

The End of these Things.

AN EXPOSITION IN ISAIAH XXIV.-XXVII.

INTRODUCTION.

I.

OF the personal life of Isaiah the prophet we know very little. He was married, and his wife is called "the prophetess." His own name means "the salvation of Jehovah," and the prophet regarded himself as a "sign and wonder" to his own generation. He had given a name to his first son, Shear-jashub, "a remnant shall return," that he too might be a witness to the covenanted faithfulness of Jehovah. God set His seal of approval on this pious resolve when He bade Isaiah take the son with him to meet King Ahaz, and declare His unalterable purpose towards the house of David; and again when He Himself made use of the prophet's second son to be a sign, and gave him his name, Maher-shalal-hash-baz, "the spoil speedeth, the prey hasteth." In this way the whole family became united in the high office of being "signs and wonders in Israel from Jehovah of hosts."

II.

The ministry of Isaiah extended through four reigns, those of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, and may have covered as long a period as sixty years. In the history of Israel he saw the decline and fall of the northern kingdom, and later the invasion of Judah by the Assyrian power, an invasion checked only at the gates of Jerusalem. He stands midway in time between the erection of the Tabernacle in the wilderness and the destruction of the last Temple by the Romans; midway also between the completion of the conquest of Canaan and the birth of the Christ. In the Gentile world the age of Isaiah was marked by the foundation of the Median monarchy; while the mean between three principal eras of ancient history, the First Olympiad (B.C. 776), the Building of Rome (B.C. 754) and the Era of Nabonassar (B.C. 747), falls within his lifetime.¹ He is thus connected in time with the beginnings of the four great kingdoms of prophecy, a connexion which seems to have been present to the mind of the Spirit, when He foretold through Isaiah the depression of Tyre under Babylonian domi-

¹ *Speaker's Commentary*, "Isaiah," p. 7.

nation as lasting for "seventy years, according to the days of one king."¹ But we are now concerned with the Book of Isaiah in its structure and general purpose, so that we may rightly understand that section of it which is to be our particular study.

Our present purpose is not, however briefly, to describe the life and times of Isaiah. The man, after life's long labour, has entered into rest. Assuredly he, like Daniel, will stand in his lot at the end of the days, when the Lord of the prophets will give His servants their reward.² His times, like many other times of world-crisis and of change, have passed away. But "the Vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz" remains. It was written long ago on its tablets and inscribed in its books,³ that it might be for the time to come for ever and ever; and so it is with us still in living power. All flesh is grass, even the longest lived; and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field, even such a flower of men as was Isaiah in his day, in nobility of character, commanding genius, gold-mouthed eloquence; but the grass withereth, the flower fadeth, while the Word of our God "which he saw" sounds on for ever.

III.

We open then this Book of Isaiah, and we read—

*The Vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, Kings of Judah.*⁴

This must surely be the title of the whole volume, which Jewish immemorial tradition asserts to have been "written" or "compiled by the men of Hezekiah," foremost among whom we must place the prophet Isaiah himself. Moreover, as a second or sub-title follows immediately at the commencement of the second chapter, we naturally take this first chapter to be a summary of the prophet's message through the four reigns.

The Word of God by the prophet convicts of sin, and declares that national calamities are a Divine chastisement. God proclaims His abhorrence of merely outward reform, and calls His people to hearty repentance and to righteous and merciful dealings. He promises full and complete pardon to the repentant and obedient, but threatens certain destruction to the rebellious. He predicts

¹ xxiii. 15. Cf. Dan. ii. 38; vii. 17; Jer. xxv. 12; xxix. 10.

² Dan. xii. 13; Rev. xi. 18.

³ xxx. 8.

⁴ i. 1.

the final rebellion of Judah, yet proclaims His unalterable purpose of purifying and restoring Zion. But the destruction of transgressors and sinners shall be together, and those that forsake Jehovah shall be consumed; the mighty oaks, the pleasant gardens, the strong and the work of the strong together, involved in one common irremediable overthrow.

We recognize, in this summary,¹ all the chief points of Isaiah's message, the call to righteousness, the evangelical promises, the large element of prediction.

The Book proceeds—

*The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.*²

This Word, as recorded by the Spirit, is seven-fold.

I. CHAPTERS II.—IV.

It is, we think, the time of Uzziah, when Judah is in the enjoyment of great prosperity.³

The Word of God proclaims by Isaiah the latter-day glory of Zion, and calls the house of Jacob to walk now, not in the sunshine of outward prosperity, but in the light of Jehovah. It proclaims the vanity of earthly greatness, and foretells a universal overthrow of human pride. It utters solemn warnings to the careless and ungodly nation, but closes, as it began, with a prediction of the final recovery and blessedness of Zion.

