

CHAPTER 14

In this chapter,

I. More weight is added to the burden of Babylon, enough to sink it like a mill-stone;

- 1.** It is Israel's cause that is to be pleaded in this quarrel with Babylon (v. 1-3).
- 2.** The king of Babylon, for the time being, shall be remarkably brought down and triumphed over (v. 4-20).
- 3.** The whole race of the Babylonians shall be cut off and extirpated (v. 21-23).

II. A confirmation of the prophecy of the destruction of Babylon, which was a thing at a distance, is here given in the prophecy of the destruction of the Assyrian army that invaded the land, which happened not long after (v. 24-27).

III. The success of Hezekiah against the Philistines is here foretold, and the advantages which his people would gain thereby (v. 28-32).

ISAIAH 14:1-3

PROMISES TO ISRAEL

This comes in here as the reason why Babylon must be overthrown and ruined, because God has mercy in store for his people, and therefore,

- 1.** The injuries done to them must be reckoned for and revenged upon their persecutors. Mercy to Jacob will be wrath and ruin to Jacob's impenitent implacable adversaries, such as Babylon was.
- 2.** The yoke of oppression which Babylon had long laid on their necks must be broken off, and they must be set at liberty; and, in order to this, the destruction of Babylon is as necessary as the destruction of Egypt and Pharaoh was to their deliverance out of that house of bondage. The same prediction is a promise to God's people and a threatening to their enemies, as the same providence has a bright side towards Israel and a black or dark side towards the Egyptians. Observe,

I. The ground of these favours to Jacob and Israel — the kindness God had for them and the choice he had made of them (v. 1): “*The Lord will have mercy on Jacob, the seed of Jacob now captives in Babylon; he will make it to appear that he has compassion on them and has mercy in store for them, and that he will not contend for ever with them, but will yet choose them, will yet again return to them; though he has seemed for a time to refuse and reject them, he will show that they are his chosen people and that the election stands sure.*” However it may seem to us, God's mercy is not gone, nor does his promise fail, ^{<197B>}Psalm 77:8.

II. The particular favours he designed them.

1. He would bring them back to their native soil and air again: *The Lord will set them in their own land, out of which they were driven.* A settlement in the holy land, the land of promise, is a fruit of God's mercy, distinguishing mercy.

2. Many should be proselyted to their holy religion, and should return with them, induced to do so by the manifest tokens of God's favourable presence with them, the operations of God's grace in them, the operations of God's grace in them, and his providence for them: *Strangers shall be joined with them, saying, We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you,* ^{<38B>}Zechariah 8:23. It adds much to the honour and strength of Israel when strangers are joined with them and there are added to the church many from without, ^{<44B>}Acts 2:47. Let not the church's children be shy of strangers, but receive those whom God receives, and own those who cleave to the house of Jacob.

3. These proselytes should not only be a credit to their cause, but very helpful and serviceable to them in their return home: *The people among whom they live shall take them, take care of them, take pity on them, and shall bring them to their place* — as friends, loth to part with such good company — as servants, willing to do them all the good offices they could. God's people, wherever their lot is cast, should endeavour thus, by all the instances of an exemplary and winning conversation, to gain an interest in the affections of those about them, and recommend religion to their good opinion. This was fulfilled in the return of the captives from Babylon, when all that were about them, pursuant to Cyrus's proclamation, contributed to their removal (^{<47B>}Ezra 1:4, 6), not as the Egyptians, because they were sick of them, but because they loved them.

4. They should have the benefit of their service when they had returned home, for many would of choice go with them in the meanest post, rather than not go with them: *They shall possess them in the land of the Lord for servants and handmaids*; and as the laws of that land saved it from being the purgatory of servants, providing that they should not be oppressed, so the advantages of that land made it the paradise of those servants that had been strangers to the covenants of promise, for there was *one law to the stranger and to those that were born in the land*. Those whose lot is cast in the land of the Lord, a land of light, should take care that their servants and handmaids may share in the benefit of it, who will then find it better to be possessed in the Lord's land than possessors in any other.

