

The Bible Speaks

by Jeffrey Frantz

Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you and his glory will appear over you. Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. (Isaiah 60:1-3)

It's a new year; take the high road! This passage from Isaiah 60 is from the prophet known as *Third Isaiah*. Third Isaiah (Isaiah 56-66) is the prophetic voice of the historical period known as the *restoration*. This was the time, after the Babylonian Exile, when those Israelites who so desired, could return to their ravaged homeland of Judah.

For fifty years, they had been in Babylon, pulled up from their Judean roots and deported to a foreign land. But now, with the rise of Cyrus of Persia, a decree had gone out and they were free to return home. Indeed, perhaps as many as twenty thousand or so did go back to Judah and to the destructive ruins of Jerusalem, the holy city.

But the challenges were endless; and times were difficult and complicated by all the upheaval and all the change. What of the remnant community that had been living in Judah during this fifty year period? What of their rights? And of course, what of the rights of those who had been deported?

How would the new power arrangements be worked out? And how would Israel, so utterly defeated five decades earlier—how would she reconstruct, and embrace her neighboring nations?

Third Isaiah stepped forward with words of hope and encouragement: *Arise and shine, for your light has come and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.*

Light, as the metaphor for the high road. With great imagination and purpose, Third Isaiah used the metaphor of *light* to lift the vision of his people. For indeed, out of all their suffering and years of deprivation, the *light* of God's guiding hand was now upon them.

There was both meaning and purpose in this revelation. For by Third Isaiah's reckoning, Israel's suffering was not in some vacuum of meaninglessness. In our suffering, we become a humble people; and we realize, with poignant realism, just how vulnerable and needy we are.

Having suffered, but moving forward, now, with new humility, Israel was uniquely situated to *be a light to the other nations*. The light of God's truth, transformed as it was through the crucible of a very real suffering, had uniquely prepared Israel for this role.

With Israel as a *sort of* role model to the world, other nations would be drawn to her *light* (see verse three above: *nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.*).

Taking the high road (the spiritual *high road*, where the holiness of God's presence pulsates with life and hope for all people) always makes things better in the long run. On the *high road*, pride and ego are subordinated to the larger good for all people, be it for family, community or the wider world.

On the *high road*, people don't act small or petty in their interactions with one another. There's no room for these behaviors—no place for them. The *high road* focuses on *the light* of God's purposes, seeking always to make things better ... to act big, with a large spirit ... seeking ways to lift up mercy and forgiveness.

Always, the dawning of a New Year challenges us to grow and move closer to God's purposes. The New Year is symbolic of new beginnings ... of letting go of the past and moving beyond yesterday. In the New Year, the *high road* beckons. It cries out, with holiness all around, yearning to draw us in ... that our light, inspired with God's holiness, will make all things new.

And nation will not rise up against nation, nor person against person.

Let the New Year come! And let the *light* of its possibilities shine over us each one.

All praise be unto God!