

ISAIAH – LESSON EIGHTEEN

ISAIAH 51:9 - 52

Vv. 9-16 – An Appeal to Jehovah and His Reply

God's promises of action were comforting. Isaiah now appeals to Jehovah to act on those promises. His appeal is urgent; note the double "awake." The call to "awake" is anthropomorphism. God neither slumbers nor sleeps. He calls upon the arm of Jehovah that represents the power that he has exercised in the past and promised in the future. "Rahab" and "the monster" recalls Egypt and Pharaoh (cf. 30:7; Psa. 87:4; Ezek. 29:3). In defeating Egypt the Lord also demonstrated his power over Egypt's gods (Ex. 12:12)(9-10). The description of the returning ransomed coming with singing to Zion (11) closely parallels 35:10. God was, in effect, preparing a "second exodus."

Isaiah records the Lord's response (11-16). The Lord had brought comfort to his people. Why did they continue to fear humans who persecuted them, when their comforter had made the universe (12-13)?

Moreover, the time of the deliverance was at hand (14-16). Prisoners would be set free; God had his hand on his own; he who had created the universe would not forget his own.

Vv. 17-20 – Jerusalem, Awake! Stand Up! – Her Tragic Plight

Isaiah calls on Jerusalem to awake from its drunken stupor that came from drinking of the cup of God's wrath. Its judgment was complete; it had drained the cup (17).¹

1. The cup of God's wrath is common in the prophets (Jer. 25:15, 17,28; Ezek. 23:31, 32, 33). It appears again in 51:22. Nations that opposed God's people also drank it according to God's timing (Obad 16). Some suppose that it was this cup that the Christ had in mind in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matt. 26:39, 42).

Jerusalem's helplessness was obvious. There was no one to guide her or to take her by the hand and lead her (18). No one could assist her because all of her children had drunk of the cup. All felt the effects of God's judgment (19-20).

Vv. 21-23 – Jehovah's Gracious Promise

In view of Jerusalem's inability to save herself, Jehovah says, "*Therefore, hear this now.*" Parent and child were both afflicted, drunken, not with wine, but with the cup of God's wrath (21). God will "sober them up" by taking away the cup (22). Instead, he would give the cup to those who had opposed and oppressed Jerusalem who would then face his judgment (23).

CHAPTER 52: 1-12

ENCOURAGEMENT FOR PROSTRATE ZION (2)

Vv.1-6 – Awake, Jerusalem! Put on Your Beautiful Garments

The first 12 verses of chapter 52 are a continuation of chapter 51. There is no reason for a break at this particular point.

For the third time Isaiah uses the double "Awake" (see 51:9, 17). Zion has lain prostrate, helpless and weak, like a woman in a drunken stupor, having drained the cup of God's wrath. Her deliverance involved two aspects: 1) removing the evidence of slavery, such as dust and chains, and 2) adorning herself with her beautiful garments and take her rightful place as a queen (1-2).

There is some disagreement over the meaning of "for henceforth there shall no more come into thee the uncircumcised and the unclean." Some suggest that it means no heathen nation shall again attack and subjugate God's people as Babylon had done. This theory is not supported by history or scripture, and is contrary to both. After the return from Babylon and the division of Alexander's empire, Jerusalem became the soccer ball with which Syria and Egypt kicked back and forth during the third and

second centuries BC. Although neither kingdom destroyed the city, Antiochus Epiphanes² subdued it, desecrated the temple and its worship by offering swine's flesh on an altar to Zeus, and forbade circumcision, observance of the Sabbath, and the possession of copies of the Scriptures. Later, pagan Rome entered the city and destroyed it. Scripture indicates that the reference is to spiritual Israel and the spiritual kingdom. Ezekiel writes: "Thus saith the Lord GOD; No stranger, uncircumcised in heart, nor uncircumcised in flesh, shall enter into my sanctuary, of any stranger that *is* among the children of Israel (Ezek. 44:9). Joel writes: "So shall ye know that I *am* the LORD your God dwelling in Zion, my holy mountain: then shall Jerusalem be holy, and there shall no strangers pass through her any more" (Joel 3:17). Zechariah adds: "8 And I will encamp about mine house because of the army, because of him that passeth by, and because of him that returneth: and no oppressor shall pass through them any more: for now have I seen with mine eyes. 9 Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he *is* just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass. 10 And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem, and the battle bow shall be cut off: and he shall speak peace unto the heathen: and his dominion *shall be* from sea *even* to sea, and from the river *even* to the ends of the earth" (Zech. 9:8-10). All who enter spiritual Zion, the city of God, will have been circumcised with a circumcision not made with hands (see Col. 2:11; Rom. 2:28-29; Gal. 6:15). No others shall enter into it.

