

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Spurgeon comments on Psalm 22, ‘Before us we have a description both of the darkness and of the glory of the cross, the sufferings of Christ and the glory which shall follow. Oh for grace to draw near and see this great sight! We should read reverently, putting off our shoes from off our feet, as Moses did at the burning bush, for if there be holy ground anywhere in Scripture it is in this psalm’ (TREASURY OF DAVID).

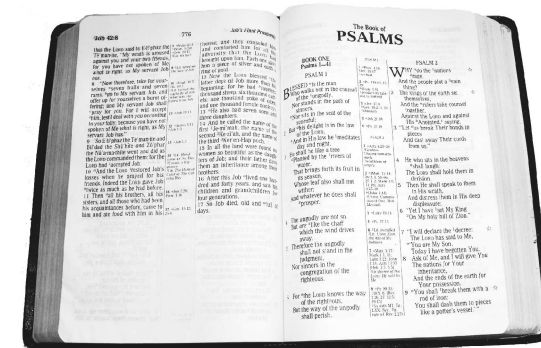
The Lord Jesus cried out on the cross, ‘*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*’ (1; cp. Matthew 27:46). Why was the Lord Jesus forsaken by God? He was forsaken because of God’s love for sinners. *For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son* (John 3:16). Our sin separates us from God (Isaiah 59:2) and the Lord Jesus *bore our sins in his own body on the tree* (1 Peter 2:24). The sinless Son of God had the guilt and pollution of our sin heaped upon him at Calvary. *All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all* (Isaiah 53:6).

Jesus suffered for our sin and because of this he felt the terrible separation from God the Father who did not spare him as he bore our sins (Romans 8:32; cp. Isaiah 53:10). The holy Son of God knew horror, clinging darkness, confusion and intense loneliness as he hung on the cross.

Are you passing through severe trial? Do you feel that your cries to God in prayer are not being heard? He heard the prayers of his people in the past and he will hear you (3–5). You may feel forsaken, but the Lord Jesus died a terrible and lonely death so that you would never be forsaken by God; nothing whatever can separate you from the love of Christ (Romans 8:35–39). He has promised, ‘*I will never leave you nor forsake you*’ (Hebrews 13:5). **Christian, take heart!**

PILGRIM BIBLE NOTES

God’s holy Word simply explained and applied



May 2013

Bible readings from Isaiah chapters 14 to 39
Psalm 22

How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer

Isaiah has a word of hope for a later generation who would be taken as captives to Babylon. God would have mercy on them and restore them to their land (1–3). This prophecy was fulfilled after the Medes and Persians conquered Babylon in 538 BC. There follows a song of triumph which celebrates the downfall of the king of Babylon (4–23).

Our attention is turned however from the king of Babylon to another person. *How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!* (12). The name ‘*Lucifer*’ means ‘morning star’, a name given to angelic beings (cp. Job 38:7). The evil personality behind the throne of Babylon was Lucifer (or Satan). He imagined that he could exalt his throne above the angels (*‘the stars of God’*) and that he could be *like the Most High* (13–14). God cast him down because of his pride (cp. 1 Timothy 3:6).

Pride is a terrible sin. Satan tempted Adam and Eve with this sin that had brought his own downfall, promising that they would *be like God* (Genesis 3:5). New age teachers and extreme charismatics such as Kenneth Copeland and Morris Cerullo also appeal to human pride by affirming that we too are gods. This is a most blasphemous and dangerous heresy. *God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble* (1 Peter 5:5). **What is the answer to pride? We must seek to have the mind of Christ. He is God, but he humbled himself and obeyed the will of the Father to die a shameful and terrible death to save us from our sins (Philippians 2:5–11).** What a wonderful Saviour! What a glorious Lord! Let us bow down and worship him.

All Scripture quotations are in italics and are taken from the New King James Version unless indicated otherwise.

But Hezekiah did not repay according to the favour shown him

The Babylonians would have been delighted to hear of the destruction of the Assyrian army which was besieging Jerusalem. When they heard of Hezekiah’s recovery from his illness, they sent ambassadors to him with letters of friendship and a present (1). The Lord tested him in this happy situation but he fell miserably short by becoming proud in heart. *But Hezekiah did not repay according to the favour shown him, for his heart was lifted up* (2 Chronicles 32:25,31). The proud king showed the Babylonians all his treasures. There isn’t any evidence that he glorified God before the Babylonians for his deliverance from death and from the Assyrians. The Lord sent Isaiah to warn him that a day would come when all the treasures so proudly displayed would be plundered by the Babylonians and his descendants carried off captive. Selfish Hezekiah accepted the word of the Lord as good, saying, *‘At least there will be peace and truth in my days’* (8).

The vital principle that we must learn from these events is that submission to God’s will is best for us. Hezekiah became proud and his son Manasseh was the most evil king ever to rule Judah (2 Kings 21:1–18). *He gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul* (Psalm 106:15). **We often pay lip service to submission to God’s will, but how real is our acceptance of his dark providence in our lives?** One of the most difficult hymns to sing is ‘Thy way, not mine, O Lord’ but so often the words trip from our lips with scarcely a thought.

*Thy way, not mine, O Lord,
However dark it be!
Lead me by thine own hand,
Choose out the path for me.*

(Horatius Bonar)

(Readings from Isaiah will be continued in August & September)

You have lovingly delivered my soul

At the time of the Assyrian invasion King Hezekiah was very ill, probably suffering from poisoning of his system which had gathered into a large boil (21). Isaiah brought him a message from God telling him that he was going to die. The distressed king did the right thing in seeking the face of God in prayer (1–3). Do you pray when you hear grim news?

God immediately responded to Hezekiah's prayer and told him that he would add fifteen years to his life (5; cp. 2 Kings 20:4–6). We can calculate, by comparing scriptures, that the king was thirty-nine years of age at this time and in the prime of his life (10; 2 Chronicles 29:1). The Lord graciously gave the king a miraculous sign to confirm his promise and the shadow of the sun-dial went back ten degrees (7–8). Isaiah told them to apply a poultice of figs to the boil and the king recovered as God had promised (21–22).

