

CHAPTER 13

Hitherto the prophecies of this book related only to Judah and Israel, and Jerusalem especially; but now the prophet begins to look abroad, and to read the doom of divers of the neighbouring states and kingdoms: for he that is King of saints is also King of nations, and rules in the affairs of the children of men as well as in those of his own children. But the nations to whom these prophecies do relate were all such as the people of God were in some way or other conversant and concerned with, such as had been kind or unkind to Israel, and accordingly God would deal with them, either in favour or in wrath; for the Lord's portion is his people, and to them he has an eye in all the dispensations of his providence concerning those about them, ^{<538>}Deuteronomy 32:8, 9. The threatenings we find here against Babylon, Moab, Damascus, Egypt, Tyre, etc., were intended for comfort to those in Israel that feared God, but were terrified and oppressed by those potent neighbours, and for alarm to those among them that were wicked. If God would thus severely reckon with those for their sins that knew him not, and made no profession of his name, how severe would he be with those that were called by his name and yet lived in rebellion against him! And perhaps the directing of particular prophecies to the neighbouring nations might invite some of those nations to the reading of the Jews' Bible, and so they might be brought to their religion. This chapter, and that which follows, contain what God had to say to Babylon and Babylon's king, who were at present little known to Israel, but would in process of time become a greater enemy to them than any other had been, for which God would at last reckon with them. In this chapter we have,

- I.** A general rendezvous of the forces that were to be employed against Babylon (v. 1-5).
- II.** The dreadfully bloody work that those forces should make in Babylon (v. 6-18).
- III.** The utter ruin and desolation of Babylon, which this should end in (v. 19-22).

^{<231>}ISAIAH 13:1-5

THE DOOM OF BABYLON

The general title of this book was, *The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz*, ^{<200>}Isaiah 1:1. Here we have that which Isaiah saw, which was represented

to his mind as clearly and fully as if he had seen it with his bodily eyes; but the particular inscription of this sermon is *the burden of Babylon*.

1. It is a burden, a lesson they were to learn (so some understand it), but they would be loth to learn it, and it would be a burden to their memories, or a load which should lie heavily upon them and under which they should sink. Those that will not make the word of God their rest (²³⁸²Isaiah 28:12; ²⁴⁶⁶Jeremiah 6:16) shall find it made a burden to them.

2. It is the burden of Babylon or Babel, which at this time was a dependent upon the Assyrian monarchy (the metropolis of which was Nineveh), but soon after revolted from it and became a monarchy of itself, and a very potent one, in Nebuchadnezzar. This prophet afterwards foretold the captivity of the Jews in Babylon, ²³⁹⁶Isaiah 39:6. Here he foretels the reprisals God would make upon Babylon for the wrongs done to his people. In these verses a summons is given to those powerful and warlike nations whom God would make us of as the instruments of his wrath for the destruction of Babylon: he afterwards names them (v. 17) the *Medes*, who, in conjunction with the Persians, under the command of Darius and Cyrus, were the ruin of the Babylonian monarchy.

I. The place doomed to destruction is Babylon; it is here called *the gates of the nobles* (v. 2), because of the abundance of noblemen's houses that were in it, stately ones and richly furnished, which would invite the enemy to come, in hopes of a rich booty. The gates of nobles were strong and well guarded, and yet they would be no fence against those who came with commission to execute God's judgments. Before his power and wrath palaces are no more than cottages. Nor is it only the gates of the nobles, but *the whole land*, that is doomed to destruction (v. 5); for, though the nobles were the leaders in persecuting and oppressing God's people, yet the whole land concurred with them in it.

II. The persons brought together to lay Babylon waste are here called,

1. God's *sanctified ones* (v. 3), designed for this service and set apart to it by the purpose and providence of God, disengaged from other projects, that they might wholly apply themselves to this, such as were qualified for that to which they were called, for what work God employs men in he does in some measure fit them for. It intimates likewise that in God's intention, though not in theirs, it was a holy war; they designed only the enlargement of their own empire, but God designed the release of his

people and a type of the destruction of the New-Testament Babylon. Cyrus, the person principally concerned, was justly called *a sanctified one*, for he was God's anointed (²⁸¹Isaiah 45:1) and a figure of him that was to come. It is a pity but all soldiers, especially those that fight the Lord's battles, should be in the strictest sense sanctified ones; and it is a wonder that those dare be profane ones who carry their lives in their hands.

