

A.B. Simpson:

"And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And He shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. O house of Jacob, come and let us walk in the light of the Lord." (Isa. 2: 2-5.)

The second address of the prophet is contained in chapters 2 to 4 inclusive. It begins with a sublime vision of the future glory of Israel and Jerusalem. This is immediately followed by the dark picture of the present condition of things which was anything but ideal. But after the dark eclipse and the long interval of sin and judgment, the vision returns and the closing paragraphs of the fourth chapter are radiant with the promise of a holy people and the presence of their covenant God in the fulness of blessing and the fulfilment of the opening vision.

I. The ideal.

Isaiah's vision was not original. His words are quoted from an older prophet, the stern and eccentric figure that suddenly appeared in Jerusalem in the early days of Hezekiah's reign and, with wild gestures and tones of agony and terror, summoned the king and the people to repentance, and became the instrument of Hezekiah's conversion. It was the prophet Micah who first uttered this sublime picture of the future glory of the house of the Lord, and Isaiah prefixes it to his second address somewhat as a modern minister would put a text at the commencement of his sermon.

1. In the vision of Micah and Isaiah the Lord's house occupies the center of the stage and the foreground of the picture. It is the old conception of the theocracy, a state founded upon the throne of Jehovah and placing His authority and worship above all other obligations.

2. The house of the Lord is represented as a mountain. The figure suggests vastness, loftiness and glory and the conception in the prophet's mind is that God's house, which simply stands for His cause, is the grandest of all causes and the noblest of all institutions. Mountains are used in prophetic imagery to represent great kingdoms. But all earthly organizations dwindle into insignificance in comparison with "His kingdom which is an everlasting kingdom, and His dominion which endures unto all generations." A distinguished statesman, having been appointed as an elder in a humble village church and permitted to pass to the congregation the emblems of the Lord's supper, remarked that he felt more highly honored in having the humblest place in the service of God than when he had held the highest offices from his sovereign and his country. The day is coming when the lowliest servant of the King of kings will be a prince compared with the proud rulers of time.

3. It is above all other mountains.

It is to be "established upon the top of the mountains and exalted above the hills."

The Chinese place their sacred pagodas on the loftiest hills and will not suffer a commercial building or a missionary edifice to overtop their sacred temples. They literally carry out the idea that the houses of their gods must be exalted above all hills.

The spiritual conception is fine. The claims of Christ should overtop all other claims. The authority of God should be supreme above all other influences. Have we thus exalted His throne in our hearts and crowned Him "Lord of all"?

4. The Lord's house is to be the center of attraction for the world. "All nations shall flow unto it." The name of Jesus already is the mightiest name on earth and the day is coming when "every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that He is Lord," and when all men shall come to Him as the source of life and every blessing. "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me."

Zechariah has given us a sublime vision of a day that is coming when Jesus shall hold an annual reception in Jerusalem and all nations shall go up once a year to Jerusalem to keep the Feast of Tabernacles and to worship

at the feet of our glorified Lord.

The vision of Isaiah shall then be fulfilled and Christ shall indeed be the center of all hearts and all nations.

5. The house of the Lord is to be the light of the world for "He shall teach us of His ways and we will walk in His paths." Jerusalem was the light of the ancient world. All true knowledge of God and righteousness came from the divine oracles committed to the chosen people, and from the same Jerusalem came the light of the Gospel in the apostolic age. Once more in the millennial age is Jerusalem again to be the center of light for all men, and the Word of God to go forth to all earth's millions, so that the "knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea." That day has not yet come. At present we are simply giving "the gospel as a witness" to all nations and "gathering out from among the Gentiles a people for His name," but a brighter light is yet to shine from shore to shore and all nations shall walk in the light of the Lord.

6. The house of the Lord is to be the seat of government for the world. "The law shall go forth from Zion." One of the curses of the nations today is bad government. It has been somewhat improved through the influence of Christianity among the nations, but we have no Christian nations as yet and never will have a truly Christian nation until the Lord Jesus comes. Then "the King shall reign in righteousness and princes shall rule in judgment." Then "He shall judge the poor of the people; He shall save the children of the needy and shall break in pieces the oppressor. In His days shall the righteous flourish and abundance of peace so long as the moon endures."

7. This will bring the golden age of the world. "They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." Man is trying to bring this about through human governments and arbitration treaties. We thank God for what has been accomplished, but the facts of current history are almost a caricature of man's pretensions, The very heavens must laugh as they behold the kings who at one time were most active in establishing the tribunals of peace a little later provoking by their tyranny the horrors of the world's most terrible wars.

But the sentiment for peace is born from above and the echoes that float along the centuries in human sentiment and poetry speak forth a deep undercurrent of divine intuition. Not vainly has the poet dreamed of that golden age :

"Through the dark future, down long generations
The echoing sounds grow fainter and then cease,
And like a bell with solemn, sweet vibrations
I hear the voice of God again say Peace;

Peace, and no longer from its brazen portals
The voice of war's loud thunder shakes the skies.
But beautiful as songs of the immortals
The holy melodies of Love arise."