5. They should triumph over their enemies, and those that would not be reconciled to them should be reduced and humbled by them: *They shall take those captives whose captives they were and shall rule over their oppressors*, righteously, but not revengefully. The Jews perhaps bought Babylonian prisoners out of the hands of the Medes and Persians and made slaves of them. Or this might have its accomplishment in their victories over their enemies in the times of the Maccabees. It is applicable to the success of the gospel (when those were brought into obedience to it who had made the greatest opposition to it, as Paul) and to the interest believers have in Christ's victories over their spiritual enemies, when he led captivity captive, to the power they gain over their own corruptions, and to the dominion the upright shall have in the morning, ~~Psalm~~ Psalm 49:14.

6. They should see a happy termination of all their grievances (v. 3): *The Lord shall give thee rest from thy sorrow and thy fear, and from thy hard bondage*. God himself undertakes to work a blessed change,

(1.) In their state. They shall have rest from their bondage; the days of their affliction, though many, shall have an end; and the rod of the wicked, though it lie long, shall not always lie on their lot.

(2.) In their spirit. They shall have rest from their sorrow and fear, sense of their present burdens and dread of worse. Sometimes fear puts the soul into a ferment as much as sorrow does, and those must needs feel themselves very easy to whom God has given rest from both. Those who are freed from the bondage of sin have a foundation laid for true rest from sorrow and fear.

ISAIAH 14:4-23

THE DOOM OF THE KING OF BABYLON

The kings of Babylon, successively, were the great enemies and oppressors of God's people, and therefore the destruction of Babylon, the fall of the king, and the ruin of his family, are here particularly taken notice of and triumphed in. In the day that God has given Israel rest they shall *take up this proverb against the king of Babylon*. We must not rejoice when our enemy falls, as ours; but when Babylon, the common enemy of God and his Israel, sinks, then *rejoice over her, thou heaven, and you holy apostles and prophets*, ⁽⁶⁶⁸⁾ Revelation 18:20. The Babylonian monarchy bade fair to be an absolute, universal, and perpetual one, and, in these pretensions, vied with the Almighty; it is therefore very justly, not only brought down, but insulted over when it is down; and it is not only the last monarch, Belshazzar, who *was slain on that night* that Babylon was taken (⁽²¹⁵⁾ Daniel 5:30), who is here triumphed over, but the whole monarchy, which sunk in him; not without special reference to Nebuchadnezzar, in whom that monarchy was at its height. Now here,

I. The fall of the king of Babylon is rejoiced in; and a most curious and elegant composition is here prepared, not to adorn his hearse or monument, but to expose his memory and fix a lasting brand of infamy upon it. It gives us an account of the life and death of this mighty monarch, how he *went down slain to the pit*, though he had been *the terror of the mighty in the land of the living*, ⁽³⁵⁷⁾ Ezekiel 32:27. In this parable we may observe,

1. The prodigious height of wealth and power at which this monarch and monarchy arrived. Babylon was a *golden city*, v. 4 (it is a Chaldee word in the original, which intimates that she used to call herself so), so much did she abound in riches and excel all other cities, as gold does all other metals. She is *gold-thirsty*, or an exactress of gold (so some read it); for how do men get wealth to themselves but by squeezing it out of others? The New Jerusalem is the only truly golden city, ⁽⁶¹⁸⁾ Revelation 21:18, 21. The king of Babylon, having so much wealth in his dominions and the absolute command of it, by the help of that *ruled the nations* (v. 6), gave them law, read them their doom, and at his pleasure *weakened the nations* (v. 12), that they might not be able to make head against him. Such vast

and victorious armies did he bring into the field, that, which way soever he looked, he *made the earth to tremble, and shook kingdoms* (v. 16); all his neighbours were afraid of him, and were forced to submit to him. No one man could do this by his own personal strength, but by the numbers he has at his beck. Great tyrants, by making some do what they will, make others suffer what they will. How piteous is the case of mankind, which thus seems to be in a combination against itself, and its own rights and liberties, which could not be ruined but by its own strength!

