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Lesson II. Jan. 10. Isa. 26: 1-10.

A SONG OF SALVATION.

GOLDEN TEXT.

"Trust ye in the Lord forever; for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength."—Isa. 26: 4.

This prophecy is a part of a larger prophecy (chaps. 24–27). It is entirely uncertain when these chapters were written, most critics placing them in Hezekiah's reign, B. C. 701, but others as late as the exile, or even after the return, either in reality or prophetic vision.

EXPLANATORY.

I. PRAISE FOR THE FINAL TRIUMPH OF GOD'S PEOPLE. THE CITY OF GOD. 1. *In that day*, the day of deliverance and final triumph seen afar off. *Shall this song be sung in the land of Judah*: where the triumph took place, whose enemies were destroyed, to which the exiles returned. This was the natural type in those days of the kingdom of God, the millennial reign of the Messiah. For then it was the only existing representative of that kingdom; and out of it grew, as a new shoot from a tree cut down, the kingdom of Christ.

FIRST, A SAFE AND PERMANENT HOME. *We have a strong city.* For the Jews, then, Jerusalem defended against all enemies. For us, the city of God, the New Jerusalem, a safe abiding under the shadow of the Almighty, a shelter under His wings, "a hiding-place from the wind and a covert from the tempest," "as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land" (Isa. 32: 2).

Salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks. The nation glories in the strength of its city—a strength consisting not in material bulwarks, but in "salvation," *i. e.*, in freedom and safety, assured by God, and the guarantee of continued spiritual blessedness. The original sense of the word rendered *salvation* (as Arabic shows) is breadth, largeness, absence of constraint. God is our salvation in two ways, (1) by what He does for us. All His wisdom and power are pledged for the defence of His people. (2) God defends us by what He does within us. "He may give us a spirit of wisdom and good counsel, so that the action we take shall be prudent; and in this way security and even rescue from peril are oftentimes obtained. In times of anxiety less importance attaches to what our foes do than to what *we do*.

SECOND, A WELCOME. 2. *Open ye the gates.* These verses remind us of the description of the New Jerusalem in Rev. 21.

THIRD, WHO MAY ENTER. *That the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in.* In Ps. 118: 19, 20 (which is founded, probably, on this passage of Isaiah), the gates are "gates of righteousness," and they who enter them are "the righteous." So in Ps. 24: 3, 4 and Rev. 21: 27.

This is not contrary to the promise that whosoever believeth on Jesus shall be saved, and that we must enter into His kingdom by faith. For faith is the way by which we become righteous; all true faith leads to righteousness. Jesus saves *from* sin, not *in* sin.

FOURTH, THE BLESSINGS OF THE INHABITANTS. 3. *Thou wilt keep.* God is the source of good. He keeps, He defends, and so brings peace; He implants the principles which bring *perfect peace.*

PEACE FROM TRUST IN GOD. (1) There can be peace only from the care and protection of the wisest and strongest and best Being in the universe. (2) There is reason to trust God, because He has promised to care for His children, and all the history of His dealings with them proves that He is able and willing to keep His promises.

FIFTH, AN EXHORTATION. 4. *Trust ye in the Lord for ever.* Not in men, not in nature, not in your own wisdom, but in God. Why? *For in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength.* Revised Version reads "in an everlasting rock," and in the margin, "a Rock of Ages." A certain refuge throughout all eternity. He has shown Himself to be a rock on which everything breaks that would attack the faithful whom He encompasses.

THE ROCK OF AGES is a rock fortress, of which Jerusalem was the best ancient, and Gibraltar the most modern, example. God is a rock fortress that no enemy can scale, no length of time can weaken. He is a sure defence from all trouble, from all sin, from all punishment of sin. He is "a safe and happy shelter," the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.

II. THE DESTRUCTION OF GOD'S ENEMIES. 5. *For He bringeth down them that dwell on high.* As Nineveh or Babylon, *the lofty city* which He *layeth low.* Both these great enemies of Judah were brought low. Proud of their strength and glory, they felt invincible; so that Sennacherib's messenger could say to Hezekiah, "Hath any of the gods of the nations delivered his land out of the hand of the king of Assyria?" (Isa. chaps. 36, 37). And yet they perished, so that Babylon is still but a heap, and Nineveh's site even was unknown for centuries, and within a few years her mounds have been opened to confirm the word of God. But these cities are but a type of the strongholds of the enemies of God in the world. Despotisms, oppressions, the liquor traffic, governmental corruption, infidelity, every form of evil, are like proud and lofty cities that defy the true God; but every one shall be brought low.

6. *The foot shall tread it down, even the feet of the poor, and the steps of the needy, i. e.*, of God's people. The same word in Hebrew expresses poverty and humble-mindedness. The weakest and poorest of God's people can overcome their strongest enemies. Those now oppressed and weak shall triumph over their oppressors.

