and then in the results of His reign as to full blessing, and the presence of Jehovah established again in Zion in the midst of Israel. Thus the whole history of the people is given us in its grand features, until their establishment in blessing as the people of God, having Jehovah in their midst. Only that it is to be remarked that nothing is given of Antichrist, nor of the power of the beast, nor of the time of tribulation as such, because that is the period during which the Jews are not owned, though they be dealt with, while our prophecy speaks of the time when they are owned. It is stated in general terms that God would hide His face from the house of Jacob, and the righteous in spirit wait for Him. {* Note here, the two great dealings of God with the conscience to convict it of sin exemplified in these two chapters. First, the state of blessing in which God had first set the person judged, and his departure from it (so man in his innocence); and second, the meeting of the Lord in glory. Are we in a state to do so? This is largely brought out in the Gospel of Matthew. The passage itself is quoted in Hebrews 2. What is spoken of in Isaiah 8:13-18 is in fact the gospel history breaking in upon the scene. Peter quotes verse 14; Paul (Rom. 9) the stumbling stone; Matthew quotes Isa. 9:1-2 for Christ's apparition in Galilee.}

From Isaiah 13 to the end of chapter 27 we find the judgment of the Gentiles; whether Babylon or the other nations, especially of those which were at all times in relationship with Israel; the position of Israel, not only in the midst of them, but of all the nations in the last days (this is Isa. 18); and, finally, the judgment of the whole world (Isa. 24), and the full millennial blessing of Israel (Isa. 25-27). From Isaiah 28 to 35 we have the detail of all that happens to the Jews in the last days. Each revelation closes with a testimony to the glory of God in Israel.

In Isaiah 36 to 39 the Spirit relates the history of a part of Hezekiah's reign. It contains three principal subjects: — the resurrection of the Son of David as from death; the destruction of the Assyrian, without his having been able to attack Jerusalem; and the captivity in Babylon. These are the three grand foundations of the whole history and state of the Jews in the last days.

From Isaiah 40 to the end is a very distinct part of the prophecy, in which God reveals the consolation of His people and their moral relations with Himself, and the double ground of His controversy with them, whether in view of the position in which He has placed the nation as His elect servant — the witness of Jehovah the one true God, in the presence of the Gentiles, and their idolatrous failure — or in respect to their rejection of Christ the only true elect Servant* who has fulfilled His will. This gives occasion to the revelation of a remnant who hearken to this true Servant, as well as to the history of the circumstances that this remnant pass through, and therefore at the same time to that of the people's condition in the last days, ending with the manifestation of Jehovah in judgment. The position of Israel with respect to the idolatrous nations gives occasion also to the introduction of Babylon, of its destruction, and the deliverance of captive Judah by Cyrus. This idolatry is one of the subjects on which Jehovah pleads with His people. The other and yet graver subject is that of the rejection of Christ. For more detail we must wait till these chapters come under examination. {* This term "servant" is a kind of key to this whole prophecy: first Israel, then in Isaiah 49 the Lord takes Israel's place, at the end the remnant. But of this more hereafter.} The condition of those to whom prophecy is addressed; the use of miracles Prophecy supposes that the people of God are in a bad condition, even when they are still acknowledged, and prophecy addressed to them. There is no need of addressing powerful testimony to a people who are walking happily in the ways of the Lord, nor of sustaining the faith of a tried remnant by hopes founded on the unchangeable faithfulness and the purposes of God, when all are enjoying in perfect peace the fruits of His present goodness — attached, as a consequence, to the faithfulness of the people. The proof of this simple and easily understood principle is found in each of the prophets. It does not appear that the prophets, whose prophecies we possess in the inspired volume, wrought any miracles.* For the law was then in force, its authority outwardly acknowledged; there was nothing to establish; and Jehovah's authority was the basis of the public system of religion in the land according to the institutions appointed by Himself in connection with the temple. It was on practical duty that the prophets insisted. In the midst of the ten apostate tribes Elijah and Elisha wrought miracles to re-establish the authority of Jehovah. Such is the faithfulness of Jehovah, and His patience towards His people. A new object of faith requires miracles. That which is founded on the already acknowledged word, and which does not demand; the reception of it as a new object, requires none, whatever the increase of light or claim on conscience may be. The word commends itself to the conscience in those who are taught of God; and if there are new revelations, they are to the comfort of those who have received the practical testimony, and have thus recognised the authority of one who speaks on the part of God. {* The dial of Ahaz in this prophet may be thought an exception, but Ahaz was really departed from God. It is also noteworthy that the apostles never wrought miracles for their own comfort. Trophimus have I left at Miletus sick. Epaphroditus "was sick nigh unto death, but God had mercy on him, and not on him only but on me also."} We will now examine the contents of the prophecy itself in a more detailed way.

Chapter 1

Blessing proposed consequent upon repentance

Isaiah 1 begins with a testimony to the sad condition of the people. They were all wounds and corruption. It was useless to chastise them any more. Their ceremonies were an abomination to Jehovah. He desired righteousness. Nevertheless the people are called to repentance, and are assured that blessing should follow repentance. Such is the position which prophecy gives them. But God knew the people who, with their princes, were wicked and corrupt; and God declares what will take place. He will execute judgment and thus cleanse the people and re-establish blessing. The two great principles are thus laid down: blessing proposed consequent upon repentance; but in fact it will be blessing brought in by judgment.

Chapters 2 to 4

Zion the centre of blessing: necessity of judgment

Thus re-established, Zion, the mountain of Jehovah, will be the centre of blessing and peace to all the nations (Isa. 2:1-4). This puts the invitation to the people into the prophet's mouth to come and walk in the light of Jehovah. Why has He forsaken His people? Because they have learnt the ways of the heathen. Well, the day of Jehovah shall be upon all the glory of man, and upon all his idols. They may cease from man, for God's own people on the earth, the place of His rest, shall be judged and smitten by their God (Isa. 3, 4). But in that day shall the Branch of Jehovah be glorious, and the earth shall be blessed. He who smites binds up the wounds by introducing the Messiah, and by Him blessing the earth. The remnant will be holy when the cleansing of Jerusalem shall have been accomplished by the judgment and the fire of Jehovah. Jerusalem shall be protected and glorified by the manifestation of Jehovah's presence, like the tabernacle in the wilderness. Such is the form in which the introduction to this prophecy is presented with much force and clearness.

Chapter 5

The vine and its wild grapes

After this the Spirit of God begins to plead with the people, taking two distinct grounds — namely, that which God had done for His people, and the coming of Jehovah in the Person of Christ in glory. Had the people made a suitable return to the care which Jehovah had lavished upon them? Were they in a condition to receive Jehovah in their midst? Chapter 5 takes up the first question, which addresses itself to the responsibility of the people, in view of the care and the government of God. What could He have done for His vine that He had not done? It has produced Him but wild grapes. He makes known the consequences of this according to His righteous government. His hedge, the protection with which He had surrounded it, shall be taken away, and it shall be left a prey to the ravages of the heathen. God, in

pleading with Israel, shews them their sins in detail. Then His hand is stretched forth against His people, and terrible judgments fall upon them. Nevertheless, "His anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still." He will bring mighty strangers against them, whose progress nothing can arrest, who will carry the people into captivity. There shall be sorrow and mourning in the land, and the light of their heavens shall be darkened. In the first instance this will be Nebuchadnezzar, and even Sennacherib but still more fully will it be the nations that come against Jerusalem in the last days, and capture it, after having overrun and invaded all the land. We shall have the details of this farther on.