2. The wretched abuse of all this wealth and power, which the king of Babylon was guilty of, in two instances: —

(1.) Great oppression and cruelty. He is known by the name of the *oppressor* (v. 4); he has *the sceptre of the rulers* (v. 5), has the command of all the princes about him; but it is *the staff of the wicked*, a staff with which he supports himself in his wickedness and wickedly strikes all about him. *He smote the people*, not in justice, for their correction and reformation, but *in wrath* (v. 6), to gratify his own peevish resentments, and that *with a continual stroke*, pursued them with his forces, and gave them no respite, no breathing time, no cessation of arms. He ruled the nations, but he ruled them *in anger*, every thing he said and did was in a passion; so that he who had the government of all about him had no government of himself. He *made the world as a wilderness*, as if he had taken a pride in being the plague of his generation and a curse to mankind, v. 17. Great princes usually glory in building cities, but he gloried in destroying them; see ²⁰⁹⁶Psalm 9:6. Two particular instances, worse than all the rest, are here given of his tyranny: —

[1.] That he was severe to his captives (v. 17): He *opened not the house of his prisoners*; he *did not let them loose homeward* (so the margin reads it); he kept them in close confinement, and never would suffer any to return to their own land. This refers especially to the people of the Jews, and it is that which fills up the measure of the king of Babylon's iniquity, that he had detained the people of God in captivity and would by no means release them; nay, and by profaning the vessels of God's temple at Jerusalem, did in effect say that they should never return to their former use, ²⁰⁹⁸Daniel 5:3. For this he was quickly and justly turned out by one whose first act was to open the house of God's prisoners and send home the temple vessels.

[2.] That he was oppressive to his own subjects (v. 20): *Thou hast destroyed thy land, and slain thy people*; and what did he get by that, when the wealth of the land and the multitude of the people are the strength and honour of the prince, who never rules so safely, so gloriously, as in the hearts and affections of the people? But tyrants sacrifice their interests to their lusts and passions; and God will reckon with them for their barbarous usage of those who are under their power, whom they think they may use as they please.

(2.) Great pride and haughtiness. Notice is here taken of his *pomp*, the extravagancy of his retinue, v. 11. He affected to appear in the utmost magnificence. But that was not the worst: it was the temper of his mind, and the elevation of that, that ripened him for ruin (v. 13, 14): *Thou has said in thy heart, like Lucifer, I will ascend into heaven*. Here is the language of his vainglory, borrowed perhaps from that of the angels who fell, who not content with their first estate, the post assigned them, would vie with God, and become not only independent of him, but equal with him. Or perhaps it refers to the story of Nebuchadnezzar, who, when he would be more than a man, was justly turned into a brute, ^{<20B>}Daniel 4:30. The king of Babylon here promises himself,

[1.] That in pomp and power he shall surpass all his neighbours, and shall arrive at the very height of earthly glory and felicity, that he shall be as great and happy as this world can make him; that is the heaven of a carnal heart, and to that he hopes to ascend, and to be as far above those about him as the heaven is above the earth. Princes are the stars of God, which give some light to this dark world (^{<20B>}Matthew 24:29); but he will exalt his throne above them all.

[2.] That he shall particularly insult over God's Mount Zion, which Belshazzar, in his last drunken frolic, seems to have had a particular spite against when he called for the vessels of the temple at Jerusalem, to profane them; see ^{<20B>}Daniel 5:2. In the same humour he here said, *I will sit upon the mount of the congregation* (it is the same word that is used for the holy *convocations*), *in the sides of the north*; so Mount Zion is said to be situated, ^{<20B>}Psalms 48:2. Perhaps Belshazzar was projecting an expedition to Jerusalem, to triumph in the ruins of it, at the time when God cut him off.

[3.] That he shall vie with the God of Israel, of whom he had indeed heard glorious things, that he had his residence *above the heights of the clouds*.

“But thither,” says he, “*will I ascend*, and be as great as he; I will be like him whom they call *the Most High*.” It is a gracious ambition to covet to be like the Most Holy, for he has said, *Be you holy, for I am holy*; but it is a sinful ambition to aim to be like the Most High, for he has said, *He that exalteth himself shall be abased*, and the devil drew our first parents in to eat forbidden fruit by promising them that they should be as gods.

