



"THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME"
ISAIAH 61:1

PLEASE VISIT OUR WEBSITE: www.pamphletstoinspire.com

THE BOOK OF ISAIAH

CHAPTER 2

AND HIS NAME
WILL BE CALLED
WONDERFUL COUNSELOR,
MIGHTY GOD,
EVERLASTING FATHER,
PRINCE OF
PEACE.
ISAIAH 9:6

Isaiah is called "The Book of Salvation." The name *Isaiah* means "the salvation of the Lord" or "the Lord is salvation." Isaiah is the first book containing the writings of the prophets of the Bible. And the author, Isaiah, who is called the Prince of Prophets, shines above all the other writers and prophets of Scripture. His mastery of the language, his rich and vast vocabulary, and his poetic skill have earned him the title, "Shakespeare of the Bible." He was educated, distinguished, and privileged, yet remained a deeply spiritual man. He was committed to obedience over the long haul of his 55-60 year ministry as a prophet of God. He was a true patriot who loved his country and his people. Strong tradition suggests that he died a martyr's death under the reign of King Manasseh by being placed within the hollow of a tree trunk and sawed in two.

Isaiah's calling as a prophet was primarily to the nation of Judah (the southern kingdom) and to Jerusalem, urging the people to repent from their sins and return to God. He also foretold the coming of the Messiah and the salvation of the Lord. Many of his prophecies predicted events that occurred in Isaiah's near future, yet at the same time they foretold the events of the distant future (such as the coming of the Messiah), and even some events still to come in the last days (such as the second coming of Christ).

In summary, the message of Isaiah is that salvation comes from God—not man. God alone is Savior, Ruler and King.

Commentary on the book of Isaiah is by noted theologian Rev. William G. Most (1914-1999). His contributions to theology have been recognized all over the world. He published 12 books and a host of articles on topics ranging from biblical studies to Mariology and Latin grammar.

Book of Isaiah

Summary of Chapter 2

This is what Isaiah saw concerning Jerusalem: Finally, in the last days, the mountain of the Lord will be the highest of all, and all nations will come to it. Many people will say: Let us go to the mountain of the Lord, to learn His ways, so we may walk as He wills. The Lord will judge between the nations from Jerusalem. Then they will make ploughshares out of swords and pruning hooks out of spears. There will be no more war anymore.

But then Isaiah puts aside this glorious vision of the future and urges the house of Jacob to follow the light of the Lord. Really, the prophet says, God has abandoned His people, for they are full of superstitions from the East, they cultivate divination as the Philistines do. They have material treasures without end, a multitude of horses. But they also have many idols and they bow down to the things their hands have made.

So it seems we may have found at least some insight into God's ways in these matters. One example is that He wants Scripture to be difficult, so we may work on it more, and get more out of it (cf. EB 563) but still more, so that those well disposed will be justly rewarded, while those who are ill-disposed will lose the little they have. To him who has, it will be given. From him who has not, even what he seems to have will be taken away (Mt. 25:29).

Here we might borrow a line from St. Paul (Romans 11:33-34): "O the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How incomprehensible are His judgments, and unsearchable His ways." We have had the privilege of seeing, not all things about His wisdom, but some little corner, like Moses who had the privilege of seeing God from behind.

Comments on Chapter 2 continued

Isaiah turns from this glorious vision to the realities of his day, when the people and rulers alike were so unfaithful to God. He says the wrath of God will strike, and he suggests, in poetic fancy, that they hide themselves in caves, or in the ground, from His anger.

Incidentally this is just the same kind of fancy that Job indulges in in Job 14:13 ff. He says in effect he would like to hide in Sheol, the realm of the dead, until God's anger would pass. He knows he cannot do this of course. Incidentally, one foolish commentator, not understanding this poetic imagery, thinks Job raises the possibility of an afterlife, and then denies survival - what would be left of the inspiration of Scripture whose chief author is the Holy Spirit?

In 2:20 the prophet says then men will throw away their idols, which include idols of rodents. Is this more fancy? No, the Egyptians considered scarab beetles sacred, which gather dung (the excrement of animals, manure) into a ball for food, roll the ball and carry it into a crevice.

End of Chapter 2

Now the evidence for things of our faith is objectively adequate, but definitely non-compulsive. It lies somewhere on that scale we mentioned where it is rational to believe, <but one's dispositions can enter into the result>.

