

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php

attention to defects, while passing in silence over a multitude of excellences.

The chief failure of the Revisers seems to me to be in their use of their own language as an instrument for reproducing the sense which the writers of the New Testament intended their words to convey. They have not always been apt in choosing the words which best fit the original Greek, and in so putting them together as to make good English ; but even in this difficult task their successes far exceed their failures.

In another paper I hope to discuss the new rendering of a few passages of special importance or special difficulty.

JOSEPH AGAR BEET.

THE VISION OF ISAIAH.

ISAIAH vi. 8-13.

III. THE SUMMONS.

WHEN Isaiah was caught up into the world invisible, the world above life and beyond death, he had a vision of the unchanging and eternal realities which underlie the changeful phenomena of time ;

He passed the flaming bounds of Place and Time ;
 The Living Throne, the sapphire blaze
 Where Angels tremble while they gaze,
 He saw.

He saw that God was the true King of men, not Uzziah, nor any of the princes who sat on the throne of David. He saw that the sin of man was no unforeseen accident or lapse, that it was known in heaven before it polluted the earth. He saw that, in his love, God had provided for it—provided a sacrifice from before the foundation of the world by which the iniquity of man would be taken away, his sin purged. And he saw that the end of the

long conflict between the impure will of man and the pure and kindly will of God would be the redemption of the human race; that, at last, the whole earth would be filled with the glory of a Divine holiness.

So much we have already learned from our brief study of this Chapter. And now we have to ask: For what end was this vision vouchsafed to the Prophet, and what effect did it produce upon him? The answer to that question is obvious. The vision came to *make* him a prophet, to call and to consecrate him to the great task of his life. He saw the King, that he might serve the King. He was convinced of sin, that he might convince his fellows. He was purged from his iniquity, that he might proclaim the love, the sacrifice, which takes away the iniquity of us all. He foresaw the triumph of the Divine Holiness, that he might labour to secure that triumph. These "eternal truths" became "present facts" to him, in order that he might make them present and influential facts to Israel and to us.

Let us observe, however, in what form this call to a Divine service reached him,—not immediately and imperatively, but indirectly and invitingly. No sooner is he fitted for service than he hears a Divine voice, asking: "*Whom* shall I send, and *who* will go for us?" It is not till Isaiah freely offers himself for the work that God bids him to go and tell what he has seen, teach what he has learned. We should wholly mistake the point, and miss the very lesson it has to teach, did we infer from this inquiry that there was any lack of ministers who were willing to fly on the errands of the King, or that Jehovah was perplexed as to which of them He should choose and send. What we really have here is an illustration of one of the standing laws of the kingdom of heaven. When the hour has come and the man, when a task is waiting and men are qualified to discharge it, God commonly asks,

“Who will undertake it?” He does not thrust them on a service for which they are unwilling or unprepared. He leaves them to choose their task, to volunteer for his service, in order *that, while serving Him, they may have all the grace and freedom of voluntary action.* This, I say, is a law of the Divine service. God prepares a man for the work; He prepares a work for the man: and then He leaves the man to find out the work and undertake it of his own freewill,—not compelling him into it by outward and forcible constraints, but drawing him toward it by the inward and gracious compulsions which spring from his own ability to do it, and his own sense of the need that it should be done.

Isaiah had just been raised to the open vision of God, to a vivid perception of the Divine holiness, to a profound conviction that it is God who rules the lives and destinies of men, and that the aim of his rule is that the whole earth may be filled with his glory. By this vision he had been convinced of sin, of righteousness, of judgment to come. He had been constrained to confess and renounce his sin. His iniquity had been taken away. Of all who stood in the heavenly temple he, therefore, was best fitted to speak of God's righteousness to sinful men, to warn them of the judgments their sins had provoked, to invite them to repentance, to assure them that there was forgiveness with God. For what had God cleansed him, save that he should carry tidings of the cleansing and redeeming love of God to all who were still unclean? Why had his eyes been opened on the eternal realities, save that he should help to open the eyes of those who were still blind to them? For what had he been quickened to a new and nobler life, save that he should convey the power of that life to those who were still dead in trespasses and sins? Not for his own sake alone had God given him the vision and the faculty divine, the power of climbing by altar-

stairs of type and symbol into the temple which holds the ideals and archetypes of all that is fair and good on earth, of looking through the shadows of time to the eternal substances which cast them: not for his own sake alone, but also for the sake of the ungifted myriads who wandered through the darkness with aimless feet, with eyes that saw not, ears that heard not, hearts that did not understand.

