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## THE VISION OF THE KING IN HIS HOLINESS.

BY PROF. JOHN D. DAVIS, PH.D.

*“Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts. Then flew one of the seraphim unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: and he touched my mouth with it and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged.”—ISAIAH 6:5-7.*

THE event which this chapter records is a vision seen by Isaiah the prophet. The visions of the prophets were, for the most part, private; they were apprehended by the individual, not by his companions. A natural cause sometimes coöperated in producing the vision; the vision of the great sheet let down from heaven, which Peter saw, and the voice heard saying, “Arise, Peter, slay and eat,” stood in some relation to his bodily hunger, as the account in the Book of Acts clearly intimates. Thus far have the visions of the prophets points in common with visions begotten of an abnormal mental condition, and to this extent the biblical

visions are to be classed as mental phenomena. These facts are only additional proofs of what we should expect, namely, that God, in holding communication with men, worked in accordance with the laws of man's mind.

The visions of the prophets, however, form a unique class. With perhaps one exception, they were granted to holy men only, men who were surrendered to God's service, men between whom and their divine sovereign there had "arisen an understanding." These visions were clearly distinguished by those who saw them from ordinary visions and were recognized as proceeding from God. The visions of the prophets were cautiously accepted by the Church; by law they were not received as genuine until their teaching and their credentials had been subjected to tests. The biblical visions stand alone in the history of religions for purity and righteousness; they were never vain, never meaningless vagaries or lying wonders, but always have a clearly discernible moral and didactic content; and they were often predictive, upon which fulfillment has set the seal of truth. Biblical visions, finally, belong to an age of revelation, and came to men who in manifold manner proved themselves to be vehicles of revelation from God.

This vision which Isaiah saw is in itself simple, but it revolutionized the man. It brought familiar truths into strong relief, focused them on his soul, and burned them into the depths of his nature. It wrought his conversion, or rather, if this chapter is in its proper place, as there is no sufficient reason to deny, it produced what we are wont to call a second conversion: it made God known to him as never before; it brought to light his own true condition by nature; it led him to offer himself for any mission which God might choose. And it was also a revelation: it announced to him an appointed work and disclosed to him the scanty success which should attend his labors for Israel, yea, the hardening of heart and sealing of the eyes of the many which his preaching would produce.

Isaiah in vision saw the King, the Lord of hosts. Host means army, and the title "Lord of hosts" has been supposed to describe Jehovah as God of the armies of Israel. The children of Israel were called God's hosts (Ex. 7:4), and they recognized Jehovah as "the Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle." But while the epithet was often applied to Jehovah when he fought for Israel, it was not his official designation as leader of Israel's armies. The word hosts in this connection did not refer to Israelitish troops, but to the armies of the

universe, in its spiritual and material aspects, as forming a vast army, in numerous divisions, of various kinds of troops, in orderly array under the command of Jehovah. The Lord of hosts is, as in this vision, the King whose glory fills the universe.

One mighty host in that army consists of the angels. It was the Lord, the God of hosts, which appeared to Jacob at Bethel when he beheld the ladder and the angels of God ascending and descending (Hosea 12: 4, 5); and God's host encamped about him after he separated from Laban (Gen. 32: 2). Their horses and chariots of fire filled the mountain round about Elisha (2 Kings 6: 16). The chariots of God are twenty thousand, thousands of angels (Ps. 68: 17); his messengers who minister unto him and do his pleasure. "Who *in the skies* can be compared unto the Lord? Who *among the sons of the mighty* is like unto the Lord, a God very terrible in the council of the holy ones, and to be feared above all them that are round about him? O Lord God of hosts, who is a mighty one like unto thee, O Jah?" (Ps. 89: 6-8.) Beautifully fitting was it that when Jehovah took upon himself the nature of man and lay as a babe in Bethlehem, a multitude of the heavenly host appeared to celebrate his birth (Luke 2: 13).

Another division of the army under Jehovah's command consists of the stars. The heavenly bodies are repeatedly called the host of heaven. On any clear night when we look aloft the aptness of the imagery is apparent. There is no confusion in the starry sky, but order and arrangement. Certain stars are grouped in the form of a bear; others trace the rude outline of a serpent; still others define the magnificent proportions of the mighty hunter. One group forms a cross, another a lyre, another a water-carrier, another a bull, another an eagle. And among them, majestically and without disturbance, move the planets. Truly, "marshaled on the nightly plain, the glittering hosts bestud the sky." The Hebrew people saw the array. Isaiah bids those who would know God to go forth, "lift up their eyes on high and see who hath created these. He who bringeth out [into the field like a general] their host by number, who calleth them all by name," and "upon them layeth commands" (Is. 40 : 26, 45 : 12).

Perhaps yet another host was included in the divine title, namely, the forces of nature. They too stand at the bidding of Jehovah. "He sendeth out his commandment upon earth, his word runneth very swiftly;" fire and hail, snow and vapor, not less than stormy wind, fulfill his word. The Lord

of hosts sends "the sword, the famine, and the pestilence" (Jer. 29 : 17). "The Lord, which giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, which stirreth up the sea that the waves thereof roar; the Lord of hosts is his name" (Jer. 31 : 35).

