

CHAPTER 32

This chapter seems to be such a prophecy of the reign of Hezekiah as amounts to an abridgment of the history of it, and this with an eye to the kingdom of the Messiah, whose government was typified by the thrones of the house of David, for which reason he is so often called “the Son of David.” Here is,

- I. A prophecy of that good work of reformation with which he should begin his reign, and the happy influence it should have upon the people, who had been wretchedly corrupted and debauched in the reign of his predecessor (v. 1-8).
- II. A prophecy of the great disturbance that would be given to the kingdom in the middle of his reign by the Assyrian invasion (v. 9-14).
- III. A promise of better times afterwards, towards the latter end of his reign, in respect both of piety and peace (v. 15-20), which promise may be supposed to look as far forward as the days of the Messiah.

ISA. 32: 1-8

We have here the description of a flourishing kingdom. “*Blessed art thou, O land!* when it is thus with thee, when kings, princes, and people, are in their places such as they should be.” It may be taken as a directory both to magistrates and subjects, what both ought to do, or as a panegyric to Hezekiah, who ruled well and saw something of the happy effects of his good government, and it was designed to make the people sensible how happy they were under his administration and how careful they should be to improve the advantages of it, and withal to direct them to look for the kingdom of Christ, and the times of reformation which that kingdom should introduce. It is here promised and prescribed, for the comfort of the church,

I. That magistrates should do their duty in their places, and the powers answer the great ends for which they were ordained of God, v. 1, 2.

1. There shall be a king and princes that shall reign and rule; for it cannot go well when there is no king in Israel. The princes must have a king, a monarch over them as supreme, in whom they may unite; and the king must have princes under him as officers, by whom he may act, 1Pe. 2:13, 14. They both shall know their place and fill it up. The king shall reign, and yet, without any diminution to his just prerogative, the princes shall rule in a lower sphere, and all for the public good.

2. They shall use their power according to law, and not against it. They shall reign in righteousness and in judgment, with wisdom and equity, protecting the good and punishing the bad; and those kings and princes Christ owns as reigning by him who decree justice, Pro. 8:15. Such a King, such a Prince, Christ himself is; he reigns by rule, and *in righteousness will he judge the world*, Isa. 9: 7; 11: 4.

3. Thus they shall be great blessings to the people (v. 2): *A man*, that man, that king that reigns in righteousness, *shall be as a hiding-place*. When princes are as they should be people are as they would be.

(1.) They are sheltered and protected from many mischiefs. This good magistrate is a covert to the subject from the tempest of injury and violence; he *defends the poor and fatherless*, that they be not made a prey of by the mighty. Whither should oppressed innocency flee, when blasted by reproach or borne down by violence, but to the magistrate as its hiding-place? To him it appeals, and by him it is righted.

(2.) They are refreshed and comforted with many blessings. This good magistrate gives such countenance to those that are poor and in distress, and such encouragement to every thing that is praiseworthy, that he is *as rivers of water in a dry place*, cooling and cherishing the earth and making it fruitful, and *as the shadow of a great rock*, under which a poor traveller may shelter himself from the scorching heat of the sun *in a weary land*. It is a great reviving to a good man, who makes conscience of doing his duty, in the midst of contempt and contradiction, at length to be backed, and favoured, and smiled upon in it by a good magistrate. All this, and much more, the man Christ Jesus is to all the willing faithful subjects of his kingdom. When the greatest evils befall us, not only the wind, but the tempest, when storms of guilt and wrath beset us and beat upon us, they drive us to Christ, and in him we are not only safe, but satisfied that we are so; in him we find rivers of water for those that hunger and thirst after righteousness, all the refreshment and comfort that a needy soul can desire, and the shadow, not of a tree, which sun or rain may beat through, but of a rock, of a great rock, which reaches a great way for the shelter of the traveller. Some observe here that as the covert, and the hiding-place, and the rock, do themselves receive the battering of the wind and storm, to save those from it that take shelter in them, so Christ bore the storm himself to keep it off from us.