[4.] That he shall himself be deified after his death, as some of the first founders of the Assyrian monarchy were, and stars had even their names from them. “But,” says he, “*I will exalt my throne above them all*.” Such as this was his pride, which was the undoubted omen of his destruction.

3. The utter ruin that should be brought upon him. It is foretold,

(1.) That his wealth and power should be broken, and a final period put to his pomp and pleasure. He has been long an oppressor, but he shall cease to be so, v. 4. Had he ceased to be so by true repentance and reformation, according to the advice Daniel gave to Nebuchadnezzar, it might have been a lengthening of his life and tranquillity. But those that will not cease to sin God will make to cease. “*The golden city, which one would have thought might continue for ever, has ceased*; there is an end of that Babylon. *The Lord, the righteous God, has broken the staff of that wicked prince*, broken it over his head, in token of the divesting him of his office. God has taken his power from him, and rendered him incapable of doing any more mischief: he has broken the sceptres; for even these are brittle things, soon broken and often justly.”

(2.) That he himself should be seized: *He is persecuted* (v. 6); violent hands are laid upon him, and none hinders. It is the common fate of tyrants, when they fall into the power of their enemies, to be deserted by their flatterers, whom they took for their friends. We read of another enemy like this, of whom it is foretold that *he shall come to his end and none shall help him*, ²¹¹⁵Daniel 11:45. Tiberius and Nero thus saw themselves abandoned.

(3.) That he should be slain, and *go down to the congregation of the dead, to be free among them, as the slain that are no more remembered*, ²¹⁸⁵Psalms 88:5. He shall be *weak as the dead are, and like unto them*, v. 10. His *pomp is brought down to the grave* (v. 11), that is, it perishes with him; the pomp of his life shall not, as usual, end in a funeral pomp. True glory (that is, true grace) will go up with the soul to heaven, but vain pomp

will go down with the body to the grave: there is an end of it. *The noise of his viols* is now heard no more. Death is a farewell to the pleasures, as well as to the pomps, of this world. This mighty prince, that used to lie on a bed of down, to tread upon rich carpets, and to have coverings and canopies exquisitely fine, now shall have the *worms spread under him and the worms covering him*, worms bred out of his own putrefied body, which, though he fancied himself a god, proved him to be made of the same mould with other men. When we are pampering and decking our bodies it is good to remember they will be worms'-meat shortly.

(4.) That he should not have the honour of a burial, much less of a decent one and in the sepulchres of his ancestors. *The kings of the nations lie in glory* (v. 18), either their dead bodies themselves so embalmed as to be preserved from putrefaction, as of old among the Egyptians, or their effigies (as with us) erected over their graves. Thus, as if they would defy the ignominy of death, they lay in a poor faint sort of glory, *every one in his own house*, that is, his own burying-place (for the grave is the house appointed for all living), a sleeping house, where the busy and troublesome will lie quiet and the troubled and weary lie at rest. But this king of Babylon is *cast out* and has no grave (v. 19); his dead body is thrown, like that of a beast, into the next ditch or upon the next dunghill, *like an abominable branch* of some noxious poisonous plant, which nobody will touch, or as the clothes of malefactors put to death and by the hand of justice *thrust through with a sword*, on whose dead bodies heaps of stones are raised, or they are thrown into some deep quarry among *the stones of the pit*. Nay, the king of Babylon's dead body shall be as the carcasses of those who are slain in a battle, which are *trodden under feet* by the horses and soldiers and crushed to pieces. Thus he *shall not be joined with his ancestors in burial*, v. 20. To be denied decent burial is a disgrace, which, if it be inflicted for righteousness' sake (as ^{394E}Psalm 79:2), may, as other similar reproaches, be rejoiced in (^{415D}Matthew 5:12); it is the lot of the two witnesses, ^{611D}Revelation 11:9. But if, as here, it be the just punishment of iniquity, it is an intimation that evil pursues impenitent sinners beyond death, greater evil than that, and that they shall *rise to everlasting shame and contempt*.