This in turn is the same sort of framework we can see with the parables. If we wanted to follow the chronology of Mark - we are not sure of it of course - Jesus at first taught rather clearly. But then the scribes charged He was casting out devils by the devil. Then He turned to parables, and all three Synoptic's quote Isaiah 6:9-10, in varied forms, saying the same thing: It is so that seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.

This was not deliberate blinding by Him. Otherwise why would He later weep over Jerusalem for not understanding the time of their visitation (Mt 23:27)?

No, He was setting up a marvelous divine device for dividing people according to their dispositions. We might speak of two spirals, in opposite directions. Let us think of a man who has never been drunk before, but tonight he gets very drunk. Next day - for this is the first time - he has guilt feelings. There is a clash between his moral beliefs and his actions. Our nature abhors such clashes, and something will have to give. Either he will align his actions with his faith, or his faith will be brought into line with his actions. This goes on and on, like a spiral that gets larger as it goes out, and feeds on itself. In other words, the man is getting more and more blind. In time he will lose perception of other moral truths and even of doctrinal truths.

Here is another remarkable thing. We know that God is identified with each of His attributes, so He does not <have> love, but <is> love. Similarly He is justice, and He is mercy. How is this possible? We can begin to understand as we are now explaining. The man who goes out on the bad spiral is getting more and more blind. This is justice, he has earned the blinding. But it is also mercy, for the more one knows about religion <at the time> of acting, the greater the responsibility. So his responsibility is mercifully being reduced. And in one and the same action, we find both mercy and justice exercised.

On the good spiral we also see both. The man who lives strenuously according to faith, which says the things of the world are worth little compared to eternity, he will go farther and farther on the good spiral. His ability to understand spiritual things gets greater and greater. This added light is, in a secondary sense, merited, and is justice. We say secondary, for in the most basic sense, no creature by its own ability can establish a claim on God. So all is basically mercy. Yet as we said, secondarily there is justice: God in the covenant has promised to reward those who keep His covenant law. So again, in one and the same action, there is both mercy and justice exercised.

So Isaiah utters the terrible prediction: they will be brought low. May God not forgive them!

Because of the coming wrath of the Lord, he tells them to hide themselves in the ground. For human pride will be humiliated on that Day of the Lord, when all the cedars of Lebanon, every high tower, every ship of trade, and all human arrogance will be brought low. Only the Lord will then be exalted, and idols will be no more. In fear men will flee to caves, to holes, they will cast away their idols. They have even treated rodents as gods. So men will flee to caverns in the rocks out of dread of the Lord when He comes to shake the earth. So they should no longer trust in man: a man has only breath in his nostrils: he is of no account!

Comments on Chapter 2

At the start of this chapter, Isaiah lets his mind turn to a glorious future, in which all nations will come to Jerusalem to worship God, and there will be no more war.

Supplement on the Messianic Age

We wish to consider two kinds of material: 1) highly idealized pictures; 2) prophecies that seem to indicate all gentiles will join Judaism.

First, the idealized picture: Isaiah 11:6-9 says the wolf will be a guest of the lamb and the leopard will be with the kid, and a calf and lion will eat together, with a child to lead them, while the baby plays at the Cobra's den. There will be no harm anywhere, and they will even beat their swords into ploughshares (2:4).

What shall we say? First, we know the Semites had powerful imaginations, and could exaggerate more than Hollywood. In fact, the dire language of Matthew 24 about the sun being darkened, the moon giving no light, and stars falling from the skies -- all these are found in the descriptions of much milder events. Isaiah 13:10 speaks of the fall of Babylon thus: "The stars in the sky and the constellations will not give their light. The sun will be dark when it rises, the moon will not give its light." Similarly, Isaiah 34:4 said in speaking of the judgment on Edom: "All the stars will be dissolved, the sky will roll up like a scroll, and the host of the heavens will fall like dried leaves from the vine." Again, Ezekiel 32:7-8 foretells the judgment on Egypt thus: "When I blot you out, I will cover the heavens and darken the stars. . . the moon will not give its light."

Which is the more powerful, the more exaggerated imagery? That about the wolf and the lamb, or about the sun and moon? Hard to say.

In passing, some leftwing authors like to say that Joel 3:10 contradicts Isaiah 2:4. Joel says they will beat their ploughshares into swords. A simple distinction will help. Even the non-conservative NAB in a note on Joel 4:10 (= NRSV 3:10) explains that warlike weapons are made in reply to God's call to armies to expel forever the unlawful invaders, from the land of the chosen people. Isaiah looks to a different situation: the heavily idealized age of the Messiah.

