

Israel, Judgment before Rule (Isaiah 24)

WITH CHAPTER 24 we begin gathering to an issue, the results of the fourth section of the prophet Isaiah. In this section, loads have been laid upon the several nations, some seemingly concerned with only a local prophecy, yet each load containing the elements which will marshal the nations to their station in the divine program. This program will promote the position in the earth which is required for leue's judgment of His people Israel.

leue's ways call first for severity upon Israel, followed by mercy. In this manner He preserves and establishes them in their land as His people, endued with the regal status implied by such a favor. When this is accomplished, the time when leue reigns in Zion will have come. The Alueim of Israel will accomplish all this for them, and for His own glory, in spite of all their waywardness.

These concluding chapters (24 to 27) of the fourth section are really one connected vision, but with the viewpoint varying as details move quickly forward from judgment, through mercy, to the actual blessing which establishes Israel; to be followed by their acknowledgment of leue's salvation of them, which eventually emerges into righteousness and worship. Thus we reach the same prospect in these chapters as that found in chapters 40 to 66.

From the several predictions made in the loads of the preceding chapters (which molded the past history concerning the Chaldean ascendancy), arise the aspects which form the basis for further prophecy. Israel corrupted the law and invented variations in the divine statutes. This led to the plundering and denuding of the land, primarily by Babylon. By these matters, history would come to be focused on the point where leue makes void the land and scatters its dwellers. Hence the situation is such that prophecy can stretch out to the far future. Chapter 24 begins thus, yet it concludes with leue reigning in Zion. Between these two, intervenes the judgment of the end time, which prepares Israel for the kingdom. This is still future. The circumcision writings in the later Greek Scriptures, especially the portions which describe the end of the Lord's ministry and His Unveiling, reveal much more than is here presented.

Judgment is attached to the load placed on Babylon. With this judging, these chapters begin (13), but they conclude with the actual achievement of blessing to Israel, which will flow through them to the other nations. In this way, God makes clear that He is aware of His goal, for He makes known the end ere He commences. Babylon assumes its load, yet remains oblivious to what it requires from them, even though this had been stated by leue's prophet.

The Assyrian power had led Ephraim (the northern Ten Tribes) captive. Although Judah was restrained somewhat by Assyria's army, they are not overthrown, because Assyria flouted leue's promise to Zion, and to the house of David. Sennacherib's discomfiture before the gates of Jerusalem was the crisis which foundered Assyria. Their mission was ended, and with this must come Nineveh's fall as told by the prophet Nahum. That prophet is thus the counterpart of Jonah, whose ministry preserved Assyria in order that they might break the folly of the ten tribes which had produced the divided kingdom.

Isaiah's ministry continued on into the peaceful days at the close of the reign of Hezekiah. His predictions specify that Babylon will really assume the leadership among the nations. This is balanced by revealing, in outline, that this world-kingdom will not continue beyond its appointed time, for another world-kingdom will rise, and this one will release the captives in Babylon. But the full glories predicted in Isaiah did not ensue in

the centuries which followed the return. They await the time when He in Whom they are invested shall arrive. Isaiah's third section had made that feature clear. The present (or fourth) section prepares the situation in which this One will be unveiled, judging the world and establishing Israel.

THE LAND DENUDED

24 Behold leue making void the land, And evacuating it!
And He denudes its surface, And scatters its dwellers.

This judgment begins with the name leue. This is significant, for it emphasizes His direct dealings with His people. Now, divine action is in the land. This must be understood. Up till then prophets have been ignored and withstood, but this judgment will be corrective, and bring the realization that they deal, not with One Who is merely provident, but with One Who is righteous as well. He is the One to Whom they must be subject, not as a duty, but from a righteous response. This is the outcome of the eons, and it is the paramount question meantime. Fully understood, righteousness is part of love; a vital facet of it, in fact.

THE PEOPLE JUDGED EQUALLY

2 And it comes to be, as people, so priest,
As servant, so his lord, As maid, so her mistress,
As buyer, so seller, As borrowee, so borrower,
As lender, so him to whom is lent.

leue is no respecter of persons. His judgment will deal alike with all classes, for all are equally at fault, whatever may be the rank. This is here applied to Israel. All share the same calamity; people or priest, servant or lord, maid or mistress, buyer or seller, lender or borrower. The whole outlook of the people must be changed and rectified, and this will cover the religious and the social order from one end to the other. This is the righteous outlook of the law which leue gave to Israel. They must be made to realize that it grants no privilege. The experience of the justice of that law will serve as a fitting prelude to its being written in their hearts.

THE PLUNDERED LAND

3 Voided, yea voided shall be the land,
And plundered, yea plundered shall be the ground.
For the mouth of leue speaks this word.
4 Mournful, disintegrated is the earth.
Enfeebled, disintegrated is the habitance.