III. THE EFFECT OF GOD'S DEALINGS.—7-10. This effect is doubled according as those with whom He deals are righteous or wicked.

FIRST, THE EFFECT OF GOD'S JUDGMENTS ON THE RIGHTEOUS. We have seen this in part in the remarks above on the *poor and needy.* 7. *The way of the just is uprightness.* Or, a right way, or straightness, plainness. He walks, in intention, along the straight way of truth; and God makes it to be, in spite of its roughnesses, a straight way to the land of peace. It is one of the main blessings of the righteous that "God shows them the way they are to walk in" (Ps. 143: 8), so that they are, for the most part, free from doubt and perplexity as to the line of conduct which it behoves them to pursue. *Thou most upright* (*i. e.*, God) *dost weigh* (or direct) *the path of the just.* He "weighs" (or "ponders") the path, with a view to keeping it straight and level. None, therefore, need turn aside from that well constructed road into "crooked ways" (Ps. 125: 5) of their own devising.

8. *Yea, in the way of Thy judgments, O Lord, have we waited for Thee, i. e.*, to see Thee come forth as a judge, for the vindication of Thy people and the destruction of their enemies. *The desire of our soul is to Thy name.* God's name expresses the whole character and nature of God. "It is the word used by the prophets when they would represent the personal presence of God."

9. *With my soul* (truly, and not in form merely) *have I desired Thee in the night.* The night of affliction, the night of sickness, of persecution, of oppression by enemies, of disappointed hopes, of spiritual darkness, the night of death. *Will I seek Thee early, i. e.*, diligently. *For when Thy judgments are on the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.* By the long judgment of the exile the Jews learned some lessons they never forgot. It was a new era in their history. They never again relapsed into idolatry.

GOD'S DISCIPLINE AND THE RIGHTEOUS. The object of God's discipline—the sorrows and sickness He sends, the burdens He lays on them, the hard work He gives, the temptations he permits—is to make men righteous, and to lead to higher degrees of goodness. It is well known that the palm grows best loaded down with weights. This is the universal law of spiritual growth. There must be resistance, struggle, conflict, or there can be no development of strength. The beatitudes in the Apocalypse are for those who overcome.

SECOND, THE EFFECT OF GOD'S GOODNESS ON THE WICKED. 10. *Let favor be shewed to the wicked*, etc. God's judgments upon the wicked are necessary, because they will not be led to repentance by His goodness. *In the land of uprightness.* God's holy and redeemed land, where the people are all upright; where the moral atmosphere is heavenly. *Will He deal unjustly.* A villain, even supposing he were placed in such a country, will nevertheless act as a scoundrel. Compare Plato on "Justice," in *The Republic*, Book 2. *And will not behold the majesty of the Lord.* God's goodness in nature, His holiness in His providence, rewarding goodness and punishing sin; all His wondrous works for His people, and His terrible judgments on the wicked; even the manifestation of God in His Son Jesus Christ, have no more effect on the wilfully wicked than a lovely landscape upon a blind man.

The Knock and What Followed.

'Twas a cold, clear winter's day. All the ponds were frozen over, and the ground was covered with snow; sleigh-bells were jingling, and everybody seemed to feel the joy of the Christmas Day that had just passed.

Coming across Mr. Armstrong's field from the hill lot were two boys and two girls, each pulling a sled. They were pelting each other with soft snow-balls, and looked like very lively little snow men and women. Shouts of laughter sounded as they came across the lot, running and tumbling over each other and the sleds. The Doctor's sleigh, drawn by two handsome bay horses, came in right just then, and the Doctor brought the horses to a standstill, and called out, "Do you want a tow? Tie on." In a second the four were flying up the road behind the Doctor's horses. What a ride that was! How they did fly! Houses, fences, trees, were mixed up with the snow-balls thrown by the horses. At last the Doctor turned into a side road that led toward the tannery and the workmen's houses. At one of the cleanest and best-looking of these houses the Doctor stopped. He jumped out and came to look at his passengers, who sat on their sleds rosy and smiling. "Hey, there! Did they go fast enough to please you?" "Oh, Doctor! it was lovely," said Letty Armstrong, jumping from her sled and shaking the snow from her coat.

"Just right, Doctor," said her brother Ralph.

"What did you think, little woman?" asked the Doctor of Amy, his own little girl, as he lifted her from her sled, and helped her shake the snow from her long yellow hair and her clothes.

"Splendid, papa, splendid!" answered Amy.

"Boss!" said Jack Fletcher, looking up at the Doctor from behind the sleigh where he was re-adjusting the ropes.

"I think that you would better take a walk about this part of the town while I make this call. Do not go beyond the houses, and when I'm ready to go I'll whistle. Amy, you answer; you have your whistle."

"Yes, papa," said Amy, as she touched the little silver whistle that hung by a small cord from the button of her coat.

The children started briskly down the street, and were soon snowballing and laughing as gayly as such happy young people usually laugh.