II. The failure.

But not yet is the vision. It is as true as it is sublime and beautiful, but, like Isaiah's, it must wait until He comes, the Prince of Peace, the Lord of lords. How very stirring to find the young prophet of Jerusalem starting out in his splendid career with this glorious vision. How true to the loftiest natures and the history of every great movement. All great lives begin with such visions. It is this that stirs the breast of patriotism and makes the heroes whose lives have illuminated the pages of history. It is this that moved the Crusader and still inspires the philanthropist, the social reformer, the Christian worker and the world-wide missionary. No life will ever be illustrious until it has had its visions.

Gideons must Isaiahs be,
Vision first, then victory."

But alas, the brightest vision must seem to fade and imagination and hope must learn to join hands with patience and faith and wait until God's full time has come. It is all true. It is less than the glorious truth for "eye has not seen nor ear heard nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for them that love Him and which God has revealed unto us by His Spirit."

But there is another vision and that is the actual reality of life and humanity, and as we turn to that we shall find,

as Isaiah did when he turned his eyes from heaven to earth, that the "gold has become dim and the most fine gold changed." What a picture of corruption met his gaze!

7. The corruption of the rulers.

"How is the faithful city become an harlot. It was full of judgment; righteousness lodged in it; but now murderers. Your silver is become dross, your wine mixed with water: thy princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves: every one loves gifts and follows after rewards: they judge not the fatherless, neither does the cause of the widow come unto them." (Is. 1: 21-23.) And here is another picture. "As for my people, children are their oppressors, and women rule over them. O my people, they which lead you cause you to err, and destroy the way of your paths. The Lord stands up to plead, and stands to judge the people. The Lord will enter into judgment with the ancients of His people, and the princes thereof: for you have eaten up the vineyard; the spoil of the poor is in your houses. What mean you that you beat my people to pieces, and grind the faces of the poor? says the Lord God of hosts." (Is. 3: 12-15.) We have become accustomed even in our modern republican life to such exposures of official corruption. Even the best forms of government do not change the selfishness and unscrupulousness of fallen nature. The righteous Judge looks down with indignation upon the reeking and ever-recurring spectacle of oppression, selfishness and misrule and longs for the day when the scepter of righteousness shall be the scepter of His kingdom and earth shall cease to groan beneath the heels of her oppressors.

2. Luxury. "Their land also is full of silver and gold, neither is there any end of their treasures; their land is also full of horses, neither is there any end of their chariots." (Is. 2: 7.) Prosperity and wealth had debauched the nation and the leading families were given up to self-indulgence and luxurious pleasure which is always a demoralizing influence in the life of nations and which today is threatening the very foundations of society.

3. Idolatry and superstition. "Therefore You have forsaken Your people, the house of Jacob, because they be replenished from the east, and are soothsayers like the Philistines, and they please themselves in the children of strangers. Their land also is full of idols; they worship the work of their own hands, that which their own fingers have made." (Is. 2: 6, 8.)

Their relations with heathen nations had introduced their abominations in the form of idolatry, sorcery and devil worship. Our own times, notwithstanding our boasted civilization, have not escaped the same peril. While we do not bow down to idols of wood and stone, we are running after the identical things that had this outcome of their coarser idolatries, for idolatry is but devil worship, and in modern Spiritualism, clairvoyance, Buddhism, Theosophy and Christian Science we have simply later forms of the same devil worship which the great father of lies is seeking to substitute for the worship of the true God in every age, and which he is refining to suit the tastes of the times and succeeding in palming off upon our boasted culture with unprecedented success.

4. Pride. "The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day. For the day of the Lord of hosts shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up; and he shall be brought low: and upon all the cedars of Lebanon, that are high and lifted up, and upon all the oaks of Bashan, and upon all the high mountains, and upon all the hills that are lifted up, and upon every high tower, and upon every fenced wall, and upon all the ships of Tarshish, and upon all pleasant pictures. And the loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be made low: and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day." (Is. 2: 11-17.)

The spirit of pride is peculiarly offensive to God. It grows with prosperity and human progress until man becomes his own god. The prophet's severest denunciations are hurled against the high looks and the haughty pride of Jerusalem and the modern prophet might as fittingly denounce the swollen vanity, the self-sufficiency, the assumption, the national vainglory and the intellectual boastfulness of our own age. A recent writer stated that it was the glory of the nineteenth century that it has given us humanity. Man's confidence in himself and his own sufficiency is a practical atheism that dominates much of human thought today.