II. That subjects should do their duty in their places.

1. They shall be willing to be taught, and to understand things aright. They shall lay aside their prejudices against their rulers and teachers, and submit to the light and power of truth, v. 3. When this blessed work of reformation is set on

foot, and men do their parts towards it, God will not be wanting to do his: Then *the eyes of those that see*, of the prophets, the seers, *shall not be dim*; but God will bless them with visions, to be by them communicated to the people; and those that read the word written shall no longer have a veil upon their hearts, but shall see things clearly. Then *the ears of those that hear* the word preached *shall hearken* diligently and readily receive what they hear, and not be so dull of hearing as they have been. This shall be done by the grace of God, especially gospel-grace; for *the hearing ear, and the seeing eyes, the Lord has made, has new-made, even both of them.*

2. There shall be a wonderful change wrought in them by that which is taught them, v. 4.

(1.) They shall have a clear head, and be able to discern things that differ, and distinguish concerning them. *The heart of those that were hasty and rash*, and could not take time to digest and consider things, shall now be cured of their precipitation, and *shall understand knowledge*; for the Spirit of God will open their understanding. This blessed work Christ wrought in his disciples after his resurrection (Luk. 24:45), as a specimen of what he would do for all his people, in giving them an understanding, 1Jo. 5:20. The pious designs of good princes are likely to take effect when their subjects allow themselves liberty to consider, and to think, so freely as to take things right.

(2.) They shall have a ready utterance: *The tongue of the stammerers*, that used to blunder whenever they spoke of the things of God, *shall now be ready to speak plainly*, as those that understand what they speak of, that believe, and therefore speak. There shall be a great increase of such clear, distinct, and methodical knowledge in the things of God, that those from whom one would not have expected it shall speak intelligently of these things, very much to the honour of God and the edification of others. Their hearts being full of this good matter, their tongues shall be *as the pen of a ready writer*, Psa. 45: 1.

3. The differences between good and evil, virtue and vice, shall be kept up, and no more confounded by those who put darkness for light and light for darkness (v. 5): *The vile shall no more be called liberal.*

(1.) Bad men shall no more be preferred by the prince. When a king reigns in justice he will not put those in places of honour and power that are ill-natured, and of base and sordid spirits, and care not what injury or mischief they do so they may but compass their own ends. Such as *vile* persons (as Antiochus is called, Dan. 11:21); when they are advanced they are called *liberal* and *bountiful*; they are called *benefactors* (Luk. 22:25): but it shall not always be thus; when the world grows wiser men shall be preferred according to their

merit, and honour (which was never thought seemly for a fool, Pro. 26: 1) shall no longer be thrown away upon such.

(2.) Bad men shall be no more had in reputation among the people, nor vice disguised with the colours of virtue. It shall no more be said to Nabal, *Thou art Nadib* (so the words are); such a covetous muck-worm as Nabal was, a fool but for his money, shall not be complimented with the title of a gentleman or a prince; nor shall they call a *churl*, that minds none but himself, does no good with what he has, but is an unprofitable burden of the earth, *My lord*; or, rather, they shall not say of him, *He is rich*; for so the word signifies. Those only are to be reckoned rich that are rich in good works; not those that have abundance, but those that use it well. In short, it is well with a people when men are generally valued by their virtue, and usefulness, and beneficence to mankind, and not by their wealth or titles of honour. Whether this was fulfilled in the reign of Hezekiah, and how far it refers to the kingdom of Christ (in which we are sure men are judged of by what they are, not by what they have, nor is any man's character mistaken), we will not say; but it prescribes an excellent rule both to prince and people, to respect men according to their personal merit. To enforce this rule, here is a description both of the vile person and of the liberal; and by it we shall see such a vast difference between them that we must quite forget ourselves if we pay that respect to the vile person and the churl which is due only to the liberal.

[1.] A vile person and a churl will do mischief, and the more if he be preferred and have power in his hand; his honours will make him worse and not better, v. 6, 7. See the character of these base ill-conditioned men.

First, They are always plotting some unjust thing or other, designing ill either to particular persons or to the public, and contriving how to bring it about; and so many silly piques they have to gratify, and mean revenges, that there appears not in them the least spark of generosity. Their hearts will be still working some iniquity or other. Observe, There is the work of the heart, as well as the work of the hands. As thoughts are words to God, so designs are works in his account. See what pains sinners take in sin. They labour at it; their hearts are intent upon it, and with a great deal of art and application they *work iniquity*. They *devise wicked devices* with all the subtlety of the old serpent and a great deal of deliberation, which makes the sin exceedingly sinful; and the more there is of plot and management in a sin the more there is of Satan in it.

Secondly, They carry on their plots by trick and dissimulation. When they are meditating iniquity, they *practise hypocrisy*, feign themselves just men, Luk. 20:20. The most abominable mischiefs shall be disguised with the most plausible pretences of devotion to God, regard to man, and concern for some

common good. Those are the vilest of men that intend the worst mischiefs when they speak fair.

Thirdly, They speak villainy. When they are in a passion you will see what they are by the base ill language they give to those about them, which no way becomes men of rank and honour; or, in giving verdict or judgment, they villainously put false colours upon things, to pervert justice.