2. CHAPTER V.

It is later in the long reign of Uzziah, possibly under the regency of Jotham, the glory of the kingdom is dimmed. The great earthquake, foretold by the prophet Amos, and which was long remembered, has taken place.⁴ Other calamities, also referred to in the Book of Amos, have fallen upon Israel and upon Judah alike.

The Word of God declares that these calamities are chastisement for sins. The Well-beloved of Jehovah, that wonderful Person Who possesses the attributes and Who speaks with the voice of Jehovah Himself, has planted a vineyard with every care, and looked for fruit and found none. He looked for justice, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry. Six times the Word of God pronounces woes upon the sins of Judah. For those sins calamities have fallen, but for all this His anger is not

¹ Cf. Jer. xxxvi. 2-4.

² ii. 1.

³ ii. 7; iii. 2, 3, 16-23.

⁴ v. 25. See Amos i. 1, 2; viii. 8, 9; ix. 5; Zech. xiv. 5.

turned away, but His hand is stretched out still. A greater calamity is to follow, and the glory of their kingdom shall be put out in darkness.

3. CHAPTER VI.

The year that King Uzziah died, and that Jotham reigned in his own right, has come, the year of Isaiah's vision. This cannot be the prophet's call, for he was by this time advanced at least some years in his ministry. Care has been taken by the Spirit to guide us through this portion of Holy Writ. St. John tells us in his Gospel that in this vision Isaiah saw the glory of Christ, and that the words Isaiah spoke were spoken of Christ.¹

ISAIAH SEES THE GLORY OF CHRIST.

"I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and His train filled the temple. Above Him stood the seraphim; each one had six wings; with twain He covered His face, and with twain He covered His feet, and with twain He did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is Jehovah of hosts, the fulness of the whole earth is His glory. And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke."

This is a vision of that pre-existent glory of Messiah, of which St. John himself has spoken. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things were made through Him. In Him was life." This glory Isaiah saw.

ISAIAH SPEAKS OF CHRIST.

For this there is solemn preparation in the vision. First a man, the prophet himself, who bears the name of The Salvation of Jehovah, is introduced into the scene; and then he is by a symbolic act purged from all iniquity. He is, in fact, "made like unto the Son of God,"² as the high-priest was made like Him by the ritual of his consecration, so that with the prophet's co-operation a picture prophecy may be enacted. Of Jesus Christ then, and not of Isaiah in his own person, this vision now speaks. We learn of counsels within the Deity; we hear the response of the Salvation of Jehovah; we mark His mission to the House of Israel, and the sentence which seals their eyes and hardens their heart. We gain a glimpse

¹ John xii. 41.

² Heb. vii. 3.

into the heart and mind of that Son of Man Who in the days of His flesh wept over Jerusalem and was ignorant of the duration of her rejection.¹ We hear of the sentence upon Israel, and the persistence of the Divine purpose of mercy.

4. CHAPTER VII.

Jotham has passed away, and it is the beginning of the reign of Ahaz. The kingdom is threatened with a great danger, for Syria and Israel are allied against Judah. There is a conspiracy to destroy the house of David, and to ally Judah, under a new king, with the two kingdoms, in hope to withstand the growing power of Assyria. Ahaz, with no thought for Jehovah, looks to the defences of his capital, and enters into negotiations with Assyria for aid.

But the head of the house of David is Jehovah, and not Ahaz ; and of this conspiracy the Lord takes notice. He sends the prophet with his son Shear-jashub to meet Ahaz and say, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah, It shall not stand, neither shall it come to pass. Ahaz stands or falls according to his faith or want of faith ; but the promise to the house of David stands by the unalterable word of Jehovah. The Lord Himself shall give a sign ; Not of the natural sons of David, but by a miracle above nature, One shall be born, who will realize that promise] and purpose. " Behold, a Virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call His name Immanuel." More is added, foretelling in enigmatic phrase the true humanity of this Sign and Wonder to be shown in the house of Israel from Jehovah of hosts ; and the total cessation of kingly rule throughout the whole land of Israel before Him at His coming. Meanwhile, as for Ahaz and his kingdom, Jehovah will bring upon it a real fear—even the King of Assyria. Jehovah will hiss for them and their swarms shall come ; the Lord of Ahaz and of Judah and of the world will shave with them as with a razor in all the land of Israel.

5. CHAPTERS VIII.—IX. 7.

A short time has passed, and the overthrow of Syria and spoiling of Israel by the Assyrians is at hand. Ahaz still occupies the throne, and it is necessary to show that the hand of Jehovah, and not the policy of the unbelieving king, directs these events.

