

68. We are to take heed to what the apostles have warned about false teachers. (I John 2:18-25)
69. Believe not every spirit but prove (test) each teacher. (I John 4:1-6)
70. Test teachers as to how they listen and heed the apostolic doctrine. (I John 4:5)
71. We are not to fellowship with false teachers (II John 5-11)— we are not to receive them into our home nor give them greeting (those who deny the deity of Jesus Christ).
72. We are to contend (agonize) earnestly for the faith which is once for all time delivered unto the saints. (Jude 3)
73. Remember that false teachers have been prophesied. (Jude 17)
74. We are to build ourselves up in faith, pray in the Spirit, keep ourselves in love (Jude 20, 21) as a method of combating false teaching.
75. On some who are teaching falsely not of perverse nature but out of doubt, we are to convince in an attitude of mercy. (Jude 22, 23)
76. Try those who claim apostolic authority to teach. (Rev. 2:2)

D. WEARINESS TO WICKED WHO BREAK COVENANT WITH THE LORD, CHAPTER 57

1. SORCERY

TEXT: 57:1-5

- 1 The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart; and merciful men are taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from the evil to come.
- 2 He entereth into peace; they rest in their beds, each one that walketh in his uprightness.
- 3 But draw near hither, ye sons of the sorceress, the seed of the adulterer and the harlot.

- 4 Against whom do ye sport yourselves? against whom make ye a wide mouth, and put out the tongue? are ye not children of transgression, a seed of falsehood,
- 5 ye that inflame yourselves among the oaks, under every green tree; that slay the children in the valleys, under the clefts of the rocks?

QUERIES

- a. Who are the "sons of the sorceress"?
- b. Were the Israelites really "slaying" children?

PARAPHRASE

These insensitive, indulgent leaders of Israel have produced a whole nation of uncaring people. These are times when good men are being destroyed and dying and no one seems to care or wonder why. Most do not realize that when the good man dies he is being taken away from these calamitous times. When the good man dies he enters in to a peaceful rest from the trials of this life. But you followers of sorcery and idolatry, prepare yourselves to face the wrath of Jehovah. Who are you making fun of? Who are you mocking with your impudent face-making? You are the sinners, aren't you? You passionately indulge in the sexual orgies of idol worship in the groves of terebinth trees and let your children be slain as human sacrifices in the rocky valleys of Palestine, do you not?

COMMENTS

v. 1-2 **THE RIGHTEOUS:** The problem Isaiah addresses here has been a problem for mankind ever since the Fall—why is it that the wicked seem to prosper and the righteous suffer? Of course, it is a problem only because of faulty perspective.

History looked at from the human perspective (limited to the past and the present; limited to this world and this life only) does seem to substantiate the idea that it "does not pay" to be good. But history seen from the divine perspective (by faith in the revelation of God about the past, present and future) says quite the opposite. The righteous man may *perish* ('avad in Hebrew which means "destroy") and the world evaluates it as something to be shunned. But the prophet of God says when the righteous man dies it is far from a tragedy for he is taken away from the evil to come. That is, the righteous man is delivered from the trials and tribulations of this world (cf. Rev. 7:14-17; 14:13; Psa. 116:15). Hosea, a contemporary of Isaiah, writes of the social chaos in the northern Ten Tribes (Israel) (cf. Hosea 4:1ff). No doubt the same kind of injustice and destruction was being directed against the righteous in the southern kingdom (Judah). Micah, also a contemporary of Isaiah, speaks of the ungodliness of Judah (cf. Micah 2:8-11; 3:1-3; 6:6-16; 7:1-6). Micah agrees with Isaiah that "the godly man has perished from the earth . . ." (Micah 7:2). The Hebrew word *yanuhu* is translated *rest* and has the connotation of "repose" (relaxation, ease). It is more precise than the usual Hebrew word for rest which is *shavath* ("sabbath"). Isaiah likens this rest unto sleep in the "bed." The word *shalom* at the first of the verse indicates the utter peacefulness which death brings to the man who "walks" in righteousness (cf. Dan. 12:10-13). Even if the righteous man must walk through the valley of the shadow of death, he will dwell in the house of the Lord forever (cf. Psa. 23). The wicked covenant breakers of Isaiah's day have it all wrong! They are self-deceived. They think the righteous have come to an untimely death because of their stubborn faithfulness to keep God's covenant. But it is the wicked covenant breakers who shall suffer!

v. 3-5 THE RIOTOUS REBROBATES: Thus the prophet arraigns the riotous leaders whom he had just characterized as "dumb dogs" (cf. 56:9-12). These leaders and their followers (which was the majority) are now characterized as "sons of the sorceress."