4. The many triumphs that should be in his fall.

(1.) Those whom he had been a great tyrant and terror to will be glad that they are rid of him, v. 7, 8. Now that he is gone *the whole earth is at rest*

and is quiet, for he was the great disturber of the peace; now they all *break forth into singing*, for *when the wicked perish there is shouting* (²¹¹¹Proverbs 11:10); the fir-trees and cedars of Lebanon now think themselves safe; there is no danger now of their being cut down, to make way for his vast armies or to furnish him with timber. The neighbouring princes and great men, who are compared to fir-trees and cedars (²⁸¹²Zechariah 11:2), may now be easy, and out of fear of being dispossessed of their rights, for *the hammer of the whole earth is cut asunder and broken* (²⁸¹³Jeremiah 50:23), the axe that *boasted itself against him that hewed with it*, ²⁸¹⁵Isaiah 10:15.

(2.) The congregation of the dead will bid him welcome to them, especially those whom he had barbarously hastened thither (v. 9, 10): “*Hell from beneath is moved for thee, to meet thee at thy coming*, and to compliment thee upon thy arrival at their dark and dreadful regions.” *The chief ones of the earth*, who when they were alive were kept in awe by him and durst not come near him, but rose from their thrones, to resign them to him, shall upbraid him with it when he comes into the state of the dead. They shall go forth to meet him, as they used to do when he made his public entry into cities he had become master of; with such a parade shall he be introduced into those regions of horror, to make his disgrace and torment the more grievous to him. They shall go forth to meet him, as they used to do when he made his public entry into cities he had become master of; with such a parade shall he be introduced into those regions of horror, to make his disgrace and torment the more grievous to him. They shall scoffingly rise from their thrones and seats there, and ask him if he will please to sit down in them, as he used to do in their thrones on earth? The confusion that will then cover him they shall make a jest of: “*Hast thou also become weak as we? Who would have thought it? It is what thou thyself didst not expect it would ever come to when thou wast in every thing too hard for us. Thou that didst rank thyself among the immortal gods, art thou come to take thy fate among us poor mortal men? Where is thy pomp now, and where thy mirth? How hast thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer! son of the morning!*” v. 11, 12. The king of Babylon shone as brightly as the morning star, and fancied that wherever he came he brought day along with him; and has such an illustrious prince as this fallen, such a star become a clod of clay? Did ever any man fall from such a height of honour and power into such an abyss of shame and misery?” This has been commonly alluded to (and it is a mere allusion) to illustrate the fall of the

angels, who were as morning stars (~~1887~~ Job 38:7), but *how have they fallen! How art thou cut down to the ground, and levelled with it, that didst weaken the nations!* God will reckon with those that invade the rights and disturb the peace of mankind, for he is King of nations as well as of saints. Now this reception of the king of Babylon into the regions of the dead, which is here described, surely is something more than a flight of fancy, and is designed to teach these solid truths: —

[1.] That there is an invisible world, a world of spirits, to which the souls of men remove at death and in which they exist and act in a state of separation from the body.

[2.] That separate souls have acquaintance and converse with each other, though we have none with them: the parable of the rich man and Lazarus intimates this.

[3.] That death and hell will be death and hell indeed to those that fall unsanctified from the height of this world's pomps and the fulness of its pleasures. *Son, remember,* ~~4265~~ Luke 16:25.

(3.) Spectators will stand amazed at his fall. When he shall be *brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit,* and be lodged there, *those that see him shall narrowly look upon him, and consider him* (v. 15, 16); they shall scarcely believe their own eyes. “Never was death so great a change to any man as it is to him. Is it possible that a man, who a few hours ago looked so great, so pleasant, and was so splendidly adorned and attended, should now look so ghastly, so despicable, and lie thus naked and neglected? *Is this the man that made the earth to tremble and shook kingdoms? Who could have thought he should ever come to this?*” ~~1817~~ Psalm 82:7.

5. Here is an inference drawn from all this (v. 20): *The seed of evil-doers shall never be renowned.* The princes of the Babylonian monarchy were all a seed of evil-doers, oppressors of the people of God, and therefore they had this infamy entailed upon them. *They shall not be renowned for ever* (so some read it); they may look big for a time, but all their pomp will only render their disgrace at last the more shameful. There is no credit in a sinful way.

