

Calvin's Comments on Isaiah 13 and 14

It was therefore highly useful that Isaiah and other prophets should discourse about calamities of this nature, that all might understand that those calamities did not take place but by the secret and wonderful purpose of God. If they had uttered no prediction on those subjects, such a disordered state of affairs might have shaken and disturbed the minds of the godly; but when they knew long beforehand that this would happen, they had in the event itself a mirror of the providence of God. When *Babylon* was taken, which they had previously learned from the mouth of the Prophet, their own experience taught them that the prediction had not been made in vain, or without solid grounds.

But there was also another reason why the Lord commanded that the destruction of *Babylon* and other nations should be foretold. These predictions were of no advantage to *Babylon* or the other nations, and these writings did not reach them; but by this consolation he intended to alleviate the grief of the godly, that they might not be discouraged, as if their condition were worse than that of the Gentiles; which they would have had good reason to conclude, if they had seen them unpunished escape the hand of God. If the monarchy of *Babylon* had remained unshaken, the Jews would not only have thought that it was in vain for them to worship God, and that his covenant which he had made with Abraham had not been fulfilled, since it fared better with strangers and wicked men than with the elect people; but a worse suspicion might have crept into their minds, that God showed favor to accursed robbers, who gave themselves up to deeds of dishonesty and violence, and despised all law both human and divine. Indeed, they might soon have come to think that God did not care for his people, or could not assist them, or that everything was directed by the blind violence of fortune. Accordingly, that they might not faint or be thrown into despair, the Prophet

meets them with the consoling influence of this prediction, showing that the *Babylonians* also will be punished.

Besides, the comparison taught them how severe was the punishment that awaited them, which they had knowingly and willingly brought upon themselves. For if God pronounces such dreadful threatenings against the unbelieving and irreligious Gentiles, who wandered in darkness, how much greater will be his rigour and severity against a rebellious people who have intentionally sinned against him!

The servant who knoweth his master's will, and doeth it not, is justly beaten with many stripes. (Luke 12:47 .)

Thus when God threatened such dreadful punishment against the blind Gentiles, the Jews, who had been instructed in the law, might behold as in a mirror what they had deserved.

But the chief design which Isaiah had in view in these predictions was, to point out to the Jews how dear and valuable their salvation was in the sight of God, when they saw that he undertook their cause and revenged the injuries which had been done to them. He spoke first of the desolation and ruin that would befall the kingdom of Judah and of Israel, because *judgment must begin* at the house of God. (1 Peter 4:17 .) God takes a peculiar care of his own people, and gives his chief attention to them. Whenever therefore we read these predictions, let us learn to apply them to our use. The Lord does not indeed, at the present day, foretell the precise nature of those events which shall befall kingdoms and nations; but yet the government of the world, which he undertook, is not abandoned by him. Whenever therefore we behold the destruction of cities, the calamities of nations, and the overturning of kingdoms, let us call those predictions to remembrance, that we may be humbled under God's chastisements, may learn to gather wisdom from the affliction of others, and may pray for an alleviation of our own grief.

The burden. As to the word *burden* , which frequently occurs, I shall state briefly in what sense it ought to be understood. It was generally employed by the prophets of God, whenever they threatened any afflictive event, in order to inform the people that no afflictive event happened which the Lord himself did not lay as a burden on men's shoulders. The wickedness and obstinacy of the people having constrained the prophets to preach incessantly about God's chastisements, the consequence was, that as a matter of ordinary jesting they called all the prophecies by the name of *a burden* ; as is evident from Jeremiah 23:36 , where the Lord kindles into fierce indignation, because they not only spoke of his word contemptuously, but also held it up to dislike. This word makes known to the godly, that the Lord appoints all calamities and afflictions, that every one may suffer the punishment of his own sin.

1

¹John Calvin, *Commentary on Isaiah - Volume 1* (<< Publisher Name >>), 275.