

A TIME OF STORM

by Allan A. MacRae, Ph.D.

The first 12 verses of Isaiah chapter 24 form one definite unit in which the prophet Isaiah describes Israel's coming exile with the condition of depopulation and misery that occurred within the next two centuries after he wrote.

At verse 13 there is a transition to something future. Although God is going to send this terrible destruction upon the land of Israel as judgment for sin, He is still a God of grace. Though the people as a whole turn away from Him, His destruction and punishment upon the land is not total. There are still those who remain true to Him, as verse 13 suggests where the subject passes from one of God's wrath and punishment to the fact that there still remains a remnant of grace.

This is brought out more clearly in verse 14 where the joy of the redeemed is emphasized: "They shall lift up their voice, and shall sing for the majesty of the LORD, they shall cry aloud from the sea." Why will they cry aloud from the sea? The sea was not a strong present factor in the life of Israel. Their shoreline had no good natural harbors as did Phoenicia further to the north.

Did Isaiah see the Word of God being spread into all the lands where the Jews would be scattered? Did he see the early Apostles going out? Did he see Paul journeying on the Mediterranean sea to Greece and to Rome and probably going on to Spain? Did he see in his mind's eye the Word of God being carried across the ocean to America and throughout the world? "They shall cry aloud from the sea." That is a tremendous teaching if it is here. Instead of

seeing the witness of God coming to an end because of Israel's failure, Isaiah sees God still having not only a remnant of grace, but he sees God's message of salvation spread throughout the world far beyond where it had ever been before.

We find this idea further developed in the next verse which reads: "Wherefore, glorify ye the LORD in the fires even the name of the LORD God of Israel in the isles of the sea. From the uttermost part of the earth have we heard songs, even glory to the righteous." Here "the righteous" has the singular meaning of "the righteous one" and would be better translated "glory to the Righteous One" meaning, of course, "glory to God!" Thus the thought suggested by "they shall cry aloud from the sea" (v.14) is made a reality in verse 15 where Isaiah sees God's purposes of grace beyond the sea spreading the word of salvation to about every section of the earth.

But why glorify the Lord in the fires? Did Isaiah see the difficulties this great witness to God would face? Did he see Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego cast into the fiery furnace where they would glorify God? Did he see Nero putting the Christians around in his garden where he poured pitch over them and set fire to them? Did he see the fires of the Inquisition? Did he see those who stood true to the Lord glorifying Him in the midst of oppression and persecution? God's Word would have a tremendous impact, but it would not be a simple march to victory. There would be difficulties and obstacles.

The prophet goes on to make absolutely clear this thought in

what is one of the strangest verses in the Bible. Verse 16 contains two separate sentences with a period in the middle of the one verse. And the two sentences seem to convey such very different meanings. "From the uttermost parts of the earth we have heard songs, even glory to the Righteous One." That is one definite thought. But how different is the rest of the verse: "But I said, My leanness, my leanness, woe unto me! the treacherous dealers have dealt treacherously; yea, the treacherous dealers have dealt very treacherously."

Actually here is repeated the two thoughts: (1) the Word of God is going to go out beyond the sea to every section of the earth, (2) but there will be difficulties, and disappointments in which God's people will glorify Him in the fires. Although many godly missionaries have gone out proclaiming the Gospel and leading many to the knowledge of salvation, many successors of these missionaries are preaching a gospel that is not the gospel but a message that tears down the faith that pioneer missionaries formerly built up. Converts are being disturbed and upset about the poison being fed to them from the very sources which formerly brought blessing.

William Carey a little before 1800 started the modern missionary movement and went to India where he reduced a number of languages to writing. He made translations of the Bible into several of these languages. He did a tremendous work for God there. Not many years ago a missionary visited the college Carey founded. He went to chapel and heard a talk about how all men are brothers

and there is truth in every religion and we must not feel that our religion has more truth than other religions have. He visited classes where he heard the Word of God torn to pieces and he thought how different this was from the time Carey served there. In the college library he was shown the valuable treasure of dictionaries, grammars and translations made in Carey's own handwriting. He said he thought he could hear the spirit of Carey behind him saying, "My leanness, my leanness, woe unto me! the treacherous dealers have dealt treacherously; yea, the treacherous dealers have dealt very treacherously."

John Calvin was the greatest exegetical scholar of the Reformation period. He is called that even by those who do not adopt all his views. He was a great leader in the work at Geneva, a great educator, a great preacher, a great theologian. Less well known is his great evangelical leadership in spreading the Word of God throughout France. He trained men in his college at Geneva and sent them to France to win souls to the Lord. Some were seized and burned to the stake, but others kept on preaching the Word. There came a day in a Paris park when a little boy began to sing one of John Calvin's hymns. Someone took it up, and then another joined, and pretty soon there were thousands of people in the park singing this hymn. It was one of the Psalms that Calvin had translated into French poetry for singing.