II. The utter ruin of the royal family is here foretold, together with the desolation of The royal city.

1. The royal family is to be wholly extirpated. The Medes and Persians, that are to be employed in this destroying work, are ordered, when they have slain Belshazzar, to *prepare slaughter for his children* (v. 21) and not to spare them. The little ones of Babylon must be *dashed against the stones*, ^{<AD9>}Psalm 137:9. These orders sound very harshly; but,

(1.) They must suffer *for the iniquity of their fathers*, which is often visited upon the children, to show how much God hates sin and is displeased at it, and to deter sinners from it, which is the end of punishment.

Nebuchadnezzar had slain Zedekiah's sons (^{<AE70>}Jeremiah 52:10), and, for that iniquity of his, his seed are paid in the same coin.

(2.) They must be cut off now, that they *may not rise up to possess the land* and do as much mischief in their day as their fathers had done in theirs — that they may not be as vexatious to the world by building cities for the support of their tyranny (which was Nimrod's policy, ^{<AD0>}Genesis 10:10, 11) as their ancestors had been by destroying cities. Pharaoh oppressed Israel in Egypt by setting them to build cities, ^{<AD11>}Exodus 1:11. The providence of God consults the welfare of nations more than we are aware of by cutting off some who, if they had lived, would have done mischief. Justly may the enemies cut off the children: *For I will rise up against them, saith the Lord of hosts* (v. 22), and if God reveal it as his mind that he will have it done, as none can hinder it, so none need scruple to further it. Babylon perhaps was proud of the numbers of her royal family, but God had determined to *cut off the name and remnant* of it, so that none should be left, to have both the sons and grandsons of the king slain; and yet we are sure he never did, nor ever will do, any wrong to any of his creatures.

2. The royal city is to be demolished and deserted, v. 23. It shall be a possession for solitary frightful birds, particularly *the bittern*, joined with the cormorant and the owl, ^{<AD11>}Isaiah 24:11. And thus the utter destruction of the New-Testament Babylon is illustrated, ^{<AD62>}Revelation 18:2. It *has become a cage of every unclean and hateful bird*. Babylon lay low, so that when it was deserted, and no care taken to drain the land, it soon became *pools of water*, standing noisome puddles, as unhealthful as they were unpleasant: and thus *God will sweep it with the besom of destruction*. When a people have nothing among them but dirt and filth, and will not be made clean with the besom of reformation, what can they expect but to be swept off the face of the earth with the besom of destruction?

THE DOOM OF THE ASSYRIANS AND PHILISTINES

The destruction of Babylon and the Chaldean empire was a thing at a great distance; the empire had not risen to any considerable height when its fall was here foretold: it was almost 200 years from this prediction of Babylon's fall to the accomplishment of it. Now the people to whom Isaiah prophesied might ask, "What is this to us, or what shall we be the better for it, and what assurance shall we have of it?" To both questions he answers in these verses, by a prediction of the ruin both of the Assyrians and of the Philistines, the present enemies that infested them, which they should shortly be eye-witnesses of and have benefit by. These would be a present comfort to them, and a pledge of future deliverance, for the confirming of the faith of their posterity. God is to his people the same to day that he was yesterday and will be hereafter; and he will for ever be the same that he has been and is. Here is,

I. Assurance given of the destruction of the Assyrians (v. 25): *I will break the Assyrian in my land.* Sennacherib brought a very formidable army into the land of Judah, but there God broke it, broke all his regiments by the sword of a destroying angel. Note, Those who wrongfully invade God's land shall find that it is at their peril: and those who with unhallowed feet trample upon his holy mountains shall themselves there be trodden under foot. God undertakes to do this himself, his people having no might against the great company that came against them: "*I will break the Assyrian; let me alone to do it who have angels, hosts of angels, at command.*" Now the breaking of the power of the Assyrian would be the breaking of the yoke from off the neck of God's people: *His burden shall depart from off their shoulders*, the burden of quartering that vast army and paying contribution; *therefore* the Assyrian must be broken, that Judah and Jerusalem may be eased. Let those that make themselves a yoke and a burden to God's people see what they are to expect. Now,