The subject reverts to the land; for it, as well as the people, is devitalized because of departure from leue and His revelation. In fact, as though to confirm to Israel their own evil case, and to arouse them, the verses widen out to include the whole earth and the habitance, in the disintegrating judgment which is predicted. This description has in view the confirmation given in verses 19 and 20, which refer specifically to the time of the sixth seal of the Unveiling. To bring salvation to leue's people, Israel, at the time of the seals of the Unveiling, it will be necessary to effect the political deliverance of the earth, for the policy of the nations of the world will continue to prevent God's intention for Israel.

THE PEOPLE ENFEEBLED

Enfeebled are the heights of the people of the land,
5 And the land is polluted under its dwellers.
For they trespass against the laws; They vary the statute;
They annul the covenant eonian
6 Therefore an imprecation devours the land,

And the dwellers in it are guilty.
Therefore the dwellers are drained out of the land,
And there remain but a bit of the mortals.

The effects of the judgment are described. They are stated in a manner which anticipates the future, yet is appropriate for the time then nearer at hand. These effects will be like an imprecation, which desires the devouring of the land. Unlike the curse, which would prevent good to its object, an imprecation would make evil become actively against the object. This imprecation is called against the people of the land by their gross practices and wicked ways. Idolatry persists on the heights, and the land is polluted by those who dwell in it. The people will be enfeebled, both in ability and numbers. leue's law is trespassed and the statute arbitrarily varied. The sign of the rainbow was given to every creature, and certainly Israel ought to be the bright spot of the earth in obedience to it, as well as to their own covenant. Yet so far do they proceed in their corruption that they willingly join the other nations in disregard for leue. They annul the eonian covenant. Even so, leue will faithfully honor it.

INEVITABLE CHANGE UNDER JUDGING

- 7 Mournful is the grape juice;
Enfeebled is the vine.
Sigh does every rejoicing heart.
- 8 Cease does the elation of tambourines.
Left off is the tumult of the joyous.
Cease does the elation of the harp.
- 9 Ashamed, they are drinking no wine.
And the intoxicant is bitter to its drinkers.

The judging is viewed as though in operation, and it rests upon those elements of festive mirth, the grape juice and vine, which so often accompanied the feast. These are "mournful" and "enfeebled". The once rejoicing heart is sighing. The tambourine ceases. There is no joyous tumult, nor does the harp elate its hearers. The would-be joyous ones are so overcome by shame that even the intoxicant becomes repulsive. There is such an inevitableness about the judging that it will really be corrective. At the same time, these lines give some idea of the conditions which overtook land and people due to Nebuchadnezzar's invading armies.

DESOLATION IN TOWN AND CITY

- 10 Broken is every town--a chaos.
Locked is every house against entry.
- 11 Yelling over the wine is in the streets;
The eventide is it for all rejoicing.
Deported is all the elation of the land.
- 12 And there remains in the city, desolation,
And houses, forsaken, perish,
And a tumult is pounding the gate.

Judgment is described through its effects upon the town. All is chaos. Houses are shut up. Lack of wine causes a yelling for it in the streets, but there is to be no mitigation in that way of the unhappy circumstances, for it is the eventide of rejoicing. In fact, rejoicing is deported out of the land. How vivid is the figure of Judah's deportation. Desolation is the whole scene in the city, for even the city gate is overcome in the calamity. Doubtless the gate of the city loses its dignity, and fails to function, due to the presence of the enemy outside, and also because it was being literally pounded on by the besiegers. This is the picture which anticipated what was to overtake Jerusalem—a desolated city of which only chaos, a figure of judgment, can

describe its condition.

IEUE AND HIS LAND GLORIFIED

- 13 Thus shall all become within the land:
Amidst the peoples, as the after-gleaning of an olive tree,
As clean-gleanings, if the vintage is finished.
- 14 They, they shall lift up their voice.
They shall jubilate together at the pomp of leue.
They shall shrill from the sea.
- 15 Therefore in the coastlands shall they glorify leue.
In the coastlands of the sea the name of leue, the Alueim
of Israel, is glorious.

The land of leue is viewed as if the deportation has taken place. Yet outside the land, amidst the peoples, there are those of Israel who realize the pomp of leue and lift up their voices to jubilate concerning Him. In number, they are but as the after-gleaning of the olive, or the clean-gleaning when the last of the vintage is gathered. Yet they shrill from the sea and the coastlands to glorify leue. By the deportation, any glory has been removed from the land, but leue's glory is not entirely lost, for it now glorifies the earth, still being in the heart of the few who continue to realize that the name of leue is glorious, though they be situated in the coastlands. Their psalms, sung at the wings of the land, affirm that stateliness is for the righteous. Despite the judging, which has taken them out of the land, they cling to their Alueim. The deportation did not destroy the expectation of the faithful remnant. Their faith triumphed over their sorrows and exulted in leue, even though they were at a distance from their land.

LEANNESS IN THE LAND

- 16 From the wings of the land, psalms we hear:
"Stateliness for the righteous."
Yet I will say, "Leanness is mine!
Leanness is mine! Alack is mine!
The treacherous deal treacherously,
And with treachery the treacherous deal treacherously."