Jehovah had a right to step in and redeem Jerusalem. He had chosen to deliver his people into captivity for their sin, not because he owed another kingdom anything. Therefore, it was his prerogative to take his people and redeem them for his purpose (3). Many people had oppressed, mocked, and belittled the people of God. Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon had all done so in turn (405).

But in the day of deliverance, God's people would know and call his name again (6). God had predicted it and God would make it happen.

2. Antiochus Epiphanes (ca. 215-164 BC). King of Syria (175-164 BC) .

Vv. 7-12 – The Herald of Good News, and an Exhortation

By prophetic inspiration Isaiah sees God's promise fulfilled, his power exerted, the people redeemed, and the messenger bringing the good news (cf. 40:9; 41:27). As the messenger heralds Zion's redemption, Isaiah sees him upon the mountains proclaiming salvation, his feet being the symbolic representation of the messenger.³ A part of the message is the proclamation, "Thy God reigneth!" This exclamation is the basis of the tidings. Although the message included the deliverance and return of the exiles, it need not – in fact, it cannot – be limited to that event. Its universality is indicated by Paul's application of this verse to the apostles whom the Lord prepared and sent into all of the world with the good news of salvation (Rom. 10:15).

Jerusalem's watchmen⁴ were the first to see the approaching messenger and they shouted joyfully together. The expression "eye to eye" is used only here and in Numbers 14:14 where it is translated "face to face." Most likely it is saying that the watchmen will closely observe the realization of God's purpose and work *when Jehovah returneth to Zion* (8).

The Lord had indeed restored Zion. Indeed, God "rolled up his sleeves" ("bare[d] his holy arm") before the nations and manifested his salvation before them (9-10).

God called upon his people to leave Babylon as a pure people – touch no unclean thing. It was important that the bearers home of the temple vessels that had been carried away be clean. They could not pursue God's holiness and cling to their evil ways (11).

Finally, God's people would not leave Babylon in a panic or frenzy. The Lord would lead them out in an orderly fashion. God would go before them and, to use a present day expression, would also "have their backs."

3. Nahum uses almost the same words when announcing the fall of Nineveh (Nah. 1:15).

4. The watchmen are not identified beyond their "job description." Some identify them with the prophets who are elsewhere called "watchmen" (Ez. 3:17; 33:2,7), though nothing here requires them to be or otherwise indicates that they are prophets.

Isaiah's words of deliverance heralded a glad day when Judah would return from exile. He then goes beyond those images to describe God's Servant, whose work would bring a salvation far greater than deliverance from Babylon (52:13-53:12).

CHAPTERS 52:13 – 53:12

Victory Through Vicarious Suffering

Students of the prophets generally concede that the loftiest height of prophecy is found in these verses, even though the Servant neither appears nor speaks. The verses deal with both purpose and achievement. The Servant is to conquer as a servant, not as a warrior (cf. Rev. 5:4-6). There is no time factor in the verses. It deals with the past, the present, and the future, *i.e.*, it embraces the whole of time.

Ch. 52:13-15 – Exaltation of the Servant

In these two verses the themes of ch. 53 are condensed, but appear in reverse order. Here exaltation precedes suffering. In ch. 53 suffering precedes exaltation. In these verses Isaiah uses the future tense, while in 53:1-9 he uses the past tense (speaks of the future as already accomplished). In 53:10-12 he returns to the future.

Once again Isaiah begins with "behold." Attention is focused on the servant. First, He will deal wisely – act with divine insight and understanding so as to produce effective and successful results (cf. Jer. 23:5). Second, Isaiah uses three terms (*exalted, lifted up and very high*). Delitzsch points out that these terms are progress, relating to the commencement, the continuation, and the climax of the exaltation. The climax was reached when Christ was raised from the dead and exalted to God's right hand (Acts 2:32-33; Phil. 2:5-11) (13).