When Hezekiah recovered, he wrote a psalm of praise to God in which he described his anguish at facing death (10–14) and his deliverance (15–22). The grateful king said to God, '*You have lovingly delivered my soul from the pit of corruption*' (17). We must remember that all God's dealings with us are in love. He hears and answers our prayers because he loves us. He chastens us because he loves us (Hebrews 12:6). **If you are going through a difficult period in your life, enduring trial and disappointment, always remember that God is dealing with you in great love and wisdom. He will lovingly deliver your soul.**

*The King of love my Shepherd is,
Whose goodness faileth never;
I nothing lack if I am his
And he is mine for ever.*

*And so through all the length of days
Thy goodness faileth never;
Good Shepherd, may I sing thy praise
Within thy house for ever.*

(Henry W. Baker)

For the LORD of hosts has purposed, and who will annul it

The remainder of this chapter contains prophecies against Assyria and Philistia. The Assyrians were a terror to Judah and her neighbours, but Isaiah encourages the people by pointing to the absolute sovereignty of God over the nations of the world. He reminds us that:

- God's plans are irreversible. *For the LORD of hosts has purposed, and who will annul it?* (27). Whatever the plans and strategy of the Assyrians, God's purposes will surely stand. *Surely, as I have thought, so it shall come to pass, and as I have purposed, so it shall stand* (24). *The counsel of the LORD stands forever; the plans of his heart to all generations* (Psalm 33:11). **In our uncertain and sad world it is a great encouragement to know that all God's purposes for us will surely stand and that he is working all things together for good to those who love him (Romans 8:28).**
- God's power is irresistible. *His hand is stretched out, and who will turn it back?* (27). Psalm 2 reminds us that it is foolish to oppose God. In the reign of Hezekiah the Lord crushed the arrogant Assyrians in his land (Judah) just as Isaiah had prophesied (25; cp. chapters 36 and 37).

In the year that King Ahaz died, the Philistines sent messengers to Jerusalem seeking an alliance against the Assyrians, but the prophet warned against such an alliance (28–32). God wanted his people to trust in him rather than in military pacts with other nations. His message for the people was *that the LORD has founded Zion, and the poor of his people shall take refuge in it* (32). God is still the same. He is sovereign over all his universe. Christian, are you fearful or anxious? Your heavenly Father knows all about you. Trust in him. He will never fail you.

*The Lord is King! Who then shall dare
Resist his will, distrust his care,
Or murmur at his wise decrees,
Or doubt his royal promises?*

(Josiah Conder)

I will drench you with my tears

These two chapters contain a grim prophecy of the sudden destruction which was to come upon Moab. The Moabites who were descended from Lot had often been the enemies of God's people (Genesis 19:36–37; Judges 3:12–30). We are presented with a vivid picture of devastated cities (15:1–4) and of refugees fleeing for safety taking with them what possessions they had managed to salvage in their panic (15:5,7; 16:2–4).

Moab was renowned for his pride (cp. Jeremiah 48:29,47; Zephaniah 2:9–11) but his pride would be turned to wailing (16:6–7). He (the people of the land) would seek his false god in his sanctuary, but his prayer would not be heard (16:12). The idols and gods of false religion are indeed useless (cp. Psalm 115:3–8).

It is possible to identify with the victims to such an extent that we find ourselves taking issue with God and we become bitter and angry against him. We may, however, go to the other extreme and be cold and hard with hearts of stone that fail to be moved by the suffering and plight of those around us. Isaiah was not like that. He was so overwhelmed by the judgment that was to come upon wicked Moab that he wept profusely for them. He said, *'My heart will cry out for Moab'* (15:5) and concerning the Moabite cities of Heshbon and Elealeh, *'I will drench you with my tears'* (16:9).

The Lord Jesus not only had compassion for the crowds that thronged him (Matthew 14:14; 20:34) but he also wept over wicked Jerusalem which had rejected him (Luke 19:41–44). Have you any compassion for those who are lost, who are in spiritual darkness and ignorance? Andrew Bonar, a well-known 19th-century preacher in Scotland, used to cry out as he lay on his bed on Saturday nights and heard the crowds tramping home from the pubs and shows, 'Oh, they perish, they perish!' **Are you concerned enough to pray for the lost and to take the gospel to them? Do you have any compassion?**

Because you have prayed to me

The Bible stresses the great need for prayer in the life of every believer and God delights to welcome us at his throne of grace (Matthew 6:6; Hebrews 4:15–16). The Lord sent a reassuring message to Hezekiah, promising that because he had prayed the Assyrians would be punished for their blasphemy (22–29). They had not realised that they owed their past victories to the sovereign purposes of God (26). The devastated countryside would begin to yield harvests (30–32) and the king of Assyria would not be able to conquer Jerusalem because the Lord was defending the city (33–35).

We must not fear arrogant despisers of God. Sennacherib lost his army in a night and was later assassinated while worshipping his useless god, Nisroch (36–38). Those who mock God do so at their peril. *He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; the LORD shall hold them in derision* (Psalm 2:4).

Let us close by thinking of the words of God concerning Hezekiah, *'Because you have prayed to me ...'* (21). Prayer makes all the difference. The devil knows this and he will do everything to keep us from prayer. He will make sure that we are too busy to pray, too tired to pray, too disheartened to pray. The Lord Jesus said that we *always ought to pray and not lose heart* (Luke 18:1).

Are you encouraged by answers to your prayers because you have prayed? Or are you weak and discouraged because you have not prayed and your needs are not met because you have not asked (James 4:2)? **Martin Luther rightly observed, 'Prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance, but laying hold of his willingness.' Let us be more faithful in prayer.**

*Restraining prayer, we cease to fight;
Prayer makes the Christian's armour bright:
And Satan trembles when he sees
The weakest saint upon his knees.*

(William Cowper)

Hezekiah ... spread it before the LORD

What was the distraught king to do in a time of severe crisis when his country was threatened with destruction and his own life was in danger? He did not pretend that the problem did not exist. He faced up to it and went to the house of God. He also sought the prayers of other godly people, in this instance the prophet Isaiah who sent back a very reassuring message (4–7).

The Rabshakeh sent messengers to Hezekiah, bearing a letter for Hezekiah which blasphemed God (8–13). What did the king do? *Hezekiah went up to the house of the LORD, and spread it before the LORD* (14). He then uttered a great prayer of confidence in God the sovereign Creator of heaven and earth. *‘O LORD of hosts, God of Israel, the One who dwells between the cherubim, you are God, you alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth. You made heaven and earth. Incline your ear, O LORD, and hear ...’* (16–17). He was realistic in his assessment of the military might of Assyria but the nations they had conquered were worshippers of useless idols which were powerless to save them. He knew that God could easily deliver Judah from the Assyrians and he prayed that the Lord would be glorified in their deliverance from the Assyrians (17–20).