Chapter 6

Messiah's coming glory: judgment and a remnant preserved

But it was in the counsels of God that His presence should be established in glory in the midst of His people, and this will be accomplished in Christ at the end of the age. Hence the testimony of the progress of the judgments is interrupted after the first general statement, and in chapter 6 the prophet sees this glory. Yet its first effect is judicial, and operates to blind and condemn them. The previous judgment (Isa. 5) had been in respect of the breaking of the law and the despising of the word of the Holy One of Israel. But with enmity against Christ and His rejection comes judicial blindness and the separation of a remnant. That it is the glory of Christ is taught us in chapter 12 of John's Gospel. The prophet feels at once the incompatibility of the people's condition with the manifestation of this glory. Unclean lips cannot celebrate it. But a live coal from the altar cleanses his own lips, and he consecrates himself to Jehovah's message; and to that which concerns the glory of Christ. The heart of the people is made fat until there is entire desolation. Nevertheless there shall be a remnant, a holy seed, which shall be like the sap of a tree that has lost its leaves.* {* A more exact translation throws much light on this prophecy. Nevertheless there shall still be in it a tenth, and it shall return and shall be to be consumed, as the oak and the teil tree, which being cut down have still the trunk [or the rooted stump]; thus the holy seed shall be their stock" (Isa. 1:9). That is, the remnant itself will undergo Judgment and consumption at the time of their return; but there shall be a holy seed, from which life will spring as from a tree cut down.}

The two aspects of God's judgment in chapters 5 and 6

We have then in these last chapters the judgment of the people under two aspects: first, that of God's government (in this point of view the people, being altogether guilty, are given up to the Gentiles); secondly, in view of the glory of Jehovah's presence at His coming according to His purposes of grace (for this the people were unfit). But here, as the purposes of God were in question, there is a remnant according to election in whom the glory shall be re-established. This distinction must be made when the government of God and His outward dealings are in question.

In Isaiah 5, which speaks of the former character of judgment, there is no remnant. It is simply the public and complete judgment of the nation; for as to this all rested on their responsibility. In the Gospels this is looking for fruit; Christ might dig about it and dung it, but this was looking for fruit.

Hence it is cursed and never to bear fruit. That is Israel (man) under the first covenant. In Isaiah 6 God acts within, in His own relationship with the people. Hence we find a remnant and the assured re-establishment of the people; for the gifts and calling of God are without repentance. Here also we find Christ. God could not cast off His people for ever, and the prophetic faith is found which says, How long? as elsewhere it is said, There is none to say, How long? For when the Son of man comes, shall He find faith on earth?

Chapters 7 to 9

The gift of Immanuel, the virgin's Son; the Assyrian's desolation of the land

But this requires further development; and it is given in a remarkable manner in the next prophecy, comprised in chapters 7, 8, 9 to the end of verse 7. Certain promises were attached to the family of David, in which — as we saw when examining the Books of Samuel — God had renewed the hopes of Israel, when the links between Himself and the people were broken by the taking of the ark, and He had forsaken His place at Shiloh. Now the house of David, the last sustainment of the people in responsibility, has also failed in faithfulness. Ahaz has forsaken Jehovah, and set up the altar of a strange god in the temple of Jehovah. In Isaiah 7 the Spirit of God directs the prophet to the king, and addresses him. Isaiah was to go and meet him, with Shear-jashub his son — a symbolical child whose name signifies "the remnant shall return." But the Lord seeks first, as He did with respect to the people in chapter 1, to encourage this branch of David to act in faith, and thus to glorify God. He announces to the king that the designs of Rezin and Pekah shall come to nought, and even proposes to him to ask a sign. But Ahaz is too far from the Lord to avail himself of this, though he replies with forms of piety. And again, as He had done with respect to the people, Jehovah declares that which shall happen to the family of David, and to the people under their rule. The two points of this prophetic announcement are — the gift of Immanuel, the virgin's son; and the complete desolation of the land by the Assyrian. These indeed are the keys to the whole prophecy of Isaiah. Nevertheless there shall be a remnant. Verse 16 refers to Shear-jashub; but this prophecy goes farther. In Isaiah 8 the second prophetic child announces by his name the approaching appearance of this enemy and his ravages; and then, since the people despised the promises made to the family of David and rejoiced in the flesh, Jehovah would take the thing in hand. Consequently we have the whole sequel of the people's history, of the directions given to the remnant, and of God's intervention in power for the establishment of full blessing in the Person of the Messiah.

God's intervention in power: full blessing in the Person of Immanuel

In Isaiah 7, where the responsibility of the family of David is the subject, Immanuel is promised as a sign; but the success of the Assyrian is complete without any reverse. Immanuel once brought in, all is changed; the land is His. The Assyrian reaches even to the neck, because the waters of Shiloah had been despised. But Immanuel secured all. Thus the prophetic Spirit passes on to the events of the last days, of which Sennacherib was but a type. He exhibits all the designs and confederacies of the nations brought to nought because of Immanuel — God (is) with us. It is the complete deliverance of Israel in

the last days (Isa. 8:5-10). And as to the remnant, what course are they to follow? (Isa. 8:11, and following.) They are not to be troubled by the fear of the people, nor to join them in their confederacies, but to sanctify Jehovah of hosts Himself, and give Him all His true importance in their hearts. He will be their sanctuary in the day of their trouble.

The rejected Christ and the remnant

But who then is this Immanuel, this Jehovah of hosts? We well know. This brings in then the whole history of the rejection of Christ, and the position of the remnant and of the nation in consequence, and of the final intervention of the power of God. The passage is too clear to need much explanation. I will point out its principal subjects. Christ becomes personally a stumbling-stone.* In consequence of this the testimony of God is deposited exclusively in the hands and the hearts of His disciples, God's elect remnant. He hides His face from Jacob; but, according to the Spirit of prophecy, this remnant waits for Him and seeks Him. Meanwhile Christ and the children whom Jehovah has given Him are for signs to the two houses of Israel (compare Rom. 11:1-8). Those (the nation) who reject the stone are in rebellion and anguish in Immanuel's land; they are given up to desolation. Nevertheless this distress is not like the former ravages of the Assyrian, because the Messiah, having appeared, has taken in hand the cause of His people, according to the counsels of God. The Spirit of prophecy passes at once, as is constantly the case, from His appearance as light, to the results of the deliverance which He will accomplish in the last days (from Isa. 9:2-3). For the church was a mystery hid in God, and not the subject of prophecy or promise. The yoke of the Assyrian being broken, all the brightness of the glory of the divine Person of the Messiah shines out in the blessing of His people. {* The beginning of verse 17 is the passage quoted in Hebrews 2, along with verse 18, to prove the humanity of the Lord and His connection with the remnant.}

Messiah and the Assyrian the basis of all prophecy as to Israel

These two subjects, the Messiah and the Assyrian, form the basis of all the prophecy that speaks of Israel, when this people are the recognised object of God's dealings. It may be noticed that the Assyrian appears here twice — the second time in connection with a gathering together of the nations. The first time, chapter 7, he is Jehovah's instrument for the chastisement of Israel, and he does his own will without any question of his being broken. The second time, chapter 8, he fills the land; but the assembly of the nations gathered together against Israel is broken and brought to nothing. This expectation of Jehovah's intervention (without sharing the fears of the world in the last days, or seeking that strength which the world think to find in confederation, but, on the contrary, resting absolutely on Jehovah alone) contains in principle a valuable instruction for the present day.

Chapters 13 and 14

Judgment of the Gentiles, the whole world, and Israel's full blessing

With Isaiah 12 one division of the whole book closes. That which commences with Isaiah 13 continues to the end of Isaiah 27, which describes the same millennial condition, but in a more extended sphere, because the world — of which these latter chapters speak — is brought in; while Isaiah 5-12 were in especial connection with Israel.

