

Questions and Answers Concerning Zion

by C.H. Spurgeon

C.H. Spurgeon teaches that Zion, symbolizing the Church founded by God, stands as a distinct and invincible spiritual city whose true treasure and confidence rest solely in the Lord's sovereign grace.

Scripture: Isaiah 14:32, Psalm 46:5, Hebrews 11:10, John 10:27, 2 Timothy 2:24-25

Topics: "The Church", "Faith and Trust in God", "God's Sovereignty"

Description

In this profound expository sermon, C.H. Spurgeon explores the biblical concept of Zion as the Church founded by God. He emphasizes the spiritual uniqueness of Zion, its divine foundation, and the unwavering confidence believers place in God's grace. Spurgeon challenges Christians to be ready to answer questions about their faith with boldness and humility, highlighting the Church's role as a visible testimony to God's kingdom in the world. This sermon encourages believers to trust solely in God and to proclaim His glory despite opposition.

Transcript

"What will they answer the messengers of the nation? That the LORRD has founded Zion, and the poor of His people shall trust in it." Isaiah 14:32.

ZION evidently attracted great attention in its own day and, I suppose, the term, "Zion," stood for the whole city. It was a city of many singularities and it was especially remarkable for its worship when Jerusalem was as it should be. It had a Temple, but there was no image in it. Worship was continually carried on there, but the God who was worshipped was invisible. This made Zion and its Temple different from all other cities and all other temples under Heaven, for, wherever else you went, you saw graven images set up and men prostrating themselves before the work of their own hands. It was not so in Zion. There, the one living and true God resided, and the Temple at Jerusalem was the center of His worship for all the faithful—and every type or symbol in His solemn service was meant to teach the people concerning Him. Zion was remarkable, not so much for the strength of its defenses, the beauty of its palaces and the glory of its Temple, as for being "the city of the great King." "God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved." Hence, although Zion was but a little hill and other hills were great compared with it, yet the fame of it went forth even to the ends of the earth.

Zion is always a type of the Church of the living God—and everywhere the Church of God is singular and, for that reason, noticeable. It is a power altogether unlike all other powers, a Kingdom quite different from the kingdoms of the earth. It uses not the force of arms—it has no defense except the indwelling Deity—it

knows nothing of the pomp of earthly splendor, it exists for God's Glory and for no other purpose. Its reason for being a Church at all is that Jesus Christ may be honored and glorified in its midst and, therefore, the true Church of Christ is sure to be noticed, however obscure it may be in any particular place. You cannot plant a Christian Church in a village without its being discovered. It may be said of Christ's Church as it was said of Himself, "He could not be hidden" neither can His Church! And in any kingdom or country, though the true Christians may form a very small remnant, yet they are sure to be noticed. They are as a fire that gives light as well as heat and, therefore, their presence must be known and felt.

I push this Truth of God a little further and say that if you are one of the citizens of this Zion, one of the members of the Church of God, you, also, will be known. You cannot go through the world unobserved! You are like Bunyan's pilgrim when he passed through Vanity Fair. He was but a humble individual, yet everybody looked at him because he hurried through the fair, neither attracted by its business nor detained by its wealth. Christian and his companion simply sped on and when the men of the place asked them, "What will you buy?" they gave no answer but this, "We buy the Truth," and hastened on as fast as they could! And you must do the same if you are bound for the Celestial City. It may be that they will not take you, as the people of Vanity Fair took Faithful, and send you to Heaven in a chariot of fire, but they will be sure to notice you. In a free country like this, you may be almost anything that you like except a Christian. There is no liberty for you and you will find that the dogs of Hell will bark at you because you are a stranger and a foreigner in this world! If you were a child at home, they would not trouble you, but you are of a different race from the men of the world who have their portion in this life—and, as you pass along, they will let you know that you do not belong to them.