The Hebrew word used here for *sorceress* is *'onenah* which means literally "one who divines by the clouds." All "divining, soothsaying, magic, astrology" was prohibited by Mosaic law (cf. Ex. 22:18; Deut. 18:9-15). In the passage in Deut. 18:9-15 Moses categorizes the pagan practices as:

1. *me'onen* — one who bewitches with the evil eye; a cloud diviner
2. *menahesh* — an enchanter; snake-charmer; mesmerist; hypnotist
3. *mekasheph* — mutterer of incantations; ventriloquial whispers as under the influence of the spirits of the dead
4. *khover* — one who inflicts a spell by weaving magical knots
5. *'ov* — lit. means "bottle" indicating something like one who pretends powers over genii
6. *yidde'oniy* — a wizard; one who interprets the ravings of a medium
7. *doresh 'el-hammethiyim* — a necromancer; one who calls up the spirits of the dead

Moses placed Moloch-worship at the head of his list, probably to show the integral connection between the practice of magic and idolatry. Making their children "pass through the fire" (human sacrifice) was more intimately connected with soothsaying (delving into the future) and magic than any other practice of idolatry. See Isaiah 8:19; 44:25 and Ezekiel 21:21 for more on this. Men have, ever since Eden, been possessed with the desire to penetrate the future and to manipulate its course. History clearly demonstrates that such power is not within the realm of the natural abilities of man. Men therefore have always attempted to gain the help of beings (departed dead, demons, Satan, angels, etc.) supposedly possessing such knowledge and power. But this is strictly forbidden by God and His word. By faith in God and obedience to His word men may know all (past, present and future) that pertains to life and godliness (cf. II Pet. 1:3-4).

The majority of people in Isaiah's day no longer sought the

word of God but had turned to "wizards" (cf. Isa. 8:16ff). This inevitably led to the other abominable practices of paganism and idolatry—adultery, fornication, and human sacrifice. They were an impudent, scornful, profane people (cf. Ezek. 2:1-7; 3:1-11, etc.). They were making malicious sport at someone else's expense—probably the poor and the righteous; they were making impudent gestures with their faces, sticking out their tongues in derision. This showed their real character. They proved their falseness by these actions. They mocked the righteous man who died an untimely death, but they were really profaning themselves!

Isaiah's generation was as sick as our generation. The Hebrew word *hannechamim* means literally, *violently, passionately*, but is translated, *inflame yourselves* in verse five. They indulged in the violent, passionate, sexual orgies among the terebinth ('*elim*) trees. The *terebinth* is related to the pistachio trees. In Palestine it grows sometimes as high as 40 feet and spreads its branches, with their thick, dark-green foliage, over a wide area (cf. II Sam. 18:9ff). The same Hebrew word is sometimes translated *oak* and sometimes *green tree*. It was the tree that provided the "groves" in which the pagans practiced their idolatry and adultery (cf. Deut. 12:2; I Kings 14:23; Jer. 2:20; 3:6, 13; 17:2; Hos. 4:13ff; Ezek. 6:13, etc.). The worst of the idolatrous practices was child sacrifice. This was often carried out in the Valley of Hinnom, within sight of the Temple of God (cf. Jer. 32:35; Ezek. 26:26-31). "In the valleys" suggests the many rocky valleys of Palestine walled on each side by "clefts of the rocks." Archaeologists have uncovered earthen jars containing the bones of sacrificed infants from various cities and villages of ancient Palestine, confirming the statements of the prophets. Ed. J. Young points out that the description "in the valleys, under the clefts of the rocks" is certainly "not applicable to Mesopotamia . . ." Another piece of the cumulative evidence that the latter portions of Isaiah were written by the prophet Isaiah who lived in Palestine *before* the Babylonian captivity, and not by some unknown post-exilic "Deutero-Isaiah."