Present gap of time from Messiah's rejection

The chapters we are now considering connect events that were then at hand with the end of the age. It is only by thoroughly apprehending this that we can understand them. The reason of this is simple: the nations are looked at in reference to Israel. But time is not reckoned, with respect to Israel, from the Babylonish captivity until the last days The introduction of the Messiah as a stone of stumbling, with which the special epoch of seventy weeks is noticed in Daniel, has been already considered. But this passage in the prophet of the times of the Gentiles shews only more distinctly that time is not reckoned afterwards to the close. Seventy weeks go to the full restoration of Israel. The immense gap, which has now lasted more than 1800 years, is in no way taken into account.* {* The seventy weeks, or 490 years, include the great gap which has already lasted more than 1800 years — these coming in between the end of the 483rd and the end of the 490th — only that Christians know that half the 70th week was really fulfilled in Christ's ministry; therefore we get a half week in Daniel 7 and in the Revelation.}

The destruction of Babylon and Assyria in the last days

In the eyes of the prophet, Babylon, or more correctly its head, besides the idolatrous corruption, represents the imperial throne of the world in contrast with the throne of God at Jerusalem.* Babylon will be overthrown, and God will again bless Israel. This will be the judgment of this present age — of the world. It is represented here in that destruction of Babylon which was at hand. But this judgment will not be completed until, the times of the Gentiles being ended, Israel shall be delivered. The character of the king of Babylon is described here in very remarkable language (Isa. 14:12-13). It is the spirit of Babylon, and still more especially in its last representative at the close, to which this prophecy in its full accomplishment refers. It was so even in Nebuchadnezzar himself — nay, even when they built the tower of Babel. The destruction of the Assyrian then takes place in the earth; and, although the house of David had had its sceptre broken, Philistia shall be judged and subdued, and Jehovah will found Zion, and the poor of His people will trust in Him. This destruction of Babylon, and of the Assyrian after Babylon, necessary to the understanding of the whole scene, is a kind of scene apart, complete in Isaiah 13, 14. {* Besides the fact of the captivity of God's people, Babylon has a very important position with respect to God's dealings. Until Nebuchadnezzar received power, the government of God, while centred in Israel (with respect to whom He had set the bounds of the peoples), took cognizance of the nations as dispersed at Babel. He allowed them indeed to follow their own ways; but before Him every nation had an individual existence. The throne once taken from Jerusalem, from whence God governed the world with a view to His chosen people, the world is given up to the dominion of a single throne, which stands therefore before God as holding the sceptre of it. Three other powers followed in succession, the last of which was in existence when Christ came, but the tune of its judgment was not yet come. These four empires form the times of the Gentiles. God will

resume His government, and again judge the nations in view of Israel; and Babylon, or the one universal empire, will be set aside in its rebel and apostate condition. But, while it lasts, the empire has its own peculiar and absolute position before God. Jerusalem, punished for its idolatry by the Babylonish captivity (subjection to idols) and the transfer of the throne from Jerusalem to the Gentiles, is so far owned in the remnant under the Gentiles that God in the prophetic books takes account of it, though not as then His people, till the second grand sin was perpetrated, the rejection of Christ But this even was in the prophet when they were in captivity. Still they were partially preserved to present Christ the Lord to them, after that set aside till sovereign grace comes on them in the last week, for faith the latter half. Time begins to count again when that is come. A proof that the prophecy relates to the last days, for of old the Assyrian fell before Babylon, being conquered by it. It is to be remarked that the Assyrian, not the beast nor Antichrist, is the subject of this prophecy. Under the Assyrian Judah was not "Lo-ammi," nor is he in this prophecy. In Babylon Judah was captive, and "Lo-ammi" written on the people. Hence we must not look for the beast. The Assyrian is the main enemy here.}

But in Israel's territory, or in connection with this people, some nations still remain; and God must dispose of these in order that Israel may enjoy the full blessing and the result of the promises. Babylon, being an immense system, which takes the place of the throne of David, is seen as a whole. The nations, whose judgments are here related (although there is allusion to events nearer the time of the prophecy), are looked at as in the last days, when God resumes His throne of judgment in order to re-establish His people. Thus Nebuchadnezzar had taken Tyre and subdued Egypt. The Assyrian had overthrown Damascus and led Ephraim captive. And these were events comparatively near at hand. But, as a whole, the events spoken of here are owned in the last days. Even in the preceding chapter the destruction of the Assyrian is placed after the fall of the king of Babylon. Yet historically the Assyrian had been subdued by Babylon; and the overthrow of Sennacherib had taken place many years before that epoch. But prophecy always looks to the accomplishment of God's purposes. Here there are generally no details with respect to the instruments employed by God. They are found elsewhere.

Chapters 15 to 18

The judgment of Moab: the last invasion of Israel predicted

In Isaiah 15 and 16 Moab is judged. They are warned that the throne of David shall be established, and the oppressor consumed out of the land. In Isaiah 17 we have the invasion of armies from the north, the assembled nations. Damascus is overthrown. Israel shall be but as a few berries on the outmost branches. Nevertheless they shall look to their Maker, and the gathered nations shall perish before the manifested power of God. The outline of this last invasion of Israel gives rise to a brief but very clear prophecy of their condition in the last days, and which is contained in Isaiah 18. They shall be restored by means of some powerful nation, outside the limits* of their then national relationships; but Jehovah stands apart from His own relationship with them, though ordering all things. Then, when Israel shall begin to bud as a vine in the land, they shall be given up as a prey to the nations. Nevertheless in that time they shall be brought as an offering to Jehovah, and shall themselves bring an offering too. {*The rivers of Cush, Nile and Euphrates.}

Chapters 19 to 23

Jehovah's dealings with the nations: Israel delivered

In Isaiah 19 and 20 Egypt shall be smitten in that day; but Jehovah will heal it. Egypt, Assyria, and Israel shall together be blessed of Jehovah. Isaiah 20 teaches us that it will be Assyria that leads Egypt captive (compare Daniel 11 at the end). It will be observed here, that, in general, from Isaiah 13 to 17 there is deliverance. The sceptre of the wicked is broken (Isa. 14:5). The throne of David will be established in mercy (Isa. 16:5). The Assyrian is destroyed — the Philistines subdued — Zion founded by Jehovah — Damascus reduced. The latter event introduces the evils of the last days. Only, as we have remarked, the gathering of the nations is for their destruction (Micah 4:11-13). Isaiah 18, resuming the subject of Isaiah 17, shews us Israel as they are to be in their land in the last days — oppressed by the Gentiles, but in result brought back to God.

The overflowing scourge: universal overthrow

The chapters following 18 do not, like the previous ones, tell of Israel's deliverance. but of the invasion and overrunning of the nations before mentioned — the overflowing scourge. Egypt is overrun as well as Ethiopia, in which Israel had trusted. Babylon is overcome — Dumah and Kedar destroyed — Jerusalem is ravaged — Tyre falls. In short it is a universal overthrow, the central scene of which is the land of Canaan, but in which the whole world is included (Isa. 24: 4). Even the powers of heaven are overturned, as well as the kings of the earth upon the earth, giving place to the establishment of Zion, the mountain of Jehovah, as the centre of power and blessing, the power of the serpent, the dragon that is in the sea, being annihilated.

The future fall of Babylon and Jerusalem

After this outline attention must be given to some details. It will be observed that Babylon and Jerusalem fall (Isa. 21, 22), one after the other, Jerusalem the last. Now it is quite evident that this connection of events is yet future. That which is said of Babylon and Jerusalem may have found its occasion in the capture of Babylon by Cyrus, and partly in the condition of Jerusalem when threatened by Sennacherib. But there was neither the connection nor the order of events noted in this prophecy. But Babylon is named in a manner that gives no clue whatever to its condition. The "desert of the sea" is a singular term to describe a city. But a dreadful invasion is before the prophet's eyes, and Babylon falls. It comes like a whirlwind of the south, and the power of Babylon is at an end — we are not told in what manner.