But our second problem is much more complex. Many times over the prophets foretell all the nations being converted to God. Objectively and actually, that meant that the gentiles would be called to be part of God's people. But that was new. Ephesians 3:5-6 tells of a secret not revealed to past ages: that Gentiles are also called to be part of the people of God.

But to read Isaiah, for example, things would sound different. For example Isaiah 2:2-5 says the mountain of the Lord will become the highest mountain, and all nations will stream toward it. They will say: "Now let us go up the mountain of the Lord. . . that He may teach us in His ways and we will walk in His paths. Teaching shall go forth from Zion and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem."

Specially striking too is Zechariah 8:22-23: "Many peoples. . shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem. . . ten men from nations of every language will grasp a Jew, and take hold of his garment: "Let us go with you. For we have heard that God is with you."

A related problem is in the last chapters of Ezekiel, chapters 40-48 which give a detailed description of a Jerusalem to be restored, with a great temple and animal sacrifices. Significantly, however there is no mention of a Day of Atonement, or an ark of the covenant, or veil. The real day of Atonement was Good Friday, and the veil was then broken forever. The ark is replaced by the Eucharist.

How can we understand this? St. Augustine in <City of God>, 4. 33 said that in the Old Testament (OT), material things were used to stand for spiritual things: "there, even earthly gifts were promised, while the spiritual men understood even then, although they did not preach it clearly, what eternity was signified by those temporal things, and in which gifts of God was true happiness." St. Paul in Gal 3:15-21 spoke of the promises given to Abraham as really standing for eternal salvation.

So, these images given by Ezekiel could be taken to stand for eternal goods. And the lack of such essential things as a Day of Atonement, an ark, and a veil give a hint of what the real sense is.

But no wonder the first Christians had a hard time understanding. Yes, Jesus had told the Apostles to go and teach all nations. But we fear Peter and the others thought this meant all nations would become proselytes. So in Acts 10, Peter, after not understanding the vision of the sheet let down from the sky, went to the Roman centurion Cornelius. Jewish Christians were shocked that he would associate with Gentiles. Clearly the commission of Mt 28:18-20 had not registered on them at all.

Let us not accept the foolish proposal that Jesus after the resurrection never spoke words at all, that He just used interior locutions; and that only in time did Peter and others come to understand. This will not do at all, and only someone ignorant of mystical theology could say such a thing. St. Teresa of Avila, who had much experience with locutions, explained (<Life 25>): "When God speaks in this way, the soul has no remedy, even though it displeases me, I have to listen, and to pay such full attention to understand that which God wishes us to understand that it makes no difference if we want or not. For He who can do everything wills that we understand, and we have to do what He wills." She added (<Interior Castle> 6. 3. 7): "When time has passed since heard, and the workings and the certainty it had that it was God has passed, doubt can come" about the authenticity of the message. So Peter would have had to understand clearly at once, if Jesus had used an interior locution, and later could begin to doubt. But the foolish proposal has that turned precisely around.

We have already seen at least a glimpse of the truth: the OT prophecies could easily give the impression, not that gentiles would be accepted into the Church as gentiles, but that they would all become proselytes (converted from one religion to another).

But now we must ask: How and why did Jesus and the Scriptures speak in away so readily misunderstood? We add that toward the end of His public life some in the crowds began to suggest He might be the Messiah. But others said no, for the Messiah must come from Bethlehem (John 7:40-44). He could so easily have said on that occasion: But I was born in Bethlehem. But He did not.

So we ask why? God wants faith to be free, not coerced. He could have arranged to have His resurrection take place with all Jerusalem, including His enemies, assembled before the tomb. This would have bowled them over. There would have been no freedom left to such a faith.

To understand, we need to notice that there are two main kinds of evidence that lead us to accept something as true: compulsive and non-compulsive. Compulsive evidence, such as the fact that $2 \times 2 = 4$, forces the mind, does not leave it at all free. But non-compulsive evidence is different, Further, there is a broad spectrum of non-compulsive evidence running from some things at the top of the scale, where the evidence is so strong that no one actually doubts, e. g., that Washington crossed the Delaware. But at the low end of that scale there are things where feelings can enter, e. g., if one would say, about the original Mayor Daley of Chicago, that he was a good honest politician, those who received favors would agree he was good and honest. The opposition would say quite the opposite.