They do not wish to understand you and you will find that they will always be ready to misrepresent you. And when they have finished their misrepresentation, they will endeavor to laugh you to scorn. Of old, Zion was so remarkable that the nations sent messengers to enquire about it. And today the people of God are a remarkable people, a pilgrim race, strangers and sojourners in the world, passing on to "a city which has foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God." If you are a true Believer in Christ, you will be sure to be noticed, questioned, quizzed, criticized, caricatured, misrepresented—never mind all that—it is the lot of all the holy Seed, and the citizens of Zion must expect such treatment until the Lord Himself shall come.

Our text may be made to apply to all God's people and I shall use the Jews and Zion as the basis upon which I shall build up my discourse. From their history we shall try to gather the true meaning of the passage. In it we have the mention of messengers and we shall enquire, first, What do these messengers of the nation ask? Secondly, why should they be answered? And, thirdly, how shall they be answered? 'That the Lord has founded Zion, and the poor of His people shall trust in it.'

I. First, WHAT DO THESE MESSENGERS ASK?

Messengers came from Babylon to Zion and, no doubt, one of the first questions they asked was, "What is the treasure of Zion? What is the wealth of this city? It stands not by the sea, like Tyre, so that it may flourish by its merchandize. It is not situated among the cedars of Lebanon, so that it may sell its precious wood or its carved work. This city stands in a strange place and yet we see that it is a wealthy place—what is the source and the extent of its wealth?" Unhappily, Hezekiah forgot how to answer that question aright, and he took the Babylonian messengers through his palace and showed them his material treasures. He led them from one secret cabinet to another and let them see all his riches. And they looked on with wondering, covetous eyes and went home to tell what loot there would be there, what a grand place

Jerusalem would be to sack and how all Babylon might be the richer because of the treasures that were hidden there. How unwise was Hezekiah! He ought to have given a far better answer. I have been in churches on the Continent where I have been asked by the guide whether I would like to see the treasury, and I have seen it. In one church, I saw what was estimated at about a million pounds sterling in the form of plates of different kinds for the adornment of the altar. I saw a treasure which was regarded as far more precious than gold and silver—a saint with all his bones laid bare, a skeleton saint decorated with emeralds, rubies and all kinds of precious stones—but it was a ghastly sight for all that! If I had purchased him, I would have speedily buried him. Should not such a treasure be buried in the earth? It is the best place for saints and sinners, too, when they are dead.

I do not doubt that living saints are a precious treasure in the Church of God, yet it would not do, if the messengers of the nations asked us what our chief treasure is, to exhibit the members of the Church—saints alive or saints dead—or to talk about the wealth of the Church, or the intellect of the Church, or even the earnestness and prayerfulness of the Church, precious as these things are. There is a better answer to that question and our text tells us that the great treasure of the Church is the fact that Jehovah has founded her. His Grace is the inexhaustible storehouse from which she derives all her spiritual wealth!

The messengers of the nations probably asked next, "What is Zion's confidence?" When city after city had been overthrown by Rabshakeh and Sennacherib, if messengers came into Jerusalem, no doubt they were amazed to find the people holding out against the great king who smote and overcame wherever he went. And they said and Rabshakeh said, "What is your confidence? Has not the king of Assyria smitten all the gods of the people whom he has fought? Upon whose arm do you rely?" If the people had taken the messengers and bid them look from the rocky sides of Zion, down the steep precipice into the ravines, and if they had said, "Who can climb up here?" Or if they had pointed to the tower of David, or to the walls of the city well jointed together, or to its massive gates and said, "These are our defenses," it would have been a poor and sorry reply, for no walls stood out long against the kings of Babylon! They brought their battering-rams and engines to the siege and very soon they cast up breast-works and all kinds of entrenchments and, before long, made a breach in the city walls and rushed in and slew the inhabitants.

But what a good answer it would have been to say, "Jehovah is our confidence. He is our defense, our castle and high tower, our battleaxe and weapons of war. And He has said that Sennacherib shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with a shield, nor cast a bank against it. The adversary may come near enough to mark the walls and bulwarks of Zion and count her towers, but he shall not be able to capture her, for 'God shall help her, and that right early.' He is our defense! Not the valiant men that stand upon the watchtowers and shoot swift arrows against the foe. Not the trained armies that throng her gates and charge upon the adversary with sword and shield, but the Lord God is a wall of fire round about us and the glory in our midst." What a grand answer that would have been to the question of the messengers!