Jerusalem, the valley of vision, is ravaged. The Persians and the Medes, who were the invaders of the preceding chapter re-appear here as attacking Jerusalem. There is no fighting outside; but, the city being taken, its inhabitants are bound or slain within it. Besides the prophetic revelations, this chapter contains also moral instruction of the deepest importance In the first place all the wisdom of man is insufficient to ward off evil, if not accompanied by the power of God. When the city of God is in

question, this wisdom, exercised in forgetfulness of the God who built and founded the city of His holiness, is an unpardonable sin (Isa. 22:11). Again, that which is related here was, historically speaking, done by Hezekiah, of whom it is said he prospered in all his works. Outward blessing attended his labours; but, at the same time, the condition of the people, even with respect to these labours, was such that God could not pardon it. This is often the case: outward faith in doing the work of God, blessed by Him, corruption as to state of heart in the thing, which God will assuredly judge, and forgetfulness of God Himself and of their belonging to Him. This is when the people of God lean upon human means. We see also here one who held a settled office, according to man, in the government of the house of David, set aside with shame, and one chosen of God taking his place all glory being given to him (a remarkable prefiguration of the setting aside of the false Christ, and the establishment of the true, in the last days). This prophecy gives room to suppose that the nations will attack Jerusalem when the Babylon of history is a desert. That which is Babylon in those days shall fall. Nevertheless Jerusalem, the object of the prophecies, shall be taken, its government changed; the usurper must yield his place to the chosen One of God.

The burden of Tyre

The burden of Tyre shews us all the pride of human glory stained, and all the honourable of the earth brought into contempt. The occasion is the capture of Tyre by Nebuchadnezzar, but the prophecy goes farther — even to the days when her merchandise shall be holiness to Jehovah (Isa. 23).

Chapter 24

Overthrow of the powers of wickedness in the heavenlies and on the earth

Isaiah 24 sets before us the overturning of everything in the earth. The land of Israel is first in view. But there all the elements of all the systems of this world will be gathered together and judged. We have already remarked that this extends to the judicial overthrow of the power of wickedness in the heavenlies, as well as of the kings of the earth upon the earth: the succeeding chapters shew us with what intent. Without it the evil would not be set aside and put a stop to. Hence when Christ rides into Jerusalem in Luke it is said, "peace in heaven." For till the power of evil is set aside thus, any blessing established on the earth is soon corrupted and fades.

Before examining them, let us retrace the objects of the judgments we have spoken of; let us retrace them in their moral order. We have Babylon, the power of organised corruption, where the people of God are captive; the public open enemy of God and His people — the Assyrian; the inward enemy — the Philistine; then Moab, the pride of man. Damascus is that which has been the enemy of God's people, but allied with the apostate part of that people against the faithful part. From all these the people are delivered. Afterwards we find, under judgment, Egypt, or the world in its state of nature, the wisdom of which is lost in confusion; Babylon, now desert in the midst of the nations; Dumah, the liberty, the independence, of man; Jerusalem, the professing people; Tyre, the glory of the world; and, finally, all that is on the earth, and, to sum up all power, spiritual wickedness in the heavenly places,

and the kings of the earth upon the earth.

Chapters 25 and 26

God's intervention celebrated in song

Isaiah 25 and 26 take the form of a song, in which the effect of God's intervention is celebrated. Let us observe its principal subjects. God is faithful. He accomplishes His purposes. He has brought the city of human pride to nought through His power. All the strong organisation of man's pride is destroyed. God has been the strength of the poor among His people in the day of their distress, and the power of the enemy has been brought low. He will execute justice in Zion for all people. He will take away the veil that is upon their heart. The resurrection of the faithful will have taken place. I say "the faithful," for it is death swallowed up in victory. Moreover, 1 Corinthians 15 applies it thus. The rebuke of His people (Israel) shall be entirely taken away. The remnant (v. 9-12) celebrate their deliverance; they had waited for God, and the power of Jehovah shall be displayed on their behalf. Moab, their haughty neighbour, shall be subdued.* {* Note, you have here all the results then of this judgment of God and what is connected with it. The saints are raised, the power of evil cast down from the heavens, the rebuke of Israel taken away, and the veil of the covering taken off the face of all peoples.}

The praise of the remnant

In Isaiah 26 the remnant sing in praise of the character of this deliverance. They have a strong city, but its bulwarks are the salvation of God. The strength of man has no place here; it is the foot of the poor that treads down the lofty city. It is the judgment that the righteous God executes Himself. The remnant had waited for Him in the way of His judgments. The long-suffering of grace was in vain; it is only when the judgments of God are in the earth* that the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness. Even when the hand of Jehovah was lifted up to strike, they did not see. But they shall see, in spite of themselves, and they shall be ashamed. The fire of Jehovah's jealousy shall devour them; they shall not rise. But Israel shall be raised, as from the dead, by the power of Jehovah. {**I apprehend "the earth" is a more contracted sphere than "the world," the distinction especially lying in this, that it is the sphere in which the revealed ways and government of God have been brought before men. When this has been the case with the whole world, it becomes the earth. The word "earth" is used for the land of Israel and for the earth in the sense explained, and for the whole earth as a scene ordered of God. Hence, when the scene with which God has already dealt is judged, then it is that the wide world at large will learn righteousness; not, though it ought to have been carried there, while the present system of grace prevails.}

Chapter 27

Jehovah's care over His people when He executes vengeance

Finally, Jehovah invites His people to hide themselves a little moment, while He comes out of His place to execute vengeance (Isa. 27). The power of Satan in this world and among men shall be destroyed, Israel preserved and watered as the vine of Jehovah. He had smitten Israel, but only in measure. Nevertheless the people shall be fully judged, and then Jehovah will gather His dispersed, one by one.

In the succeeding chapters we have the details of that which will happen to Israel in their own land, when invaded by the Gentiles in the last days, of which we have had but the general picture and results. We shall find a complete and glorious deliverance of the remnant amidst the most terrible judgments.

Chapter 28

Details of Israel's invasion in the last days: the scourge from the north at Jerusalem

Isaiah 28 sets before us the first elements of these final scenes in the history of this wonderful people. The scourge comes from the north. Ephraim is invaded as by an overflowing torrent, by a tempest of hail that smites and destroys; he is trodden under foot. But in that day Jehovah shall be for a crown of glory to the residue of His people. The people morally besotted, do not hear. And this is the judicial sentence of Jehovah who turns to Jerusalem in pronouncing it. There they had made a covenant with death and the powers of darkness,* that they might escape the overflowing torrent. But the covenant shall be disannulled, the scourge shall overtake them; they shall be trodden down, and smitten by this terrible rod. We have then this revelation, that when Ephraim shall be invaded by this terrible scourge, the princes of Jerusalem will seek to preserve themselves from it by making a covenant with the power of evil. But it shall come to nought. The waters shall overflow and sweep away the refuge of lies. Jerusalem, as well as Ephraim, undergoes the consequences of the assault of the enemy. But the Messiah is the elect corner-stone, the sure foundation for the remnant; he that believes in Him shall not be confounded. Thus Ephraim is invaded and Jerusalem taken. There is a consumption determined by Jehovah upon the whole earth. {* They insolently say they have made a covenant with the power of evil, so that, when the scourge came, it would not come nigh them. Impossible to conceive a more open defiance of God and His judgments. Historically they will have done it in uniting with the man of sin, the Antichrist, whose coming is after the power of Satan; but here it is said in defiance of God. This expression is used elsewhere also, as in Daniel, as a kind of technical formula for the Lord's dealings in the last day — the finishing of the work and cutting it short in righteousness. He judges completely, fills it up, but cuts it short for the sparing of the remnant, the elect.}

Chapter 29

The second attack: Jehovah's deliverance

Isaiah 29. Jerusalem is reduced to the last extremity. But this time Jehovah appears for her deliverance, and the multitude of her enemies disappear as a dream of the night. Everything is dark and gloomy as to the people; all is morally overturned, and soon God will overturn everything by His power, and change

the forest into Carmel (that is, a fruitful field). Henceforth Jacob shall no more be weak and feeble. The meek shall be blessed, the deaf shall hear the word. The terrible one and the blasphemer shall be consumed before Jehovah. There are two parts then in this history, two attacks. The first succeeds against Ephraim and against Jerusalem. The second does not succeed. Jerusalem is brought very low, but Jehovah appears and she is delivered. The spirit of scorn and unbelief was marked in chapter 28; the spirit of blindness in chapter 29.