What should we do when we receive bad news, when everything seems to be going wrong for us? **We must come to God in prayer, remembering that he is sovereign and is in control of all our circumstances.** We must spread the situation before him and bring our praises as well as our petitions to him. He will never fail us. Why do we so often sink under trials and difficulties? Surely it is because we neglect prayer and do not spread our troubles before the Lord.

*Restraining prayer we cease to fight;
Prayer makes the Christian's armour bright;
And Satan trembles when he sees
The weakest saint upon his knees.*

(William Cowper)

Because you have forgotten the God of your salvation

Isaiah begins this chapter with a prophecy against Damascus, the capital of Syria (1–3) but his attention is also directed to Israel, the northern kingdom (4–11). Verses 12 to 14 probably refer to the invading army of the Assyrians which were to surround Jerusalem in the reign of Hezekiah. They were dealt with by God in a night and they never returned again to terrify Jerusalem (14; cp. 37:36).

Israel and Syria formed an alliance against Judah (7:1). Both nations were warned here that they would come to grief under judgment from God. Israel was particularly guilty because she had turned from the Lord to idols which are useless to save (7–9). Why this unfaithfulness? Why was God to punish them? Isaiah told Israel that it was *‘because you have forgotten the God of your salvation’* (10). Israel had been repeatedly warned in the past about the danger of forgetting God (eg. Deuteronomy 4:9,23; 8:11,14,19).

We can all be forgetful and we too must be on our guard against the traps that Satan lays for us. We do not mean to forget God, but we neglect prayer and we rush our reading and study of the Scriptures. In all the demands of daily life it is very easy to crowd God out of our lives. When we forget God or forget to rejoice in our wonderful salvation, we will soon lapse into sin. **If you have been forgetting God, repent today. It is folly to put off doing what you know to be right.**

*O thou, my soul, forget no more
The Friend who all thy misery bore;
Let every idol be forgot,
But, O my soul, forget him not.*

*Jesus for thee, a body takes,
Thy guilt assumes, thy fetters breaks,
Discharging all thy dreadful debt;
And canst thou e'er such love forget?*

(Written by Krishna Pal who was the first convert to Christ from Hinduism through the ministry of William Carey).

The LORD said to me, 'I will take my rest'

The advancing Assyrian army (17:12–14) struck terror and panic into the nations in their path. Ethiopia ('Cush' ESV) is described as the land shadowed with buzzing wings (1) because of its abundance of insects. The Ethiopians had sent ambassadors to Jerusalem offering an alliance with Hezekiah against the common enemy. There was one man who did not panic – the prophet Isaiah. What was his secret?

- He had confidence in God who is sovereign over the nations. He knew that God was in control of all his circumstances. The prophet called upon the world to observe what the Lord would do to the mighty Assyrian army (3). *The LORD said to me, 'I will take my rest'* (4). God calmly looked down on the tumult and was quiet. There is never any panic in the courts of heaven. *Why do the nations rage, and the people plot a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together against the LORD and against his Anointed ... He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; the LORD shall hold them in derision* (Psalm 2:1–2,4). God assured the prophet that he would triumph over the Assyrians and that the astonished Ethiopians would pay homage to him (7).

- He enjoyed fellowship with God. Isaiah listened for the voice of God. *The LORD said to me ...* (4). The prophet was not too busy to have communion with God. Do you pray that God will speak to your heart when you read your Bible and come to hear the word of God preached? **What a blessing it is to have fellowship with God, and to know his peace and calm in our hearts.** Are you feeling stressed or burdened with care? Oh, come boldly to the throne of grace that you may obtain mercy and grace to help you in this time of need (Hebrews 4:16). *Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus* (Philippians 4:6–7).

What confidence is this in which you trust?

Psychological warfare is not new to the twenty-first century! It was used by the Assyrians against the people of Jerusalem in 701 BC and Satan has always used it against the children of God. Sennacherib, the Assyrian king, had accepted the tribute he had imposed on Hezekiah, but he now demanded the unconditional surrender of Jerusalem (cp. 2 Kings 18:13 to 19:37).

The Rabshakeh (Assyrian army chief of staff) tried to scare Jerusalem into submission and spoke in Hebrew to make certain that everyone understood his threats (11). He rightly scorned the futility of relying on Egypt for help, but he went too far in scorning Hezekiah's counsel to trust in the Lord and he blasphemed God (19–20). He even claimed to have had a word from the Lord (10) but this made no impression on Hezekiah (21). We reject the claims of those who believe that they have 'words from the Lord' because we have all that we need in God's word, which was far from complete in Hezekiah's day.

The words of the Rabshakeh about trust are very relevant however. *'What confidence is this in which you trust?'* (4). Trusting in men and their schemes is futile, but it is not vain to trust in the Lord. He is the glorious, all-powerful sovereign Creator of the world. He will never fail us nor forsake us (Hebrews 13:5–6).

Many people foolishly trust in their own goodness and works to gain acceptance with God. The Bible plainly shows that we are guilty sinners in the sight of God and that only the Lord Jesus Christ is able to save us from our sins (Ephesians 2:8–10). **On what are you basing your confidence for salvation, on whom are you depending?**

*Not the labour of my hands
Can fulfil thy law's demands;
Could my zeal no respite know,
Could my tears for ever flow,
All for sin could not atone;
Thou must save, and thou alone.* (Augustus M. Toplady)

But the redeemed shall walk there

This chapter is so different from chapter 34 which presented a scene of judgment and of desolation. There is here a joyful anticipation of the restoration of the Jews to their land after the captivity in Babylon. There is also a prophecy of Christ's coming to earth when the eyes of the blind would be opened, the deaf made to hear and the lame to walk (5–6). There is also a glimpse of Christ's return after which there will be *new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells* (2 Peter 3:13).

The way to heaven is called '*the Highway of Holiness*' (8) and *the redeemed shall walk there* (9). The words '*redeemed*' and '*ransomed*' (9–10) are similar to each other and are often linked (cp. Jeremiah 31:11; Hosea 13:14). The word '*redeemed*' speaks of deliverance by payment of a price ('a ransom'). The Lord is the Redeemer of his people (41:14). The Lord Jesus has redeemed us to God by his blood (Revelation 5:9; 1 Peter 1:18–19). He gave *his life a ransom for many* (Matthew 20:28).