QUIZ

1. What is the problem with the righteous dying Isaiah deals with in this text?
2. Is it a tragedy when the righteous man dies?
3. How many different kinds of "sorcerers" might have practiced in Palestine?
4. What kind of sorcerer did Isaiah name in verse three?
5. How were Isaiah's people demonstrating their profaneness?
6. How intense was their indulgence in idolatry?
7. What bit of evidence do we have for the authorship of Isaiah here?

2. SENSUALITY

TEXT: 57:6-10

- 6 Among the smooth stones of the valley is thy portion; they, they are thy lot; even to them hast thou poured a drink-offering, thou hast offered an oblation. Shall I be appeased for these things?
- 7 Upon a high and lofty mountain hast thou set thy bed; thither also wentest thou up to offer sacrifice.
- 8 And behind the doors and the posts hast thou set up thy memorial: for thou hast uncovered thyself to another than me, and art gone up; thou hast enlarged thy bed, and made thee a covenant with them; thou lovedst their bed where thou sawest it.
- 9 And thou wentest to the king with oil, and didst increase thy perfume, and didst send thine ambassadors far off, and didst debase thyself even unto Sheol.
- 10 Thou wast wearied with the length of thy way; yet saidst thou not, It is in vain; thou didst find a quickening of thy strength; therefore thou wast not faint.

QUERIES

- a. What is the portion called "among the smooth stones"?
- b. Where is "behind the doors and the posts"?

- c. How could they be "wearied" and yet find "quickenning of strength"?

PARAPHRASE

You stupid people. You go down into the valleys and take the stones worn smooth by the rains and winds and make them your gods. You have declared that these rocks are the focus of all your existence. You worship rocks with wine and grain offerings. Do you think this is acceptable to Me, the Living God? You have not allowed any obstacle to deter you from entering into the gross sexual immoralities connected with your idolatry. You laboriously carry your beds up steep mountains and set them there to aid in your indulgence. Up there you also haul all your offerings and sacrifices. The scripture plaques that are supposed to be where they can be seen on the door-posts of your homes you have deliberately hidden behind the posts. You have done this because you have committed yourselves to total intimacy in idolatry and immorality. You take off your clothes and climb into your large beds up among the groves of the hills along with those prostitutes you have paid to have sexual intercourse with you. This is your consuming passion, Israel! You spared yourself no trouble in developing these abominable practices as your way of life. A long time ago you sent merchants and envoys to pagan kings trading your goods for their gods. You continued to go out of your way to make yourself more and more comfortable to heathen practices. You allowed yourself to be debased with a rottenness like that of the grave in order to practice your immorality. All this made you physically and psychologically weary but you never admitted the stupidity of it all because you found a certain intoxicating, exhilaration in your rebellious immorality. So, you kept it up!

COMMENTS

v. 6-8 PRESENT: The depravity of the rulers and leaders infected the whole nation. The "smooth stones" of the valley apparently are to be linked to the idolatry being practiced. Perhaps they were using these "smooth stones" to build altars (which in itself was forbidden; not even to Jehovah was an altar to be built anywhere except in Jerusalem) to pagan gods. They might have been using the "smooth stones" to chisel into images of Molech or other idols. The question of Jehovah through His prophet is, almost incredulous, "Do you actually believe this is acceptable to Me, the Living God!?" Worshipping rocks!? The worship of Molech (in Hebrew the word means, "governing"), god of the Ammonites, was best noted for its gross sexual orgies and sacrifice of children. It was already forbidden by Moses (Lev. 18:21; 20:1-5); allowed by Solomon to please his foreign wives (I Kings 11:7); principally worshipped in the valley of Hinnom (Gehenna) (II Chron. 33:6). The words Moloch, Molech, Milcom (I Kings 11:5) and Malcam (Zeph. 1:5) are all variations of the same image. (See *Minor Prophets*, by Clinton Gill, College Press, pgs. 22-38; and Ezek. 16:20; 23:37-39; Jer. 7:9-11, 31; 19:4-13; Psa. 106:35-42; for further information on the worship of Molech.)