Chapter 30

Unbelief and trust in man and their result; God's perfect grace

The effect of this unbelief is manifested in Isaiah 30. The people put their trust in man, according to the wisdom of man. They look to Egypt for help, but in vain. This contempt of Jehovah, accompanied by an absolute refusal to hearken to His word, which called on the people to trust quietly in Him, added yet more to their iniquity. God allows the evil, therefore, to go on to the full; but it is in order to give then free course to His grace. Verse 18 is a marvellous testimony to the ways of Jehovah. He allowed the chastisement to be fully accomplished, that nothing might be left for Him but perfect grace. Grace and glory will abound, when Jehovah shall bind up the breach of His people and heal their wound. At the end of the chapter we have the intervention of Jehovah against this last instrument of His chastisements — the rod of Isaiah 10. The Assyrian is destroyed, and in the place where the rod should fall on him, there shall be only songs of triumph. But Tophet, the fire of Jehovah, was prepared for another also — "for the king." He who shall have assumed that title in Israel shall be consumed also by the indignation of Jehovah.

Chapter 31

The true means of deliverance

Isaiah 31. The folly of trusting in an arm of flesh is again pointed out, but only while dwelling on the true means of deliverance. Jehovah at Jerusalem would be in the midst of the nations as a lion among the shepherds, and would defend Jerusalem as birds hovering over it. His presence should overthrow the Assyrian, and cause him to flee; for the fire of Jehovah shall be in Zion, and His furnace in Jerusalem.

Chapter 32

Messiah shall reign in righteousness: full earthly peace

Then, in Isaiah 32, the Messiah should reign in righteousness and set everything morally in order. Zion would in fact be a wilderness until the Spirit was poured out from on high, and then it should become a Carmel; and that which before had passed for a Carmel should be counted comparatively but a

wilderness. Righteousness should be established everywhere, and peace, the fruit of righteousness, when the hail should come down upon the lofty ones who bear no fruit; and the city, the organisation of human pride, should be utterly abased. The last verse appears to me to speak of the blessedness of full earthly peace.

Chapters 33 and 34

The last two great acts of judgment

Isaiah 33, 34 announce the last two great acts of judgment. At the moment when God establishes Himself in Zion, and fills it with righteousness, a final and powerful enemy (whom I believe to be the same as the Gog of Ezekiel), who had come up to spoil the land, appears on the scene. But there are those who wait upon Jehovah, and He arises, and the enemy is put to flight. They gather the spoil of those who thought to despoil Israel. In verses 14, 15, the faithful remnant are distinguished. The Messiah appears in His beauty; and, all being at peace after the destruction of this enemy, the most distant parts of the land are open to the inhabitants of Zion, which is established in safety for ever.

Isaiah 34 reveals the terrible judgments which will fall upon the other nations in Edom (compare Isa. 63).* Here it is those who have oppressed Zion, and the vengeance that God takes on oppressors. Idumea is itself the particular object of this; but all the enemies of Israel, who were associated with Edom, the armies of the nations assembled against Jerusalem, will perish by the judgment of Jehovah in the land of Edom. {* Compare also Psalm 83 and Obadiah.}

Chapter 35

The blessing that succeeds the judgment

Isaiah 35 gives a picture of the blessing that succeeds the judgment, the blessing even of the wilderness, which depends on that of Israel. The redeemed of Jehovah shall go up with joy in full security to Zion, and all mourning shall pass away for ever.

Chapters 36 to 39

Sennacherib's invasion: Hezekiah's sickness unto death: the Babylonian captivity

Isaiah 36-39 relate the history of the invasion of Sennacherib, its result, and the sickness unto death of Hezekiah, which preceded it: an instruction for the remnant as to the manner in which the Lord should be waited on (this deliverance being, as to the substance of it, a figure of that which will take place with respect to the Assyrian in the last days). The sickness of Hezekiah furnishes us with a type of the Son of David as raised from the dead — the power of Christ, which shall be perfected in a nation raised also —

morally — from the dead, all their sins being pardoned. It is the outward and inward deliverance of Israel: resurrection (as to its practical power); and deliverance from the Assyrian. Meanwhile, as a present thing, the captivity in Babylon is announced.

The second part of Isaiah: Israel's moral history

Previously to this, we have rather had the outward history of Israel; but now we have their moral or inward history, in their place of testimony against idolatry, and in their relationship with Christ, and the separation of a remnant.* {* See the next note further on.}

Chapter 40

Comfort beginning with knowledge of helplessness: God's omnipotence in grace

The first part of that which might be called the second book of Isaiah extends from Isaiah 40 to the end of chapter 48. The Messiah is, comparatively speaking, but little introduced here. It is rather the great question between Jehovah and idols, answered first by the success of Cyrus and the capture of Babylon. For, though their glory cannot be separated, there is Jehovah and His anointed. This is evidently connected in grace with the deliverance of Israel, God's witness on the earth, unworthy, as the nation was, to be so. At the same time these ways of God shewed that there was no peace at all for the wicked in Israel. This great truth is repeated twice over, being applied to the two great controversies which God had with Israel. We will point out some details to make all this evident. The first eight verses of chapter 40 express in a very remarkable manner the principles on which God acts: the grace flowing from His own heart, when His chastisements had been fully inflicted. God would comfort His people; and He speaks to the heart of Jerusalem, by telling her that her warfare is accomplished. The herald proclaims the coming of Jehovah. And here it is the fact, as deliverance: His rejection is not mentioned. It is spoken of later in Isaiah 51, 53. But with respect to the people, what must the prophet say? "All flesh is grass." If all flesh is to see the glory of Jehovah, if He pleads in vengeance with all flesh, this is where the testimony must begin. All flesh is grass: Jehovah blows upon it. Is it thus with the Gentiles only? No; "the people is grass." Comfort must begin with this. The grass withers; who, then, can be trusted in? God has spoken. "The word of our God " (says the faith of the remnant — says the Spirit of prophecy) "shall stand for ever." Then comes the prophetic testimony to the blessedness of ransomed Zion, who proclaims to the cities of Judah the presence of Jehovah — the Saviour, whose tender care is then described in a touching manner. The glory of His divine Majesty is contrasted with idols to verse 26. He then challenges Israel for their unbelief. He who is Jehovah faints not, neither is weary. The depths of His wisdom are unsearchable; but they that wait on Him renew their strength, and shall not grow weary.

Chapters 41 to 43

Cyrus raised up to overthrow idolatry: Israel the elect servant of God

Isaiah 41 begins the historical details which prove this. Who raised up Cyrus to overthrow idolatry? But in the midst of the havoc he made of it, Israel is the elect servant of God, the seed of Abraham [1] (this title of "servant" is a key to the rest of the book). He is not to fear: God will uphold him; and they that strive with him shall perish. God will hearken to His poor, and minister to their need. The besotted idolaters of the nations know nothing of what God is about to do in judgment and for the deliverance of His people. {* It will be remarked that, though there is the fullest discovery of Israel's sin, yet these chapters are the expression of grace and sovereign goodness, and a remnant preserved; not the responsibility of the nation and judgment.}

But although Cyrus is Jehovah's instrument for inflicting judgment and for delivering His people, this is but a passing and partial thing. Above all this there is a servant of God, His elect, who will appear in humility and without pretension, but who shall not fail nor be discouraged, till He have set judgment in the earth; and the isles of the Gentiles shall receive His law (Isa. 42). This testimony was needful, and secures the blessing of Israel by the unfailing purpose and grace of God; but nothing more is said of the Messiah in this part of the prophecy. The result of bringing in the work of the Messiah is the glory of Jehovah, who alone in fact shall be glorified, and that unto the ends of the earth. In the manifestation of this glory He who had for a long time held His peace, will deliver His blind and deaf people Israel, who had not understood His ways. He will magnify His law. But why then are the people robbed and spoiled? Jehovah had given them up because of their disobedience.

