

ISAIAH'S PROPHECY CONCERNING THE SHOOT
OF JESSE AND HIS KINGDOM: ISAIAH XI.

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At the fifth verse of the tenth chapter of Isaiah commences a section of prophecy extending through the twelfth chapter. Its subject matter is, The Destruction of the Assyrian Power and the Rise of the Kingdom of Jehovah under His Anointed. The closing verses (33, 34) of the tenth chapter describe under the figure of a fallen forest the complete overthrow of Assyria. In contrast with this destruction appears the Messiah.

And a twig will come forth from the stump of Jesse,
And a shoot from his roots will be fruitful;
And the spirit of Jahveh will rest upon him,
The spirit of wisdom and understanding,
The spirit of counsel and might,
The spirit of knowledge and the fear of Jahveh.
And not according to the sight of his eyes will he judge,
And not according to the hearing of his ears will he
admonish;

But he will judge in righteousness the weak,
And administer equity to the meek of the land,
And will smite the terrible with the sceptre of his mouth,
And with the breath of his lips will he slay the wicked.
And righteousness will be the girdle of his loins,
And faithfulness the girdle of his waist.* (vs. 1-5.)

This prophecy like those of Immanuel and the Child-of-The-Four-Names associates the advent of the future king with lowliness and distress.† In chap. VII. this was indi-

* This translation and those of the following sections are taken from Briggs' *Messianic Prophecy*, pp. 202-204. A few variations from the A. V. and R. V. will be observed.

† Comp. Am. 9: 11.

cated in the desolation and ruin in which Immanuel's infancy was passed; in chap. IV. in the darkness out of which the people emerged; and here in the representation of the Davidic family as a stump out of which a twig shoots. All this was signally realized at the birth of Christ. The Jews were then despised and ruled by the Romans, and his parents, though of royal descent, were of very humble and poor circumstances.

This prophecy is fuller than the previous ones in its delineation of the character of the coming king. Here for the first time Isaiah declares that he shall be of the family of David, and he gives a beautiful description of him in his royal office. The spirit of Jehovah, the source according to the Old Testament of intellectual and spiritual endowments, rests upon him, resolving itself into wisdom and understanding, a knowledge of things as they are and also of their practical use; into counsel and strength, ability to plan and heroic energy to execute; into the knowledge and fear of Jehovah, a knowing of God's will and being constrained to do it. His kingly manner, his performance of his judicial and executive duties, both of which belonged to the oriental monarch, is graphically portrayed. He judges and decides cases not according to appearance but according to reality, dispensing righteousness for the poor and equity for the meek. His simple word will be sufficient to execute his decrees. A power thus approaching Divine omnipotence is granted unto him. The continual maintenance of right will be the ruling motive of his life.

The prophet describes next the wonderful peace of his reign:

And the wolf will dwell with the lamb,
 And the leopard lie down with the kid,
 And the calf and young lion and fatling together,
 And a little child shall be leader over them.
 The cow and bear will graze:
 Together will their young lie down,
 And a lion like the ox will eat straw,
 And a suckling will play over the hole of the asp,
 And over the light hole of the great viper
 The weaned child will stretch out his hand.

And they will not harm or destroy in all my holy mountain.
 For the earth will be filled with knowing Jahveh
 As the waters are covering the sea. (vs. 6-9.)

To interpret these verses aright, besides remembering that the future Messianic Kingdom from the point of view of Old Testament prophecy, was to be earthly and centered in Palestine, two additional facts must be noticed. The first is that wild beasts and reptiles were a constant source of danger at that day in the Holy Land. This is clearly shown by many passages.* The lion and the bear preyed not only upon flocks but also upon men and children.† Doubtless their ravages never were as fearful as are those of the man eating Tiger in India.‡ Still the circumstances must have been somewhat parallel. No wonder then that the cessation of wild beasts forms a prominent feature in the descriptions of the Messianic times, and has a place along side the abolition of war and the blessings of abundant harvests.§ Completeness of bliss could not be conceived of without their removal. "Isaiah stands where Hercules stood and Theseus and Arthur when—

" There grew great tracts of wilderness,
 Wherein the beast was ever more and more,
 But man was less and less till Arthur came.

And he drave
 The heathen, and he slew the beast, and felled
 The forest, and let in the sun, and made
 Broad pathways for the hunter and the knight,
 And so returned." ||

* Gen. 9: 5; 37: 20, 33; Ex. 23: 29; Lev. 26: 6, 22; Deut. 32: 24; Judg. 14: 5f; 1 Sam. 17: 34; 2 Sam. 23: 20; 1 Kings 13: 24; 2 Kings 2: 24; 17: 25f; Is. 35: 9; Ezk. 34: 25; Hos. 2: 18.

† 1 Kings 13: 24; 2 Kings 2: 24.

‡ "A single tiger is known to have killed 108 persons in the course of three years. Another killed an average of about 80 persons per annum. A third caused 13 villages to be abandoned and 250 square miles of land to be thrown out of cultivation. A fourth so late as 1869 killed 127 people and stopped a public road for many weeks, until the opportune arrival of an English sportsman, who at last killed him." *Encyclopædia Britannica* 9th edition, article, India. With this may be compared (2 Kings 17: 25.) "Therefore the Lord sent lions among them which killed some of them."

§ Lev. 26: 5f; Is. 35: 9; Ezk. 34: 25-28; Hos. 2: 18.

|| *The Book of Isaiah*, by the Rev. George Adam Smith. Vol. I. p. 190.