Setting up a bed upon a "high and lofty mountain" indicates extensive and elaborate preparations were made by the Hebrews in order to engage in these Canaanite fertility-cult practices. There were special groves of trees, well-kept flower gardens and elaborately furnished "temples" high up in the hills of Jehovah's holy land where the men and women went to "worship" at the throne of flesh. Great amounts of labor and money were spent building and maintaining these whore-houses. The worship of flesh is not dead! Great amounts of labor and money are expended today to build and maintain modern sophisticated whore-houses. The Anglo-saxon fertility cult has its groves, prophets, priestesses, publishing-houses, and "temples" today in both America and Great Britain.

One might wonder how the Hebrew people could ever succumb

to such gross depravity. They had the Law of Moses. They even copied some of those Laws and fastened them to the door-posts of their houses so they might be reminded constantly of Jehovah's presence and His revealed will. Verse eight tells the tragic story! These people had deliberately taken these "memorials" of scripture off their door-posts and hidden them "behind" the posts. Out of sight, out of mind! The Hebrew people had long ago rejected the word of God (II Kings 17:19; II Chron. 36:16; Amos 2:4, etc.). Incredibly, the books of the Law of the Lord had even been lost at one point in Judah's history (cf. II Kings 22:8ff). These people had prostituted themselves to pagan gods. What they were doing was no accident. It was not because they had been socially deprived, or because they were born in a "ghetto." They voluntarily chose to "uncover" themselves to another. This is a figurative description of the intimacy with which they joined themselves to their idols. They really gave themselves to idolatry; they "married" their pagan gods ("made . . . a covenant"). That is not unique. People today "marry" their possessions, their jobs, their recreation. These Jews "loved" their idol-beds (orgies). They were not forced into idolatry.

v. 9-10 PAST: Judah's past history was replete with instances of her kings and leaders going to pagan kings for help in bringing idolatry into the land of Jehovah (cf. II Kings 16:10ff; II Chron. 28:22ff; Isa. 30:1ff; Amos 5:25-27, etc.). Ezekiel's graphic parody of Judah's idolatry (spiritual adultery) pictures the nation, the bride of Jehovah, as an adulterous nymphomaniac! She did not play the part of a normal prostitute accepting pay for her adultery. She went after her lovers, paying them to practice spiritual harlotry with her (Ezek. 16:23-34)! Judah could not invent enough idolatry on her own—she had to send ambassadors to other nations to copy their idolatry for themselves. *Sheol* symbolized the grave, the place where human flesh rots. Graves were associated with that which was "unclean" according to the Mosaic Law. Isaiah declares Judah "debased" herself even unto rottenness, corruption and death by joining herself so intimately and wholly to idolatry.

Judah expended great effort, millions of shekels, and willingly allowed herself to be humiliated before pagan kings in her insatiable lust for idolatry. Judah "wore herself out" running after every opportunity to engage in it. Prophets likened Israel's pursuit of idolatry to a "wild ass" in heat (cf. Jer. 2:23-24; Hosea 8:9ff). Pursuing idolatry as Judah did was expensive, exhausting and debasing, but she never would admit the obvious: "It is vain." As a matter of fact, she found a certain intoxication and exhilaration in it. Sin and rebellion is enticing because it intoxicates with a *false* sense of *power*. Man in rebellion against God falsely assumes an exhilarating sense of sovereignty. His brain, intoxicated with this false sovereignty, is philosophically and psychologically addled and he will not admit the stupidity of his rebellion. He floats in a fantasy-land of philosophical inebriation like the drunkard. He has a false sense of "strength." This was Judah. She would not admit the stupidity of idolatry (cf. Isa. 44:9-20) because she was inebriated with the indulgent pleasure and false sovereignty she felt in practicing it.

QUIZ

1. What were the people doing with the "smooth stones"?
2. What was involved in the worship of Molech?
3. To what pains did these people go to practice their idolatry?
4. Would the Hebrew people reject the Law of Moses?
5. To what extent did Judah go after idolatry?
6. What is so invigorating about sin and idolatry?

3. STUPIDITY

TEXT: 57:11-13

11 And of whom hast thou been afraid and in fear, that thou liest, and hast not remembered me, nor laid it to thy heart?

have not I held my peace even of long time, and thou fearest me not?