1. This prophecy is here ratified and confirmed by an oath (v. 24): *The Lord of hosts hath sworn*, that he might show the immutability of his counsel, and that his people may have strong consolation, ³⁰⁶⁷Hebrews 6:17, 18. What is here said of this particular intention is true of all God's purposes: *As I have thought, so shall it come to pass; for he is in one*

mind, and who can turn him? Nor is he ever put upon new counsels, or obliged to take new measures, as men often are when things occur which they did not foresee. Let those who are *the called according to God's purpose* comfort themselves with this, that, *as God has purposed, so shall it stand*, and on that their stability depends.

2. The breaking of the Assyrian power is made a specimen of what God would do with all the powers of the nations that were engaged against him and his church (v. 26): *This is the purpose that is purposed upon the whole earth (the whole world, so the Septuagint), all the inhabitants of the earth (so the Chaldee), not only upon the Assyrian empire (which was then reckoned to be in a manner all the world, as afterwards the Roman empire was,* ^{<481>}Luke 2:1, and with it many nations fell that had dependence upon it), but upon all those states and potentates that should at any time attack his land, his mountains. The fate of the Assyrian shall be theirs; they shall soon find that they meddle to their own hurt. Jerusalem, as it was to the Assyrians, will be *to all people a burdensome stone; all that burden themselves with it shall infallibly be cut to pieces by it,* ^{<312>}Zechariah 12:3, 6. The same hand of power and justice that is now to be stretched out against the Assyrian for invading the people of God shall be *stretched out upon all the nations* that do likewise. It is still true, and will ever be so, *Cursed is he that curses God's Israel,* ^{<489>}Numbers 24:9. God will be an enemy to his people's enemies, ^{<1232>}Exodus 23:22.

3. All the powers on earth are defied to change God's counsel (v. 27): *"The Lord of hosts has purposed to break the Assyrian's yoke, and every rod of the wicked laid upon the lot of the righteous; and who shall disannul this purpose? Who can persuade him to recall it, or find out a plea to evade it? His hand is stretched out to execute this purpose; and who has power enough to turn it back or to stay the course of his judgments?"*

II. Assurance is likewise given of the destruction of the Philistines and their power. This burden, this prophecy, that lay as a load upon them, to sink their state, came *in the year that king Ahaz died*, which was the first year of Hezekiah's reign, v. 28. When a good king came in the room of a bad one then this acceptable message was sent among them. When we reform, then, and not till then, we may look for good news from heaven. Now here we have,

1. A rebuke to the Philistines for triumphing in the death of king Uzziah. He had been as a serpent to them (v. 29), had bitten them, had smitten them, had brought them very low, ^{<406>}2 Chronicles 26:6. He *warred against the Philistines, broke down their walls, and built cities among them*. But when Uzziah died, or rather abdicated, it was told with joy in Gath and *published in the streets of Ashkelon*. It is inhuman thus to rejoice in our neighbour's fall. But let them not be secure; for though when Uzziah was dead they made reprisals upon Ahaz, and took many of the cities of Judah (^{<438>}2 Chronicles 28:18), yet *out of the root of Uzziah should come a cockatrice*, a more formidable enemy than Uzziah was, even Hezekiah, the fruit of whose government should be to them *a fiery flying serpent*, for he should fall upon them with incredible swiftness and fury: we find he did so. ^{<288>}2 Kings 18:8, *He smote the Philistines even to Gaza*. Note, If God remove one useful instrument in the midst of his usefulness, he can, and will, raise up others to carry on and complete the same work that they were employed in and left unfinished.

2. A prophecy of the destruction of the Philistines by famine and war.

(1.) By famine, v. 30. “When the people of God, whom the Philistines has wasted, and distressed, and impoverished, shall enjoy plenty again,” and *the first-born of their poor shall feed* (the poorest among them shall have food convenient), then, as for the Philistines, God will kill *their root with famine*. That which was their strength, and with which they thought themselves established as the tree is by the root, shall be starved and dried up by degrees, as those die that die by famine; and thus *he shall slay the remnant*: those that escape from one destruction are but reserved for another; and, when there are but a few left, those few shall at length be cut off, for God will make a full end.