2. They are called God's *mighty ones*, because they had their might from God and were now to use it for him. It is said of Cyrus that in this expedition *God held his right hand*, ²⁸¹Isaiah 45:1. God's sanctified ones are his mighty ones. Those whom God calls he qualifies; and those whom he makes holy he makes strong in spirit.

3. They are said to rejoice in his highness, that is, to serve his glory and the purposes of it with great alacrity. Though Cyrus did not know God, nor actually design his honour in what he did, yet God used him as his servant (²⁸¹Isaiah 45:4, *I have surnamed thee as my servant, though thou hast not known me*), and he rejoiced in those successes by which God exalted his own name.

4. They are very numerous, *a multitude, a great people, kingdoms of nations* (v. 4), not rude and barbarous, but modelled and regular troops, such as are furnished out by well-ordered kingdoms. The great God has hosts at his command.

5. They are far-fetched: *They come from a far country, from the end of heaven*. The vast country of Assyria lay between Babylon and Persia. God can make those a scourge and ruin to his enemies that lie most remote from them and therefore are least dreaded.

III. The summons given them is effectual, their obedience ready, and they make a very formidable appearance: *A banner is lifted up upon the high mountain*, v. 2. God's standard is set up, a flag of defiance hung out against Babylon. It is erected on high, where all may see it; whoever will may come and enlist themselves under it, and they shall be taken immediately into God's pay. Those that beat up for volunteers must *exalt the voice* in making proclamation, to encourage soldiers to come in; they must *shake the hand*, to beckon those at a distance and to animate those that have enlisted themselves. And they shall not do this in vain; God has commanded and called those whom he designs to make use of (v. 3) and power goes along with his calls and commands, which cannot be resisted.

He that makes men able to serve him can, when he pleases, make them willing too. It is the *Lord of hosts that musters the host of the battle*, v. 4. He raises them, brings them together, puts them in order, reviews them, has an exact account of them in his muster-roll, sees that they be all in their respective posts, and gives them their necessary orders. Note, All the hosts of war are under the command of the Lord of hosts; and that which makes them truly formidable is that, when they come against Babylon, the Lord comes, and brings them with him as *the weapons of his indignation*, v. 5. Note, Great princes and armies are but tools in God's hand, weapons that he is pleased to make use of in doing his work, and it is his wrath that arms them and gives them success.

ISAIAH 13:6-18

THE DOOM OF BABYLON

We have here a very elegant and lively description of the terrible confusion and desolation which should be made in Babylon by the descent which the Medes and Persians should make upon it. Those that were now secure and easy were bidden to *howl* and make sad lamentation; for,

I. God was about to appear in wrath against them, and it is a fearful thing to fall into his hands: *The day of the Lord is at hand* (v. 6), a little day of judgment, when God will act as a just avenger of his own and his people's injured cause. And there are those who will have reason to tremble when that day is at hand. *The day of the Lord cometh*, v. 9. Men have their day now, and they think to carry the day; but God laughs at them, for he sees that *his day is coming*, ⁴⁵⁷³Psalm 37:13. Fury is not with God, and yet his day of reckoning with the Babylonians is said to be *cruel with wrath and fierce anger*. God will deal in severity with them for the severities they exercised upon God's people; with the froward, with the cruel, he will show himself froward, will show himself cruel, and give the blood-thirsty blood to drink.

II. Their hearts shall fail them, and they shall have neither courage nor comfort left; they shall not be able either to resist the judgment coming or to bear up under it, either to oppose the enemy or to support themselves, v. 7, 8. Those that in the day of their peace were *proud*, and *haughty*, and

terrible (v. 11), shall, when trouble comes, be quite dispirited and at their wits' end: *All hands shall be faint*, and unable to hold a weapon, *and every man's heart shall melt*, so that they shall be ready to die for fear. The pangs of their fear shall be like those of a woman in hard labour, and *they shall be amazed one at another*. In frightening themselves, they shall frighten one another; they shall wonder to see those tremble that used to be bold and daring; or they shall be amazed looking one at another, as men at a loss, ^{<44B>}Genesis 42:1. *Their faces shall be as flames*, pale as flames, through fear (so some), or red as flames sometimes are, blushing at their own cowardice; or their faces shall be as faces scorched with the flame, or as theirs that labour in the fire, their *visage blacker than a coal*, or like *a bottle in the smoke*, ^{<44B>}Psalms 119:83.