12 I will declare thy righteousness; and as for thy works, they shall not profit thee.

13 When thou criest, let them that thou hast gathered deliver thee; but the wind shall take them, a breath shall carry them all away; but he that taketh refuge in me shall possess the land, and shall inherit my holy mountain.

QUERIES

- a. What "righteousness" did Judah have to declare?
- b. When would Judah cry?

PARAPHRASE

Israel, what has preoccupied you and possessed you? Who has so impressed you that you have so thoroughly devoted yourself to that which is false? Why have you forgotten Me? Apparently you no longer fear Me because I have withheld My hand of judgment so long from you. Let Me tell you that I am soon going to show you, in no uncertain terms, what I think of your alleged righteousness. I am also going to show you that the idols you have made for yourself are not gods at all. Then you will cry out for deliverance but I will say, Let your idol-gods deliver you. They will be proven to be absolutely useless. They will disappear like a feather in a windstorm. In that time of trial, the person who puts his trust in Me will be able to look forward in hope that I will fulfill My promises to the faithful.

COMMENTS

v. 11 **ENTRENCHED:** The Hebrew word *da'agethe* is translated *afraid* but more properly means *anxious* or *preoccupied*. The word *thyire'yi* is from the root *yera'* and is translated *fear*; it is the most generic word for *fear* in Hebrew and generally means *reverential fear*. These people were not trembling with a paralyzing terror; they were just totally preoccupied with worshipping their idols and all the false living that went with it. They were living a lie and had totally committed themselves to it. This was a result of their breaking covenant with Jehovah. It was stupidity. And Jehovah was about to expose that stupidity. They were so thoroughly engrossed in their plunge into self-indulgence they did not remember Jehovah. How quickly men forget!

The goodness of God in "holding His peace" and withholding His judgments did not cause them to remember Him in thankfulness. They were not moved by His grace to repent. Their selfish, twisted minds rationalized that they were getting away with their wickedness. Israel had wanted to "be like the nations" for a long time (cf. I Sam. 8:4ff). For centuries she had preoccupied herself with the approval of men. When that consumes a nation or a man, Jehovah is forgotten. You cannot be a friend of the world and a friend of God (James 4:4).

v. 12-13 **EXPOSED:** All the time the Hebrews were engaging in idolatry they were also maintaining a facade of righteousness by offering sacrifices in the temple and by observing certain Sabbath regulations (cf. Amos 8:4-6; Isa. 1:10-15, etc.). But Jehovah will not "hold His peace" forever. He will soon come forth in judgment upon this people and then their sham righteousness will be exposed. The world will see then just where Israel has put its trust. Jehovah will demonstrate that all their pretended righteousness was unacceptable to Him. Not only that, He will expose once and for all the impotency of the idols they worshipped. Their enemies (Assyria and Babylon) will come in succession and attack them, destroy their cities and carry them away into exile. Their enemies will

also carry their idol-gods away on horseback. Their idol-gods will not deliver them from their enemies. Their enemies will mock their idols, their temple, their worship and even Jehovah. Of course, Jehovah will not be mocked. He will eventually destroy their enemies also. When the Hebrews cry out for deliverance, they will see clearly that idols are not gods. What misery and wretchedness is in store for the one who has been so thoroughly preoccupied and possessed by idol-mania. Despair, frustration, shame and guilt will be his end.

To the contrary, the one who has listened to the prophets of God and trusted Jehovah's word will find blessedness. The Hebrew word *khoseh*, translated *refuge*, means *confidence*, *trust*, or *flee to for safety*. The man whose preoccupation is to seek the approval of the Lord will find fulfillment, satisfaction and hope in the ultimate blessings of God. This is the man who keeps covenant with Jehovah.

QUIZ

1. What kind of fear did the people have?
2. What was false about them?
3. Why had they forgotten Jehovah?
4. What was God going to do about their sham righteousness?
5. What is the character of the man who receives Jehovah's blessing?