Let us also, Beloved, give the same answer to all who ask what is our confidence. Let us tell them that our confidence is in God alone. If, dear Friends, we are truly citizens of Zion, this is one of the marks of our citizenship, that our entire confidence is in that unseen arm upon which alone we lean. We look only to God for our salvation, and we cast away all confidence in ourselves, or in our fellow men, reckoning all earthly supports as being like broken cisterns that can hold no water, and trusting alone to the deep eternal fountain of Grace that wells up in the heart of God Himself.

No doubt the messengers of the nations also asked, "What is the history of this Zion? What is the story of the nation of which Jerusalem is the capital? Where did your fathers come from? Did they obtain possession of this land with their own bow and their own swords? Have they made advances, step by step, to the greatness whereof they now boast?" The right answer to that question was, "God has founded Zion." That was the secret of her glorious history and the messengers ought to have received no other reply but that to their enquiry! Sometimes, nowadays, men come to us and they say, "Where did your Church come from? What is the origin of it? From where did it arise?" Well, you may tell the story, if you give all the glory to God and if you reflect all honor upon the power of Divine Truth, but never fail to go back to the very beginning and answer, "God has founded Zion," for if there is a church which cannot trace its foundation to the eternal Truth of God's Word, to the eternal power of God's Spirit, to the eternal founding by God's own Sovereign Grace, it is not the Church of God at all!

I hope you would give a similar answer to the question about your own history. If you are a believer in Christ, how came you to be a Christian? How was it that you ever began to love the Lord? How is it that you have a good hope of Heaven? How is it that you believe that you have eternal life? This is the answer for you to give—

"Jesus sought me when a stranger, Wandering from the fold of God. He, to rescue me from danger, Interposed His precious blood." Each saved soul must say, "It is of God's Grace that I am what I am. As God has founded Zion, so has He founded me."

Another question which these messengers would be sure to ask would be this—"What is the expectation of Zion? You say that Jehovah built it and that He has, up to now, guarded and preserved it, but to what end is such a little city as this made so conspicuous? Why is it so honored by the Divine Presence?" Oh, then I hope the people opened their mouths wide and told the messengers that God had founded Zion and that the poor of His people would trust in it and that they added, "So we have the expectation of being provided for, preserved, delivered, magnified through God's mercy." And as for you and me, Beloved, when they say to us, "What do you expect?" let us open our mouth wide and tell what God has done and what we expect He will yet do for us—that He will guide us by His counsel and, afterwards, receive us to Glory—that He will correct and chasten us as a man chastens his own son—that He will perfect our education and then will take us Home to dwell with Him where sorrow and sighing can never come! Then let us tell them of the coming of our Lord and of the Glory that is wrapped up in His advent. And let our hearts burn and our eyes sparkle as, with joyful lips, we talk of the things which God has prepared for them that Love Him and which He has revealed to us by His Spirit!

II. Now, secondly, WHY SHOULD THESE MESSENGERS BE ANSWERED?

The question in our text is, "What will they answer the messengers of the nation?" But there is no hint of any question as to whether they are to be answered or not. It is taken for granted that a reply is to be given to their enquiries. I hope, dear Brothers and Sisters, that we shall always be ready to give an answer with meekness and fear to every man who asks of us a reason for the hope that is in us. Questions will be sure to be put to Christians, for they are men wondered at and, hence, there is a necessity for us to be well taught of God and to have our minds stored with heavenly knowledge, that we may not be dumb when we ought to speak, but may always be ready with such an answer as shall be acceptable to God and may be beneficial to those who ask the question.