III. All comfort and hope shall fail them (v. 10): *The stars of heaven shall not give their light*, but shall be clouded and overcast; *the sun shall be darkened in his going forth*, rising bright, but lost again, a certain sign of foul weather. They shall be as men in distress at sea, when neither sun nor stars appear, ^{<40Z>}Acts 27:20. It shall be as dreadful a time with them as it would be with the earth if all the heavenly luminaries were turned into darkness, a resemblance of the day of judgment, when the sun shall be turned into darkness. The heavens frowning thus is an indication of the displeasure of the God of heaven. When things look dark on earth, yet it is well enough if all be clear upwards; but, if we have no comfort thence, wherewith shall we be comforted?

IV. God will visit them *for their iniquity*; and all this is intended for the punishment of sin, and particularly the sin of pride, v. 11. This puts wormwood and gall into the affliction and misery,

1. That sin must now have its punishment. Though Babylon be a little world, yet, being a wicked world, it shall not go unpunished. Sin brings desolation on the world of the ungodly; and when the kingdoms of the earth are quarrelling with one another it is the fruit of God's controversy with them all.

2. That pride must now have its fall: *The haughtiness of the terrible* must now be *laid low*, particularly of Nebuchadnezzar and his son Belshazzar, who had, in their pride, trampled upon, and made themselves very terrible to, the people of God. *A man's pride will bring him low*.

V. There shall be so great a slaughter as will produce a scarcity of men (v. 12): *I will make a man more precious than fine gold.* You could not have a man to be employed in any of the affairs of state, not a man to be enlisted in the army, not a man to match a daughter to, for the building up of a family, if you would give any money for one. The troops of the neighbouring nations would not be hired into the service of the king of Babylon, because they saw every thing go against him. Populous countries are soon depopulated by war. And God can soon make a kingdom that has been courted and admired to be dreaded and shunned by all, as a house that is falling, or a ship that is sinking.

VI. There shall be a universal confusion and consternation, such a confusion of their affairs that it shall be like the *shaking of the heavens* with dreadful thunders and the *removing of the earth* by no less dreadful earthquakes. All shall go to rack and ruin *in the day of the wrath of the Lord of hosts*, v. 13. And such a consternation shall seize their spirits that Babylon, which used to be like a roaring lion and a raging bear to all about her, shall become *as a chased roe and as a sheep that no man takes up*, v. 14. The army they shall bring into the field, consisting of troops of divers nations (as great armies usually do), shall be so dispirited by their own apprehensions and so dispersed by their enemies' sword that they shall *turn every man to his own people*; each man shall shift for his own safety; *the men of might shall not find their hands* (~~685~~ Psalm 76:5), but take to their heels.

VII. There shall be a general scene of blood and horror, as is usual where the sword devours. No wonder that every one makes the best of his way, since the conqueror gives no quarter, but puts all to the sword, and not those only that are found in arms, as is usual with us even in the most cruel slaughters (v. 15): *Every one that is found alive shall be run through*, as soon as ever it appears that he is a Babylonian. Nay, because the sword devours one as well as another, *every one that is joined to them shall fall by the sword*; those of other nations that come in to their assistance shall be cut off with them. It is dangerous being in bad company, and helping those whom God is about to destroy. Those particularly that join themselves to Babylon must expect to share in her plagues, ~~680~~ Revelation 18:4. And, since the most sacred laws of nature, and of humanity itself, are silenced by the fury of war (though they cannot be cancelled), the conquerors shall, in the most barbarous brutish manner, *dash the children*

to pieces, and ravish the wives. Jusque datum sceleri — Wickedness shall have free course, v. 16. They had thus dealt with God's people (⁽²¹⁶⁾Lamentations 5:11), and now they shall be paid in their own coin, (⁽²¹⁷⁾Revelation 13:10. It was particularly foretold (⁽²¹⁸⁾Psalms 137:9) that the *little ones of Babylon should be dashed against the stones*. How cruel soever and unjust those were that did it, God was righteous who suffered it to be done, and to be done *before their eyes*, to their greater terror and vexation. It was just also that the houses which they had filled with the spoil of Israel should be spoiled and plundered. What is got by rapine is often lost in the same manner.