We, in like manner, are bound to proclaim the true King of men, if at least we too have seen Him sitting on the throne high and lifted up. If we have been cleansed from sin by virtue of the Sacrifice offered up once for all, we too have a commission to the unclean. Nay, we cannot have had any true vision of the things that are unseen and eternal, if we do not "declare the vision." No true life has been quickened within us, if that life is not uttering and manifesting itself through us. Our lips have not been cleansed if we exert and diffuse no cleansing influence. Even when He who is our life went into a house "and would have no man know it," He "could not be hid." And if Christ has been formed in us, He must reveal Himself in our altered and purer lives. He is light, and in Him is no darkness at all; and light must shine, shine the more evidently the thicker is the darkness into which it is borne.

It is not at our option, therefore, to refrain from service, if at least we have seen God and died—died to sin, if we have seen God and live—live unto righteousness. But our service is often marred by our ignorance or our forgetfulness of the law here revealed. We wait to have our work marked out for us and thrust upon us; or we wait for some stirring call to a conspicuous and difficult task; and, while waiting, we let occasion slip. Let us understand and bear in mind, then, that God does not, as a rule, mark out the special task we are to do for Him with a precision which

excludes all possibility of mistake ; nor does He constrain us to undertake it by compulsions which we could not resist without utterly breaking from his service. He fits us for a work ; He puts the work in our way ; and then He leaves us both to find it out, and to find out that it is ours. Nay, He often permits us to doubt whether it is ours, to distrust our fitness for the special task that falls in our way, or to see more tasks than one, all of which seem to have equal claims upon us, although we cannot possibly undertake them all. He leaves us to discover for what we are fit, to weigh the claims of the several tasks which appeal to us, and to make our own election. And He thus leaves us to ourselves, not because He is unwilling to help us, but because He is fain to help us in the best way,—so help us as to train and strengthen our judgment ; so help us that we may serve and yet be free, that we may serve and *therefore* be free. When we are admitted to his presence and quickened to a perception of the true realities and the true aims of life, God does not undertake to do our thinking for us, nor our willing and choosing. Rather He compels us to think for ourselves, that we may discover what his Will for us is, and bring our wills into accord with his. Because He would have us men and freemen, not automata or slaves, He still asks, “ *Who* will go for us, and whom shall I send ? ”

Let us remember, too, that not always, nor often, does God invite us to do some *great* thing for Him. Isaiah volunteered to go to his own people, his own neighbours, and to try, with his cleansed lips, to make their lips clean. And though at times he had to rebuke princes and to pronounce the doom of nations, yet it was his whole life which he dedicated to God, with all its petty details of daily conduct. It was part of his work to live with the prophetess he took to wife according to a Divine law, to name and train his children so that little Immanuel

and little Maher-shalal-hash-baz should be "for signs and for wonders in Israel from the Lord of hosts."

And, in like manner, God sends us to our own people, to our kinsfolk and acquaintance. We have been cleansed that we may cleanse them. And we are not to wait for great opportunities which seldom come, which may never come to us, and for which we might not prove fit if they did come. We are to endeavour so to order our whole life by a Divine law that, even in the trivial round and common task, we may shew that we have taken God for our King, and that we delight to do his will. It is by this constant and patient heed to the little things of daily conduct that we are gradually to build up a character and life wholly consecrated to Him; and if we do but take the trivial occasions for self-conquest and self-denial, for resisting evil and doing good, which every day affords, we may safely leave God to link on day to day, and duty to duty, and to draw all our poor and imperfect acts of service into the large and effectual ministry by which He is teaching and saving the world.

