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The End of these Things.

AN EXPOSITION OF ISAIAH XXIV.—XXVII.

INTRODUCTION.

II.

A SECOND series of prophecies concerning Judah and Jerusalem succeeds, like and yet unlike those seven which formed the former volume of "The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem."

Here each prophecy begins with a Woe, and through all there runs a strain of burden.¹ Woe to the crown of pride of the drunkards of Ephraim, and to the fading flower of his glorious beauty ! and to the scoffers that rule in Jerusalem !² Woe to the rebellious children that take counsel, but not of Me !³ Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help, and rely on horses, and trust in chariots because they are many, and in horsemen because they are very strong, but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel, neither seek Jehovah !⁴

Woe too to thee, Assyria, that destroyest, and thou wast not destroyed ; and dealest treacherously, but they dealt not treacherously with thee !⁵

Come near, ye nations, to hear ; and hearken, ye peoples ; let the earth hear, and the fulness thereof ; the world, and all things that come forth from it. For Jehovah hath indignation against all the nations, and wrath against all their host ; He hath utterly destroyed them, He hath delivered them to the slaughter.⁶

It is still part of the volume of the Burden of Babylon ; each prophecy still finds its starting point in the circumstances of the time, whether in the reign of Ahaz⁷ or in the reign of Hezekiah,⁸ and Assyria is the world power directly in view ; while each prediction of woe to the worldly-minded of Judah and Jerusalem, or the treacherous Destroying Power of Assyria, points ever on to the final indignation against all nations which shall usher in the Kingdom of God. Appropriately then at the close of this series—intimately connected throughout as it is with Assyria—there follows the record of the overthrow of Sennacherib before Jehovah,⁹ putting the seal of historic fulfilment upon Woes that

¹ xxx. 6.

⁴ xxxi., xxxii.

⁷ xxviii., xxix.

² xxviii., xxix.

⁵ xxxiii.

⁸ xxx.—xxxv.

³ xxx.

⁶ xxxiv., xxxv

⁹ xxxvi., xxxvii.

had fallen, and forming an earnest of the final fulfilment of the whole.

But there is more to follow before the volume is closed.

That city which was "the beginning of the kingdom" of him who first "began to be a mighty one in the earth,"¹ and where there took place the first great exhibition of human power in combination, and of its scattering by Jehovah²; which was the parent of the Assyrian,³ and destined to be its still greater successor; is chosen by the Spirit not only to give its name to this whole volume of prophetic burden, but in its own history to form its unique and striking close.⁴

It adds greatly to the force of this closing section of the Volume of the Burden to recall the political status of the Chaldean city in Isaiah's day. Up to the sixth year of Hezekiah's reign the Chaldeans had been subject to Assyria, but in that year a native Chaldean, Merodach-Baladan, took the opportunity of the death of the Assyrian king Shalmaneser IV to enter Babylon and seize the throne. Owing to the preoccupation of Sargon with his western campaigns, Merodach-Baladan contrived to maintain himself on the throne for twelve years, but at the end of that time his kingdom was completely subjugated by the Assyrians. The rise of Babylon to power on the ruins of the Assyrian kingdom did not take place till one hundred years later. But it is the purpose of the Spirit of God to make this Babel of the older records a type and figure for all time. He has purposed to show in that Chaldean city an image of the world. The proud king shall see it in a dream; the captive servant of Jehovah shall reveal the forgotten dream, and make known its interpretation. Babylon shall stand in this picture at the head of all world-powers,⁵ whose destiny is to become like the chaff of the summer threshing floors, carried away by the wind, so that no place is found for them, that the stone cut out without human hands may become a great mountain and fill the whole earth.

Here then, during the brief independence of Babylon under Merodach-Baladan,⁶ his ambassadors shall be brought to Hezekiah by a train of providential circumstances,⁷ the prophet shall be

¹ Gen. x. 8-10.

² Gen. xi. 1-9.

³ Gen. x. 11.

⁴ xxxviii.-xvi.

⁵ Dan. ii. 38.

⁶ xxxviii., xxxix.

⁷ The illness of Hezekiah was fifteen years before his death, that is in the fourteenth year of his reign, the embassy from Babylon in the same or succeeding year, two or three years before the fall of Merodach-Baladan before Sargon.

commissioned to foretell their rise to power, and the total captivity of Judah at their hands, and shall also receive that magnificent burden of Babylon which begins with the "Comfort ye, comfort ye, My people," tells of the final overthrow of the oppressive city, and closes with the prediction that when the new heavens and the new earth shall be, and a purified Judah and Jerusalem remain, and all flesh come to worship before Jehovah, "they shall go forth, and look upon the dead bodies of the men that have transgressed against Me; for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh." ¹

But now we turn back, after this brief glance, to the end of the volume, to consider a little more in detail those passages which immediately precede and lead up to the special prophecy before us in this book.