Some who come to Zion ask questions out of curiosity I should not wonder if the ambassadors who came to Jerusalem looked all about the city with wondering eyes and kept on enquiring, "What is this? What is that? What is the meaning of this memorial and what is the intention of this symbol?" They did not ask these questions because they cared particularly about what they saw—possibly they asked even more questions when they were in Epsom, or when they sauntered through the streets of Nineveh, but, having come to Jerusalem, they had a curiosity about what was to be seen there, so they began to enquire. In like manner, Beloved, there will come to you, to your Zion, to your house, persons who will make enquiries about your religion—not that they love it, or believe in it—but, still, they would like to know about it. Men are curious about religious matters. They jot down in their notebook information that they gather concerning them. They may not be, themselves, devout, but they would like to know what is the nature and extent of your devotion. They may not be, themselves, Believers, but they would be glad to learn what kind of faith yours is. Would you discourage this curiosity? I think you would be very unwise if you did so. No, rather try to make some use of it. It is, in itself, nothing particularly worthy of notice, but there is at least a measure of hopefulness about it. When men's minds once begin to work, we are led to hope and pray that the Spirit of God may work with them and work in them, according to the good pleasure of His Grace. It is a very hopeful thing when you, my Brothers in the ministry, get an attentive audience to listen to you. Mind that you always give them something worth listening to! It were an ill day for you and me, in trying to do good, if we could never persuade anyone to listen at all. Let us hold the wedding guest and detain him with our tale, though it may seem to him to be as sad as that of the Ancient Mariner of whom Coleridge speaks, let us try to hold him fast till we have told him—

"The old, old story

Of Jesus and His love!"

We shall not complain if people ask, simply out of curiosity, about our religion, for that very curiosity will give us an opportunity to set things belonging to the Kingdom of God before minds which are somewhat receptive. If you ever lose your present access to those ears and they grow fast closed to your message, you will say, "I wish that even that curiosity would come back, again," for curiosity about the things of God may lead to something better, by-and-by, if you know how to use it wisely. So, we will answer the messengers of the nation even though they ask merely from curiosity.

No doubt there are others who ask out of contempt The ambassadors of a great power like Babylon, when they passed inside the walls of Zion, most likely said, "So this is your precious capital, is it? This little pettifogging village that we could put in one corner of Babylon and never know that it was there—is the city of the great King, is it?" And they laughed within themselves for very scorn and said, "This little miserable dog hole is your wonderful city, is it? Why, in Babylon, we have hanging gardens, wondrous palaces and mighty works of art and yet you say, 'Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth is Mount Zion?'" And they gave a loud guffaw at the very thought of what seemed to them so absurd! Well, Brothers and Sisters, shall we refuse to answer when our questioners ask in contempt concerning our Zion? Sometimes we shall do well not to reply, for we are forbidden to cast pearls before swine, but, on other occasions we may answer them because we do not wish men to think that we are ashamed or afraid to declare our convictions, or that we have nothing to say concerning the faith that we hold. Oh, proclaim it, though all Philistia shall be listening! Proclaim it among the nations that the Lord reigns! Proclaim it amid a senate of philosophers or a parliament of kings!

This Truth of God might well be written across the sky and the sun, itself, as it makes its daily circuit, should be the Mercury to bear this message everywhere! The heavens should proclaim the Glory of God and the firmament show His handiwork! And it is our desire and intention to let the Gospel be published wide as the light of day! Publish it even to the contemptuous, for, sometimes, even he who despises is not the last to be converted. And an enemy who has enough light to hate the Truth of God may have enough to be brought to love it! Think not that a man like Saul of Tarsus, the persecutor of the saints, is the most hopeless of mankind. God thought not so and He brought him in penitence to His feet and made him to be not a whit behind the very chief of His servants! Therefore, if men ask you about religion, even out of contempt, and you can see the sneer upon their faces as they ask the question, give them an answer! Tell them of Jesus' dying love and of all that wonderful plan of salvation arranged by the Sovereign Grace of God. You may even find your answer in our text—"The Lord has founded Zion and the poor of His people shall trust in it."