¹ Mark xiii. 32.

Jehovah bids the prophet take a great tablet and write upon it in the presence of prominent men the words, For Maher-shalal-hash-baz. The tablet is large, and the writing is in common characters, that all may read that "the spoil speedeth, the prey hasteth." The prophetess conceives and bears a son, and Jehovah calls his name Maher-shalal-hash-baz, and declares that before the child has knowledge to cry My father and My mother, the riches of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria shall be carried away before the King of Assyria.

Again Jehovah speaks to the prophet, it may be in the interval of waiting. Israel has refused the silent stream of Shiloah, image of Him Whom God would send¹ in the house of David, therefore Israel shall be swept away by the waters of the great River, strong and many and tumultuous, the King of Assyria and all his glory. It shall come up like flood, and go over all its banks, and sweep onward into Judah, and reach even to the neck; and the spread of its eagle wings shall fill the breadth of Thy land, O Immanuel.

The Voice of God by the prophet speaks on—Roll on tumultuous River, till thy proud waters are stayed; yea, make an uproar *all* ye peoples, and be broken finally in pieces. Take counsel together and it shall be brought to nought; speak the word, and it shall not stand; for God is in Immanuel's land, and with the people that put their trust in Him. The hand of Jehovah is strong upon the prophet to impress this truth. His people are to fear Jehovah alone, and know no other fear; they are to trust Jehovah alone, and form no other alliance, let king and people do as they will. What though Jehovah be as a rock of offence to multitudes in both houses of Israel, yet let the prophet take means to preserve this testimony along with the Divine law among the faithful remnant for their obedience evermore. And I, says Isaiah, accept the sacred trust. I will wait for Jehovah, that hideth His face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for Him. Nor I alone; behold, I and the children whom Jehovah hath given me are here in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation for signs and wonders from Jehovah of hosts, Who dwelleth in Zion. So this "Salvation of Jehovah" himself will walk by faith, and with the children whom God has given him will become a sign and wonder to an unbelieving

¹ vi. 8; John ix. 7.

people. Here too Isaiah, in the Spirit, speaks the words of Christ.¹

But now the Spirit is speaking on once more, ever *tending towards this Christ*. Let Judah seek to their God. Let them get back to the law of Moses and to the testimony borne through the prophets, so only shall morning break over them or over the world.

For a morning there shall be in the latter time. A great light shall break upon Israel. It shall first be seen where the horrors of the Assyrian invasion first fell, in the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, in Galilee of the nations. The nation, now so diminished, shall yet be multiplied; where now there is weeping, they shall yet rejoice. All Israel's burdens are removed, all her oppressions are at an end, all war is stilled. And why? "For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and His Name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and of peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to establish it, and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of Jehovah of hosts will perform this." The birth of the Virgin's Son is the pledge of all, from the first manifestation of His glory in Cana of Galilee, till the time when He comes to restore the kingdom to Israel.

6. CHAPTERS IX. 8-X. 4.

It is now later in the reign of Ahaz. Rezin, the King of Syria, has fallen before Tiglath-pileser, and Israel has been harassed and weakened. The Spirit speaks once more by Isaiah.

The word which the Lord sent unto Jacob has actually lighted upon Israel. The Lord marks their rebellious spirit. They say, The bricks are fallen, but we will build with hewn stone, the sycomores are cut down, but we will put cedars in their place. He sees that the people have not turned to Jehovah who smote them. Wickedness burns its way through their land. Justice has fled their courts. Therefore their calamities are and shall be multiplied. It is the hand of Jehovah, and not the state-craft of Ahaz, which smites through Assyria's devastating hosts. And this Hand is stretched out still. Again the solemn refrain of an earlier prophecy² is taken up and four times repeated, For all this His anger is not turned away, but His hand is stretched out still.

¹ Heb. ii. 13.

² v. 25.

7. CHAPTER X. 5-12.

Ahaz has gone to his account. Hezekiah has long been on the throne of Judah. Samaria and the northern kingdom are numbered amongst the completed conquests of Assyria. The proud conqueror looks towards Jerusalem, " Shall I not, as I have done unto Samaria and her idols, so do to Jerusalem and her idols ? " But what he shall do and what he shall not do are in the hands of God. Again the Lord¹ speaks by His prophet.

The Lord, Jehovah of hosts, calls to the Assyrian, Ho Assyrian, the rod of Mine anger, the staff in whose hand is Mine indignation ! It is My anger alone which lends you force, and My purpose which directs your blows. Jehovah will yet use Assyria to perform His whole work of judgment upon Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, but He will then consume *his* men of power in one day. Assyria shall not do to Jerusalem as he did to Samaria.