They had almost reached the last house in that direction when they saw a little girl, about Amy's age—eleven years—come out of the house. She was not warmly dressed, and was not a happy-looking child. She passed them without looking directly at them.

"What a cross looking girl," said Ralph. "'Nough to sour a pan of milk," said Jack Fletcher.

"She looked cold, I thought," said Amy, looking after the little girl who had passed out of sight.

The children were about to turn the corner and walk in the other direction when they were startled by a knock and a hurrying of feet from the door of the house that the little girl had left. In a second Ralph and Jack were in the grasp of a big, burly-looking man. "Ye'll knock at my door and run, will ye," he said, giving each boy a shake.

"We have not knocked at your door, sir," said Ralph.

"Who did, thin? There's not another bye in sight, and I driven wild wid ye's. I said I whip the first bye I caught, and I will, shure," and here Tim Murphy raised his hand, in which he held a big stick. Just as his arm was about to fall, a quick step sounded, and the Doctor caught Tim Murphy by the arm.

"What is the matter here?"

"Ah, Doctor, these boys have been knocking at me door and running away. Shure, me life is pestered out of me wid their nonsense."

"Boys, did you do this?"

"No, Doctor."

"I guess there's some mistake, Tim. Let us go in and see the baby."

With a shamefaced expression Tim led the way toward the house.

The one room was dark and gloomy. Near the door was a broad, wet place where the several children had tramped in and out all day. Their tracks were all over the floor in muddy, wet spots. A tired woman, evidently Tim's wife, was sitting in a broken rocking-chair, holding a very thin baby, who gazed at the children in solemn wonder.

"How's the baby?" said the Doctor, as he sat down near the mother, while Tim stood by the broken stove looking at the boys with a half-angry expression.

"Better, thank ye, Doctor."

"Yes, he is," answered the Doctor, opening his medicine case and beginning to fix some powders.

The little girl that had attracted the attention of Ralph and Jack came in just then, bringing two younger children, almost crying with the cold, with her. Amy put out her hand to the little girl and said, sweetly, "How do you do?" A pleased expression passed over the little girl's face as she took Amy's hand, but she did not answer. Amy knelt down and began untying the little, ragged hood of the youngest child. She was surprised when she saw how little the child had on to protect it from the cold; and then she looked at the broken stove and realized how little chance there was that the child could get warmed in that house.

When the Doctor had arranged the baby's medicine he stood up and said: "I guess you've changed your mind about these boys, Tim."

"Yis, Doctor. You see, the byes do play all kinds of pranks, and these were all I see."

"Was it knockin', father? Shure, John Grady and Tom Flynn tole me ye'd nabbed two fellers and bate them for knockin' when they did it," said Anna Murphy.

"I begs yere pardon, Doctor, for troublin' yere byes."

"I know these boys are men enough to forgive a mistake," said the Doctor.

"Certainly, Doctor."

"Good-night, Mrs. Murphy; good-night, Mr. Murphy," said the boys, passing out of the door after the girls. Soon they were on the sleds and flying back to their home.

The next evening, which was New Year's Eve, at dusk, the Doctor, with Amy, Letty, and Ralph in the sleigh, and Jack sitting on a bright red sled behind, were driving over the same road. They came to a halt at quite a distance from Tim Murphy's house, and the children almost fell over each other in their eagerness to get out of the sleigh. The Doctor handed out bundles of all shapes, and sizes, which were piled on the sled. When the sled would hold no more, the girls' arms were filled, and the procession, with Ralph pulling the sled and Jack in the rear carrying a big goose, started toward Tim Murphy's house. They turned in at the gate and stole softly up to the door. The girls piled the bundles on the top step, the sled was placed at the lowest step, and Jack hung the goose on the knob.

Inside, Tim and Mrs. Murphy and the children were eating a supper of bread without butter and tea without milk or sugar. Suddenly there was a resounding knock on the door, a scurrying of feet, smothered giggles, and then quiet.

With a rush Tim bounded to the door. It was not easy to open, for the goose was heavy. Tim stared at the goose, then at the bundles. It did not take long to bring them inside: sugar, condensed milk, potatoes, butter, mince pie, apples, candy, two dolls, a rattle for the baby, stockings, a shawl, and other things that Tim Murphy's house had never held before. The next day the Murphy children had their first New Year's dinner.

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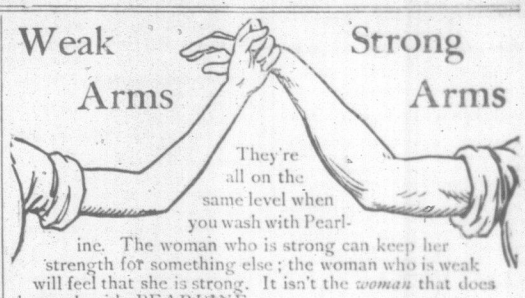

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