But sometimes, no doubt, the messengers of the nations will ask out of admiration. There were some of them that came, like the Queen of Sheba, and asked about everything because they admired it all. And there are, perhaps among us, some whose hearts God has touched. They have the first signs and tokens of an affection for the Truth of God and for the Lord—and when they come where you are who love His dear name, they will ask you many questions most admiringly. Oh, never be slow to answer such enquirers! No, but set out before their eager eyes all the wonders of Zion and all the glories of your Lord! Tell them what the Lord has done for you and for all His people. Tell them how you were washed in the blood of the Lamb, how your heart has been changed, cheered and comforted. Tell them everything, for now that the Lord has given them some hungering and some thirsting after these things, now is your time to bring out the "butter in a lordly dish!" Now is your opportunity to set before them the Bread that came down from Heaven, even Christ Jesus who is the Bread of Life. Now let them all know about the "wines on the lees, well-refined," and the "fat things full of marrow," for you have before you those who will gladly feed on all the dainties and delights provided in the great banquet of the Gospel.

And it may be that while you are telling the story, there will be some enquirers who will ask because they want to enjoy these good things for themselves. The spouse in the Canticles said, "I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my Beloved, that you tell Him, that I am lovesick." And they then asked her, "What is your Beloved more than another beloved, O you fairest among women? What is your Beloved more than another beloved, that you so charge us?" So the spouse sat down and told them of all His matchless beauties and finished up by saying, "This is my Beloved, and this is my Friend, O daughters of Jerusalem." Then they enquired, "Where is your Beloved gone, O you fairest among women?—Where is your Beloved turned aside?—That we may seek Him with you." In like manner, dear Friends, when you see others who are willing to hear what you can say to them about Christ, do not hesitate to tell them, for perhaps they, too, will love your Savior! Perhaps they have a wish to participate in the merits of His blood and the blessings of His salvation—and that is exactly what you wish concerning them and concerning all mankind, for you often say—

"His worth, if all the nations knew Surely the whole world would love Him, too." Therefore, tell all who are in the world about it, praying God's Spirit to open their hearts that they may receive the message and may trust in Jesus and be saved.

O my dear Hearers who love the Lord, be none of you reticent about these precious things, but answer the messengers of the nation whenever you meet with them! It may do them good, contemptuous though they may be! It may do them good though they are, for the time, but curiosity-mongers. Therefore tell them. Tell

them the story fully, for, at any rate, it will do you good. It is a very useful thing for a man to proclaim what spiritual Truth he knows, for he thereby teaches himself. It will increase your own sense of safety if you declare to others what the real defense of Zion is. It will increase your own sense of joy if you proclaim what is the true joy of Zion. For your own good, do this, and do it also for the Glory of God. You are to be God's mouth to man—let not God ever seem to be silent because you are idle! O you people of God, "You are God's heritage"—the word the Apostle uses means, "You are God's clergy, so I charge you, be not dumb dogs that cannot bark, but let others know what the Lord has done for your souls! "You that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence," but speak and speak, and speak yet again, and give to the messengers of the nations an answer to their enquiries concerning Zion and the Church of the living God!

III. Now I come to the closing and most important point. How SHALL THESE ENQUIRERS BE ANSWERED?

According to our text, they are to be answered by this declaration—"The LORD has founded Zion." Whenever any religious enquiry is put to you, let it be definitely made known in your answer that every good thing that you have, or that the Church of God has, comes from God. Leave your hearer in no doubt about this matter—do not let him suppose that it came by your own exertion or merit—but say most plainly, "The Lord has founded Zion." If one soul is saved, God has done it. If 500 souls are saved and banded together in Christian fellowship, "this is the finger of God." And if there are tens of thousands of saved saints in the world, this is what the Lord has done by His own Almighty power! It is not of man, neither is it by man, but it is of the Lord alone! Make that Truth of God very conspicuous in your answers to all enquirers.