(2.) By war. When *the needy of God's people shall lie down in safety*, not terrified with the alarms of war, but delighting in the songs of peace, then every gate and every city of the Philistines shall be howling and crying (v. 31), and there shall be a total dissolution of their state; for from Judea, which lay north of the Philistines, *there shall come a smoke* (a vast army raising a great dust, a smoke that shall be the indication of a devouring fire at hand), *and none of all that army shall be alone in his appointed times*; none shall straggle or be missing when they are to engage; but they shall all be vigorous and unanimous in attacking the common enemy, when the time appointed for the doing of it comes. None of them shall decline the

public service, as, in Deborah's time, Reuben abode among the sheepfolds and Asher on the sea-shore, ^{<056>}Judges 5:16, 17. When God has work to do he will wonderfully endow and dispose men for it.

III. The good use that should be made of all these events for the encouragement of the people of God (v. 32): *What shall one then answer the messengers of the nations?*

1. This implies,

(1.) That the great things God does for his people are, and cannot but be, taken notice of by their neighbours; those among the heathen make remarks upon them, ^{<032>}Psalms 126:2.

(2.) That messengers will be sent to enquire concerning them. Jacob and Israel had long been a people distinguished from all others and dignified with uncommon favours; and therefore some for good-will, others for ill-will, and all for curiosity, are inquisitive concerning them.

(3.) That it concerns us always to be ready to give a reason of the hope that we have in the providence of God, as well as in his grace, in answer to every one that asks it, *with meekness and fear*, ^{<015>}1 Peter 3:15. And we need go no further than the sacred truths of God's word for a reason; for God, in all he does, is fulfilling the scripture.

(4.) The issue of God's dealings with his people shall be so clearly and manifestly glorious that any one, every one, shall be able to give an account of them to those that enquire concerning them. Now,

2. The answer which is to be given to the messengers of the nations is,

(1.) That God is and will be a faithful friend to his church and people, and will secure and advance their interests. Tell them that *the Lord has founded Zion*. This gives an account both of the work itself that is done and of the reason of it. What is God doing in the world, and what is he designing in all the revolutions of states and kingdoms, in the ruin of some nations and the rise of others? He is, in all this, founding Zion; he is aiming at the advancement of his church's interests; and what he aims at he will accomplish. The messengers of the nations, when they sent to enquire concerning Hezekiah's successes against the Philistines, expected to learn by what politics, counsels, and arts of war he carried his point; but they are told that these successes were not owing to any thing of that

nature, but to the care God took of his church and the interest he had in it. The Lord has founded Zion, and therefore the Philistines must fall.

(2.) That his church has and will have a dependence upon him: *The poor of his people shall trust in it*, his poor people who have lately been brought very low, even the poorest of them; they more than others, for they have nothing else to trust to, ^{<382>}Zephaniah 3:12, 13. *The poor receive the gospel*, ^{<415>}Matthew 11:5. They shall trust to this, to this great truth, that the Lord has founded Zion; on this they shall build their hopes, and not on an arm of flesh. This ought to give us abundant satisfaction as to public affairs, that however it may go with particular persons, parties, and interests, the church, having God himself for its founder and Christ the rock for its foundation, cannot but stand firm. *The poor of his people shall betake themselves to it* (so some read it), shall join themselves to his church and embark in its interests; they shall concur with God in his designs to establish his people, and shall wind up all on the same plan, and make all their little concerns and projects bend to that. Those that take God's people for their people must be willing to take their lot with them and cast in their lot among them. Let the messengers of the nations know that the poor Israelites, who trust in God, having, like Zion, their foundation in the holy mountains (^{<387>}Psalms 87:1), are like Zion, which *cannot be removed, but abides for ever* (^{<393>}Psalms 125:1.), and therefore they will not fear what man can do unto them.