Fourthly, They affront God, who is a righteous God and loves righteousness: They utter error against the Lord, and therein they practise profaneness; for so the word which we translate hypocrisy signifies. They give an unjust sentence, and then profanely make use of the name of God for the ratification of it; as if, because the judgment is God's (Deu. 1:17), therefore their false and unjust judgment was his. This is uttering error against the Lord, under pretence of uttering truth and justice for him; and nothing can be more impudently done against God than to use his name to patronise wickedness.

Fifthly, They abuse mankind, those particularly whom they are bound to protect and relieve.

1. Instead of supplying the wants of the poor, they impoverish them, they *make empty the souls of the hungry*; either taking away the food they have, or, which is almost equivalent, denying the supply which they want and which they have to give. And they *cause the drink of the thirsty to fail*; they cut off the relief they used to have, though they need it as much as ever. Those are vile persons indeed that rob the spital.

2. Instead of righting the poor, when they appeal to their judgment, they contrive to destroy the poor, to ruin them in their courts of judicature with lying words in favour of the rich, to whom they are plainly partial; yea, though the needy speak right, though the evidence be ever so full for them to make out the equity of their cause, it is the bribe that governs them, not the right.

Sixthly, These churls and vile persons have always had instruments about them, that are ready to serve their villainous purposes: All their servants are wicked. There is no design so palpably unjust but there may be found those that would be employed as tools to put it in execution. *The instruments of the churl are evil,* and one cannot expect otherwise; but this is our comfort, that they can do no more mischief than God permits them.

[2.] One that is truly liberal, and deserves the honour of being called so, makes it his business to do good to every body according as his sphere is, v. 8. Observe, *First, The care he takes, and the contrivances he has, to do good. He devises liberal things.* As much as the churl or niggard projects how to save and lay up what he has for himself only, so much the good charitable man

projects how to use and lay out what he has in the best manner for the good of others. Charity must be directed by wisdom, and liberal things done prudently and with device, that the good intention of them may be answered, that it may not be charity misplaced. The liberal man, when he has done all the liberal things that are in his own power, devises liberal things for others to do according to their power, and puts them upon doing them. *Secondly*, the comfort he takes, and the advantage he has, in doing good: *By liberal things he shall stand*, or be established. The providence of God will reward him for his liberality with a settled prosperity and an established reputation. The grace of God will give him abundance of satisfaction and confirmed peace in his own bosom. What disquiets others shall not disturb him; his heart is fixed. This is the recompence of charity, Psa. 112: 5, 6. Some read it, *The prince, or honourable man, will take honourable courses; and by such honourable or ingenuous courses he shall stand or be established*. It is well with a land when the honourable of it are indeed men of honour and scorn to do a base thing, when its king is thus the son of nobles.

ISA. 32: 9-20

In these verses we have God rising up to judgment against the vile persons, to punish them for their villainy; but at length returning in mercy to the liberal, to reward them for their liberality.

I. When there was so great a corruption of manners, and so much provocation given to the holy God, bad times might well be expected, and here is a warning given of such times coming. The alarm is sounded to the *women that were at ease* (v. 9) and the *careless daughters*, to feed whose pride, vanity, and luxury, their husbands and fathers were tempted to starve the poor. Let them hear what the prophet has to say to them in God's name: "*Rise up, and hear with reverence and attention.*"

1. Let them know that God was about to bring wasting desolating judgments upon the land in which they *lived in pleasure and were wanton*. This seems to refer primarily to the desolations made by Sennacherib's army when he seized all the fenced cities of Judah: but then those words, *many days and years*, must be rendered (as the margin reads them) *days above a year*, that is, something above a year shall this havock be in the making: so long it was from the first entrance of that army into the land of Judah to the overthrow of it. But it is applicable to the wretched disappointment which those will certainly meet with, first or last, that set their hearts upon the world and place their happiness in it: *You shall be troubled, you careless women*. It will not secure us from trouble to

cast away care when we are at ease; nay, to those who affect to live carelessly even little troubles will be great vexations and press hard upon them. They were careless and at ease because they had money enough and mirth enough; but the prophet here tells them,

(1.) That the country whence they had their tents and dainties should shortly be laid waste: “*The vintage shall fail*; and then what will you do for wine to make merry with? *The gathering of fruit shall not come*, for there shall be none to be gathered, and you will find the want of them, v. 10. You will want *the teats*, the good milk from the cows, *the pleasant fields* and their productions:” the useful fields that are serviceable to human life are the pleasant ones. “You will want the fruitful vine, and the grapes it used to yield you.” The abuse of plenty is justly punished with scarcity; and those deserve to be deprived of the supports of life who make them the food and fuel of lust and prepare them for Baal.