The redeemed of the Lord shall walk *the Highway of Holiness*. Nothing that defiles can enter heaven (Revelation 21:27). God has called us to be holy and without holiness we shall not see the Lord Jesus Christ in heaven (Ephesians 1:4; Hebrews 12:14). Lasting joy and contentment is not found in the pursuit of happiness as an end in itself, but in obedience to God's word.

Are you discouraged or fearful in heart? *Be strong and do not fear* (4). When we reach heavenly Zion sorrow will give way to singing and sighing will be replaced by songs of joy as we praise God for ever. *The ransomed of the LORD shall return and come to Zion with singing, with everlasting joy on their heads* (10). **All the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that awaits us (Romans 8:18). Let us now thank God for our great salvation.**

Blessed is Egypt my people

In his prophecy against Egypt Isaiah paints a grim picture of chaos and destruction:

- Egypt's idols would be useless to save them. They would totter at the presence of God (1). The Egyptians would still rely on their idols however, and would consult sorcerers and spiritist mediums (3). Millions of people still go to occult practitioners who give them false hopes on which they rely.
- There would be civil strife (2).
- There would be economic collapse (5–10).
- The wise men and leaders of Egypt would have no answer to the nation's problems (11–15).
- There would be fear and terror in the land (16–17).

It is important to see that it was God who brought catastrophe upon the Egyptians, though he used other nations to fulfil his purposes. Notice how his activity is described. *Behold, the LORD rides ... I will set ... I will destroy their counsel ... I will give into the hand of a cruel master* (1–4). *Because of the waving of the hand of the LORD of hosts ... because of the counsel of the LORD of hosts which he has determined against it* (16–17).

The chapter closes with a message of hope for Egypt. They would cry to the Lord who would deliver them. This prophecy looks forward to the gospel age when the Lord would say, '*Blessed is Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my inheritance*' (25). Matthew Henry observes in his Bible commentary, 'The Gentile nations shall not only unite with each other in the gospel-fold under Christ the great Shepherd, but they shall all be united with the Jews (24).' During the first century, the gospel spread westward throughout Egypt and northern Africa, and eastward to the land that was Assyria. Let us pray that many in those countries which are now in the grip of Islam will come to faith in Christ. **Nothing is too hard for the Lord! (cp. Jeremiah 32:27).**

How shall we escape?

The Philistine city of Ashdod refused to pay tribute to the Assyrians and was taken by the Assyrian commander in chief (described as ‘Tartan’, cp. 2 Kings 18:17) in 711 BC. This short prophecy dates from that time (1). The Lord told Isaiah to dress like a captive, going about barefoot and naked for three years. This was to be a sign against Egypt and Ethiopia who would themselves be taken as prisoners and captives (2–4).

What lesson was there for Judah in this strange prophecy? Egypt and Ethiopia were active in stirring up their neighbours against the Assyrians (cp. 18:2). The Lord was using Isaiah to warn Judah that it was folly to trust in Egypt or Ethiopia for deliverance. Those who trusted in them would be put to shame when the Assyrians attacked. They would then say, ‘*How shall we escape?*’ (5–6). How futile it is to trust in men for deliverance. What lessons are there for us here?

- We must always trust in the Lord in uncertain times, in trials and trouble. We should always cast all our care upon him (1 Peter 5:7) and commit our way to the Lord, trusting in him (Psalm 37:5). He will never fail us, nor forsake us (Hebrews 13:5).
- If you are not a Christian, you must trust only in the Lord Jesus Christ to save you from your sin. He alone can save you through his death at Calvary for sinners (John 14:6; 1 Peter 3:18). If you are trusting in your Christian family or friends, in your church-going, or in your good works for salvation, you will have a shock on the day of judgment. *How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?* (Hebrews 2:3).

In whom are you trusting?

*Have faith in God, my heart;
Trust and be unafraid;
God will fulfil in every part
Each promise he has made.*

(Bryn A. Rees)

For the cause of Zion

The Old Testament prophets often spoke of judgment that was to come upon the unfaithful Jews and their heathen neighbours. They also saw into the distant future and prophesied of the last judgment. The first four verses of this chapter prophesy of the judgment of the wicked when Christ returns (cp. 2 Thessalonians 1:7–9). The Lord stretched out the heavens when he created the universe (cp. 40:22; 42:5; Psalm 104:1–2). When the Lord Jesus comes again, *the heavens shall be rolled up like a scroll* (4; cp. Revelation 6:14). *Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness* (2 Peter 3:10–11).

The theme of God’s judgment continues as Isaiah turns his attention to Edom, the nation descended from Esau, brother of Jacob (Genesis 36:1). Edom had often opposed the people of God (cp. Obadiah 10–14). There is a stark picture of desolation and ruin as God warns that *he shall stretch over it the line of confusion and the stones of emptiness* (11). Life without God is confusion and leads to emptiness and judgment. The Lord gave an assurance that these prophecies of judgment from his book would be fulfilled (16). We know from secular historical records that judgment came upon Edom as Isaiah had prophesied.

Why was God so severe in his judgment upon Edom? He was punishing them because of what they had done to his people; it was *for the cause of Zion* (8). Woe betide those who dare to oppose or oppress the people of God. The Lord Jesus came into the world to *save his people from their sins* (Matthew 1:21). He *loved the church and gave himself for it* (Ephesians 5:25). There will always be those who hate us just because we are Christians, but we are precious to God. **We must never take personal revenge, however, but leave our cause to God, the righteous judge (Romans 12:17–19). If he is for us, why should we fret because of evildoers?**

Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?

It was approximately 701 BC and the mighty Assyrian army was at the gates of Jerusalem. King Hezekiah had already seen his outlying fortress cities taken and had agreed peace terms with Sennacherib, king of Assyria. He paid the Assyrians a huge tribute which was financed from temple and palace treasures. Egypt had failed to help just as the prophet had warned. The Assyrians had treacherously broken the peace treaty (notice the references to plunder, treachery and covenant-breaking in verses 1 to 8; see 2 Kings 18:13–17 for further details).

Isaiah prayed against the Assyrian hordes, exalting God for his great power (2–3). The promise of the Lord to deal with the Assyrians (10–13) was soon fulfilled as he miraculously destroyed the vast army (37:36–38). The sinners and hypocrites in Jerusalem who had refused to trust in God were amazed and seized with fear. They cried out, *‘Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?’* (14). They had recovered a sense of the awesome power and majesty of our sovereign, holy God. How we need that same sense of awe in our churches today. The question of the people is answered in the following verse. To dwell in fellowship with God, we must present our bodies to him as living sacrifices with feet, mouths, hands, ears and eyes being given over to righteous living (15; cp. Romans 12:1).

