

ISAIAH 22

A BAD BOY IN HEZEKIAH'S PALACE

This chapter is made up of two separate prophecies. The first comprises the first fourteen verses, and is addressed to the city of Jerusalem. And the second (verses 15-25) relates to the fall of Shebna, the prefect of King Hezekiah's palace, and to the promotion of Eliakim to take his place. Both prophecies may have been delivered at nearly the same time; but still, the subjects are distinct.

Verses 1-14 concern the city of Jerusalem, although it is referred to under the name of "the valley of vision." Very properly was Jerusalem called a valley; for the mountains stood around it, and the land of Judah abounded with fruitful valleys. But most emphatically, it is called "the valley of vision," because it was there that God was known and His name was great. It was there that the prophets were made acquainted with His mind by visions, and it was there that the people worshiped their God and King in His sanctuary. Wherever Bibles and faithful shepherds are, there is a valley of vision, from which the Lord expects fruit accordingly. But this part of the chapter contains a "burden of the valley of vision," and a heavy burden it is. Even Church-privileges, if they are improperly used, will not secure people from the Lord's righteous judgments. This prophecy refers to a period when the city was besieged, and when universal consternation spread among the people; and the prophet represents himself as being in the city, as a witness of the consternation. Most commentators believe that he is referring to the Assyrian king Sennacherib's invasion of the land of Judah in 709 BC. The description (verses 9-11) of the preparations that were made for protecting the city from the enemy agrees exactly with the account given of the defense-measures that King Hezekiah took against Sennacherib, in 2 Chronicles 32:2 – particularly in regard to the effort that was made to secure the water of Siloam for the use of the city, and to prevent the Assyrians from having access to it.

Isaiah speaks of the city of Jerusalem being filled with alarm and distress – intermingled with the tumultuous mirth of some who regarded defense as hopeless, and who gave themselves up to partying and merriment because they imagined that they would soon die. This was indeed a day of trouble, and the prophet's heart was pained! In the midst of all the people's preparations for defending the city, they had not humbled themselves and returned to the Lord for protection, as they should have done! Judah had sinned in looking to the number of her troops and the strength of her inhabitants, instead of lifting her eyes to the Lord her Maker for help. Let us not fail to observe how the Lord, by His grace, carries on His merciful intentions toward His people in all ages. He chas-

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ A prophecy concerning Jerusalem, and the grievous distress they would be under during Sennacherib's invasion – verses 1-14
- ❖ The Lord speaks His displeasure against Shebna – verses 15-19
- ❖ He speaks of the promotion of Eliakim to take Shebna's place – verses 20-24

tens their sins with the rod; He sends trouble among them, in order to call them to weeping, repentance, and prayer. But if, instead of humbling their souls before Him, they seek to deaden their sorrows by carnal enjoyments; and if they defy and rebel against His rod of love – then the affliction will be increased. The prophet showed the incurable wickedness of such persons as being beyond the reach of all the sacrifices of the law (verse 14). And herein we have a sweet testimony of the vast and infinite importance of the blood and sacrifice of Christ, which cleanses us from all our sins!

The remainder of this chapter (verses 15-25) is occupied with a prediction respecting the fall of Shebna, and the promotion of Eliakim in his place. It appears that Shebna was the prefect of King Hezekiah's palace (verse 15), or the highest government authority under the king himself. It is clear from the prophecy that Shebna was a man with no scruples; but we are not told the particular details of his maladministration, for which Isaiah was sent to prophesy against him. Jewish tradition claims that Shebna kept up a traitorous correspondence with the king of Assyria, and had actually entered into a treaty with him to betray the city of Jerusalem into his hands. Whether or not this is true, it does seem that he was a secret enemy to the true interests of Judah and Jerusalem. Hezekiah's days were times of reformation; and yet Shebna, a bad man, outwardly complied with the Godly king just enough to keep his place at court.

In this message to Shebna, we have a reproof of his pride, vanity, and security. The prophet predicts that Shebna would be driven from his high position. Verse 25 tells how the nail that was now fastened in the sure place (that is, Shebna, who thought himself immovably fixed in his office) would be cut down and fall. And he would not only be driven from his high station, but he was also tossed like a ball out of Jerusalem and out of his own homeland.

But in verses 20-25, the prophet gives a very pleasing account of the character of Eliakim (who replaced Shebna in his high public office), and of the Lord's approbation of him. Indeed, the outlines of our Redeemer's office and character are sketched before our eyes in Eliakim the son of Hilkiyah! If Eliakim was invested with the robe of the government; if he had power to open so that none could shut, and shut so that none could open; and if he was fastened as a nail in a sure place, so that all glory would rest upon him – then can we refrain for even a moment from having our hearts instinctively led to think of Jesus? His robe of salvation is the everlasting clothing and glory of His redeemed children. And who except He truly has the "key of the house of David"? Moreover, He is a nail indeed in a sure place; for upon Him, the Father has fastened all the mercies and blessings of His people, from all eternity! What a precious consideration for the believer!

O Lord Jesus! You alone have the key of David! We pray that You would be pleased to unlock the treasures of Your wisdom and knowledge to us; and we also beseech You to open our souls to the true and full enjoyment of them. Amen.