We think that we have seen reason for taking the title which stands at their head as not confined to the first of the prophecies which follow, but comprehensive of the remainder of the book. But that first prophecy itself, as we read it with attention, suggests the same conclusion. It speaks indeed of "the beauty of the Chaldeans' pride"; it foretells its overthrow amidst scenes of slaughter by the Medes,² and the ignominy of its last king³; it predicts also its final extinction and desertion by men.⁴ It indicates that the time of the Chaldean city was yet future, when the prophecy was uttered, and that her days of prosperity would not be of long duration;⁵ and all this was exactly fulfilled in history. But there are long portions of the prophecy which evidently look beyond the Chaldean power to all world-powers, and to that final crisis of the world, of which the Word of God had already spoken through the prophet, when there shall be a day of Jehovah upon *all* that is proud and haughty, and upon *all* that is lifted up, and it shall be brought low.⁶ Such are Chapter xiii. 9-13, and Chapter xiv. 3-11; such also is the commencement of Chapter xiv., which speaks of the return of Israel from every land and of their final emancipation and honour in the world. There is even one passage which seems to look beyond and behind world power to a "prince of the

¹ lxvi. 24. Cf., in the Summary Introduction, i. 28-31

² xiii. 17-19.

³ xiv. 18-20.

⁴ xiii. 20-22; xiv. 21-23.

⁵ xiii. 22.

⁶ ii. 12-21.

power of the air," who makes the earth to tremble and shakes kingdoms ; who makes the world a wilderness, and overthrows its cities, and lets not loose his prisoners to their home, but who shall yet be brought down to Sheol, to the uttermost parts of the pit. " How art thou fallen from heaven, O day-star, son of the morning ! how art thou cut down to the ground, that didst lay low the nations ! And thou saidst in thy heart, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God ; and I will sit upon the mount of congregation, in the uttermost parts of the north ¹ ; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds ; I will make myself like the Most High." Is not this he, the dread " prince of this world," whose fall is inseparable from that of " Babylon " ?

But the close of this first prophecy is yet more significant. The time of the Chaldeans' city was yet to come, a hundred years still in the future, as men reckon time ; her representative at the moment was the Assyria n power the burden therefore closes with the words, " Jehovah of hosts hath sworn, saying, Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass ; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand ; that I will break the Assyrian in my land, and upon my mountains tread him under foot ; then shall his yoke depart from off them, and his burden depart from off their shoulder."

This was the signal and outstanding illustration of the burden of this world in Isaiah's day, constantly referred to in his prophecies, and recorded in its fulfilment at their close ; but it was an illustration, and an illustration only, for the oracle proceeds :

" This is the purpose that is purposed upon the whole earth ; and this is the Hand that is stretched out upon all the nations. For Jehovah of hosts hath purposed, and who shall annul it ? His Hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back ? "

But there are other burdens also, which from time to time the prophet saw, which we have already enumerated, but which call for further briefest notice.

In the year that King Ahaz died and Hezekiah succeeded to the throne the hopes of Philistia revived. Ahaz had formed an alliance with the Assyrian monarch ; Philistia on the other hand had joined the league of nations against Assyria. On Hezekiah reversing the policy of his predecessor, Philistia sends messengers to Judah. The Word of God through Isaiah warns the Philistines

¹ See below, Chapter vi, p. 52.

that the Assyrian power will yet destroy them, and that the strength of Zion is not in political alliances, but in the protection of Jehovah, in Whom the needy find refuge.¹

The prophet sees also a burden of Moab. Although we cannot with certainty indicate the fulfilment of this prophecy, owing to our ignorance in detail of the history of Moab ; yet the spirit of the Moabites, and the geographical names, are fully illustrated by the inscription on the celebrated Moabite stone, and by recent exploration of the Moabite country ; and it is certain from the Assyrian records that Moab felt the full force of the Assyrian power.²

The burden of Damascus foretells that Damascus and Samaria once united in conspiracy against the house of David, shall be united in a common doom.³