This, then, is our high calling and vocation,—to live for God, so that our very lives may speak for Him. To this service we are invited to volunteer, that, while serving, we may be free. For this service, if only we choose it, God qualifies us by revealing to us the sacred and abiding realities which underlie all the shadows and changes of time. And, indeed, the service is often so hard, and appears to be so unsuccessful, that we cannot hope to be steadfast in it unless we see all that Isaiah saw, and share his strong persuasion that God rules over all and rules all for good. If we would understand what the difficulties of this Divine service are, and where lies our hope of being faithful to it, we have but to consider the task which the Prophet was called to undertake, and the motives which secured his fidelity.

How ominous and foreboding were the very terms of his commission. Kindled to ardent devotion by his vision of the King, the Lord of Hosts, he eagerly offered himself for service. If God will but deign to send him on any errand, how gladly would he go upon it! One is tempted to surmise that, had he foreseen the message he was sent to deliver, he would hardly have been so eager to carry it. "Go," says God, "Go thou, and tell this people, Hear on, and understand not; and look on, but perceive not: make the heart of this people fat, and their ears heavy, and their eyes rheumy, lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and should be converted and be healed." To speak to those who would not listen, and shew them truths they would not see; to know beforehand that, by resisting his message, they would but harden themselves in their iniquity: this was the task and burden imposed on the youthful Prophet. Could any task be more appalling and hopeless? To be called to a ministry doomed to failure from the first: could any fate be more sad and dark than that? Yet this was the ministry to which Isaiah was summoned, or seemed to be summoned, by the Vision whose splendour had raised him above all the fears of the flesh, all the lures and shows of time.

Was, then, the God who had shewn Himself so gracious to *him*, about to shew Himself hard and ungracious to all but him? Was his mercy to Isaiah only a caprice, not an illustration of his way with men? Did his resolve to harden and destroy a nation which He no longer deigns to call "*My* people," of whom He speaks with a certain disdain as "*This* people,"—did this resolve reveal his true character, the constant bent and disposition of his mind towards men?

Well, if Isaiah did not infer God to be hard and austere, bent on the perdition rather than on the salvation of men,

Christian theologians have abundantly supplied his omission. From the very message which Isaiah was commissioned to deliver, they have inferred the vast majority of their fellows to be reprobate, and have even charged God Himself with inflicting a "judicial blindness" upon them, which left them no chance of repentance, no hope of salvation. Were an angel out of heaven, instead of a theologian from Geneva, to preach this "gospel of damnation," we could not but reject it, so utterly is it opposed to the character and word of God. If *He* were bent on making the heart of Israel fat, if it were by his decree that they sank into a moral insensibility which rendered judgment inevitable, why did He give them his law? Why utter remonstrance on remonstrance, invitation on invitation? Why vouchsafe to Isaiah, and through Isaiah to them, this sublime vision of a better temple, with its eternal sacrifice, its celestial ministrants, its cleansing and redeeming pain? If, in place of fixing our attention on a single sentence, we take the general drift of revelation, whether in the Bible at large, or in any single Scripture, or even in this vision of Isaiah, it is simply impossible for us to think of God as blinding the men He did so much to enlighten and to save; we can only conclude that it was they themselves who hardened themselves by resisting the warnings and invitations of his grace.

To men and to nations there comes a crisis in which they must either lose all they have gained; or, by changing their moral attitude and retracing their erring steps, fit themselves for further service and progress. If they will not hearken to the warnings of the Divine Providence, if they harden and settle themselves in ways that are not good, by the very law of their nature they grow more and more insensible to all the influences by which God seeks to cleanse and reclaim them. Shakespeare has stated this law of human life in the words he puts into the mouth

of the great Roman captain, who had ruined himself and his cause by his addiction to vice and luxury :—

“ When we in our viciousness grow hard,
O misery on't! the wise gods seal our eyes ;
In our own filth drop our clear judgments ; make us
Adore our errors ; laugh at us while we strut
To our own confusion.”