4. SMITING

TEXT: 57:14-19

- 14 And he will say, Cast ye up, cast ye up, prepare the way, take up the stumbling-block out of the way of my people.
 15 For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to

- revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite.
- 16 For I will not contend forever, neither will I be always wroth; for the spirit would faint before me, and the souls that I have made.
- 17 For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth, and smote him; I hid my face and was wroth; and he went on back-sliding in the way of his heart.
- 18 I have seen his ways, and will heal him: I will lead him also, and restore comforts unto him and to his mourners.
- 19 I create the fruit of the lips: Peace, peace, to him that is far off and to him that is near, saith Jehovah; and I will heal him.

QUERIES

- a. What is the "stumbling-block" in the way of His people?
- b. Whose spirit would "faint" before Him?
- c. Who is the one "far off" to whom peace is declared?

PARAPHRASE

And it will be said by the Lord, Build up a roadway, Build up a roadway; make a way that is prepared for My people. Take every obstacle over which they might stumble out of their way. This is the declaration of The High and Lofty One who dwells beyond time and space in eternity and who is Absolute Holiness. This One says, I dwell in the realm of Absolute Holiness beyond time and space, but I also dwell in people who are of a broken, penitent and humble spirit. I am the One who supplies the power to regenerate the broken and humble hearted. I have smitten My people time and again, but I will not smite forever (in fact, I am working toward a peaceful reconciliation with those who will be reconciled), for if I smote them forever and did not provide a way of reconciliation then all mankind

would perish—all the souls I have made. It was on account of My people's greed and defrauding of one another that I smote them. Time after time I withdrew My presence and protection from them but they went right on rebelling and turning away from Me to their own devices. Yes, I have been fully aware of Israel's rebellions, yet, I will accomplish My work of reconciliation and offer Israel healing by My grace. I will offer Myself to Israel for leadership and I will restore blessings to her I promised her long ago. The work of reconciliation and its proclamation will come from Me, says Jehovah, I will accomplish and proclaim peace to everyone in the world who will accept it—to Israel who has been in special covenant relationship to Me and to all the Gentiles who have not. This reconciliation will heal all who accept it of the sickness of their rebellion.

COMMENTS

v. 14-15 RELIEVED: Although the Lord has recounted the sorceries, sensualities and stupidities of Israel and although He has smitten them in the past (and will smite them again in the captivities), He *now* addresses Himself to the future reconciliation He is going to accomplish through the Servant which will begin in the restoration from the captivity and be offered to all mankind through covenant relationship. Jehovah will command, "Build a roadway, build a roadway . . ." The Hebrew words *sollu sollu* are from the root word *salal* which means "heap up" as in building up a road-bed. In rescuing His people from captivity (the first and imperative step toward messianic fulfillment) Jehovah commands their captors not merely "let my people go," but "Put your hand to the task, O captors of My people, and assist them by working for their return to their land!" And thus it was so! Cyrus and the Persians contributed financially and in other ways to return the Jews to Palestine (cf. Ezra, chapters 1-6). The Persians also removed a number of "stumbling-blocks" (Hebrew *mikeshol*, "obstacle")

from the way of the Jews.

It is the omnipotent Jehovah, the high and lofty One who has decreed this redemption of those He will soon smite in captivity. Jehovah is God without beginning and end. He dwells in absolute unendingness ("eternity"). He sees all things at once. There is no time with Him. Thus He is able to talk about Israel's captivity and redemption all at the same time. The same *perspective* is available to human beings through *faith* in Jehovah. This is hope in the midst of trouble. Jehovah is about to make "the Valley of Achor (Trouble) a door of hope" (cf. Hosea 2:15; II Cor. 1:3-11). Jehovah is also absolutely holy (righteous, pure, true, just, faithful). He keeps His word. What He is and says is always good. And, although He dwells in the high and holy place, He also dwells with men who are of a contrite and humble spirit—for that is good. The Hebrew word *daka'* means literally, *bruise, break in pieces, crush, contrite*. Men who wish to be filled with the goodness God can supply must first of all be poor in spirit (cf. Mt. 5:3-9; Psa. 34:18; 51:17; Isa. 66:2). The Hebrew word *shephal* means, *made low, depressed, thrown down, sit down low, humbled*. The Lord could not dwell with the nation as it was during the days of the prophets for it was haughty (Isa. 2:11, 17; 3:16; 10:33; 24:4; Ezek. 16:50; Zeph. 3:11; Micah 2:3). He exhorted them to be humble (Micah 6:8). The Lord cannot dwell in a church that is haughty either (Rev. 3:17, etc.). How is it that the Lord requires humility and contrition in order to dwell in the human heart on the one hand and then on the other hand promise to "revive the spirit of the humble"? In this case, of course, the Lord is not going to "revive" haughtiness. He is going to regenerate. What a man boasts in determines his state of aliveness. If he boasts in himself, he is dead because human power is impotent. If he boasts and trusts in the Lord he is humbled but he has hope because he shall receive an imputed exaltation—an imputed righteousness and eternal life. And, of course, the only way an *imputed* exaltation can be received is by faith in the One who is alone able to impute it—God! That is why David was a "man after God's own