God promised the besieged people that they would see King Hezekiah resplendent in his royal robes and no longer in the sackcloth of mourning as the Assyrian army was miraculously removed (17–19). They would then acknowledge God as their Judge, Law-giver and King (22). It is also true that every Christian will see the Lord Jesus in his beauty in heaven (Revelation 22:4). What a glorious day that will be. **Will you be there, dwelling with the God of ‘everlasting burnings’ and awesome majesty? Are you living to please him?**

Watchman, what of the night?

There are prophecies against Babylon (1–10), Edom (11–12) and Arabia (13–17) in our reading today. Isaiah had a distressing vision of the fall of Babylon which was then emerging as a strong power (2). Babylon revolted against Assyria in 710 and 701 BC and was besieged by the Assyrians and their allies, Elam and Media. Isaiah’s message was that it was pointless to trust in Babylon for help.

There were no spy-satellites in Isaiah’s time. A watchman looked out from his watchtower and was able to warn of any approach from enemy armies. In verses 6 to 12 we see a faithful watchman at his post. He is questioned by Edom (*‘Seir’*). H.C. Leupold suggests in his commentary that *‘Dumah’* is a kind of mystery-name for Seir; it means ‘silence’. In the silence of the darkness of the night, the watchman is asked, *‘Watchman, what of the night?’* (*‘Watchman, what time of the night?’* ESV). Edom was feeling the length of the dark night and was hoping for good news that it would soon end. The watchman replied that he saw signs of morning and of night and that Edom should return for a more definite answer (11–12).

We all pass through periods of darkness in our lives and we may wonder how much longer the night must continue. For the Christian the day is coming when darkness will be banished. The Lord Jesus will return to take us to be with himself. There will be no more curse, no more night. We shall see him and be with him for ever (Revelation 22:1–5). **If you are passing through difficult times, trust in the Lord. He will bring you through. He will never leave you nor forsake you.**

*We expect a bright tomorrow;
All will be well;
Faith can sing through days of sorrow,
All, all is well:
On our Father’s love relying,
Jesus every need supplying,
Or in living or in dying,
All must be well.*

(Mary Peters)

Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die

'The Valley of Vision' (1,5) is Jerusalem and the prophet was here speaking of the city when it was under siege from the Assyrians in 701 BC (cp. 2 Kings 18:13–16). Isaiah was very distressed because the people did not look to God to help them in this time of trouble (1–5, 11). The Lord was calling for them to weep and mourn for their sin, but they were indulging in revelry. Danger and death were lurking nearby but their attitude was, 'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!' (12–13). They did not seek God in dangerous times, but they indulged in feasting and drinking wine.

Many still have the same attitude today and they do not seek after God when they are in danger or trouble. The prevailing attitude is, 'Have a good time while you are able.' God warned the people of Isaiah's day of the seriousness of such a sin (14). To harden our hearts against God is absolute folly (see Proverbs 29:1). Many prepare for retirement by joining pension schemes. Others rightly take out insurance to cover their funeral expenses but they do not prepare for death and eternity. If you have a frivolous and careless attitude to death, think hard. *Seek the LORD while he may be found* (55:6). Tomorrow may be too late!

Isaiah prophesied against Shebna who held high office as the steward (or treasurer) in the royal household (15). He was full of his own importance and he had built himself an imposing and ornate sepulchre (16). Archaeologists have discovered an inscribed lintel which they believe may have been from this tomb of Shebna. God had a solemn message for Shebna, 'So I will drive you out of your office' (19). The Lord said that he would replace him with Eliakim and this prophecy was fulfilled (20–25; 2 Kings 18:18; 19:2).

God drove Shebna out of his office because he was not faithful. He was a self-seeker who did not honour God. **He was more concerned to have a good funeral and a fine tomb than with pleasing God and laying up treasure in heaven. Where are your priorities?**

The effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever

We saw yesterday that the Lord promised that he would destroy the Assyrian invaders when they came against Jerusalem (31:8). Isaiah now prophesies that *a king will reign in righteousness* (1). Who is this king? These prophecies were given at a time when Judah was rebellious and refusing to trust in God (see chapters 28 to 31). King Ahaz of Judah was the one evil king during Isaiah's ministry and he rebelled against the Lord (chapter 7; cp. 2 Chronicles chapter 28). Now a different kind of king is promised who *will reign in righteousness* (1). Some believe that the promise of this king refers to good King Hezekiah, during whose reign the Lord destroyed the invading Assyrian army. He cared for his people and sought to protect them (2–4).

Isaiah prophesied to King Ahaz of the coming of the Messiah at the same time speaking of the Assyrian invasion (7:10–17). Many believe that the king promised here looks to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, rather than to the reign of Hezekiah.

Moral values are turned upside down when God is despised (cp. 5:20–21), but when he is loved and obeyed, wickedness is hated and exposed (5–8). The Bible does not underestimate the role of women in society for good or for evil (cp. 2 Timothy 1:5). The women of Judah who lived for pleasure and luxury were a significant factor in the spiritual decline of the nation (9–13). Godly women, however, are a precious treasure (1 Peter 3:1–5).

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the gospel age is promised here (15; cp. Joel 2:28–32). The righteous reign of Christ in our hearts makes a great difference in our lives. *The work of righteousness will be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever* (17). The Lord loves righteousness (Psalm 11:7) and we cannot be saved without it (Matthew 5:20; Hebrews 12:14). **Peace, quietness and assurance. Do you have these precious qualities in your life? Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you** (Matthew 6:33).

Who do not look to the Holy One of Israel, nor seek the LORD!

Isaiah continues to berate the people of Judah for trusting in the military might of Egypt for their defence – *who do not look to the Holy One of Israel, nor seek the LORD!* (1). They knew from their own history that the Lord had destroyed the mighty Egyptian army and that chariots and horses do not guarantee success in battle (Exodus chapters 14 and 15). How foolish and perverse of them to trust in mortal men rather than in the living God (3; cp. Psalm 20:7)! God told the prophet that he would defend Jerusalem. He is pictured as:

- A roaring lion with its prey, quite unconcerned by the multitude of shepherds (the nations who were gathered against Jerusalem). He would fight for Mount Zion (4).
- A mother bird, hovering over her nest to defend her fledgelings. God would protect and deliver his people from their enemies (4–5). The Lord himself would destroy the Assyrian aggressors (8). How foolish to trust in men or in idols (7).

