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## THE WOES OF INTEMPERANCE.

– NOV. 24. – Isa. 5:11-23. –

**Golden Text – "Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink." – Isa. 5:11.**

THE text of this chapter is highly figurative and will not bear a literal interpretation. It is a symbolic prophecy concerning both the houses of Israel – Israel after the flesh, and spiritual Israel, the Gospel church. In both cases it applies to the whole nominal Israel, and takes no cognizance of the distinctions in each of wheat and chaff, or wheat and tares, or "Israelites indeed" and Israelites in name only. The prophecy is addressed to the Jewish and Christian systems respectively under the figure of a vineyard.

But when the Lord looked for grapes, the fruit of the vine, "behold, it brought forth wild grapes." Then he inquires what more could he have done to make his vineyard produce better fruit, and shows that it was not for any lack of attention on his part, but rather because of the perversity of the vine, which, even under these favorable conditions had greatly degenerated and become "a strange vine" unto him. (Jer. 2:21,22.) Our Lord Jesus in his parable of the vineyard (Matt. 21:33-43) uses the same illustration and applies it to Israel.

Seeing the double application of the prophecy,\* and recognizing the fact that its fulfilment upon fleshly Israel is in the past, we proceed to note its significance as applied to this age in which our interest centers: –

\*See MILLENNIAL DAWN, VOL. II., p. 209.\*

"He looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry." (Verse 7.) So it is throughout the length and breadth of Christendom. They join house to house and field to field. (Verse 8.)

The nations of Christendom, the religious organizations, the corporations and the individuals are all engaged in this business of acquiring wealth and property, while the cry of the oppressed comes up into the ears of the Lord of armies, who by the mouth of the prophet declares woe against this evil order of things and against all that participate in it. – Verses 9,10. See also James 5:1-6.

The intoxication here referred to by the prophet is not that produced by alcoholic beverages, but that which is aptly symbolized by such intoxication; viz., the intoxication produced by imbibing the spirit of the world, the wine of Babylon. – Rev. 17:2; 18:3.

"Woe," says the prophet, "unto them that rise up early in the morning that they may follow strong drink, that continue until night, till wine inflame them!" – that is, to those who all day long give themselves up to the intoxicating spirit of the world. – Verse 11.

"And the harp and the viol, the tabret and pipe, and wine are in their feasts." – They are given up to pleasure-seeking, – "but they regard not the work of the Lord, neither consider the operation of his hands." They have no interest in the great plan of God, and in his methods of working it out: they give themselves up to selfish worldly pursuits of business and pleasure. – Verse 12.

"Therefore my people [those professing to be God's people – Christians] are gone into captivity [to ambitious leaders who have usurped authority over them, and who by their unwise counsel have darkened knowledge, made void the word of God and buried deep the precious truth of his Word], because they have no knowledge [not being in that attitude of heart and mind in which God could teach and lead them]. And their honorable men [their clergy and bishops and popes] are famished, and their multitude dried up with thirst." Yes, there is a famine in the land not for bread nor for water, but for the word of the Lord – Verse 13; Amos 8:11.

"Therefore *sheol* [the grave] hath enlarged herself, and opened her mouth without measure; and their glory, and their multitude, and their pomp, and he that rejoiceth shall descend into it." (Verse 14.) Thus is symbolized the fact that the great systems, religious, social and civil, that now, unitedly constitute Christendom, shall go into oblivion, destruction. – Rev. 16:19; 18:2,3,5,10,16-19.

"And the mean man [the selfish man who exalted himself regardless of others] shall be brought down, and the mighty man shall be humbled, and the eyes of the lofty shall be humbled" – in the great leveling processes of the day of the Lord." – Verse 15.

"But the Lord of hosts shall be exalted in judgment, and God that is holy shall be sanctified in righteousness." (Verse 16.) Such will be the outcome of this great day of trouble upon the nations of Christendom.

"Then shall the lambs feed after their manner, and the waste places of the fat ones [of the rich] shall strangers eat." (Verse 17.) Thus shall the whole present order of things be reversed; for the Lord will espouse the cause of the poor and needy, and especially of those who are of a humble and contrite heart. – Psa. 12:5; 34:16-22.

"Woe unto them that draw iniquity with cords of falsehood, and sin as it were with a cart rope [who scheme largely with iniquity and who deal in lying and hypocrisy]: That say [by their conduct], Let him [the Lord] make speed and hasten his work, that we may see it; and let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw nigh and come, that we may know it." (Verse 19.) Thus in unbelief they scoff at the truth now due which disproves the long cherished doctrines upon which all of the systems of error are built. But the Lord says, "Woe unto them;" for their hour of tribulation cometh, and that speedily.

"Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil, that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!" – that commend the errors of human tradition and scorn the

divine truth. "Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!" for "the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God." – Verses 20,21; 1 Cor. 3:19.

"Woe unto them that are mighty to drink wine [those who, while professing to be the Lord's people, nevertheless greedily imbibe the spirit of the world], and men of strength [of intellect and influence] to mingle strong drink [to mingle the world's ideas and doctrines and customs with a little of the truth perverted and misused and so associated with the error as not to be understood, that so its power might be lost]: which justify the wicked [who thus pervert the truth] for reward [generally for the mean reward of popular approval or business or social interest], and take away the righteousness of the righteous from him [misrepresent those who hold the truth]!" – causing many to stumble. – Verses 22,23.

The remainder of the chapter sets forth in strong and forceful symbols the nature of the woe or penalty which is to come upon the class described, which corresponds in every particular with other prophetic delineations of the great time of trouble which is to wind up the affairs of this Gospel age and sweep the social and religious world as with the besom of destruction, preparatory to the establishment of the Redeemer's Kingdom. "He that hath an ear to hear let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." "The wise shall understand, but the wicked [perverters and scornors of the truth above referred to] shall do wickedly, and none of the wicked shall understand" – until the judgments of the Lord are abroad in the earth, and the Lord speaks unto them in his hot displeasure.

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