There were times in Southern France when Roman Catholic leaders would be having great celebrations in the big cathedral at which ceremony only ten people were present. Yet two blocks away a

crowd of 4000 were having a great gathering led by these men John Calvin had trained. They were ready to lose their lives for the sake of the Gospel. They thought nothing of their own comfort or safety and the work they accomplished in France was one of the great evangelical works of history.

The time came when the Jesuits, fearing the result of this Gospel work, organized to put an end to Protestantism. Many Protestants were massacred. King Henry III, who had fled to the Protestants for safety, was assassinated by one of the Jesuits. Henry of Navare (Henry IV) who was the son, and grandson of French Protestant leaders was next in line for the throne. His forces successfully conquered much of France and the people were attracted to him and rallied behind him, all except Paris. There the Jesuits determined to stop him by stirring up the people to hate him because he was a Protestant. Henry unsuccessfully besieged Paris. Finally the day came when He said, "What is France without Paris? How can I be king of France if I can't take Paris? Paris is worth a Mass." So he gave the word, "I wish to join the Roman Catholic Church." Of course many people said, "He's just doing it for political reasons. He's not sincere." But the Jesuits said, "We should take him at his word. We should accept him and believe what he said."

Henry IV thought he could best help his Protestant brothers by giving them the freedom to worship as they wished while himself turned from them to become a Romanist. The gates of Paris were opened to him and he took over and made the Edict of Nantes (April

13, 1598) freedom of worship to the Protestants in recognized places and permitting them to garrison certain towns as a security for its maintenance. But he kept Jesuits for the instructors of his own children. By saying, "Paris is worth a Mass" Henry meant he could change his beliefs in order to give peace and safety to his Protestant brothers. He thought the Edict of Nantes would be irrevocable in that it would give the Protestants safety and toleration for all time to come. But he let the Jesuits train his children.

Next when Louis XIII became king he allowed Cardinal Richelieu to have control. The Cardinal did not bother the Protestants except he said, "Why do you need garrisons? You are perfectly safe. The Edict of Nantes gives you all the freedoms you need. You should do away with your garrisons." Most gave them up voluntarily and the few who did not he attacked and took away their garrisons, but did not interfere with their freedom.

Louis XIII was succeeded by his son, Louis XIV who went into such indescribable debauchery and wickedness that the Jesuit preachers in his courts thundered on hell fire and terrors for those who sin. Louis XIV began to feel as if he could hear the fires crackling about him and he thought of what must be ahead for him. He said to the Jesuits, "What shall I do?" They said, "There is no need of your worrying. You can easily build up merit enough to off-set the wickedness of your life." "How?" he asked. "In your kingdom," they said, "there are hundreds of thousands of people that do not pay any attention to what the Pope says. They don't go

to Mass or read the Bible in the translations the Pope has authorized for that purpose. You just do away with them throughout France, and you will have blessing forever. You won't need to worry about your wicked life."

So Louis XIV gave orders that Protestants should no longer hold prominent positions in government. He ordered to cut down their privileges one after another. He made it clear that anyone who wished to be saved had better join the Roman Church. He used force against those who did not follow his desires and finally revoked the Edict of Nantes (Oct.18, 1685). He announced, "Every Protestant minister must leave the country within 60 days. All others must join the Roman Church and no others are allowed to leave the country."

In spite of his orders thousands of Huguenots escaped to Holland and to Germany. Great numbers came to the United States; others to South America. They were the finest, most able and energetic people in France. Hundreds of thousands of them left. Others of them went into the mountains and tried to preserve their lives, but Protestantism was practically wiped out. Today France is one of the hardest countries in which to do Christian work. As you think of what happened because Henry IV said, "Paris is worth a Mass," you can imagine hearing the spirit of John Calvin saying, "My leanness, my leanness, woe is me! The treacherous dealers have dealt treacherously; yea, the treacherous dealers have dealt very treacherously."

Isaiah foresaw that the Word of God would go forth, but also

that it is necessary to glorify the Lord in the fires. God never promised world conquest to His followers, or that they would be able to establish justice and righteousness in the earth. Jesus Christ will do that when He returns, but He has commanded us to win individuals to Christ and persuade them after they have received Him into their hearts to glorify Him even if necessary in the midst of the fires.

In the future will you be able to say, "I have glorified my Lord even in the midst of fires. I glorified Him in spite of treacherous dealers." Or will you confess, "I got discouraged, so I turned aside. I quit." May the Lord enable us as we read Isaiah's vision to determine to glorify the Lord even in the midst of fiery trials if necessary. Let us determine not to allow the treacherous dealers to turn us aside or the wiles of Satan to be successful against us but let us follow our Lord faithfully to the end.■