

Who Shall Declare His Generation?

By
Rev. H. P. Robinson

“...and who shall declare his generation? For he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken” (Isaiah 53:8).

If I were to be called upon to classify the prophets of the Old Testament according to degree of importance, I would pick Isaiah the son of Amos. Isaiah was God's mouthpiece during the reign of four kings: Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah.

He excelled in the influence he held over the nation for so long and in the quality of the book that bears his name. He is unequalled in his prophetic utterances about the birth, life and death of the Jewish Messiah.

In classifying his book as the choicest of literature, we conclude that he reaches the high water mark and shines brightest in the fifty-third chapter. In this chapter the great prophet rises to a superb height in unexcelled eloquence as he describes the anguish and agony of the Suffering Savior.

This chapter graphically portrays the trial, the death and burial, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He is seen in this chapter as treading the winepress alone. He stands out in these verses as the loneliest man who ever lived. We see him rejected by men, forsaken by God and afflicted by Satan.

The Shortness of Life

As the prophet goes along step by step, he sees in his prophetic vision something that alarms him. He expresses this great alarm at the shortness of his life and the brevity of his days. He is seen as the promised deliverer, the long hoped for Messiah, the one that all generations had hoped for, looked for and groaned for.

Jesus finally comes and Isaiah sees him cut off in the prime of life, in the midst of his days. He expresses concern that this man who was promised to be head of a new generation of men is nevertheless cut off and there is no seed, no offspring to carry on his generations. Then he comes up with one of the great questions of the Bible: Who shall declare his generation?

Jewish thought and custom placed great emphasis upon genealogies. Luke traces the generations of man from Jesus the son of Mary back to Adam and back to God. Matthew connects the generations of Jesus to that of Abraham and David, tying him to the covenant of Abraham, the covenant of promise; and tying him to the covenant of David or the Davidic covenant of kingship.

The Old Testament historian kept a strict record of families and their sons after them. The scribes were careful to keep account of the kings and their dynasties. The first book of Chronicles, as the title indicates, gives the generations of the Jewish people beginning with Adam and covering all the sons of Jacob.

When the David's kingdom divided under Solomon's son, the Kingdom of Israel changed dynasties a number of times. But the Kingdom of Judah remained a Davidic dynasty until they were carried away into Babylon around 520 B.C. Even in Babylon the genealogy was not lost because in the opening of the New Testament when Caesar Augustus sent out a decree that all the world should be taxed and that every man should go to his own city, both Joseph and Mary knew that Bethlehem was the city of their father David.

In the New Testament a different kind of record is kept, not by tribes or families, but a genealogy of men and women of faith. The Pharisees argued with Jesus that they were the descendents of Abraham. Jesus told them that they were the sons of Satan and they gave evidence of that because they acted like him. Like father, like son.

Jesus talked of a generation of spiritual children. The eleventh chapter of Hebrews gives a list: Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses. And even a few families of gentiles are included: Rahab and Ruth, who foreshadow the generations of faith that were to come.

Isaiah, familiar with this age old pattern, sees this young prince, the hope of all future generations, cut off with no seed, no sons, without posterity, dying in the morning of life and he exclaims: "Who shall declare his generation?"

Abraham: a Type of this Situation

Abraham is old. Ishmael is cast out. Isaac is alone and unmarried. God has promised Abraham generations to inherit the earth. In Isaac is the only hope of the fulfillment of the promise.

Then the Lord said, "Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering" (Genesis 22:2).

It was a dismal day. It was a dark night. Abraham didn't see how God could do it. If Isaac was cut off before he was married, how could his seed inherit the earth? Even as Isaac asked, "Where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" (vs. 7), Abraham "staggered not at the promise of God" (Romans 4:20) and replied: "My son, God will provide himself a lamb" (Genesis 22:8).

And in the nick of time, God spoke out of Heaven and stopped Abraham, and in a sense, Isaac was raised from the dead, a type of Christ, who though he was cut off in the prime of life, was raised again to fulfill the promise.

Then came the promised expanded when God said to Abraham, “. . .for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice” (vs.16-18).

Abraham called in his old servant, Eleazar, who is a type of the Holy Ghost, and sent him to get a bride for Isaac. Faithful Eleazar went and searched the land and found Rebekah. She made herself ready and returned to be the mother of unnumbered generations.

The Sudden Change in the Picture

Isaiah sees this young prince cut off and dying, just as Abraham imagined the death of Isaac as a burnt offering. Isaiah expresses his dismay and alarm in a question: Who shall declare his generation?

Something happens, a great transaction takes place. Like the miracle on Mt. Moriah, Isaiah sees the prince reborn. He lifts up his voice again and says, “He shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand” (Isaiah 53:10).

Someone has come into the picture to declare his generation. Who is this person that will declare his generation? The Holy Ghost. He will declare it.

Jesus was approaching death and his disciples were sad. How would they carry on? Jesus said, “I will go to the cross and die. The third day I will rise again. But I will go back to my father and send you the Holy Ghost. When he comes, he will testify of me. He will glorify me.”

All we have heard of Christ, all we know of Christ has been by the Holy Ghost. We will never hear the last of Jesus because the Holy Ghost will never cease to declare his generations.

Jesus established his kingdom, set up a society of twice born men. Although thousands were touched by his ministry, at the end of the day, there were only 120 kingdom followers in the Upper Room. They were poor and unlearned. They were lepers he had cleansed, blind men he had healed, fishermen he had called, and tax collectors he had saved. But they were there, an unpromising looking crowd.

The future generations of faith depended upon them. When the Holy Ghost fell, at the end of that day, there were 3,000 followers. A few days later another 5,000 more had joined. Who shall declare his generation, indeed! All but one of the twelve disciples died a violent death, but the martyrs lighted a fire that sent bright flares to the ends of the earth, declaring his generation.

Today, the Holy Ghost falls and where he falls, men and women declare the generations of Christ. The records of the generation of faith are in Heaven. The book is full of the names of the children of faith, more than the stars in the heavens and the sands on the sea shore. The disciples and apostles answered the prophet's question and declared his generation and the names of the faithful were added to the book. We, too, must answer the prophet's question in our own times by declaring his generation, that his seed multiply for as long as the ages last.