The land is represented as "hearing" the psalms which float in from outside it, from its wings. There is a response from the land, for the desolated city speaks of the contrast with itself, expressed in psalms. "Leanness is mine," twice repeated, and then followed by the expression of regret; "alack is mine." The land can never forget that leue has called it, "My land." Yet the land remains aware of the tenth still present in it, for the treacherous still deal treacherously. They are bent upon being consumed (see 6:13).

THE PEOPLE SNARED

- 17 Afraidness and a pit
And a snare are on you, dwellers of the land.
- 18 And it comes that the one fleeing from the awful sound shall
fall into the pit.
And the ascender from the midst of the pit shall be seized
In a snare.
For the crevices of the heights are opened,
And the foundations of the earth shall quake.

The prediction resumes with a message to intimate the certainty of the judgment which is coming on the

people. The dwellers of the land are thoroughly ensnared, for everything in the land is against them; however much they may persist in their efforts to escape from the result of their follies. Neither the heights, nor the foundations of the earth will afford them relief. There must be a conclusion which consummates leue's glory for His land and His people, and the means of achieving it will ensue. Hoping to escape, the fugitives will seek the cover of the rocks (Rev.6:15,16).

LAND SMASHED

- 19 Smashed by smashing is the earth.
Quashed by quashing is the earth.
- 20 Slipped by slipping is the earth.
Swayed by swaying is the earth.
And it staggers as a drunkard,
And it wanders as a mariner,
And its transgression is heavy upon it.
And it falls, and is not proceeding to rise.

These verses foretell the great cataclysm of the sixth seal of the Unveiling. They refer specifically to the land, but they include the wider context of the earth as described in the Unveiling (6:12) when every mountain and island will be moved out of its place (6:14). It is notable that this same subject is found in the opening chapter of this section (13:6-13) which speaks of Babylon and the outcome of its load. Israel's own land is now brought into these circumstances. For this prediction it is plain that matters have developed beyond the Assyrian menace, and even that of Babylon. They reach forward into the years of the kingdom in Israel.

AN IMPRISONED GATHERING

- 21 And it comes in that day,
leue will check over on the host of the height, in the
height,
And on the kings of the ground, on the ground,
- 22 And they are gathered, a gathering imprisoned in a crypt,
And closed in an enclosure,
And for many days they will be missing.
- 23 And the brick will melt, And the wall will fall,

The transition of this vision to the far future is now complete, for it is "that day" when leue checks over, or inspects, those who are not subjected to Him and who would subject His people. The contrast in the parallels of the lines of verse 21 suggests the possibility that a discriminating exists here between the invisible and the visible rulers who regulate the policies of earth. The "host of the height" are in the height, whereas the "kings of the ground" are on the ground. As in the Unveiling, the earthly rule is controlled by the Adversary. Moreover, to the prophet Daniel it was made plain that there is a messenger to the various kingdoms of the world who exercises an interest in the policy of the nations (Dan.10:13,20). These messengers direct rebellion against Al, the Subjector. This question is now to be adjudicated and the necessary means of restraint will be instituted. This will bring the restraint of the crypt which is in view in the next verse (22), pending an ultimate decision.

THE DEATH-DOOMED ONES

In a sense, at least, the rulers of earth are regarded as those who have exercised authority, or abetted its exercise, against Israel. With rare exceptions, the outlook of rulers in the scriptures has been contrary to and opposed to Israel, and thus they would prevent the realization of God's promise to Israel, and so also His intention for Israel. At least, there have been other lords beside leue who have possessed Israel, and this has

been a grievous matter to the faithful (see 26:13).

In figure, this prediction pictures the whole class of such rulers gathered into an imprisoned group. The question will then be settled once and for all time, for they are the death-doomed ones who will be missing many days. In fact, the length of the term is indicated by what must first happen to the brick and the wall of the crypt into which they are gathered. They will be missing until the brick melts or decomposes, causing the wall to fall. We take two words from the Septuagint for our version, for they bring the Hebrew into agreement with its own context.

MOUNT ZION GLORIFIED

For leue of hosts is King in mount Zion and in Jerusalem,
And in front of His elders is He glorified.

The glorious outcome of the judging has been reached and is now stated. leue of hosts is King in mount Zion and in Jerusalem. He has directed the armies of the nations, both friendly and otherwise, in such a way that His own end has been reached. He is glorified before His elders. These elders are those who are associated with the throne of leue, and often accompany the Cherubim. They are not directly related to the temple, as probably are those which correspond to Hebrews 1:6. Rather these elders are those who are able to estimate and commend the values of divine administration. Their approval adds luster to leue's glory, for they are able to realize and understand the worth of His rule and subjecting. Will not their concurrence recommend leue's rule to the peoples of the earth? The presence of the elders commends their acceptance of and submission to Israel, whose king is leue, for they are well experienced in His administration. The Adversary will then be relieved of his office and restrained in the abyss which is to be his jail for a thousand years (Rev.20:1-3). Then will the nations stream to the mount of leue (Isaiah 2:2-4).

To be continued E. H. Clayton

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