

- There he lies down, there he nibbles the branches.
 11 When the boughs are dry they break
 And women come and use them for firewood.
 For this is a people with no eyes to see;
 Therefore their maker shows them no mercy,
 And their Creator shows them no kindness.

Yet again the promise of final restoration

- 12 In that day the Lord will thresh out the grain from the river Euphrates to the brook of Egypt. And you will be picked up one by one, you people of Israel. In that day a great trumpet will sound, and those who were lost in the land of Assyria and those who were outcasts in the land of Egypt will come and worship the Lord on the holy mountain in Jerusalem.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

The Prophet condemns the dissolute nobility

- 1 Why this crown of pride on Ephraim's drunken head!
 Why the glorious beauty of frail flowers
 Which wreath the fertile valley,
 Whose owners lie dead drunk!
- 2 Beware! The Lord's agent is strong and powerful,
 Like a storm of hail, a hurricane of havoc,
 Like a torrent of rain, flooding and flattening,
 Flung down with fury upon the earth!
- 3 The crown of pride on Ephraim's drunken head
 Shall be trampled underfoot,
- 4 And the glorious beauty of frail flowers
 Which wreath the fertile valley
 Shall be like the first ripe fig of the season,
 Seen, seized and swallowed all in a moment!

What will be—and what is!

- 5 In that day the Lord of hosts shall himself be a crown of
glory
And a diadem of beauty for the survivors of his people.
6 He will give wisdom to those who sit in judgement
And strength to those who defend the gate.
7 Yet here in Jerusalem men reel with wine
And stagger with strong drink.
Priest and prophet reel in their cups,
They are befuddled with wine,
They stagger with strong drink,
Their very visions are distorted,
They stumble over their words of judgement.
8 The sacred tables are covered with filthy vomit,
There is not a place that is clean.

The revellers mock the Prophet—

- 9 Who is he trying to teach?
Who is he trying to instruct?
Are we just weaned,
Are we children just taken from the breast,
10 Do we have to learn that
The-law-is-the-law-is-the-law,
The-rule-is-the-rule-is-the-rule,
A little bit here, a little bit there?

—and he replies

- 11 Yes, with stuttering lips and a foreign tongue
Will the Lord speak to this people.
12 He once said to them:
This is the rest you may give to the weary,
This is the true refreshing,
And yet they would not hear.

- 13 (So the word of the Lord shall be to them:
 The-law-is-the-law-is-the-law,
 The-rule-is-the-rule-is-the-rule,
 A little bit here, a little bit there.¹)
 So they go stumbling backwards,
 To be broken and trapped and captured.

It is time to stop mockery and face reality

- 14 Therefore listen to the word of the Lord, you scoffers
 Who rule this people in Jerusalem!
 15 Because you say, We have struck a bargain with death,
 We have made an agreement with the underworld,
 When the overwhelming flood passes through
 It will not reach us,
 For we have hidden behind a lie
 And taken refuge behind deceit;
 16 Therefore this is what the Lord God says:
 Here I lay the foundation of Zion,
 A stone, a well-tested stone,
 A precious corner stone, solid and secure:
 The man who trusts in me shall rest unmoved.
 17 I will make justice my line
 With righteousness its plummet;
 Then hail will sweep away the refuge of lies
 And floods will overwhelm your shelter.
 18 Then your bargain with death will be cancelled,
 And your agreement with the underworld broken.
 When the overwhelming flood passes through
 You will be beaten down by it;
 19 Every time it sweeps through it will take some of you,
 Morning after morning it will surge through
 By day and by night;
 All news will be of unspeakable terror.
 20 The bed is indeed too short for comfort

¹ The manuscript evidence for this part of the verse is uncertain.

28. THE FIRST BOOK OF ISAIAH

And the blanket too narrow for warmth!
21 For the Lord will rise up as he did on Mount Perazim,
He will be angry as he was in the valley of Gibeon;
That he may do his deed, strange though it be,
And work his work, strange as it is.
22 Now, therefore, stop your mockery
Or you will be bound more fast than ever.
For I have heard from the Lord God of hosts
An order for destruction of the whole land.

Can men not learn from the methods of the farmer?