But even the debased Roman did not charge the guilt of his folly on the wise gods ; the blame and shame were his, for not having ruled his life by a Divine law. And shall we blame Jehovah because the Jews grew hard in their own viciousness, because the eyes they would not open became sealed, because they adored their own errors, and strutted on to their own confusion ? Isaiah was sent to warn them of the gulf which yawned across the path on which they were walking ; but to warn men of a gulf they are blindly approaching,—is that to thrust them into it ? is it not rather to do all one can to save them from it ?

And yet what can be more sad and dreadful than to stand and warn men in vain ? to see them approaching the giddy verge of ruin deaf to the most piercing remonstrance, the most tender appeals ? Isaiah's mission might well have seemed to him too hard for mortal strength. And it would have been too hard but for this heavenly vision. Because he had seen God and had been sent by God, he knew that, whatever the issue of his ministry might be, he was at least doing the will of God. If his ministry must be an unsuccessful one, better, far better, that he should know it from the first. Had he not foreknown it, had he laboured on till “ towns were wasted and men carried away,” till “ farm after farm was forsaken, and city after city laid desolate ” (Verses 11, 12), would he not utterly have lost heart ? would he not have felt that he must have mistaken his vocation, that he was of no use, that he was serving neither God nor man ? Nothing could well have saved

him from despair but the fact that God had forewarned him of the failure of his mission, and yet had bidden him discharge it. For so long as a man is sure that he is doing the will of God he cannot altogether lose heart, however inauspicious his conditions may be, however unfruitful his toils. If Isaiah had no other comfort as he saw Israel growing blind, and deaf, and hard by its resistance to his appeals, he had at least this comfort, that he was running on God's errand, delivering God's message, carrying out God's purpose, and witnessing the very issues which God had foretold.

But he had far other and better comfort than this. For not only was he doing God's will; he knew what God's will was. He had seen *the end* of the Lord; and hence he knew God's will to be, not the perdition, but the salvation of man. God had forgiven *him*, although he was a man of unclean lips: why should He not forgive others whose lips were unclean? The Seraphim had declared that the end to and for which God was working through all the changes of time was to fill the whole earth with the glory of his holiness. To secure that end, it might be inevitable that incorrigible men, or nations even, should suffer and perish; but if their very sufferings were designed to correct and purge them, if the loss of the man or of the people were to be the gain of the world; if, in short, it was really the purpose of God to steep the whole earth in the splendour of his own holiness, all might be borne with patience and with hope.

And that this was God's end even in the judgments which were about to waste and desolate the land of Judah there could be no doubt; for the message or commission given to the Prophet, though it opened so sternly, closed with words full of promise and grace. If the sinful nation was to be cut down like a terebinth or an oak, yet a stock was to be left, a sacred germ, from which a new and

happier growth should spring forth (Verse 13, *Hebrew*). All the miseries and calamities provoked by their sins were designed to make them, and at last must make them, what they professed to be,—a holy nation, a people of priests, zealous in all good works. They might retard the process; but the end of God must be reached, his purpose carried out, in them and in all men. God would yet bring his many sons to glory, making them perfect through suffering.

Was there not hope, strength, comfort for the Prophet in this gracious revelation and promise? That could not be an altogether unsuccessful ministry which carried out the will of God, even though it won no converts among men. That could not be an altogether unhappy ministry which carried out a will so pure and so beneficent. At times, no doubt, Isaiah saddened into despondency, and cried, "Who hath believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" But, as a rule, he speaks with composure and hope, even when he has to denounce the most terrible judgments. His writings reveal him to us, indeed, as a man of a singularly noble and serene spirit, as habitually looking forward to that golden age in which all men shall know the Lord from the least unto the greatest, and sing as they walk in the way of his commandments. No one of the prophets has left us so many descriptions of that age, or descriptions of it so full of charm, so inspiring and joyful.

And if any should ask, How was it that in times so dark, and which grew ever darker, with the whole land reeling under earthquake, devastated by invasion, decimated by pestilence and famine, Isaiah maintained his serenity of spirit? we can only point to the vision by which he was consecrated to the prophetic function, and to its revelation of the gracious purpose which God is still pursuing even when his judgments are abroad in the earth. By this vision Isaiah was lifted into

“ that blessed mood
 In which the burden and the mystery,
 In which the heavy and the weary weight
 Of all this unintelligible world
 Is lightened ; ”

and in which

“ With an eye made quick by the power
 Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
 We see into the life of things.”