(2.) That the cities too, the cities of Judah, where they lived at ease, spent their rents, and made themselves merry with their dainties, should be laid waste (v. 13, 14): *Briers and thorns*, the fruits of sin and the curse, *shall come up*, not only *upon the land of my people*, which shall lie uncultivated, but upon *all the houses of joy* — the play-houses, the gaming-houses, the taverns — *in the joyous cities*. When a foreign army was ravaging the country the houses of joy, no doubt, became houses of mourning; then the palaces, or noblemen’s houses, were forsaken by their owners, who perhaps fled to Egypt for refuge; the multitude of the city were left by their leaders to shift for themselves. Then the stately houses *shall be for dens for ever*, which had been as forts and towers for strength and magnificence. They shall be abandoned; the owners shall never return to them; every body shall look upon them to be like Jericho, an anathema; so that, even when peace returns, they shall not be rebuilt, but shall be thrown to the waste: *A joy of wild asses and a pasture of flocks*. Thus is many a house brought to ruin by sin. *Jam seges est ubi Troja fuit* — *Corn grows on the site of Troy*.

2. In the foresight of this let them *tremble and be troubled, strip themselves, and gird sackcloth upon their loins*, v. 11. This intimates not only that when the calamity comes they shall thus be made to tremble and be forced to strip themselves, that then God’s judgments would strip them and make them bare, but,

(1.) That the best prevention of the trouble would be to repent and humble themselves for their sin, and lie in the dust before God in true remorse and godly sorrow, which would be the lengthening out of their tranquillity. This is meeting God in the way of his judgments, and saving a correction by correcting our own mistakes. Those only shall break that will not bend.

(2.) That the best preparation for the trouble would be to deny themselves and live a life of mortification, and to sit loose to all the delights of sense. Those that have already by a holy contempt of this world stripped themselves can easily bear to be stripped when trouble and death come.

II. While there was still a remnant that kept their integrity they had reason to hope for good times at length and such times the prophet here gives them a pleasant prospect of. Such times they saw in the latter end of the reign of Hezekiah; but the prophecy may well be supposed to look further, to the days of the Messiah, who is *King of righteousness* and *King of peace*, and to whom all the prophets bear witness. Now observe,

1. How those blessed times shall be introduced — by the *pouring out of the Spirit from on high* (v. 15), which speaks not only of the good-will of God towards us, but the good work of God in us; for then, and not till then, there will be good times, when God by his grace gives men good hearts; and therefore God's *giving his Holy Spirit to those that ask him* is in effect his giving them all good things, as appears by comparing Luk. 11:13 with Mat. 7:11. This is the great thing that God's people comfort themselves with the hopes of, that *the Spirit shall be poured out upon them*, that there shall be a more plentiful effusion of the Spirit of grace than formerly, according as the necessity of the church, in its desolate estate, calls for. This comes from on high, and therefore they look up to their Father in heaven for it. When God designs favours for his church he pours out his Spirit, both to prepare his people to receive his favours and to qualify and give success to those whom he designs to employ as instruments of his favour; for their endeavours to repair the desolations of the church are all fruitless *until the Spirit be poured out upon them* and then the work is done suddenly. The kingdom of the Messiah was brought in, and set up, by the pouring out of the Spirit (Acts 2), and so it is still kept up, and will be to the end.

2. What a wonderfully happy change shall then be made. That which was a *wilderness*, dry and barren, *shall become a fruitful field*, and that which we now reckon a *fruitful field*, in comparison with what it shall be then, *shall be counted for a forest*. *Then shall the earth yield her increase*. It is promised that in the days of the Messiah the *fruit of the earth shall shake like Lebanon*, Psa. 72:16. Some apply this to the admission of the Gentiles into the gospel church (which made the wilderness a fruitful field), and the rejection and exclusion of the Jews, which made that a forest which had been a fruitful field. On the Gentiles was poured out a spirit of life, but on the Jews a spirit of slumber. See what is the evidence and effect of the pouring out of the Spirit upon any soul; it is thereby made fruitful, and has its fruit unto holiness. Three things go to make these times happy: —

(1.) Judgment and righteousness, v. 16. When the Spirit is poured out upon a land, *then judgment shall dwell in the wilderness* and turn it into a fruitful field, and *righteousness shall remain in the fruitful field* and make it yet more fruitful. Ministers shall expound the law and magistrates execute it, and both so judiciously and faithfully that by both the bad shall be made good and the good made better. Among all sorts of people, the poor and low and unlearned, that are neglected as the wilderness, and the rich and great and learned, that are valued as the fruitful field, there shall be right thoughts of things, good principles commanding, and conscience made of good and evil, sin and duty. Or in all parts of the land, both champaign and enclosed, country and city, the ruder parts and those that are more cultivated and refined, justice shall be duly administered. The law of Christ introduces a judgment or rule by which we must be governed, and the gospel of Christ a righteousness by which we must be saved; and, wherever the Spirit is poured out, both these dwell and remain as an everlasting righteousness.