There is a challenge for you in these verses. **Do you seek the Lord when you are in trouble? Do you trust in him alone to help you and to bring you through?**

*Why should I make a man my trust?
Princes must die and turn to dust!
Vain is the help of flesh and blood;
Their breath departs, their pomp and power,
And thoughts all vanish in an hour,
Nor can they make their promise good.*

*Happy the man whose hopes rely
On Israel's God! He made the sky,
And earth, and seas, with all their train:
His truth for ever stands secure;
He saves the oppressed, he feeds the poor,
And none shall find his promise vain.*

(Isaac Watts)

The LORD of hosts has purposed it, to bring to dishonour ...

Phoenicia was a country measuring some 140 miles in length and 15 miles in width, wedged between the Mediterranean Sea and mountain ranges. The Phoenicians were an enterprising people who turned to trade and commerce because they were unable to live adequately from the produce of their poor soil. They built fleets of sea-going ships which travelled to the limits of the world that they knew – the whole of the Mediterranean, the coast of West Africa and even to Britain. Tyre was founded by the merchants of Sidon and became the great trading city and port of the nation.

The first fourteen verses of this chapter are in the form of a poem which describes the destruction of the city of Tyre. The Phoenician sailors call into Cyprus on their way home and hear of the terrible calamity that has come upon Tyre. They are in a state of shock and consternation and Sidon is called on to lament her offspring (1–5). The home port to which the merchants anticipate coming at the end of their voyage is no more (6–11). The prophet reveals that God has brought this catastrophe on the city. *The LORD of hosts has purposed it, to bring to dishonour the pride of all glory, and to bring into contempt all the honourable of the earth* (9).

The desolation of Tyre and Sidon would last for seventy years. The Lord would then visit her, restoring her prosperity, but she would not change her evil ways. Her gains would not bring her any benefit but would be set apart for the Lord for the use of his people (15–18). Why should such an enterprising people be ripe for divine judgment? They had become very prosperous and smug and had no time for God. There is a message here for affluent countries where God has been forgotten or scorned. Could it be that the economic and social problems around us are also a judgment from the Lord? **If we love God, we will get our priorities right and seek to lay up treasures in heaven rather than on earth. We also know that our hearts will surely follow our treasures (Matthew 6:19–21).**

They shall lift up their voice, they shall sing

Chapters 24 to 27 are more concerned with the final judgment of the whole world than with the judgment of individual nations as in the previous chapters. We may feel glad that we did not live in those nations when God visited judgment upon them (chapters 13 to 23) but the judgment now described does concern us directly. Divine judgment will come because men and women have corrupted the earth with their rebellion against God's holy laws (1–6). There are two pictures in this chapter, one of despair and the other of hope.

- If you do not know God, the day of judgment will be a day of despair because there will be no escape from it. All classes of people are included, both rich and poor (1–4, 18–19; cp. Revelation 6:15–17). This judgment also takes in the fallen angels (21; cp. 2 Peter 2:4).
- If you are a true Christian, you have no need to fear the end. You will have a song of praise to God. *They shall lift up their voice, they shall sing* (14, 16). At this point in his prophecy Isaiah feels distress and ruin because of the wickedness that he sees around him (16). The Lord will reign in the new Jerusalem (23; cp. Revelation 21:1–8; 22–27). There is something for us to sing about in judgment (cp. Exodus 15; Revelation 15). God will judge everyone for their sin (5, 20) but those who know Christ and his forgiveness have no charge to answer. They will sing of the righteousness of God in judgment. They will see the Lord Jesus and worship and adore him. They will worship him with songs of praise and gratitude (Revelation 5:8–14). There is no condemnation to those who are in Christ (Romans 8:1). **They will have a song in the day of judgment. Will you?**

*Saviour, hasten thine appearing!
Bring, O bring the glorious day
When, the awful summons hearing,
Heaven and earth shall pass away!
Then with golden harps we'll sing,
Glory, glory to our King!*

(Thomas Kelly)

The LORD will wait, that he may be gracious to you

Judah was not listening to the word of God through his prophet, Isaiah. They were a rebellious people and this makes the words of verse 18 all the more wonderful, *'Therefore the LORD will wait, that he may be gracious to you.'* The word 'gracious' means 'bestowing undeserved kindness and showing mercy'. The word 'wait' here means 'to wait eagerly, to long for'. Think of that! God longs to show his grace to undeserving rebels. We have proved this in our own Christian experience and this should encourage us in our prayers for unsaved loved ones and friends.

God is not only gracious in saving us from our sin, he also waits to be gracious:

- To hear and to answer our prayers (19).
- To be with us in adversity (20).
- To guide us (21). God who controls the course of the stars in space speaks to us through his word and directs us. How wonderful!
- To turn our hearts from sin (22).
- To bestow unexpected blessings upon us (23–26).
- To give us a song (29). The songs which tell out the praises of God are far better than the songs of the world.

Verses 27 to 33 refer to God's judgment on Assyria. *The LORD will cause his glorious voice to be heard ... For through the voice of the LORD Assyria will be beaten down* (30–31). When Christ returns for his people and to usher in the final judgment, everyone will hear his voice (John 5:28–29; 1 Thessalonians 4:16).

God, who is waiting to be gracious, blesses *all those who wait for him* (18). Those who wait for God long for fellowship with him and thirst after him (cp. Psalm 40:1–5; 42:1–2). They patiently trust in God when they cannot trace his ways. **If you are not a Christian, will you continue to rebel against God? He waits to be gracious to you. Come to him now in the name of Jesus and trust in him.**

Speak to us smooth things

The people of Judah were again reminded of their sin of refusing to trust in God in the face of the Assyrian threat to their country. ‘*Woe to the rebellious children,*’ says the LORD, ‘*Who take counsel, but not of me, and who devise plans, but not of my Spirit*’ (1). The crisis facing their country should have driven them to seek the Lord but they refused God’s word. They sent ambassadors to Egypt seeking help, but Egypt would prove to be useless (2–5). There is a picture of a caravan travelling to Egypt with donkeys and camels laden with gifts, but all this was to no purpose. God called Egypt (also known as Rahab), ‘*Rahab-Hem-Shebeth*’ which means ‘Rahab sits idle’ (7). In his commentary on Isaiah H.C. Leupold suggests that this phrase means that Egypt is ‘a Big-mouth that is a Do-Nothing’.