And that being done, make this Truth equally plain, that the Lord is the Founder of His Church—His true Church—that all her doctrines are revealed in His Word and are her doctrines because He has given them to her—that her ordinances are taught by Christ, Himself, in His own Word and, therefore—and for that reason only—are they ordinances of His Church! Lay this down with the utmost emphasis, that the Lord has founded Zion as to her doctrines and her ordinances and also as to all the polished stones that He has built into all her walls. Christ is the one Foundation of His Church and God has laid Him in Zion as the chief Cornerstone—elect, precious—but every stone that is laid upon Him is laid there according to the Divine purpose and predestination, yes, and by the effectual working of the power of the Holy Spirit who brings men up from the quarry of sin and builds them upon the Foundation of Christ Crucified!

To make our answer to these messengers complete, they will want to know all about our Church and our Zion, so let us acknowledge our own poverty. You notice, in the text, that the answer is, "The Lord has founded Zion, and the poor of His people shall trust in it." Say to the enquirers, "Ah, you must not look for anything great in us! We are poor by nature and poor by practice, too. And in ourselves we are less than nothing and vanity." There may be some very good people in the world who think that they are perfect. We are not among them—we could not, dare not, will not stand up and say, "We thank God that we are not as other men are." We have rather, each one of us, to smite upon our breasts and say, "God be merciful to me, a sinner." It is most important, in our testimony, that we should confess our spiritual poverty, for our Lord Jesus is never magnified unless He is set forth as the Savior of sinners. And Grace is never glorified unless sin is denounced and bemoaned. O Beloved, let your own poverty be a black foil that shall make the precious gem of Divine Grace shine the more gloriously in the eyes of men!

Then say also that, as God has founded Zion, we mean to cleave to her That is to say, if this Bible is God's Book, we believe in it from cover to cover. If any doctrine, however mysterious, is taught by the Spirit of

God, we accept it. If we do not understand it, we believe it. If there are any ordinance commanded by God, we will obey it to the best of our ability as it is delivered to us. I cannot agree with those who say that they have "new truth" to teach. The two words seem to me to contradict each other—that which is new is not true. It is the old that is true, for truth is as old as God. Albeit that its locks are bushy and black as a raven for strength and force, yet I might say of every Truth of God that its head and its hair are white like wool, as white as snow, for its antiquity. "Ah, but," they say, "we are wise in this generation; we have learned much from this source and that." Have you? Then keep your precious knowledge to yourselves—we do not covet it. We are content to believe concerning this Word, that the Lord has founded it and, we poor simpletons mean to trust in it, and to cleave to it, come what may.

Do you notice how sweetly is put in the text the resolve to trust in what God has founded? "The poor of His people shall trust in it." The inhabitants of Jerusalem sheltered behind the walls of Zion and they felt perfectly safe. There was Sennacherib coming up with hordes of Assyrians, apparently numerous enough to eat them all up, but when they knew that God had founded Zion and meant to preserve her, they might smile at the king of Babylon, and they did so. "The virgin, the daughter of Zion, has despised you, and laughed you to scorn; the daughter of Jerusalem has shaken her head at you." If Zion is founded by God, vain is all the might and malice of man or devil against it—it shall stand against all who oppose it. I can fancy Luther talking like this, only with stronger sentences than I can put together, and bidding the people join in singing that favorite Psalm of his, the 46th—"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will we not fear though the earth is removed and though the mountains are carried into the midst of the sea."

Let us, also, have this brave confidence, my Brothers and Sisters! Trust in Jehovah and be at ease concerning His Truth and cause. Let nothing daunt or disturb you. God has routed greater men than the wiseacres of the 19th Century! And when they are all swept into the nothingness from which they came, His Truth shall still live and triumph, glory be to the name of Him who sent it to us and, thereby, founded the one only Eternal City, the Church of the living God, the pillar and ground of His Truth! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON: ISAIAH 14'