However, before the exaltation will come the humiliation. He will be subjected to the worst of treatment and the severest of suffering. Many will be astonished, struck with amazement and shock at what they see. The reason is found in the parenthetical

statement – “his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men” (14).

Commentators are divided on verse 15. Some argue that “sprinkle” refers to the cleansing and purification ceremonies of the Old Testament, and Isaiah had in mind the cleansing and purifying of nations through the Servant’s suffering. Others argue that the rendering of the ASV margin, “startle,” is the correct translation, and that those who were astonished at what they had seen of the Servant’s marred visage are now startled, caused to leap up in amazement, trembling with awe as they behold his exaltation. Delitzsch takes the latter position and says this of the Hebrew word’s meaning: “The verb *nâzâh* signified primarily to *leap* or *spring*; hence *hizzâh*, with the causative meaning to *sprinkle*. The *kal* combines the intransitive and transitive meanings of the word “spirt,” and is used in the former sense in Isa. 63:3, to signify the springing up or sprouting up of any liquid scattered about in drops. The Arabic *nazâ* (see Ges. *Thes.*) shows that this verb may also be applied to the springing or leaping of living beings, caused by excess of emotion. And accordingly we follow the majority of the commentators in adopting the rendering *exsilire faciet*. The fact that whole nations are the object, and not merely individuals, proves nothing to the contrary, as Hab. 3:6 clearly shows. The reference is to their leaping up in amazement (LXX $\theta\alpha\upsilon\mu\acute{\alpha}\sigma\omicron\nu\tau\alpha\iota$); and the verb denotes less an external than an internal movement. They will tremble with astonishment within themselves (cf., *pâchădû v^erâg^ezû* in Jer. 33:9), being electrified, as it were, by the surprising change that has taken place in the servant of Jehovah.”

Beyer makes a strong argument for the use of “sprinkle.” “Some scholars have debated the use of the Hebrew word *nazah*, here translated ‘sprinkle,’ and suggested—based on the Septuagint reading—that the word should be translated ‘startle’ or ‘surprise.’ This theory, however, has difficult reconciling the Hebrew to this meaning. ¶ If in fact the idea of “sprinkle” is correct, the connotation is probably priestly, since the word is typically used in a cultic sense. The servant somehow intercedes on behalf of the nations as a priest might do. Exactly how he does this is not revealed until later.”

Either interpretation is true.⁵ In response to Beyer's comments it may be said the Delitzsch, a recognized Hebrew scholar, had no trouble using "startle." Moreover, The translators of the Septuagint, who were presumably Hebrew scholars and were in fact Hebrews,⁶ had no difficulty. Hailey accepted "startle" and argued based on the context: "Though ["sprinkle"] has much to its credit, the latter seems to be verified by what follows: *For that which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard shall they understand.*"⁷ Kings, possibly among Gentiles, will be startled and spring up on amazement, though they will keep silent, when they see and understand what they have not previously been shown or told. As for the Jews, they have long heard wonderful words and seen marvelous deeds, but they have been deaf and blind to the underlying meaning. They should have recognized the Servant-Messiah when He came, but they did not."

5. "Sprinkle," as used here, has nothing to do with the form of New Testament baptism.

6. The verb *nâzâh* signified primarily to *leap* or *spring*; hence *hizzâh*, with the causative meaning to *sprinkle*. The *kal* combines the intransitive and transitive meanings of the word "spirt," and is used in the former sense in Isa. 63:3, to signify the springing up or sprouting up of any liquid scattered about in drops. The Arabic *nazâ* (see Ges. *Thes.*) shows that this verb may also be applied to the springing or leaping of living beings, caused by excess of emotion. And accordingly we follow the majority of the commentators in adopting the rendering *exsilire faciet*. The fact that whole nations are the object, and not merely individuals, proves nothing to the contrary, as Hab. 3:6 clearly shows. The reference is to their leaping up in amazement; and the verb denotes less an external than an internal movement. They will tremble with astonishment within themselves, being electrified, as it were, by the surprising change that has taken place in the servant of Jehovah.

7. This is Isaiah's stated reason for the conduct of the kings.