We can too easily fall into the same sin of which Judah was guilty. When faced with a crisis or hard choices, we do not seek the Lord. We do not pray, but complain and fret, and seek the advice of the ungodly.

*O what peace we often forfeit!
O what needless pain we bear!
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer.* (Joseph M. Scriven).

The rebellious people did not want to hear a plain declaration of God’s word. They wanted to be flattered and made comfortable in their sin. They said to the prophets, ‘*Do not prophesy to us right things; speak to us smooth things, prophesy deceits*’ (10). People are still the same in the twenty-first century. They do not want to hear of man’s responsibility for his own sin, of judgment and of hell, of repentance for sin and trust in Christ alone for salvation, of the need to deny themselves in following Christ. Like Judah of old they will not have God’s way or obey his word because they want their pride oiled with smooth things. **Do not be like the foolish people of Judah. You cannot know lasting quietness and confidence in your life if you refuse to trust in God and obey his word (15–17).**

O LORD, you are my God. I will exalt you

This great and encouraging chapter contains a song of praise for God’s people! *O LORD, you are my God. I will exalt you, I will praise your name, for you have done wonderful things* (1). We saw yesterday, that even in the day of judgment the redeemed of the Lord will have a song. Why should we have a song?

- Because God has ‘*done wonderful things*’. His plans of old (before he created the world) will surely come to pass (1). ‘A city’ (2) here represents all that opposes God. In Isaiah’s time it represented cities of nations which oppressed Israel such as Nineveh and Babylon (37:37; 21:9). ‘Babylon’ is a symbol of the anti-Christian governments and kings of the world who have persecuted God’s people through the ages (cp. Revelation chapters 17 and 18). There will be rejoicing in heaven when ‘Babylon’ is finally destroyed (Revelation 19:1–4).
- Because of our security in God (4). Matthew Henry comments, ‘He is a Refuge from the storm of rain or hail, and a Shadow from the scorching heat of the sun in summer. God is a sufficient refuge to his people in all weathers, both cold and hot, wet and dry.’ Are you being battered by stormy trials? God is your refuge and strength (cp. Psalm 46:1). What a wonderful reassurance!
- Because of what God will do for us. He will prepare a feast for us when the Lord Jesus comes again (6; cp. Revelation 19:9). There will then be no veil of ignorance (7; cp. 2 Corinthians 3:15). We will rise bodily from the grave (cp. 26:19). We will not live for ever as disembodied spirits (John 5:28–29; 1 Corinthians 15:51–55). God *will swallow up death for ever* and grief will be banished (8; cp. Revelation 21:4). Think of that; death, our last enemy will be destroyed. **Is it any wonder that we rejoice in our Saviour with great joy (cp. 1 Peter 1:8)? Is it any wonder that we await the return of Christ with glad anticipation (9)?** *Even so, come, Lord Jesus!* (Revelation 22:20).

You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on you

The promise of the restoration of Judah from captivity (1–2, 12–14) was fulfilled after the conquest of Babylon by the Medes and Persians in 538 BC. We must always remember that Old Testament prophecy often speaks both of the near and distant future. This chapter is no exception. The main reference here, however, is not to the restoration of Judah, but to the gospel age. The ‘*strong city*’ (1) is the Jerusalem above (Galatians 4:26; Hebrews 12:22–23). The church below is the earthly representative of that city which is the church made perfect in heaven (cp. Revelation 21:1–5). What are the characteristics of the citizens of heaven, of every Christian?

- They are a singing, worshipping people (1).
- They are a secure people surrounded by walls of salvation (1,20).
- They are a righteous people who love the truth (2).
- They enjoy a peace which this world cannot give – *the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding* (Philippians 4:7; cp. John 14:27). Verse 3 is precious. *You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you.* If you would enjoy God’s perfect peace, you must have a steadfast mind, trusting in God; you must live a holy life seeking to do God’s will.
- They are directed by God. Their way is uprightness because the *Most Upright* guides them (7).
- They thirst for fellowship with God (8–9).
- They pray for the salvation of sinners (10).
- They have a glorious hope – the resurrection of the dead (19).

Christian, should you be downhearted? No! Think of your glorious privileges and raise your songs of praise to God. If you have no song, could it be that you do not belong to the city of God? Isaiah saw another city in his prophecy (5–6). It was a city of the proud which was doomed for destruction. If you are not a Christian, you belong to that city. Flee from that city to Christ. He will accept you and save you if you will repent of your sin and trust in him.

Those also who erred in spirit will come to understanding

There are two messages of woe in this chapter – to Jerusalem (called ‘*Ariel*’, 1–14) and to the scheming, plotting leaders of Judah who vainly thought that they could hide their devious plans from the Lord (15–24). ‘*Ariel*’ means an altar-hearth and the prophet warned that Jerusalem would become like an altar which dripped with the blood of those killed in the slaughter as the city was besieged (1–3). Verses 5 to 8 probably refer to the incident in which God destroyed the Assyrian divisions around Jerusalem (chapters 36 and 37). The army vanished like a dream in the night (7–8).

The Lord punished Judah by bringing spiritual slumber upon them and sealing his word so that they were unable to hear it (9–12). Ignorance is not bliss and spiritual blindness is a terrible condition which seals up the word of God so that it cannot be understood. The New Testament Pharisees were like the people of Judah. They had much religious show, but little reality as their hearts were far from God (13; cp. Matthew 15:7–9). If we are not right with God and continue to reject his word, we are in deadly danger.

When God visits our hearts things are different. The spiritually deaf are able to hear God’s word, the spiritually blind are enlightened and there is joy in the Lord (18–19). *Those also who erred in spirit will come to understanding, and those who murmured will learn doctrine* (24). **Nothing is too hard for the Lord. He can save the most ignorant and hostile sinner so that they will embrace the Saviour and learn his ways. What a glorious gospel we have to declare.**

*O Jesus, King most wonderful,
Thou Conqueror renowned,
Thou sweetness most ineffable,
In whom all joys are found!*

*When once thou visitest the heart,
Then truth begins to shine,
Then earthly vanities depart,
Then kindles love divine.*

(Bernard of Clairvaux).

The LORD of hosts who is wonderful in counsel

This passage is a parable which ends with an exclamation of praise to God. There is nothing haphazard in the work of a farmer as he ploughs, sows seed and harvests. The man has a field and various kinds of seed. He ploughs just enough to break up the soil. He then sows the best seed (*the wheat*) in the best soil, then barley and then around the edges of the field, the inferior rye-seed (*spelt*). There is also careful processing of the harvested grain. It is sufficiently threshed to remove the chaff and no more (24–28).