heart." In his contrition and humility David cried out, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me . . ." (Psa. 51:10).

Jehovah is going to smite His people in captivity in order to make it possible for those who will to be contrite and humble. Then He is going to redeem them and revive them and form a faithful remnant from among them through which to bring to fruition His ultimate redemptive work in the Suffering Servant.

v. 16-19 REASON: The reason for the smiting and the reviving is now proposed. If He should contend *forever* there would be *no* redemption for anyone! All have sinned. All deserve eternal punishment. But, amazing grace, God has a divine plan by which He will offer salvation to those who will accept it. He will punish sin in His Son, thereby justifying His holiness and at the same time justifying those who believe (cf. Rom. 3:21-26)! Man's salvation originates absolutely in the *grace* of God! Had it not, all "spirits would faint" before Him and all the "souls that He made" would perish.

Certainly, for the iniquity of man's covetousness God was, by His very nature, moved with wrath and condemnation. The question is not, "How could a good God send anyone to Hell? . . ." the question is, "How could a good God send a sinner to Heaven?" He could not. Therefore, He worked out a way to make sinners good enough to go to Heaven. The Hebrew word *batsa'* is translated "covetousness" and means *unjust gain, to spoil, to plunder, to defraud*. It was this deliberate, often violent defrauding of one's fellow man that moved Jehovah through the centuries to smite Israel. Still she kept on "turning away from" Him (Heb. *shovav*) or "backsliding." To turn away from God is to go backwards. Many men have thought that turning away from God and the Bible was to advance. But history has proved over and over that turning away from God and the Bible is regression for humanity.

Now the purpose of God's smiting is to "heal." This healing is a spiritual healing—a healing of the inner man (cf. Isa. 19:22; 53:5; Hosea 5:13; 6:1; 14:4; Jer. 17:14; 30:17, etc.).

God, the divine surgeon, had to use drastic, radical "surgery" to heal Israel, for she resisted it adamantly (cf. Jer. 6:14; 8:11; 15:18, etc.). The healing process began with the smiting at the captivity, continued through the rescue from captivity and the "indignation" of the post-exilic centuries, and was finally accomplished in the Servant through whose "stripes we are healed," (Isa. 53:5ff). And that is precisely, we believe, the relationship of verse 19 to this context, inasmuch as it appears to be fulfilled in Acts 10:36 and Ephesians 2:17. God's healing was reconciliation of Himself to man (Isa. 53:1ff). Reconciliation (healing) in the plan of the God of all mankind was ultimately to be provided for all men. Thus, when peace (reconciliation) was declared to those near and to those afar, it was done in the completed work of the Messiah. Again, the missionary call rings forth from the "Gospel prophet of the O.T."

QUIZ

1. What does the term "Cast ye up . . ." imply about the Hebrew return from captivity?
2. Why stress the nature of God here?
3. Why emphasize that God dwells in the contrite and humble hearted?
4. How does God "revive" the humble hearted?
5. Why did God have to "smite" Israel to heal?
6. Who all are to be recipients of God's healing?
7. Where is the fulfillment of verse 19?

5. SEETHING

TEXT: 57:20-21

- 20 But the wicked are like the troubled sea; for it cannot rest, and its waters cast up mire and dirt.
- 21 There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.

QUERIES

- a. Why are the wicked like the sea?
- b. Is there really no peace to wicked people?