But now He delivers and saves them (Isa. 43). He created them for His glory. The blind have eyes; the deaf, ears; they are witnesses that Jehovah alone is God. The judgments on Babylon — the commencement and the figure of the final judgments* — prove this. Jehovah had formed this people for Himself, and the people had grown weary of their God; and, as it were, had made Him to serve with their sins. But now He pardons it all for His own glory. Glorious and striking testimony of Him who, in grace to the sinner when the sin becomes unbearable, puts away the sin instead of the sinner! This is what God has done through Christ. {* That is, earthly judgments.}

Chapters 44 and 45

Encouragement and promise: the folly of idolatry when God is their Redeemer

Isaiah 44. Jehovah now reasons with His people whom He had formed from the womb, encourages them, promises them His Spirit. Their children shall spring up as willows by the water-courses. They shall be witnesses for Him, Jehovah, the King of Israel, and their Redeemer. He shews Israel the folly of idolatry, reminds him that he is Jehovah's servant, and that He will not forget them, and assures them of the entire pardon of all their sins: even Jehovah, who is the disposer of all things, and who calls Cyrus by name to rebuild Jerusalem.

Isaiah 45 enlarges upon the same subjects, dwelling on the deliverance of Israel as an everlasting deliverance, the result of which shall never be overthrown.

Chapters 46 to 48

Isaiah 46 to 48 — God's pleading against idolatry; sovereign redemption

In Isaiah 46, 47, the application is made to Babylon and to her idols, but still as pleading for Israel as beloved of God; for governmental judgment is always the deliverance of the beloved righteous. Babylon with all her pride and all her idols must come down and sit in the dust. In Isaiah 48 Jehovah at length pleads with Israel. He specifies Israel, the name of relationship with Himself, Jehovah, which those He is pleading with bear and claim, while noting that they were descended from Judah — in a word, the Jews, who had the place of Israel and called upon the name of the God of Israel; but He declares their wickedness and obstinacy. He had told them many things long before, and had made new revelations to them, that they might know that Jehovah is God. But they hearkened not; they did not understand. Nevertheless for the glory of His name Jehovah would not cut them off; but would refine them as silver. He reminds them in an affecting manner of the blessing they would have enjoyed had they kept His commandments. Nevertheless it is even now declared unto them that Jehovah has redeemed His people. But as for the wicked, there is no peace unto them. This continual pleading against idolatry, whilst giving instruction for that day, seems to prove that, up to the end, the question of Israel's either testifying against idolatry or being defiled with it themselves will have a principal place. For the government of the world it is a primary question. The god of this world governs by means of idols; Jehovah, by His own name. Israel ought to have been the witness of this. They will be unfaithful to it in the last days. This is the reason why there is so much testimony here on the subject.

Chapter 49

Messiah the true servant: God's glorious answer to His rejection

The Messiah is brought in, for it is He who delivers. But it is a question apart, so to say. The subject of Christ, and of the people's guilt with respect to Him, begins with Isaiah 49, which, with the following to the end of chapter 57, forms a whole; and, if one may venture to say so, Christ takes the place of Israel as the true servant of God. As He declared. "I am the true vine."* This makes an apparent difficulty, but gives the true sense of chapter 49. Israel is the vessel of the glory of God on the earth, and the Spirit of prophecy in Israel calls on the isles of the Gentiles to hearken, as being thus chosen of Jehovah. "Thou art my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified" (v. 3). Then Christ, by this same prophetic Spirit, says, "then have I laboured in vain." For we know that Israel rejected Him. Verse 5 is the answer. He shall be glorious. It would be a light thing to restore the remnant of Israel. He shall be the salvation of Jehovah unto the ends of the earth. Here we find a principle that is applicable to the work of Christ, even in the days of the gospel. But for the fulfilment of the counsels of God the succeeding verses carry us on to the millennium. Verse 7, Christ is exalted. Verse 8, He is given for a covenant of the people

(Israel) to secure the blessing of the land of Canaan, and the long desolate inheritance, and then the deliverance of the captives. At length God has comforted His people. Zion, apparently forsaken, must confess that Jehovah's faithfulness is greater than of a mother to her sucking child. Her destroyers are gone, her children flock in crowds to her and replenish her waste places, which regorge with an unlooked-for multitude before the eyes of the astonished mother, long time desolate. Kings shall be her nursing fathers, and shall bow down to her. And although she has been the captive of the mighty, she shall be delivered, and her oppressors trodden under foot. And all flesh shall know that Jehovah is her Saviour. This is the result in grace of the introduction of the true Servant. {* So, I doubt not, in Matthew, "I have called my Son out of Egypt." Christ replaces the first Adam before God, though blessing in that new position many of his children. He takes the place of Israel also, though blessing the remnant and making it the nation.}

Chapter 50

The Person and first coming of the Lord: Christ's sufferings from man

Isaiah 50 enters into the detail of the judgment which God brings upon Israel, and the true cause of their rejection.* Nothing can be more touching, more wonderful, than the manner in which the Person and the first coming of the Lord are presented in this remarkable chapter, which requires not interpretation but devout study. Jehovah, who disposes of the heavens and the earth at His pleasure, has learnt how to speak a word in season to the weary and heavy-laden, taking the place Himself of lowliness and humiliation. Men — sad and dreadful truth! — seized the opportunity to insult and put Him to shame. They would none of Him. The heart pauses before such a truth, and judges itself. But soon also, thank God, it melts before that love which took occasion to introduce man into God's own perfection (and that of man in the divine counsels) and to adapt itself, at the same time, to all his need — to make him feel that it had experienced all his misery. But, whatever the sorrows and trials attendant on such a service the Man, Christ, trusted in God throughout, and turned not away back. {* It is affecting to remark how in both pleadings, as to idolatry, and as to the rejection of Christ, the love and faithfulness of Jehovah and its consequences are introduced before the pleadings of the Spirit of God with the people for their failure in these very points; the resulting blessing before the human evil, God before man. It was so in the counsels of God before the world: the full declaration of the blessing comes afterwards.}

Israel's rejection: the remnant who hearken to God's true servant

Here then is prophetically the cause of Israel's, or more specifically Judah's rejection; — when Jehovah came, there was no man. But, at the same time, with the help of the New Testament, we find the Christian's place in the most clear and striking manner. It is the place of Christ Himself. That which Christ says here the apostle adopts, and puts it into the mouth of the believer* (Rom. 8:33-34). He is identified with Jesus in His position before God. God (thus judges faith) acknowledges Him whom the people have rejected and by so doing have, as it were, forced God to give them a bill of divorcement. Next, this is what distinguishes the remnant — a new and important principle — they hearken to the voice of the servant, the Messiah, to the prophetic word. We have seen the church hidden in the Person

of Christ Himself; here it is the faithful remnant of Israel in the latter day that are specified (v. 10). The rest who seek resources in themselves, in man and in flesh, shall lie down in sorrow. {* These verses in Romans 8 should be divided thus. "It is God that justifies; who is he that condemns? It is Christ that died, yea, rather that is risen again, etc.; who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" In His love He has gone through everything that could make us imagine it possible. They have become the proofs of His love. Moreover it is the love of God: creation cannot separate us from His. I add a brief synoptical view of all these chapters, to aid in seizing them as a whole. Isaiah 40-48 treat the question of idolatry between God and Israel; Isaiah 49-57 that of Christ. Isaiah 49 gives an orderly view of the purposes and ways of God as to Israel and the Messiah. God will be glorified in Israel (v. 1-3). Then Christ has laboured in vain; yet His work is with God. 1st, He will be glorified in the eyes of Jehovah. 2ndly, It is a light thing, the restoration of the preserved of Israel. He is salvation to the ends of the earth. 3rdly, Heard in an acceptable time, He is set as a covenant of the people. Zion is restored. In Isaiah 50 Israel is divorced, because when Jehovah came, there was no man. He had come as man in humiliation in order to perfect sympathy with man in sorrow. Given up to shame, God justifies Him (v. 5-9). This, that is, Christ's justification, is the church's, as we have seen; in verses 10, 11 we have the Jewish remnant of the church. Chapter 50 gives us Christ's sufferings from man; in 53 it is atonement. Chapter 49 gives the glory resulting from Christ's taking the place of Israel, the fruit of His labour; chapter 50 the consequence of His rejection by Israel, yet in grace as to the yet unrevealed church and the remnant which is positively spoken of; chapter 49 has more to do with the government of God.}