Verse 1. For the LORD will have mercy on Jacob, and will yet choose Israel, and set them in their own land: and the strangers shall be joined with them, and they shall cleave to the house of Jacob. This promise had a measure of fulfillment when Israel was brought back from Babylon. And it is still true that when God's people come to their worst, there is always something better before them. On the other hand, it is equally sure that when sinners come to their best, there is always something terrible awaiting them. The Apostle Paul wrote to the Romans, "God has not cast away His people which He foreknew." And his declaration agrees with this prophecy, "The Lord will have mercy on Jacob, and will yet choose Israel, and set them in their own land" I believe that there will be a far grander fulfillment of this prophecy in that day when God shall bring back His chosen people to their own country—and then shall be the fullness of blessing to the Gentiles, also. "The strangers shall be joined with them, and they shall cleave to the house of Jacob."

2. And the people shall take them and bring them to their place: and the house of Israel shall possess them in the land of the LORD for servants and handmaids: and they shall take them captives, whose captives they were; and they shall rule over their oppressors. The chosen people now have the worst of it in many parts of the world, but they shall have the best of it, by-and-by. They shall not always be trampled on—their time of uplifting shall come at the last. And there is nothing after the last—that which is last, lasts

forever.

3, 4. And it shall come to pass in the day that the LORD shall give you rest from your sorrow, and from your fear, and from the hard bondage wherein you were made to serve, that you shall take up this proverb against the king of Babylon, and say, How has the oppressor ceased! The golden city ceased! O child of God, you shall, by-and-by, have a glorious season of rest! Today is your time of labor. You are now under hard bondage, but you shall yet come forth into the fullness of your liberty in Christ Jesus. In that day Jehovah, Himself, shall give you rest from all your grief and fears. You shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. This was a great prophecy for Isaiah to utter, for, in his day there was no power on earth equal to that of Babylon. That great city abounded in palaces and extraordinary wealth—and its power was such that no kingdom could stand against it. For a while it broke in pieces all those who fought against it, yet God broke Babylon in His own time. And here is a song of rejoicing in anticipation of its overthrow, "How has the oppressor ceased! The golden city ceased!"

5. The LORD has broken the staff of the wicked and the scepter of the rulers. No power can ever be permanently strong that is founded upon wickedness. Sooner or later it will have to come to an end. A falsehood may array itself in the garments of wisdom and strength and go forth to fight hopefully for victory, but, in the end, it must die. The stone of the Truth of God will reveal the giant's brow and lay him headlong in death.

6, 7. He who smote the people in wrath with a continual stroke. He that ruled the nations in anger is persecuted, and none hinders. The whole earth is at rest, and is quiet: they break forth into singing. The Babylon that none could resist becomes, herself, destroyed and there is no one to come to her assistance. Go at this day and see where the owl dwells, and mark the habitation of the dragons, and say to yourself, "This is Babylon, the great city that was the queen over all nations. But she did evil in the sight of the Lord, and spoke extremely proudly and, behold, Jehovah has crumbled her in the dust and, now that Babylon is gone, 'the whole earth is at rest, and is quiet: they break forth into singing.'"

8. Yes, the fir trees rejoice at you, and the cedars of Lebanon, saying, Since you are laid down, no feller is come up against us. For the cruel kings of Babylon cut down the nations as the woodman with his axe fells the trees of the forest. But when the power of Babylon was broken, peace and quietness reigned everywhere. O Brothers and Sisters, what a blissful day it will be when the modern Babylon is taken away, for to this hour she is the troubler among the nations! Wherever the blight of Popery comes, there is evil, there is oppression, there is bondage—and only when Romanism shall be utterly swept away and cast like a millstone into the flood, will it be said, "The whole earth is at rest, and is quiet: they break forth into singing." Here is a very wonderful picture of the king of Babylon going down to the grave!

9, 10. Hades from beneath is moved for you to meet you at your coming: it stirs up the dead for you, even all the chief ones of the earth; it has raised up from their thrones all the kings of the nations. All they shall speak and say unto you, Are you also become weak as we? Are you become like unto us? It is a fine pictorial representation of the spirits of departed kings lifting themselves up from their beds of dust and saying, "Are you, king of Babylon, that slew us, also come here? The mighty conqueror—are you yourself conquered—and brought to the grave?"