The remnant of Israel shall in that day escape ; and they shall lean upon Jehovah, the Holy One of Israel, in truth. A remnant shall return, even the remnant of Jacob unto the mighty God. For, so speaks this Oracle concerning Israel throughout the ages, " Though thy people, Israel, be as the sand of the sea, a remnant of them shall return " ; they are not all Israel who are of Israel, and not only Assyrian destruction, but many another destruction awaits them in the future. Yet out of each destruction a remnant shall return to the mighty God.²

Therefore thus saith the Lord Jehovah of hosts to His people of the faithful remnant, Be not afraid of the Assyrian. He shall smite you with the rod as the Egyptian smote you of old in Egypt. But yet a very little while, and the indignation of Jehovah against you will be past, and will be directed to the destruction of Assyria. Soon Jehovah of hosts will smite him as He smote Egypt long ago ; his burden and his yoke will be lifted from off you, and destroyed before the Holy Oil of the Anointed of Zion.

And then the prophet, transported in vision to the day itself, sees the Assyrian armies approach Jerusalem.³ " He is come to

¹ Cf. vi. 1. The frequent occurrence of this title in this part of the prophecy is significant. x. 12, 16, 23, 24, 33 ; xi. 11.

² Rom. ix. 6, 27.

³ Or we may be here listening to a later utterance of the prophet, describing what he saw. Surely it is speaking without knowledge to say that no Assyrian army followed this route.

Aiath, he is passed through Migron ; at Michmash he layeth up his baggage ; they are gone over the pass ; they have taken up their lodging at Geba. . . . This very day shall he halt at Nob ; he shaketh his hand at the mount of the daughter of Zion, the hill of Jerusalem." But fear not the Assyrian, O My people, " Behold, the Lord, Jehovah of hosts, will lop the boughs with terror, and the high of stature shall be hewn down, and the lofty shall be brought low. And He will cut down the thickets of the forest with iron, and Lebanon shall fall by a mighty one."

And now in full flood pours the stream of promise to Zion. There shall come forth a Shoot out of the stock of Jesse, and a Branch out of his roots shall bear fruit. The Spirit of Jehovah shall rest upon Him. He shall deliver the meek. He shall smite the wicked. He shall reign in righteousness. The wolf shall dwell with the lamb. The earth shall be full of the knowledge of Jehovah as the waters cover the sea.

He shall be seen in Zion ; to Him shall the nations seek ; and His resting-place shall be glorious. Ephraim and Judah shall be reconciled and restored to their own land ; and in that day shall say,

" I will give thanks unto Thee, O Jehovah ; for though Thou wast angry with me, Thine anger is turned away, and Thou comfortest me. Behold, God is my salvation ; I will trust and I will not be afraid ; for Jehovah, even Jehovah, is my strength and my song ; and He is become my salvation."

" Therefore," continues the Word of God to Israel, " with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation. And in that day shall ye say," for all the world to hear,

" Give thanks unto Jehovah ; call upon His Name ; declare His doings among the peoples ; make mention that His Name is exalted. Sing unto Jehovah, for He hath done excellent things ; let this be known in all the earth."

" Cry aloud then and shout, thou inhabitant of Zion ; for great in the midst of thee is the Holy One of Israel."

The burden of Babylon, which Isaiah the son of Amoz did see.

A new volume with a new title. The last volume was entitled " the Word," this is entitled " the Burden " ; that was " concerning Judah and Jerusalem," that is " of Babylon," but both Word and Burden alike are of that " which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw," and both are included under the general title of " The Vision con-

cerning Judah and Jerusalem," for the Burden of Babylon is not of Babylon in the abstract, but of Babylon in the concerns of Zion.

And as we read on in this new volume we find from its contents that the Babylon of the title comprehends more than the city of the Chaldeans.¹ The burden of Assyria is part of the burden of Babylon.² So are the burdens of Philistia³ and of Moab⁴ and of Damascus.⁵ Egypt⁶ is part of Babylon, and the tribes of the Peninsula and of Arabia.⁷ There also are to be found the worldly-minded sons of Israel.⁸ Tyre,⁹ the merchant-kingdom, is there. The *whole world is there*.¹⁰

We turn the pages further, and find no other title. The Burden of Babylon seems indeed to have reached its climax in the Burden of the World, yet the stream of prophecy continues.

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¹ xiii. 19.

² xiv. 25.

³ xiv. 28.

⁴ xv.

⁵ xvii.

⁶ xviii.-xx.

⁷ xxi.

⁸ xxii.

⁹ xxiii.

¹⁰ xxiv.-xxvii.

(To be continued.)

