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Isaiah's ideal king

ISAIAH'S IDEAL KING.

Ideals are not the product of imagination and invention, but of life and experience. To understand then the ideals held by any writer one must know the national thought into which he was born, and also the historical conditions of the times in which he lives.

To comprehend Isaiah's conception of the ideal king and the possibility of such a conception, one must know(1) the religious ideas of the nation up to the time of his birth, and (2) the historical conditions which were the occasion of his conception.

The fundamental idea of the Jewish race was, that God was their father; they were his people; and communication between them was possible. It is true that many times in their lives they were in trouble and doubted this truth, but at such times a great deliverance was sure to come and clear away the doubt.

They soon learned that any limitation of God's revelation, was not due to the inability of God to communicate Himself, but to their inability to be communicated to. If the simplest and most effectual way for God to begin to reveal Himself is by delivering his people from trouble, then the men used to re-

veal Him will be leaders. Any man whom God can fill with his spirit may be chosen. The nation was in Egypt; God knew it and cared for them; the only way to tell them so was to deliver them; the way to do it was by one of their own number. The victories under Joshua, the successes by Gideon, had firmly taught them that He reveals his will through great leaders.

But when the kingdom was established, an advance was made. Leaders were no longer chosen because of their bearing toward Jehovah, but the leader must be the king--naturally. The earthly king reigned as a sort of representative of the heavenly king, all heavenly power was invested in him. Any good which God had for his people would come through him; any deliverance would be wrought through him. The king would be the one man on earth who would stand between God and his people, who would interpret God's will to men.

Such were the religious ideas which Isaiah inherited. Now what was the political condition of his times ?

Judah had been threatened by an invasion from Israel and Syria. Ahaz who was then on the throne, fearing that he could not resist the attack and would lose his capital, decided to appeal to Assyria for help. This was an unwise thing to do, and one man in the nation knew it. Isaiah saw that Assyria

if appealed to would help as requested and would bring relief and safety from the allies, but he also saw what the king did not , that after the relief Judah would suffer great affliction from Assyria herself. By this act of asking for protection, the king would place himself under this great conquering power. The prophet tells his fear to the king, and tries to persuade him to give up his foolish course. Ahaz's refusal convinces Isaiah that a weak, cowardly, foolish king is on the throne of David. At a time when the nation needed courage in her king, he had shown weakness and cowardice. When the time called for wisdom, he had proved his ignorance. When it needed obedience to God's will, he had followed his own wilful course.

The prophet must in some way find relief from such a state of affairs. We are reminded of a similar situation in which Samuel and Elisha were placed. Saul had disobeyed God's will, and refused to carry out God's orders in regard to the Amalekites. Samuel condemned his action, and placed another king over Israel. So when the wicked king Ahab caused the death of Naboth, in order to obtain his vineyard, God through Elisha remedied the evil, by removing the king. Here we see the custom was, when a king proved unworthy, to depose him--a simple

remedy for all such difficulties. But Isaiah could not do this. Times had changed, and now if a king proved himself unfit, the nation had to abide his unfitness till his death.

Dethronement was not to be thought of, but one could find some relief in looking forward to a time when there would be a true king. This is what Isaiah did. He calls his disciples around him, and comforts them by prophesying of a time after Ahaz, when there shall be an ideal kingdom and an ideal king. Assyria, he tells them, after she has crushed Judah, will in turn be smitten by Jehovah and then this ideal king will appear. These are his words: "Unto us a child is born, a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called Wonder of a Counsellor, Mighty Lord, Speedy Booty, Prince of Peace."

Wonder of a Counsellor. It is a law of thought that a thing suggests its opposite. The thought of death suggests the thought of life; thought of badness, goodness; thought of failure, success. So it is here. The inability of Ahaz to govern, would suggest to the mind of a prophet a being who could govern. His ignorance, weakness, and wilfulness would create a longing for a king who was all wisdom, all strength, and perfectly obedient. Wonderful counsellor is an attempt

to describe such a character. This king unlike Ahaz is to be so filled with wisdom and knowledge, that he can readily decide all questions of state. He is to be so obedient that he will be a perfect instrument in the hands of God.

The next title given to this king is Mighty Lord,--the Hebrew ,--El Gibbor. This word should be translated Lord, not God. In places where it means God, the word has the article before it, as in Jer. 32: 18, Neh. 9: 32, and in Deut. In Psalm 82 we have the word used without the article and should be translated Lord. Instead of this the translators have done violence to the construction and the sense by translating it gods. So it reads, "God summoned the lords." Verse 6 should read, "Ye are lords", not "Ye are gods".

Again, El in Hebrew is used not only of God, but also of heathen divinities, of kings, and of people in power. Nebuchadnezzar is spoken of in this way. Now what word have we in English, which can fully express this El of the Hebrews ? God is not the word, for we never use that word of any but the Supreme Being. But there is a word which we use for the Supreme Being, also for kings and people of note. The word Lord to us means the same as the word El to the Hebrews. Mighty Lord then is the best translation of the title El Gib-

bor. This does not refer to the divinity of the son, and his identity with the Father. But it is merely a title given to this king in recognition of his achievements. He is to do so much for the nation by conquering their enemies, and by his administration, that Mighty Lord will be the best title to give him. His great deeds will show that there is no limit to his power, practically he will be omnipotent.