11-15, Your pomp is brought down to the grave, and the noise of your viols: the worm is spread under you, and the worms cover you. How are you fallen from Heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How are you cut down to the ground, which did weaken the nations! For you have said in your heart, I will ascend into

Heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the height of the clouds; I will be like the Most High. Yet you shall be brought down to Hades, to the sides of the Pit. God hates pride with a perfect hatred! He drives His sword through the very heart of it and cuts it in pieces. None can be great and mighty, and boast of what they are able to do without provoking the King of Kings to put forth against them some of His great power! Oh, let none of us talk about climbing to Heaven by our good works, or getting there by our merits, lest it should happen to us, also, that we should "be brought down to Hades, to the sides of the Pit."

16-18. They that see you shall narrowly look upon you, and consider you, saying, Is this the man that made the earth to tremble, that did shake kingdoms; that made the world as a wilderness and destroyed the cities thereof; that opened not the house of his prisoners? All the kings of the nations, even all of them, lie in glory, every one in his own house. That is, they lie in state, each one in the mausoleum of his family. They went down to death and they were buried with all the honor and glory that were supposed to be due to their high position.

19. But you are cast out of your grave like an abominable branch, and as the raiment of those that are slain, thrust through with a sword, that go down to the stones of the pit; as a carcass trodden under feet. So total, so terrible, so disgraceful was the destruction of Babylon, that no honor or glory remained to it.

20-22. You shall not be joined with them in burial because you have destroyed your land and slain your people: the seed of evildoers shall never be removed. Prepare slaughter for his children for the iniquity of their fathers; that they do not rise, nor possess the land, nor fill the face of the world with cities. For I will rise up against them, says the LORD of Hosts. And he has done it. It seemed the most unlikely thing to happen, but the Lord spoke, and it was done—all the glory of Babylon was swept away. "I will rise up against them, says the Lord of Hosts."

22-27. And cut off from Babylon the name, and remnant, and son, and nephew, says the LORD. I will also make it a possession for the bittern and pools of water: and I will sweep it with the boom of destruction, says the LORD of Hosts. The LORD of Hosts has 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 shoulders. This is the purpose that is purposed upon the whole earth: and this in the hand that is stretched out upon all the nations. For the LORD of Hosts has purposed, and who shall disannul it? And His hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back? And God did this to the Assyrians in the day when Sennacherib invaded the land and the Angel of Destruction slew the whole host in one night! What a striking simile the Lord uses here! "This is the hand that is stretched out upon all the nations. For the Lord of Hosts has purposed, and who shall disannul it? And His hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back?" Conceive in your mind the picture drawn here—Jehovah Himself puts out the hand of His almightiness and challenges the nations to stand up in opposition to it!

28. In the year that king Ahaz died was this burden. About this time, the Philistines had plucked up courage and had invaded Judah.

29. Rejoice not, whole Palestina, because the rod that smote you is broken: for out of the serpent's root shall come forth a cockatrice, and his fruit shall be a fiery flying serpent. Ahaz was defeated, but Hezekiah was raised up to be the leader of the LORD's people.

30. And the firstborn of the poor shall feed, and the needy shall lie down in safety: and I will kill your root with famine, and he shall slay your remnant. If God's enemies have a bright day or two, it shall soon be stormy weather with them. They may for the moment exult over God's people, but He knows that their day of reckoning is coming.

31. Howl, O gate; cry, O city; you, Palestina, are dissolved: for there shall come from the north a smoke, and none shall be alone in his appointed times. That is the way the Babylonians would come running down from the north. No one would be able to hide himself from them, not a single person would find a shelter, or escape from their terrible adversaries.

32. What will they answer the messengers of the nation? That the LORD has founded Zion, and the poor of His people shall trust in it. Though the passage seems dark at first, yet it is full of consolation to the people of God and is of similar import to that other gracious promise—"No weapon that is formed against you shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against you in judgment you shall condemn."

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