VIII. The enemy that God will send against them shall be inexorable, probably being by some provocation or other more than ordinarily exasperated against them; or, in whatever way it may be brought about, God himself will *stir up the Medes* to use this severity with the Babylonians. He will not only serve his own purposes by their dispositions and designs, but will put it into their hearts to make this attempt upon Babylon, and suffer them to prosecute it with all this fury. God is not the author of sin, but he would not permit it if he did not know how to bring glory to himself out of it. These Medes, in conjunction with the Persians, shall make thorough work of it; for,

1. They shall take no bribes, v. 17. All that men have they would give for their lives, but the Medes *shall not regard silver*; it is blood they thirst for, not gold; no man's riches shall with them be the ransom of his life.

2. They shall show no pity (v. 18), not to *the young men* that are in the prime of their time — they shall shoot them through with their bows, and then *dash them to pieces*; not to the age of innocence — *they shall have no pity on the fruit of the womb, nor spare little children*, whose cries and frights one would think should make even marble eyes to weep, and hearts of adamant to relent. Pause a little here and wonder,

(1.) That men should be thus cruel and inhuman, and so utterly divested of all compassion; and in it see how corrupt and degenerate the nature of man has become.

(2.) That the God of infinite mercy should suffer it, nay, and should make it to be the execution of his justice, which shows that, though he is gracious, yet he is the God to whom vengeance belongs.

(3.) That little infants, who have never been guilty of any actual sin, should be thus abused, which shows that there is an original guilt by which life is forfeited as soon as it is had.

ISAIAH 13:19-22

THE DOOM OF BABYLON

The great havoc and destruction which it was foretold should be made by the Medes and Persians in Babylon here end in the final destruction of it.

1. It is allowed that Babylon was a noble city. It was *the glory of kingdoms and the beauty of the Chaldees' excellency*; it was that *head of gold* (²¹²⁵Daniel 2:37, 38); it was called *the lady of kingdoms* (²³⁴⁵Isaiah 47:5), *the praise of the whole earth* (²⁵⁴⁴Jeremiah 51:41), *like a pleasant roe* (so the word signifies); but it shall be as a *chased roe*, v. 14. The Chaldeans gloried in the beauty and wealth of this their metropolis.

2. It is foretold that it should be wholly destroyed, like Sodom and Gomorrah; not so miraculously, nor so suddenly, but as effectually, though gradually; and the destruction should come upon them as that upon Sodom, when they were secure, eating and drinking, ²⁷⁷⁵Luke 17:28, 29. Babylon was taken when Belshazzar was in his revels; and, though Cyrus and Darius did not demolish it, yet by degrees it wasted away and in process of time it went all to ruin. It is foretold here (v. 20) *that it shall never be inhabited*; in Adrian's time nothing remained but the wall. And whereas it is prophesied concerning Nineveh, that great city, that when it should be deserted and left desolate yet flocks should lie down in the midst of it, it is here said concerning Babylon that *the Arabians*, who were *shepherds*, *should not make their folds there*; the country about should be so barren that there would be no grazing there; no, not for sheep. Nay, it shall be the receptacle of *wild beasts*, that affect solitude; the houses of Babylon, where the sons and daughters of pleasure used to rendezvous, *shall be full of doleful creatures, owls and satyrs*, that are themselves frightened thither, as to a place proper for them, and by whom all others are frightened thence. Historians say that this was fulfilled in the letter. Benjamin Bar-Jona, in his Itinerary, speaking of Babel, has these words: "This is that Babel which was of old thirty miles in breadth; it is now laid waste. There are yet to be seen the ruins of a palace of Nebuchadnezzar,

but the sons of men dare not enter in, for fear of serpents and scorpions, which possess the place.” Let none be proud of their pompous palaces, for they know not but they may become worse than cottages; nor let any think that *their houses shall endure for ever* (¹⁹⁸¹Psalm 49:11), when perhaps nothing may remain but the ruins and reproaches of them.

3. It is intimated that this destruction should come shortly (v. 22): *Her time is near to come*. This prophecy of the destruction of Babylon was intended for the support and comfort of the people of God when they were captives there and grievously oppressed; and the accomplishment of the prophecy was nearly 200 years after the time when it was delivered; yet it followed soon after the time for which it was calculated. When the people of Israel were groaning under the heavy yoke of Babylonish tyranny, sitting down in tears by the rivers of Babylon and upbraided with the songs of Zion, when their insolent oppressors were most haughty and arrogant (v. 11), then let them know, for their comfort, that Babylon's time, her day to fall, is near to come, and the days of her prosperity shall not be prolonged, as they have been. When God begins with her he will make an end. Thus it is said of the destruction of the New-Testament Babylon, whereof the former was a type, *In one hour has her judgment come*.