The Greeks, looking at the heavens above them and at the earth around them, beholding everywhere order, called what they saw *cosmos*—beauty of harmony. The Romans, discovering the same harmonious relations and movements, named the entirety of creation a *universe*—combined as one. To the poetic imagination of the Hebrews, with their knowledge of the omnipotent, reigning God, the regularity and order everywhere apparent suggested an army in vast, numerous, and varied divisions acting under the command of one will, and that will Jehovah's. The Lord of hosts, he is the King, the King who sitteth upon the throne of the universe.

Isaiah saw the great King, the Lord of hosts, further, as the Holy One. Seraphim stood before him, crying: "Holy, holy, holy art thou, Lord God Almighty. The whole earth is full of thy glory." It was the glory and making of Israel that the truth of the holiness of God was known and cherished in her borders. When we wander among the



nations contemporary with the Hebrews, whether among the kindred peoples in Arabia, or Phœnicia, or the Tigris valley, or farther away among men of another race, among the cultured Greeks, and when we become acquainted with the conceptions of God current among the contemporaneous nations and with the forms of worship in which they engaged, we are amazed to find the truth of the holiness of God shining in its effulgence in the mountains of Judea. Israel alone among the neighboring nations worshiped an absolutely holy God. There was a light in Palestine beyond the brightness of the sun, more beneficent in its influence, powerful to awaken moral life.

The Lord of hosts reveals himself as a moral being even when as King, seated upon his throne, he demands allegiance. He addresses himself to us as our Creator, the former of our bodies, bestower of our faculties, framer of our spirits, and our continual upholder. He addresses himself to us as the possessor of that inherent sovereignty over us which the parent possesses over the young child. On this ground he claims from us obedience, reverence, affection. He is not a usurper; he has erected his throne upon the foundation of truth. Universal sovereignty he claims as a right.

But in another manner God of old revealed his

holiness to Israel: he proclaimed the moral law. In it he laid bare the fact that he cannot be worshiped under the likeness of anything in heaven above or in the earth beneath or in the waters under the earth; for however sublime the object, it is only one of God's thoughts and affords but a partial view of his boundless glory. They that worship God must worship him in spirit and in truth; they must leave his eternal power and moral grandeur in their boundlessness and in their truth.

In the same majestic code God comes before us as he whose name may not be taken in vain. Man bows to power, and fawns upon wealth, and applauds genius; he feels respect for moral worth alone. God appeals to this innate homage to worth. He does not desire unwilling submission, nor to be courted for favors, nor to be given applause; he requires the reverence due unto his name. He discloses his glorious character to our moral judgment: a character which is above vanity; which overawes frivolous mention, awakens the deepest emotions of our being, commands the admiration, reverence, homage, and adoration of our moral nature.

Again does God come before us in the ten commandments, speaking to us now of our relation to our fellow-men, requiring of us a moral life; re-

quiring of thee, O man, that thou do justly, and love mercy, and walk humbly with thy God.

Yet again the Lord comes before us in the precepts of the law and in the reasons annexed thereto "glowing with zeal for all that is pure and good and holy and true, ever engaged in separating the holy and true from the unholy and false, striving to do it first by mercy, and if man makes that fail, then by the cutting off of his judgments"; a God delighting in the presence of holy ones and bountifully blessing them; a God who cannot behold iniquity, the awful outflow of whose indignation is against sin, but against sin only—a fire consuming iniquity.

These were the familiar thoughts which were brought home to Isaiah. He saw God in a single vision as the King of the universe and the absolutely Holy One. At the sight he cried out, "Woe is me! for I am undone; for I a man of unclean lips . . . have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." There was a widespread belief in Israel that no man could see God and live. The cry of Isaiah did not spring from intellectual assent to that doctrine; it was the soul's realization of the fact.

In contrast with the King, Isaiah saw himself a rebel. In the presence of God, man must see himself thus. In our souls we know two things. We

know that if God exists, he is our King. We cannot away with that. We can mock, we can stifle the voice of nature in us, we can stop our ears; and yet when all things stand naked and revealed we are forced to confess that he is our lawful King. We know also that we have rebelled against him; we know that we have gone stubbornly every one his own ways. Upon this fundamental thought the writers of Scripture dwell—that before the secret tribunal of man's most inmost soul, sooner or later, willing or unwilling, man must confess the truth that God is his lawful sovereign. And with that confession must come from him who has not obeyed the truth the cry, "Woe is me! for I am undone; for I have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." No place for me in the kingdom of God. Banishment is my lot. I know the condemnation of the King—not spoken in words alone, of which the sound will die, not written on perishable parchment, but uttered by the soul: "Depart with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord."

But these are not the only floods of conviction which are bound, sooner or later, to rush upon the soul. In the presence of the King, the King of glory, whose nature is holiness, in the presence of that company of holy angels, the prophet saw himself unclean, and the sense of his defilement over-

whelmed him. Seraphim, who had never rebelled, never sinned, could surround the throne, could adore, and in overpowering admiration could cry, "Holy, holy, holy art thou, Lord God Almighty"; but his lips, although they had often spoken God's name, were unfit to ascribe holiness to the Holy One. Back of the lips was the heart, and because of the heart he was unable to render the lips as sacrifice.