Isaiah's message is that just as the farmer knows what he is doing, so God is in complete control of the nations of the world and wisely governs all things. He is *the LORD of hosts who is wonderful in counsel and excellent in guidance* (29). One of the names of the Lord Jesus Christ is 'Wonderful Counsellor' (9:6). We should trust in God because:

- He *is wonderful in counsel*. His purposes cannot be frustrated or thwarted. God declares, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure' (46:10; cp. Psalm 33:11).
- He *is excellent in guidance* (the Hebrew word translated 'guidance' = 'wisdom'). In God *are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge* (Colossians 2:3). He lovingly and wisely cares for his people.

Are you troubled or perplexed? Dear Christian, come to the all-wise God, your heavenly Father, *who is wonderful in counsel and excellent in guidance*. Pour out your heart to him in worship, adoration and praise. Tell him that you love him and that you will trust in him. *Commit your way to the LORD, trust also in him* (Psalm 37:5). **He will bring you through.**

*God shall alone the refuge be
And comfort of my mind;
Too wise to be mistaken, he,
Too good to be unkind.*

(Samuel Medley)

Gathered one by one

This is yet another prophecy that not only points to the restoration of the Jews from captivity in Babylon, but also to the gospel age. 'Leviathan' (1) is a serpent-like monster. These great creatures are used to describe three empires:

- Assyria, 'the fleeing serpent' (the swift-flowing River Tigris).
- Babylon, 'the twisted serpent' (the winding River Euphrates).
- Egypt, 'the reptile that is in the sea' (the Nile Delta).

God warned that he would visit judgment upon them and he promised that his people would be *gathered one by one* from their captivity (1, 12–13). The picture of Israel as a delightful vineyard guarded by the Lord and from which he gathers fruit (2–6) is a sharp contrast to the picture of the useless vineyard in chapter 5.

We should not look for a restoration of Israel which will be ruled over by Christ at the end of the age. The church, which includes Jews and Gentiles, is the Israel of God (cp. Romans 2:29; Galatians 3:29; 4:21–27; 6:16). The church is now God's vineyard, kept and cared for by him (3), and through which the whole world is blessed (6). Israel did not bear spiritual fruit because she was unfaithful to God and trusted in idols (7–9). If we are not right with the Lord we also will fail to be fruitful.

The church is the Israel of God but not all churches belong to Christ. Outward show, ceremony and profession of Christ's name are not enough. God must be honoured and his precious word must be loved and obeyed. To belong to Christ, *you must be born again* through the mighty work of the Holy Spirit in your life (John 3:3–8). When the Lord Jesus comes again, his people will be *gathered one by one* and taken to heaven to be with him for ever (12; cp. Matthew 24:30–31). **Will you be among those gathered?**

The LORD of hosts will be for a crown of glory

There are six addresses in chapters 28 to 33 all beginning with the word ‘*woe*’ (28:1; 29:1,15; 30:1; 31:1; 33:1). In some the prophet denounces Judah for seeking help from Egypt rather than trusting in God. Isaiah begins by pointing to the northern kingdom (Ephraim) which was like a crown of fading flowers on the head of a drunken reveller. The party would soon be over with the coming of divine judgment. The flowers would be trampled underfoot as Assyria, the Lord’s ‘*mighty and strong one*’ conquered Ephraim (1–4).

Isaiah warned Judah to take heed. She too would be punished if she persisted in her sin. Matters were made worse in Judah through a lack of spiritual direction from the religious leaders who were drunkards. Strong drink robs a man of dignity and sound judgment (7–8). These verses are a sharp warning against drunkenness which is sin (cp. Ephesians 5:18). These people despised Isaiah and scorned his simple, direct approach. ‘*Whom will he teach knowledge?... precept upon precept, line upon line ... here a little, there a little.*’ They would not listen to the word of the Lord and he would surely bring judgment upon them (9–14). They had despised the stammering tongue, but they would hear the strange language of foreigners (perhaps the Assyrian invaders). Verse 11 is taken up in the New Testament to show that the gift of tongues was given as a sign of judgment upon unbelieving Israel which had rejected Christ (1 Corinthians 14:21).

The Lord also had a message for the faithful remnant to encourage them to stand firm. The ‘*crown of pride*’ of the drunken mockers would soon fade away (1,3), but *in that day the LORD of hosts will be for a crown of glory and a diadem of beauty. A beautiful crown to give a spirit of justice and strength to those who turn back the battle at the gate* (5–6). **Satan and his evil servants are very strong and are very near (‘at the gate’), but let us remain faithful to the Lord. Strengthened by him, we will turn back the battle at the gate.**

A tried stone, a precious corner-stone, a sure foundation

Those who mock God’s word are not modern – there were plenty like them in Isaiah’s time (14). The foolish leaders of Judah had *made a covenant with death* confident that they would escape judgment (15–16). This covenant may refer to the treaty made with Egypt and other nations to protect themselves from Assyrian aggression. They vainly imagined that this alliance would safeguard them from death and from the abode of the dead (‘*Sheol*’). Such confidence was totally misplaced and would not save them from judgment. Just as a man cannot cover himself when lying on a short bed so Egypt would not be able to shield Judah from her enemies. Isaiah warned his hearers against mocking God’s word (18–22).

The prophet points again to the coming of Christ. Verse 16 is quoted several times in the New Testament (Romans 9:33; Ephesians 2:20; 1 Peter 2:6–8) – *Behold, I lay in Zion a stone for a foundation, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone, a sure foundation; whoever believes will not act hastily.* Why should we trust in the Lord Jesus? He is our sure foundation and he will never fail us. When we trust in him, we will not act hastily on account of panic. To belong to Christ is to be included in the new covenant which was sealed with his precious blood. This is a covenant of life, not a covenant of death. Is it any wonder that Peter could write as the Holy Spirit brought this prophecy to his mind, *Therefore, to you who believe, he is precious* (1 Peter 2:7). **Is the Lord Jesus precious to you?**

*Christ is made the sure Foundation,
Christ the Head and Corner-stone,
Chosen of the Lord, and precious,
Binding all the church in one,
Holy Zion’s help for ever
And her confidence alone.*

(7th-century hymn, translated by John Mason Neale)