The newly-founded empire of Ethiopia and Egypt is next addressed. It is summoned to send ambassadors to Judah, that nation dragged away and peeled, whose land the invading floods destroy.⁴ Through it all the inhabitants of the world are called to see the standard of Jehovah unfurled on the mountains of Israel, and to hear His trumpet blow. Jehovah has long watched in silence, in His dwelling-place, the growth of the Assyrian power, but He is about to cut it down suddenly.⁵ It was Tirhakah, king of Ethiopia and of Egypt, who must first of all the nations have heard of the overthrow by Jehovah of Sennacherib, against whom his own arms had striven in vain.⁶

In the Burden of Egypt the Word of God foretells the civil confusion and strife which followed the death of Tirhakah and the fall of the Ethiopian dynasty. It predicts the fierce and cruel domination of Egypt by Persia, and its deliverance by Alexander and the large influx of Jews into Egypt. Jehovah, it declares, late victor over Sennacherib, now rides upon a swift cloud and comes to Egypt, and the idols of Egypt shall tremble at His presence, and the heart of Egypt shall melt in the midst of it. He it is who will stir up the Egyptians against the Egyptians, and will give them over into the hands of a cruel lord ; He it is who will in their despair send to them " a saviour and a mighty one," and will deliver them. Their fear of the Persian tyranny will be intensified by the knowledge that it was purposed and foretold by Jehovah, and their

¹ xv. 28-32.

² xv., xvi.

³ xvii.

⁴ xvii. 12-14 ; viii. 7.

⁵ xviii.

⁶ xxxvii. 9.

terror of the land which enjoys His favour will be increased. But He Who decreed their oppression has also prepared their deliverer. And after that deliverance the people of the land they feared shall come into Egypt; their language shall be heard there; there shall be an altar to Jehovah in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar at the border thereof to Jehovah; and Jehovah shall be known to Egypt, and the Egyptians shall know Jehovah. How exactly all this was fulfilled, and how this prophecy contributed to its own fulfilment in the building of the Temple of Jehovah at Leontopolis, may be read in the pages of secular history.

In the year that Sargon sent his Tartan against Ashdod (B.C. 711), the prophet receives a command to walk naked and barefoot "for a sign and a wonder concerning Egypt and concerning Ethiopia." Even so within three years, or perhaps for the space of three years, the King of Assyria shall lead away the captives of Egypt and the exiles of Ethiopia, and Judah shall be ashamed of its reliance. Although the records of Sargon do not mention a conquest of Egypt, the prophet Nahum seems to refer to the fulfilment of this prophecy,¹ and possibly Sennacherib also—the successor of Sargon—when he speaks of Egypt as "this bruised reed."²

The burdens of the wilderness of the sea and of Dumah refer to the Sinaitic peninsula bordering the Red Sea and the north-west district of Arabia. These wandering and somewhat obscure communities are not outside the purview of Jehovah of hosts, the God of Israel. The prophet sees for them a grievous vision, a treacherous man dealing treacherously with them and a destroyer destroying them. If morning dawns on their darkness, the shadows again close round them. He sees this, not by his own prescience, but because he has heard it from Jehovah of hosts, the God of Israel, and declares what he has heard. He is indeed the watchman of Jehovah, if they will enquire of him. Now the treachery of their enemies prospers, and the destroyer destroys; but far distant, and after long waiting, the prophet sees Elam and Media arising; he sees a royal banquet, troops of horsemen, trains of baggage; and "fallen, fallen is Babylon, and all the graven images of her gods are fallen to the ground." It is a vision of the Assyrio-Babylonian invasions, and of the final fall of the treacherous destroying power.³

¹ Nahum iii. 8-10.

² 2 Kings xviii. 21.

³ xxi. 1-12

The burden upon Arabia is of hurried flights, the drawn sword, the bent bow, and all the grievousness of war; not like the two preceding burdens of long-drawn-out distresses and a far-off mighty fall, but of an immediately impending calamity. "For thus hath the Lord said unto me, Within a year, according to the years of a hireling, all the glory of Kedar shall fail, for Jehovah the God of Israel hath spoken it."¹

The burden of the Valley of Vision. It is Samaria, at the head of her fat valley, home of the prophets of Jehovah, the crown of pride and flower of Ephraim's beauty, on whom the burden lies. Samaria has fallen, all her rulers have fled away together, all that were found by the enemy are bound and carried captive. It is a day of discomfiture, and of treading down, and of perplexity, from the Lord, Jehovah of hosts, in that valley of vision. All Assyria's mercenaries are there, and all is spoiled. Judah now lies bare to the invader, and looks to its defences; but not to Him Who has done this, and purposed it long ago. The Lord, Jehovah of hosts, calls His people to mourning, but behold joy and gladness, eating and drinking. And Jehovah of hosts reveals Himself in the ears of the prophet, Surely this iniquity shall not be forgiven you till ye die. There is that Shebna, treasurer of the house of David, hewing himself out a sepulchre on high, as if all were secure, utterly unawakened by the ruin of the daughter of his people. He shall be thrust down from his station and tossed into a large country and die there. Jehovah's servant Eliakim, the son of Hilkiyah, shall take his place, "and the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder, and he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open. And I will fasten him a nail in a sure place, and he shall be a throne of glory to his father's house. And they shall hang upon him all the glory of his father's house."