But further. The peculiar situation of the Jewish nation (that of a small nation surrounded by larger ones), made it necessary for their king to be a warrior. He must be valiant in battle, always ready to meet the enemy, and by the help of Jehovah always successful. Ahaz failed in this one essential. His conduct proved him a coward and weakling. The ideal king then would be an ideal warrior, just what the people were longing for. His great wisdom, and strength, would be used to fight their battles and subdue their enemies. In fact, he would be such a warrior, subduing all so easily, that he would be called Speedy Booty. This is the third title of the son and expresses the ideal of the people more than the other two.

The last title is Prince of peace. This seems to contradict the preceding one. How can this king be a mighty war-

rior and at the same time a Prince of peace ? Instead of a contradiction, however, it is a corroboration. He is prince of peace because he is such a warrior. He obtains peace for his people by conquering their enemies. He preserves peace by keeping these conquered ones in subjection.

We must not put too much stress upon these names. They are merely titles given to this ideal king in his kingly capacity. Inscriptions of the Babylonians and Egyptians show the same tendency. In speaking of their kings, they use such expressions as "Ever-living", "Lord of Life", "Lord of Eternity and Infinity". So here these titles are a general statement of the character of the king and his relation to his people.

But the prophet wishes to go farther and tell the people the relation of this king to Jehovah. Jehovah is the source of all his power and wisdom. The Spirit of Jehovah shall rest upon him. Not a spirit different from the one others have had, but the same that Samson, Solomon and David had, only greater in degree. He will be closer to God than any of the prophets had been; he will combine all in himself. This spirit gave Samson strength, Solomon wisdom, Bezalel skill, but this one is to have so much of the spirit that he will have

all of these,--strength, wisdom and skill. This king is not to be an absolute king in his own right. The idea was deep rooted in the Jewish mind that Jehovah was their king. Any ideal king on earth then must be a reflection of Jehovah's rule, must be God on earth, a perfect instrument in God's hands. God is his king, and he must be as submissive to God as his subjects are to him. The prophet gives us an example in Ch. 11, of what this perfect filling by the spirit of God will do. This king is not to judge after the sight of his eyes. As in the case of David, when the woman Tekoa came to him he was able by the spirit of God to have a deep insight into the knowledge of the case, so this king would have so much of the spirit that he would understand intuitively all cases, and be able to deal with them justly. Every Jew wanted this in his king.

This ideal king is to be so filled with the spirit of Jehovah, that God can use him perfectly to interpret his will to the people. The question might be raised here, what relation does this ideal king hold to Immanuel of the 8th chapter ? Many have thought him the same person. If this be true, he must have been born at the time the prophecy was written, but the form of the verb in this and the 11th chapter indicates

that all this is to take place in the future.

Again, Immanuel is a symbol of the times immediately following the appeal by Ahaz to Assyria for help; the ideal king is to characterize the times immediately following the overthrow of Assyria and the relief to Judah. Immanuel is a name given indicating the circumstances under which the child is born, and had nothing whatever to do with his character or nature. The peaceful condition of affairs was the emphatic thing about his birth. On the other hand, the ideal king is called Wonder of a Counsellor because of his character and deeds. Immanuel is named by his mother as an expression of her gratitude for God's deliverance of the nation; the ideal king is named by the people in recognition of his good administration. In case of the first it was not necessary that a child should really bear that name; in case of the second it was necessary that there should be a king who should have this character. We conclude then that the child spoken of in the 7th chapter is not the one prophesied in the 9th, and that there is no connection between them, they being separate prophecies.

But does this king hold any relation to the Suffering Servant of second Isaiah ? We learn from the record that the

ideal king is a great warrior; the servant of Jehovah is a sufferer. One by his wisdom, courage and power does mighty deeds; the other by his meekness, gentleness and patience simply teaches the people. One is to be an active instrument in God's hands; the other is to passively do his will. The king is to be God's viceroy on earth; the servant is to be a sacrifice for sin. Nations are to wonder at the first; in the second all the nations of the earth are to be blessed. Again we conclude that these two are not the same person, and that there are two separate prophecies.

We have studied the prophecy. Did Jesus Christ fulfil it ?

From the record we see that Isaiah looked forward to the appearance of a scion from the house of David, who would reveal perfectly the will of God to his people. This king would be so completely filled with God's power that he would perfectly do his will. He expected this king to come in his time, after the Assyrian crisis. He was to be a successor to Ahaz and by his wisdom and glory would compensate them for the sufferings endured under that king.

This prophecy was fulfilled to some extent by Hezekiah, who in the later part of Isaiah's life gave such a good reign,

but we cannot call the appearance of this king a complete fulfilment. Indeed if we shut the fulfilment of this prophecy up to the fulfilment of the letter, we are forced to admit that the prophet was here mistaken, for no king has ever yet appeared who has had such qualities or such a kingdom. Jesus Christ was not such a temporal king. If he had been he could not have fulfilled the prophecy of the 53d chapter.

But although we are forced to the conclusion that the letter of the prophecy was never fulfilled, we know that the spirit of it was more than fulfilled. This prophecy expresses the deep longing and need of the race for a full revelation of Jehovah. This is what a Messiah must mean, a full revelation, an incarnation. What does it matter if the religious ideas and the conditions of the times framed this longing of the Jews in the form of an ideal king ? If the incarnation came in any form,--as a king, or a sufferer, or both,--this prophecy and all prophecy, Jewish or heathen, which had this same deep longing, was fulfilled.

Jesus Christ was this complete self revelation of God. It does not matter whether he came as a king or a sufferer. He came, and satisfies the deepest longings of all peoples.

Not only the deepest longings they have had, but ever can have.

The grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ is the fulfilment of all prophecy.

Thesis.

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Miss. Sarah Dipper.