It is easy for God to show to us our guilt: a vision to Isaiah; an opening of the eyes to our first parents; a thunder-storm witnessing to God's power in nature recalling pious Job to a proper attitude toward God; an earthquake shock at Philippi awakening the jailer to his sinful, lost condition; a still, small voice to Elijah; a parable to David; an overlooked truth to Nicodemus; a glimpse of the past life to the woman at Sychar. Verily it is but a thin veil that hides the sinfulness of our hearts from our eyes, if hidden it be. The breath of God sweeps it away. He needs but to suggest to us, for example, this: Do you ever do what your conscience or the Bible tells you is wrong? Do you ever go your own way and not God's? Do you always bow to the holy law of God as the supreme rule of right, and are you always influenced by a governing regard for God?

And toward your fellow-men do you entertain pure thoughts only, and kindly and chaste and unenvious desires toward your neighbor and your rival? In the words of that wondrous summary, do you love God with all your heart at all times, and your neighbor equally as yourself? Love never faileth. Love seeketh not its own, is not provoked, taketh not account of evil, rejoiceth not in unrighteousness, but rejoiceth with the truth.

Those may ascend God's holy hill who have clean hands and a pure heart. To ascend means to stand in the visible presence of the King; to occupy a place in the circle about the throne; to worship him whose awful indignation against sin is a consuming fire; to be under the gaze of the all-seeing eye which regardeth not the outward appearance, but searcheth the heart; and there venture to cry, "Holy, holy, holy art thou, Lord God Almighty."

In the presence of the King, the Lord of hosts, the Holy One, Isaiah saw himself undone. But when he lost all hope of being able to stand before the holy God he learned that God can save the sinner, that God only can save, and that God saves without the sinner's help. It is the lost whom God finds. It is the soul burdened by the sense of its guilt which God is willing to relieve. Oh, blessed suffering when it is the forerunner of God-

given relief ! When he discovered himself undone Isaiah saw an altar,—as long afterwards the Apostle John saw, standing amidst the company about the throne, the Lamb as it had been slain from the foundation of the world. It brought to the prophet's mind the familiar teaching of propitiation, of that shedding of blood without which there is no remission of sins ; and that the holy God, whose just indignation against sin is the destruction of the sinner, has nevertheless established an altar in the precincts of the palace. He saw a live coal taken from off the altar with tongs by a messenger sent forth by God, and laid upon his lips with the words, "Lo, this hath touched thy lips ; and thine iniquity is taken away and thy sin purged." He saw the altar, he heard that it availed for him, and that by God's work he was rendered guiltless in God's sight. He saw the burning coal, and perhaps he discerned in it somewhat of the baptism with the Holy Ghost and with fire, which purifies the soul and makes it fit for the Master's use. God burns out the sin in mercy that the sinner be not consumed in wrath. And lo ! the holiness of God has extended the sphere of holiness ; it has freed a sinner from guilt ; it has kindled a flame in him which will work for righteousness ; it has added another to the number of the saints.

It is a matter of common observation that the greatest sinners often make the greatest saints. There is reason for this fact, and in part it is because the great sinner beholds the awful pit in which he was fallen, discerns most profoundly the necessity for and the efficacious power of the sacrifice on Calvary, and apprehends most vividly the wonders of redeeming love. But there is no need that one be a great criminal in order to become a great saint. It is only necessary for any man to obtain a true view of the desperate wickedness of his heart, and at the same time a right conception of the absolute holiness of God, in order to be revolutionized in conversion and to become an unwearied publisher of man's lost condition by nature, and of the free grace of God in Christ. Paul is sometimes falsely cited as the great sinner becoming the great saint. He is really the example of a conscientious, strictly moral though misguided servant of God, transformed by one focused glimpse of the crucified, risen Jesus as Saviour and Lord into the fearless, tireless missionary of the cross and scepter of the Christ. So, too, Isaiah would seem to have been a godly man before the vision; but after the vision, he it is who, more than any other writer of Scripture, dwells upon those attributes of God which are comprehended in the two titles, "Lord of hosts,"



and "Holy One of Israel"; and if we mistake not, he is the prophet who diligently proclaimed that we all like sheep have gone astray; that all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; that the holiness of God devours the land in judgment, burning until the cities be left desolate; and he is the prophet who lifts up with greatest urgency to dying Israel and a dying world the suffering, atoning Saviour offering salvation for a look, to every one, without money and without price.

Who wrote the last twenty-seven chapters of the Book of Isaiah? The man who had the vision.

Who is it that became the faithful servant of God, ready for a service of large disappointment and popular dislike? He who saw God as the King, the Lord of hosts, the Holy One, and himself as the rebel, guilty, lost, subject to the justifying grace and sanctifying work of God.

The Lord grant that we, through the written Word and by the work of the Spirit, may likewise apprehend the King in his glory and be revolutionized.