Had he seen only king Uzziah and the princes who succeeded him, or only the temple whose very priests ministered “ with hands full of blood ” ; had he, in short, been left to spell out the mystery of human life for himself, in times so corrupt and calamitous he might well have been shaken with many fears and devoured by a rooted sorrow. But he had also seen the Lord of hosts sitting on the throne of the world ; he had stood in the heavenly temple with its eternal sacrifice ; he had been taught that the world was spinning down grooves of change to its final rest in God ; that men are to rise from sin, through suffering, to holiness. And, therefore, he was calm and hopeful in the wildest storm of judgment. All would yet be well, all must be well ; for by their very calamities God was purging men from their uncleanness, and preparing them for the glory that is to fill the earth.

Now it is precisely here, it is in holding fast to the convictions which were the strength of Isaiah’s heart, that *we* shall find strength to do God’s will. The work to which He has called us is often hard, well nigh intolerable. To speak for Him in our daily life, to eliminate all in us that is contrary to his high will, to do all we do as for Him, that we may win our neighbours to an obedience like our own,— is not that hard ? hard in itself ? and harder still because we have so little success in it ? Are we not apt to say, “ I am sick of these vain endeavours after a righteousness I

shall never reach. Even if I were to reach it, still what could I do for others? The best men do but little. The world is not to be cleansed and raised. With my utmost efforts I can hardly influence a single soul for good. My own life is hardly any the better for all my endeavours, and no other life is permanently or greatly the better for them." Probably we have all had such despairing thoughts as these, and have yielded to them. Need I say how keenly and constantly they cut the hearts of those who, in addition to speaking for God in their daily life, are also called to speak for Him with tongue or pen?

Where, then, are we to look for comfort and hope? Not assuredly in any attempt to persuade ourselves that we are better than we are, or that we have done more good than we know. Let us take the matter at its worst. Let us grant that we are but little better than we were, and that our neighbours are but little the better for all that we have said and done. What then? Are we therefore to abandon our endeavours after holiness, after usefulness? Never: for, like Isaiah, we are doing the will of God. It is his will that we should constantly renew our effort, though it should fail, or seem to fail. It is his will that we should speak for Him by the life He has quickened in us and the lip He has cleansed, even though those to whom we speak will not hear. In this dark confused world *that* is often our only point of light. Shall we not, then, keep it ever before us, and struggle on toward it? What better thing than the will of God can we any of us be doing or trying to do? Better to fail at that than to succeed in all else.

And yet we need not fail; or, if we fail, we need not lose courage and hope. If *our* purpose change, the purpose of God changeth not. If we fail, He must succeed. Faith in Him, faith in his will and his goodwill,—this is what we want most of all. Could we but see what Isaiah saw, God sitting on the throne and compelling the very sins of men

and the very judgments of Heaven to work together for good ; could we but see what the Seraphim saw, the whole earth filling with the glory of a holiness before whose pure splendours even they must veil their faces with their wings, —who would talk of failure, whose heart would be clouded and torn with fear?

In fine, if we would be strong in hope, whether for ourselves or for the world at large, we must rise, with Isaiah, into the holiest of all, into the secret place of the tabernacle of the Most High ; we must listen, with St. John, to those holy voices which sing day and night without ceasing : “ Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and He Himself 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.”

S. Cox.

*ASSYRIAN AND BABYLONIAN INSCRIPTIONS IN
THEIR BEARING ON THE OLD TESTAMENT
SCRIPTURES.*

XIII. MENAHEM AND PUL.

THE name of the next Assyrian king, the “ Pul ” of 2 Kings xv. 19 ; 1 Chronicles v. 26, who appears in Biblical history, presents a problem on which there is as yet no approach to agreement among Assyrian scholars. It does not appear in the inscriptions, and the one point in which all are of one mind is, that there being no name in them of this monosyllabic, uncompounded character, we must regard it as being, like the Shalman of Hosea x. 14, an abbreviated form. On the question what name it represents we have very conflicting hypotheses.