(2.) Peace and quietness, v. 17, 18. The peace here promised is of two kinds: —

[1.] Inward peace, v. 17. This follows upon the indwelling of righteousness, v. 16. Those in whom that work is wrought shall experience this blessed product of it. It is itself peace, and the effect of it is *quietness and assurance for ever*, that is, a holy serenity and security of mind, by which the soul enjoys itself and enjoys its God, and it is not in the power of this world to disturb it in those enjoyments. Note, Peace, and quietness, and everlasting assurance may be expected, and shall be found, in the way and work of righteousness. True satisfaction is to be had only in true religion, and there it is to be had without fail. Those are the quiet and peaceable lives that are spent *in all godliness and honesty*, 1Ti. 2: 2. *First, Even the work of righteousness shall be peace.* In the doing of our duty we shall find abundance of true pleasure, a present great reward of obedience in obedience. Though the work of righteousness may be toilsome and costly, and expose us to contempt, yet it is peace, such peace as is sufficient to bear our charges. *Secondly, The effect of righteousness shall be quietness and assurance*, not only to the end of time, of our time, and in the end, but to the endless ages of eternity. Real holiness is real happiness now and shall be perfect happiness, that is, perfect holiness, for ever.

[2.] Outward peace, v. 18. It is a great mercy when those who by the grace of God have quiet and peaceable spirits are by the providence of God made to *dwell in quiet and peaceable habitations*, not disturbed in their houses or solemn assemblies. When the terror of Sennacherib's invasion was over, the people, no doubt, were more sensible than ever of the mercy of a quiet habitation, not disturbed with the alarms of war. Let every family study to keep itself quiet from strifes and jars within, not two against three and three against

two in the house, and then put itself under God's protection to dwell safely, and to be *quiet from the fear of evil* without. Jerusalem shall be a peaceable habitation; compare Isa. 33:20. Even *when it shall hail*, and there shall be a violent battering storm *coming down on the forest* that lies bleak, then shall Jerusalem be *a quiet resting-place, for the city shall be low in a low place*, under the wind, not exposed (as those cities are that stand high) to the fury of the storm, but sheltered by the *mountains that are round about Jerusalem*, Psa. 125: 2. The *high forts and towers are brought down* (v. 14), but the city that lies low shall be a quiet resting-place. Those are most safe, and may dwell most at ease, that are humble, and are willing to dwell low, v. 19. Those that would dwell in a peaceable habitation must be willing to dwell low, and in a low place. Some think here is an allusion to the preservation of the land of Goshen from the plague of hail, which made great destruction in the land of Egypt.

(3.) Plenty and abundance. There shall be such good crops gathered in every where, and every year, that the husbandmen shall be commended, and though happy, who *sow beside all water* (v. 20), who sow all the grounds that are fit for seedness, who *cast their bread*, or bread-corn, *upon the water*, Ecc. 11: 1. God will give the increase, but then the husbandman must be industrious, and mind his business, and sow beside all waters; and, if he do this, the corn shall come up so thick and rank that he shall turn in his cattle, even the ox and the ass, to eat the tops of it and keep it under. This is applicable,

[1.] To the preaching of the word. Some think it points at the ministry of the apostles, who, as husbandmen, went forth to sow their seed (Mat. 13: 3); they sowed beside all waters; they preached the gospel wherever they came. Waters signify people, and they preached to multitudes. Wherever they found men's hearts softened, and moistened, and disposed to receive the word, they cast in the good seed. And whereas, by the law of Moses, the Jews were forbidden to *plough with an ox and an ass together* (Deu. 22:10), which intimated that Jews and Gentiles should not intermix, now that distinction shall be taken away, and both the ox and the ass, both Jews and Gentiles, shall be employed in, and enjoy the benefit of, the gospel husbandry.

[2.] To works of charity. When God sends these happy times blessed are those that improve them in doing good with what they have, that sow beside all waters, that embrace all opportunities of relieving the necessitous; for in due season they shall reap.