PARAPHRASE

But the wicked are never healed in the inner man because they are filled with a restlessness of soul that keeps boiling up within them like the sea whose waves never stop rolling in, bringing up filth and muck. There is no secure feeling of being at peace with the wicked.

COMMENTS

v. 20 CONSCIENCE: The contrite and humble man will be healed. He will be healed in the inner man where the conscience dwells. He will receive, by grace, through faith, an imputed righteousness—a cleansed conscience. But the wicked man's conscience is like the constantly rolling sea. It is *never* completely at rest. It may be calmed at times, but it is forever boiling and churning and more often than not it is casting up all the mire and muck thrown into it. The wicked, said Calvin, ". . . are terrified and alarmed by conscience, which is the most agonizing of all torments and the most cruel of all executioners." Luther said, "Conscience is a savage beast and a devil . . . There is nothing which so much disturbs the peace or causes so much unrest as a frightened heart. It turns pale at the flash of lightning and at the rattle of a leaf." From the St. Louis Post-Dispatch of September 22, 1941 comes the following story:

Seven years of tortured nights, when he awakened screaming at the specter of the man who had befriended him and whom he had killed, have ended for Harold Malmberg.

Malmberg, 27 years old, died yesterday in the Nebraska Penitentiary hospital from poison he swallowed three days before, Warden Neil Olson said. During his seven years, Malmberg "was a model prisoner," who never complained and did not seek parole, Olson added. But he could not face his conscience.

Malmberg had few nights of peace after he shot Russell Goodwin three times in 1934 and left him beside the road to die, after Goodwin, a traveling salesman, had picked up the hitchhiking youth. In prison he had nightmares in which the man he admitted murdering "came back every night to sit on his bed and talk to him," the warden explained.

In the daytime, Malmberg was "a jovial sort who did the tasks required of him cheerfully and well."

While he steadfastly refused to tell what he had swallowed, doctors labored continuously over Malmberg from the time he was discovered ill early Friday morning until he died. The poison apparently had been stolen from the prison photographic darkroom where he worked.

Malmberg consistently denied he intended to kill Goodwin when he ordered the salesman out of his car at pistol point. The jury did not accept his pleas of insanity, and the Des Moines, Iowa, youth was sentenced to life imprisonment.

Man may escape the punishment of human courts and judges. His evil deeds may be kept in absolute secrecy from everyone else. He may carry them with him to the grave, but he cannot hide himself from his conscience, nor can he escape from its tormenting judgment. Every man must live with his own conscience, and woe to him whose conscience has become his judge and executioner. Be assured of this, "If our hearts (conscience) condemn us, God is greater than our heart" (I Jn. 3:20-21).

v. 21 CONFLICT: A guilty conscience may become a frightful tormentor and a source of intense agony and distress leading

to mortal sorrow and, sometimes, even suicide if the sense of guilt cannot be removed effectively. A guilty conscience may even prove disastrous to the physical and mental health of an individual. The wicked, unfaithful, covenant-breaker can never have security, peace of mind and soul.

The point of these last two verses is to make a sharp contrast between the "healing" that will come to those of contrite and humble hearts and their turning to the Lord and His promises to be eventually accomplished in the Servant, and the wicked who refuse healing and reconciliation. The guilty conscience can only be healed through imputed righteousness. The cleansing of the conscience can only come by grace through faith in the substitutionary atonement of Christ (cf. I Jn. 1:8-9; 2:1-6; Heb. 9:14; 10:19-22; I Pet. 3:21). One of the important reasons there are certain actions required of men for entrance into covenant relationship with Christ (faith, repentance, immersion in water) is to provide man a series of overt actions and a point of reference in time to which he may relate his inner, invisible spiritual person with the cleansing of his conscience. In other words, man needs such reference points by which to express his faith and experience access into the grace of God (cf. Rom. 5:1-2). It is in our obedience to the word of God that we have assurance of the purification of our souls (cf. I Pet. 1:22-23).

QUIZ

1. How is the contrite and humble man healed?
2. Have you experienced the truth of verses 20-21 in your conscience?
3. Have you experienced the cleansing of your conscience?
4. How are we assured, what is the source of our assurance, that we may have our conscience cleansed?