23 Now listen closely to my words,
Hear what I have to say!
24 Does the ploughman do nothing but plough,
Is he always opening and breaking down his ground?
25 Surely, once the field is smooth and level,
Does he not broadcast the dill and scatter the cummin,
And plant the wheat and barley in rows,
With vetches sown as a border?
26 For he is instructed aright
And taught by his God.
27 Dill is not threshed with a threshing sledge,
Nor is a cart-wheel rolled over cummin!
But dill is threshed with a stick,
And cummin with a flail.
28 No one crushes bread-corn to pieces;
But once the cart-wheel has been driven over it
A man spreads it out and does not crush it.
29 This knowledge also comes from the Lord of hosts,
Whose counsel is wonderful, and whose wisdom is
great.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

Jerusalem will be surrounded and marvellously rescued

- 1 Jerusalem, God's hearth and altar,
 Where David set up his camp!
 Let year follow year,
 Let the round of festivals continue;
- 2 Yet I will bring trouble upon this hearth and altar,
 And there will be groaning and grief,
 And she shall truly be an altar burning for me!
- 3 I will encircle you with an armed camp,
 I will surround you with towers of battle
 And hem you in with siege-works.
- 4 Then you will speak as you lie prostrate,
 Your words will come humbly from the earth,
 And weak as the voice of a ghost
 Will be your squeaking from the dust!
- 5 But the army of your enemies shall become like fine dust,
 And the army of the ruthless shall be scattered like chaff
 in the wind.
- 6 For suddenly, in the twinkling of an eye,
 You will be visited by the Lord of hosts
 With thunder and earthquake and dreadful noise,
 With storm and whirlwind and consuming fire.
- 7 The whole horde of nations who take arms against
 Jerusalem,
 Yes, all who besiege and oppress her
 Shall vanish away like a dream of the night.
- 8 As when a hungry man dreams he is eating
 And wakes still hungry,
 Or a thirsty man dreams he is drinking
 And wakes with his thirst unquenched,
 So shall it be with the armies of all nations
 Who fight against Mount Zion.

The Prophet declares the blindness of the nation to the truth

- 9 Stupefy yourselves, yes, live in a stupor,
Blind yourselves, yes, live in darkness!
Fuddle your wits, but not with wine!
Stagger about, but not through drink!
- 10 For the Lord has drowned you in deepest sleep;
He has closed the eyes of the prophets,
And muffled the heads of the seers,
- 11 So that the word of the Lord
Is a closed book to you.
- 12 (When men give it to a learned man and ask him to read it he says, I cannot, it is a closed book. When they give it to the illiterate and ask him to read it, he says, I cannot read.)

The Lord plans a salutary shock for his people

- 13 Now the Lord says:
Because this people draws near to me only in words
And honours me with no more than lip-service,
While their hearts are far from me,
And their reverence for me is a rule they have learned by
heart;
- 14 See, I will deal with them in a way that will astonish them
And leave them filled with amazement and wonder!
For the wisdom of their wise men shall be eclipsed
And the understanding of their clever men be over-
shadowed.

God is the master, not man

- 15 Alas for those who hide their plans from the Lord,
Whose deeds are done in the dark;
Who say, Who sees us? Who knows what we do?
- 16 Your thoughts are upside down—

29. THE FIRST BOOK OF ISAIAH

Is the potter so much clay?
Is the thing that is made to say to its maker,
He did not make me?
Can the pot say of the potter,
He has no sense?

There will be confusion—

- 17 It shall surely not be long before
Lebanon's forests turn into fertile fields,
And fertile fields become like forests!

—before final restoration

- 18 But in that day the deaf shall hear words from a book,
And out of their darkness and gloom
The eyes of the blind shall see.
19 The humble shall find new joy in the Lord,
And the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of
Israel.
20 For the tyrant's day shall be over and the scoffer be no
more.
All who watched for evil will be wiped out—
21 Those who destroyed a man with a single word,
Who perverted the course of justice,
And defrauded the innocent by a legal quibble.

*The Lord's people will eventually honour him for all that
he has done*

- 22 Therefore the Lord, who rescued Abraham, says this con-
cerning Jacob's house:
Never again shall Jacob be disgraced,
Never shall his face grow pale in fear.
23 For when his children have seen
All that I have done for them,

They will honour my name,
 They will honour the Holy One of Jacob,
 And will stand in awe of the God of Israel.

24 Those who have been faithless will understand the truth
 And the obstinate be willing to be taught.

CHAPTER THIRTY

A warning against the treaty with Egypt

1 Alas for you, you rebellious children, says the Lord,
 Who carry out a plan which is none of mine,
 Who weave an alliance without my blessing,
 And so add sin to sin;
 2 Who set out to go to Egypt,
 Without seeking any word from me,
 To seek the protection of Pharaoh
 And shelter in the shadow of Egypt.
 3 For the protection of Pharaoh shall prove a humiliation,
 And sheltering in the shadow of Egypt shall prove your
 undoing.
 4 For though he has princes at Zoan
 And his messengers reach Hanes,
 5 Everyone shall be ashamed of a nation who is no use to
 them,
 Who can give neither help nor profit
 But only disillusion and disgrace.

The dangerous and useless journey to Egypt

6 They go through the heat of the Southland,
 Through a land of drought and anguish,
 The home of the lion and lioness,
 The viper and the flying serpent.
 They carry their riches on the backs of asses,
 And their treasures on the humps of camels,