Chapters 51 and 52

The remnant encouraged and acknowledged: God's salvation universally manifested

The application is found in Isaiah 51 and 52 to the end of verse 12, and that to the remnant of Israel. In verse 13 a fresh division of the prophecy begins. The remnant in the last days are exhorted to have confidence. Those who follow after righteousness are a little flock; but God had called Abraham alone, and had blessed and increased him; He can do the same for the remnant. Compare Ezekiel 33:24, where we see in what manner carnal confidence, walking in unrighteousness, can imitate, to its own ruin, divine faith. Jehovah will comfort Zion. Verse 4 is the second exhortation. The remnant are acknowledged as Jehovah's nation. His righteousness was near; salvation and deliverance were already gone forth from Him, and should be for ever. In verse 7 there is a further step. They are a people who know righteousness, who have the law in their heart; they are not to fear men who should be devoured by the judgments of God. But His righteousness and His salvation should be everlasting. The remnant, thus set in their place, are revealed by the Spirit of prophecy as owned of Jehovah. The same Spirit speaks by the mouth of the remnant (v. 9), to implore His intervention in power, and to claim the perfect lovingkindness of Jehovah, and the assured salvation of His redeemed ones, as well as the re-establishment of Zion in everlasting joy. The remnant thus encouraged, the Spirit turns to Zion, and even as "Awake! awake!" had been addressed to the arm of Jehovah, so is it now to Zion herself, oppressed and trodden under foot of strangers. As if to say it was Zion that had need to awake, not the

Lord, for the salvation was there. The cup shall now be given to those that afflicted her again. "Awake! awake!" is once more addressed to her, that she may stand up and clothe herself in strength and glory. For Jehovah has made bare His holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of Israel's God. This threefold repetition of "hearken" (v. 1, 4 and 7), followed by the threefold repetition, "Awake! awake!" is extremely beautiful. Isaiah 52:11-12 shew that in those days Israel will be captive among apostate Gentiles, as in the days of Babylon. Verse 13 is closely connected with that which precedes. It is Christ's position in those times of glory and of deliverance wrought by Jehovah. Nevertheless it may be considered separately, and as beginning a new subject, because it forms a whole with respect to the Lord Jesus Himself. Christ shall be very highly exalted in those days. But what had His position been? On this subject the Spirit of prophecy enlarges. The kings shall be astonished at His glory — His whose visage had been so marred, more than any man.

Chapter 53

The affliction of the day of atonement; Christ's work; the confession of the escaped remnant

Isaiah 53. Israel's unbelief is declared. The structure of this most interesting chapter is as follows. As we have seen, in the Psalms and elsewhere, the full repentance of Israel comes after their deliverance. That is, when (as judged of Jehovah) their chastening is over, the glorious manifestation of Christ as their deliverer produces the deep sense of their sin in having rejected Him. This is Psalm 130. It is the affliction of the day of atonement. This chapter (53) expresses it. After verse 1 the Spirit speaks by the mouth of the escaped remnant of Israel. They confess their sin in having despised Him. Nevertheless there is faith now in the efficacy of His work (v. 5). Verse I shews that the testimony of Christ, addressed to faith, had been rejected. They believe when they see Him. I need not comment on this chapter, which is engraved on every true Christian's heart. We, by the work of the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, have anticipated, and more than anticipated, their faith in the value of that work which is here spoken of; and their sin, which, as far as the nation was concerned in it, they here acknowledge. They had esteemed Him smitten, rejected of God, but the meaning of this is now seen. In verse 11, it is my belief that the two parts of Christ's work are distinguished. By His knowledge He shall bring many to righteousness, or instruct many in righteousness, and He shall bear their iniquities.

Chapter 54

The result of confession and Christ owned

Isaiah 54 gives the result of these events to Jerusalem in those days. Jerusalem is looked at as barren and desolate, after having rejected Him who came to be her husband; but now, through that grace which has made Jehovah to be her righteousness, she is called to enlarge the place of her tent, and spread forth the curtains of her habitation. That grace indeed reckons all gathered during her desolation as her children. Christ being owned as the son born to her, all came in under Him (see Ps. 87:5-6). For a little

while God has treated her as a rejected wife, but has now comforted her with everlasting mercies.

Chapters 55 to 57

Full, free grace and blessing: the moral instruction necessary

Isaiah 55, 56, 57 are exhortations given in view of these things. Chapter 55 is full free grace, which consequently embraces the Gentiles. For this reason it can be applied as a principle to the gospel. Its accomplishment will be in the time of blessings to the earth through the Lord's presence. Isaiah 56 gives the moral character that is necessary to enjoy the blessing, which is no longer according to the narrow legal principles of former days. His house shall in fact be a house of prayer for all those whose hearts are truly turned unto the God of Israel; and they shall be joyful in it. Isaiah 57 denounces (we may say, on the same principle) those even in Israel who morally walk contrary to the will of God. The righteous might perish. But it would only be taking them from the evil to come. But whether it were Israel or not, there would be no peace for the wicked. These three chapters then give the moral instruction that belongs to those days. The faithful shall be blessed, and the meek, be they who they may; the wicked shall be judged, whether of Israel or not. Thus closes, as I have said, with chapter 57 the second subdivision of this part of the prophecy.

Chapters 58 and 59

Present sin and hypocrisy denounced

But these moral considerations rouse the indignation of the Spirit at the condition of Israel in the days of the prophecy — their sin and their hypocrisy in pretending to serve Jehovah; and in Isaiah 58, 59 He denounces their trust in outward forms, and places blessing on condition of obedience. It was not that the arm of Jehovah was shortened, or His ear grown heavy; but the iniquity of the people hindered blessing and would bring judgment upon them. Yet, when all had failed and there was no one to maintain righteousness, Jehovah Himself would intervene in His sovereignty and might. He would crush His enemies and judge the isles; so that His name should be feared throughout the whole earth. The Redeemer should come to Zion and to those that turn from transgression in Jacob. Blessing should then be permanent, and the presence of the Holy Spirit abide with the seed of Jacob for ever.

Chapter 60

Jerusalem's future condition

Isaiah 60 gives us the condition and the glory of Jerusalem in that time of blessing: all of the people thus spared would be righteous.

Chapters 61 and 62

The full grace of the Person of the Redeemer

Isaiah 61. As Isaiah 50-53 presented Christ in His sufferings, chapter 61 exhibits Him in the full grace of His Person concerned in the blessing of Israel. The three preceding chapters had revealed the judgment and the intervention of Jehovah, at the same time pointing out the Redeemer. We have seen the same principle in the structure of the prophecy from Isaiah 40 to the end of chapter 48, as in the last series. Then in Isaiah 49 the Messiah is specially introduced. So He is here from the beginning of chapter 61 to verse 6 of chapter 63. But there is a progress necessarily accompanying the introduction, in the last series of chapters, of the Person of Christ as the principal subject of Jehovah's pleadings. We see that it is Jehovah Himself who is Christ, and Christ who is Jehovah. "Wherefore, when I came," is the inquiry, "was there no man?" Hence also there is the difference between the moral sins of Israel against Jehovah, and the rejection of Himself in the Person of the Messiah, which we have seen so clearly pointed out in chapter 50. So also with respect to the repentance of the Jews. In the former chapters the law is written in their hearts; they turn away from iniquity, they trust in Jehovah; they hearken to the Spirit of prophecy, to the servant of Jehovah; they are delivered. But when they shall see their Redeemer in glory, then it is that the true repentance, the deep affliction, shall take place at the sight of Him whom they have despised and rejected, and who in His grace has borne their iniquities.