5. The vanity and corruption of woman. Finally the prophet's piercing glance turns to the loud and showy women who form perhaps a large part of his audience and who with haughty necks and scornful eyes are beginning to frown down the awful message of the young enthusiast to whom they had listened for awhile with such admiration and pride. But now their faces blanch while he cries: "Moreover the Lord says, Because the daughters of Zion are haughty, and walk with stretched forth necks and wanton eyes, walking and mincing as they go, and making a tinkling with their feet: therefore the Lord will smite with a scab the crown of the head of the daughters of Zion, and the Lord will discover their secret parts. In that day the Lord will take away the bravery of their tinkling ornaments about their feet, and their cauls, and their round tires like the moon, the

chains, and the bracelets and the mufflers, the bonnets, and the ornaments of the legs, and the headbands, and the tablets, and the earrings, the rings and nose jewels, the changeable suits of apparel, and the mantles, and the wimples, and the crisping pins, the glasses, and the fine linen, and the hoods, and the veils. And it shall come to pass, that instead of sweet smell there shall be stink; and instead of a girdle a rent; and instead of well set hair baldness; and instead of a stomacher a girding of sackcloth; and burning instead of beauty." (Is. 3: 16-24.)

This fearful picture might be adjusted without much strain to one of the fashionable parades of today. It is not wrong for women to dress with modest taste, for God has made the world beautiful and given to woman the instinct of good taste. But when a woman dresses for display, for adornment, for personal vanity and to become a center of attraction for the eyes of men, she degrades herself and dishonors her womanhood and her God. It is very significant that the one thing he says about women here is about their dress. It would seem as if a woman's character was expressed in her apparel. You can tell the pure and modest woman by her dress. You can tell the loud, vain and immodest woman by her walk, her look and her array.

God help you, dear sisters, to dress as women becoming godliness, and above all other charms to wear the "ornament of a meek and quiet spirit which in the sight of God is of great price."

The condition of woman in Isaiah's time was one of the very evidences of the degeneration of the nation and the awful precursor of the shame, the outrage and the ruin in which they were so soon to be involved in the ruthless grasp of their pitiless enemies.

III. The later vision.

But the dark eclipse is to pass away and when judgment shall have done its fearful work the day at last will come of which the prophet says, "In that day shall the branch of the Lord be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and comely for them that are escaped of Israel. And it shall come to pass, that he that is left in Zion, and he that remains in Jerusalem, shall be called holy, even everyone that is written among the living in Jerusalem: when the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and shall have purged the blood of Jerusalem from the midst thereof by the spirit of judgment, and by the spirit of burning." (Is. 4: 2-4.)

The change is to come about partly by divine judgment, bringing conviction of sin, but more fully through the work of the Holy Spirit whom the Messiah is to bring and who is to cleanse them "through the Spirit of judgment and the Spirit of burning." This was the message later of John the Baptist, as he announced the coming Savior, "He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire."

This is the only remedy for all wrong social conditions and for all the evils of our hearts and lives. The coal that touched Isaiah's lips and consumed his sins must burn out from us the taint of depravity and burn in the holy image of our God.

But it was only the remnant that was to be delivered. "Them that are escaped of Israel and he that is left in Zion and he that remains in Jerusalem." The whole nation was not to be saved, but "a remnant according to the election of grace."

This is the principle on which God is working now for both Jew and Gentile. He is not saving all the world, but "gathering out of the Gentiles a people for His name." He is not saving all Israel, but a remnant from among them are finding the light, accepting the Messiah and getting ready for the glory of the latter days. The work of God is not a wholesale work today, but a little flock, a humble minority.

Dear reader, are you in this remnant? Have you turned from the great broad road of time and are you in the narrow way and with the little flock?

And when this remnant shall have been saved, sanctified and prepared, then will come in all its fulness, the vision of the glory. How sublimely the prophet describes it, "And the Lord will create upon every dwelling place of Mount Zion and upon her assemblies a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night: for upon all the glory shall be a defense. And there shall be a tabernacle for a shadow in the daytime from the heat, and for a place of refuge, and for a covert from storm and from rain." (Is. 4: 5-6.)

It is the old symbolism of the pillar of cloud and fire that led them through the wilderness and the tabernacle round which they gathered before their covenant God, only all this ancient symbolism is to reach a splendor in

the coming age such as only the later visions of the New Testament fully unfold.

The apostle John describes the vision of this tabernacle in the language of the Apocalypse, "The tabernacle of God shall be with men and He will dwell with them and they shall be His people and God Himself shall be with them and shall be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain for the former things have passed away. He that sits upon the throne shall dwell among them; they shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them nor any heat, for the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall feed them and lead them unto living fountains of waters and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

God bring us to that glorious time and that happy company. Isaiah began his visions of sin and sorrow, of darkness and judgment, with this glorious picture. He could not have stood the darkness if he had not first seen the light. Let us go forth into our mission in this world of sin and sorrow with a vision as bright and clear as the ancient prophet. And when our hearts grow sick with sin and all seems dark and wrong let us remember the vision and keep saying, "Though it tarry, yet it will surely come; though He tarry, yet He will surely come," and the light of that blessed hope will lift us above the shadows of the present evil world and enable us to live under "the powers of the age to come."