This then is the first meaning of our passage. There would be no more danger either to man or cattle from beasts of prey or reptiles. But does this exhaust its meaning? Isaiah pictures a transformation of animal nature. Was this only a graphic, poetic way of stating that all such danger would be removed? or did the prophet really expect such a change? We cannot exactly determine; most likely, however, the latter. But whether he had this expectation or not, by this representation we think he meant to convey a still further and deeper thought in addition to the one which we have found. This brings us to our second fact: According to the Old Testament there is an intimate connection between man and nature. Its state appears influenced by his moral and spiritual condition. Man sins. Cursed is the ground for his sake; it brings forth thorns and briars.* Man is redeemed. The mountains and the hills shall break forth into singing and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.† Thus changes in nature imply changes in men.‡ And the prophet means to tell us that the curse of sin will be removed. His conception is like that of Milton who, when man first sinned, says,

Nature first gave signs impressed
On bird, beast, air;
The bird of Jove, stooped from his aery tour,
Two birds of gayest plume before him drave.
Down from a hill, the beast that reigns in woods
First hunter then, pursued a gentle brace,
Goodliest of all the forest, hart and hind.‖

Isaiah presents the reverse of this picture because the reverse had taken place: The earth was full of the knowledge of Jehovah as the waters cover the sea (v. 9). This implies a transformation of the human race for to know

* Gen. 3: 17, 18.

† Is. 55: 12f.

‡ The Scripture doctrine of the relation between man and nature is very mysterious, and one may well hesitate to dogmatize upon the subject. The relation, however, may be entirely subjective, the change being in man and not in nature; the thorn and the briar becoming to the sinner a burden and in them he finding the earth cursed, although the evil was really in himself. The landscape of the pure in heart is different from that of those who forget God.

‖ Paradise Lost. Book XI.

Jehovah is to love him,* and to love him is to be redeemed from the thralldom of sin. Paradise had been regained.

And in that day the root of Jesse will appear,
Which is about to stand as a banner of the peoples.
Unto him will nations resort;
And the place of his resting will become glorious.
And it will come to pass in that day,
Adonay will a second time stretch forth his hand,
To get the remnant of his people,
Which remain from Asshur,
And from Egypt and from Pathros and from Cush,
And from Elam and from Shinar and from Hamath;
And will lift up a banner to the nations,
And collect the outcasts of Israel,
And the dispersed of Israel will he gather
From the four corners of the earth. (vs. 10-12.)

The Messiah is here placed as king and lawgiver not for Israel only but for the nations generally. This passage is to be compared with Is. 2: 2-4. The thought of each is the same. It is the promise of world-wide influence and dominion. Then comes also the restoration of captives. This is a favorite theme with the prophets. Well it might be. The land of Israel was repeatedly plundered, and its inhabitants carried into exile or sold into slavery. What picture then of future bliss could be complete without the return of the scattered ones? Broken families must be re-united; children returned to their parents, and parents to their children. Heirs must be restored that one's "name be not blotted out in Israel." No future happiness or glory would be perfect while a true Israelite was unable to return home. Family affection was very marked among the Hebrews, and passionate was their love for their native land. The song of the exile was:

"If I forget thee, O Jerusalem,
Let my right hand forget her cunning.
Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth,
If I remember thee not;
If I prefer not Jerusalem
Above my chief joy." (Ps. 137: 5f.)

* This is a frequent force of the verb *yadhd*—"to know."

Already at the time of Isaiah there had been a wide dispersion of the Israelites. He also predicted an era of judgment before the Messianic times and with this in view he may have named the countries mentioned. This restoration of exiles is typical of the gathering of the redeemed of God from every land and people.

And the jealousy of Ephraim will depart,
 And the adversaries of Judah will be cut off;
 Ephraim will not be jealous of Judah,
 And Judah will not distress Ephraim,
 And they will fly upon the shoulders of the Philistines seaward,

Together they will spoil the sons of the East,
 Edom and Moab will become a prize of their hand,
 And the sons of Ammon will become their subjects.
 And Jahveh will put under a ban the tongue of the Egyptian sea,

And wave his hand over the river with his violent blast,
 And smite it into seven channels,
 And cause them to go over dry shod;
 And a highway will be for the remnant of the people who will be left from Assyria,

As it was to Israel in the day of his going up from the land of Egypt. (vs. 13-16.)

As no future bliss could be complete without the return of the scattered sons and daughters, so also none could be without the re-uniting of the northern and southern kingdoms. The prophets of Israel were *union* men. They longed for the unification of their people. They saw this accomplished in their vision. Christ takes up the same thought in his prayer, John 17.

United the people of Jehovah would conquer their enemies. This verse (14) with the figure of the bird of prey seems strangely out of place in connection with the previous picture of the truce of nature. "It is very evident here how the prophet paints the remotest future with colors of the present. Still in the period of the reign of peace (comp. too v. 4) he makes Israel take vengeance on his enemies and subdue them quite in the fashion that in the prophet's time

would be the heart's desire of a true Theocrat."* The fulfilment, of course, is to be seen in the conquests of Christianity through spiritual weapons.

The coming redemption of Israel from their captivity in various lands would be marked by manifestations of divine power and favor as signal as those of their former deliverance from Egypt. (vs. 15-16.) The waters both of the sea by Egypt and of the Euphrates would be divided, and also a highway, a prepared road would be for the exiles on their homeward march. The prophet conceived the future after the analogy of the past. In the drapery he was mistaken. This, however, to him may have been only a figure, even as it was to John the Baptist.† In the fulfilment of the underlying idea the prophet's words have proved sublimely true. Christ's redemption of mankind from sin far transcends in manifestations of divine power and favor the redemption of Israel from Egypt.

* Naeglesbach in the *Lange Commentary* in loco.

† See Mark 1 : 3, where such a use is made of the similar language of Is. 40 : 3.