Chapters 61, 62 appear to me too plain to need much remark. The manner in which the Lord stopped in the middle of verse 2 (Isa. 61) Will be observed, the time for the fulfilment of the last part of the verse not being yet come. But He could set before them that which applied to His own Person in grace.

Chapter 63

Jehovah's judgment and its result

Isaiah 63:1-6. We find again here the terrible judgment of chapter 34 executed by Jehovah (or rather having been already executed, for He returns from it). The result is the peace and blessing which we have just seen described in chapter 62.

The plea of the afflicted trusting remnant

From verse 7 of chapter 63 we have the reasoning of the Spirit of prophecy in the mouth of the remnant, or perhaps that of the prophet, putting himself in that position. And in Isaiah 65, 66 we find Jehovah's answer. Nothing can be more affecting than the way in which the Spirit lends Himself to the expression of all the feelings of a faithful Israelite's heart; or rather in which He gives a form to the sentiments of an afflicted but trusting heart, recalling past kindnesses, overwhelmed by the present distress, acknowledging the hardheartedness and rebellion of which they had been guilty, but appealing to the unchangeable faithfulness of God's love against the judicial blinding and hardening which the people are under. If Abraham acknowledged them not, God was their Father. Where was His strength, His tenderness. His mercies? Were they restrained? Faith recognises through all things the link between the people and God; it acknowledges that God prepares for those that wait on Him things beyond man's

conception* — that He meets those who walk uprightly; and it confesses that the state of Israel is quite different — that they are sinners, not even seeking His face. But the affliction of His people, the disastrous condition into which sin had brought them, is to faith a plea with God. Whatever had happened, the people were to faith as the clay, and Jehovah the potter. They were His people; their cities, the cities of Jehovah. The house in which their fathers had worshipped was burnt up, and all was laid waste. {* The difference between this and gospel knowledge as made by Paul (1 Cor. 2) is striking, often quoted for just the contrary. These things, he says, have not entered into man's heart, but God has revealed them unto us (Christians) by His Spirit; so at the end of the chapter, "but we have the mind of Christ.}

Chapters 64 and 65

God's answer: the full revelation of His dealings in grace; the millennium

The next two chapters give us a full revelation of the dealings of God in answer to this appeal. First of all, God, through His grace, had been sought after by others. He had made Himself known to those who were not called by His name. The infinite and sovereign grace of God had sought out the poor Gentiles. At the same time, with infinite patience, He had stretched forth His hands to a people who would not have Him — to a people who provoked Him continually in the grossest manner. And now He declares His mind. The people that forsook Him shall be judged; He will number them with the sword; they shall bow down to the slaughter. But there shall be an elect remnant in grace — the servants of Jehovah, who shall be spared and blessed (v. 11, 12, 8, 9, 13, 15). Jehovah would then introduce an entirely new order of things, in which the truth of His promises should be acknowledged, and the former things should be quite forgotten — new heavens and a new earth, not as yet with respect to the physical change, but the moral order of which should be entirely new. It should not be only a new order of things on the earth, which the power of evil in the heavens might spoil, as in former days; the state of the heavens themselves should be new. We learn elsewhere that Satan will have been cast out, and his power there gone for ever.* Indeed, this would have been the occasion of the last terrible trials in Jerusalem. But now Jerusalem should be blessed in the earth, and her people should enjoy the gifts of Jehovah in as long a life as that of men before the flood. A man of a hundred years old should be a child; and if any one should die at that age, he must be looked upon as cut off by the curse of God. God would always grant the prayers of His people. Peace should be established, and there should be no evil in all His holy mountain. This is the millennial state of the Jews. {* Hence, when the Lord enters into Jerusalem as Jehovah Messiah, it is said (Luke 19:38) "peace in heaven."}

Chapter 66

The millennium introduced by the judgments of the God of glory

Isaiah 66 speaks of the judgment that introduces it, and consequently gives us more historical details. The temple is rebuilt in Jerusalem (v. 6), but Jehovah does not own it, man alone being concerned in its

building; neither does He acknowledge the sacrifices offered in it. He looks to the meek and contrite spirit. There were some who mocked at the hopes of these, and said mockingly, "Let Jehovah display his glory"; but He will appear to their confusion, and for the blessing of those who waited for Him. Zion shall suddenly be as the mother of a people, blessed in Jehovah and comforted. The remnant is thus distinguished in these two chapters in the most explicit manner.

The use of the word "servant" in Isaiah

Let us retrace here the use of the word servant. First of all it was Israel; then Christ Himself, the only true Servant amidst this people; afterwards the remnant who hearkened to His words as the Servant, or Spirit of prophecy. For the Spirit of prophecy is the testimony of Jesus. The latter are called servants here: they shall be comforted in Jerusalem, as one whom his mother comforts; and the hand of Jehovah shall be known toward His servants, and His indignation toward His enemies. For He shall come and execute judgment against all flesh. Salvation has been made known to all flesh. And now Jehovah shall plead in judgment with all flesh. The unbelieving and idolatrous Israelites shall be there, confounded with the nations, all of whom God will assemble, who shall come and see His glory. He will execute judgment on the multitude by fire and by His sword. But there shall be some who through grace will escape. God will send these to the distant nations who have never seen His glory nor heard His fame. There is no question here of the election by grace for heaven. They will declare (not that grace, but) the glory which they have seen; and the nations will bring back the dispersed of Israel, as an offering to Jehovah in His holy mountain. And the seed of Jacob, and the priests whom Jehovah shall choose, shall be as the new heavens and the new earth before Jehovah, and all flesh shall come to worship before Him. Those who have been the objects of Jehovah's judgments, who have transgressed against Him, especially it seems to me the apostate Jews, shall be an abiding testimony of Jehovah's terrible judgment. For if the full blessing of His presence shall shine upon His people, it is the principle of judgment that brought it in and that maintains it.

God's patience with sin: its eventual judgment

There remains a general remark to be made here. The sinful condition thus judged existed in the days of the prophet. The patience of God bore with it, but the principle that brought in judgment was there (witness chap. 6). Until the rejection of Christ, and in a certain sense until the reception of Antichrist coming in his own name, the evil is not fully consummated, nor the final judgment executed. But already in Ahaz the occasion had been given for pronouncing it. Thus, the occasion being in this manner given, the whole condition of Israel, the grace that received the Gentiles, the nothingness of forms and ceremonies — in a word, all the great moral principles of truth are laid down in this part of the prophecy; and we see Stephen, Paul, the Lord Himself, making use of passages that speak of these principles, applying them to the times in which they lived: the Lord, to the hardened state of the people; Stephen, to the unprofitableness of an already judged system; Paul, to the Jews' state of condemnation, and to the manifestation of grace to the Gentiles. What remains is the accomplishment of the great result, in which these things shall be demonstrated to the world by the judgment and the sovereign blessing of God.

The Lord's first coming in humiliation as clearly revealed as His second in glory

As to the coming of Jesus in humiliation, we have seen it as clearly revealed as His coming in glory. In short, all the ways of God in the government of His people, with respect to their conduct under the law, to the promises made to the house of David, and at last to their treatment of Christ — Jehovah in humiliation amongst His people — the government, I repeat, and the ways of God towards Israel in all these respects, are developed in the clearest and most wonderful manner in the course of this prophecy.

But the judgment pronounced now by the prophet the patience of God suspended nearly 800 years. It was only accomplished when they rejected Christ.