And in that day of Shebna's fall it shall be seen that the nail that was fastened by man in a sure place shall give way, and shall be hewn down; and the burden that was upon it shall be cut off, for Jehovah hath spoken it.² Here is a burden of persons and places of the prophet's day. In the sixth year of Hezekiah's reign Samaria fell, in the fourteenth year of his extended life, and the twenty-eighth of his reign, we find Hilkiyah, the son of Eliakim, treasurer,³ and another Shebna scribe.

¹ xxi. 13-17.

² xxiii.

³ xxxvii. 2.

The burden of Tyre. Tyre, whose merchants are princes, has her burden too. Jehovah of hosts has purposed it. Far and wide has spread the news of her fall. The Chaldeans have made her a ruin. For seventy years she shall be depressed. Then she shall revive, and once more lead men to make gold their god. All which exactly came to pass.

All these burdens then are definite in their reference, and we can mark their fulfilments in history; but that which succeeds them and completes the series ¹ is both destitute of local reference, and apparently without fulfilment in the history of the world. Each of the preceding prophecies moreover takes its occasion from some event in the prophet's day; this great prophecy on the contrary is introduced abruptly.

Is not the simplest account of the difficulty of pointing to anything which can be called a fulfilment, namely that there has been no fulfilment, also the true one? And if there has been no fulfilment of this prophecy, is it not more reasonable, as well as more believing, in the light of the manifest fulfilments of those which precede and follow it in this book, to suppose that the time for fulfilment has not yet arrived, rather than to deny that it has any definite fulfilment? And is not the true explanation of the abrupt introduction of this prophecy that its occasion or starting point is nothing else than the very preceding burdens themselves? The burden of the Chaldean city, which commenced the series, pointed on to the burden of a more comprehensive Babylon; ² the purpose against Assyria is the purpose that is purposed upon all the earth; ³ the portion of Syria and of Israel leagued against David is the portion of all who would rob the appointed King. ⁴ And still more those final purposes of mercy after judgment declared to the nations, Egypt and Assyria and Tyre, ⁵ made to synchronize as they are with Israel's final glory, and so far unfulfilled, suggest the thought that these burdens are but the earnest of a greater universal burden yet to fall, after which shall be seen a world full of the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

Rightly then, and in its due place at the close of the burdens of the nations, there follows a prophecy which is in fact The Burden of the World; predicting a time when "the transgression of the

¹ xxiv.-xxvii.

² xiv. 4.

³ xiv. 26.

⁴ xvii. 12-14.

⁵ xix. 23, 24; xxiii. 18.

Earth shall be heavy upon it, and it shall fall and not rise again," to be followed by a time when the Kingdom of Jehovah shall embrace all nations, and in the midst of them Judah and Jerusalem shall find a special and an honoured place.

Let us then turn to the study of this prophecy, assured that it indeed tells THE END OF THESE THINGS.

WALTER S. MOULE.

(To be continued.)

NOTE.—The following short analysis of the Book of Isaiah is offered to show at a glance the position of the prophecy to be considered.

THE VISION OF ISAIAH THE SON OF AMOZ, WHICH HE SAW CONCERNING JUDAH AND JERUSALEM IN THE DAYS OF UZZIAH, JOTHAM, AHAZ, AND HEZEKIAH, KINGS OF JUDAH (i. 1).

Summary Introduction (i.).

I.—*The word that Isaiah the Son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem* (ii.—1).

Seven Prophecies (ii.—xii.).

II.—*The Burden of Babylon, which Isaiah the Son of Amoz did see* (xiii. 1).

An introductory Burden (xiii. 1—xiv. 27).

Twelve local Burdens (xiv. 28—xxiii. 18).

The Burden of the World (xxiv.—xxvii.).

Concerning Assyria (xxviii.—xxxvii.).

Concerning Babylon (xxxviii.—lxvi.).

