

## Isaiah 14:24-32, The Burden when Ahaz Died

### Overview

This exposition associates vv. 24-27 with what follows rather than what precedes.

- It doesn't fit with the burden of Babylon.
  - As has long been recognized, the reference to Assyria is anachronistic there.
  - The divine imperative of 14:21 forms a nice inclusio with 13:2.
  - The נאם יהוה "saith the Lord" statements of 14:21-23 are most naturally seen as summaries, ending that portion.
- It does form a nice unity with 29-32.
  - 24-27 is a perfect introduction to 29, "the rod of him that smote thee is broken."
  - Both paragraphs include a historical prophecy and an emphasis on our attitude toward the Lord of history.
- It is true that this is a non-standard way of introducing a burden. We expect an initial "the burden of Palestina." But this one doesn't begin that way anyway. It is called a burden, but it is dated (v. 28).

So in this case alone, the title of "burden" lies at the center of the oracle (28). It is not associated directly with a specific nation, but in fact involves three:

- Assyria (vv. 24-27), which had threatened the whole Levant;
- Judah (v. 28), which had falsely hoped in Assyria;
- Palestina (vv. 29-32), which had prematurely rejoiced in the destruction of Assyria.

Assyria is appropriate neither as a basis for hope nor as a reason for fear. The first section ends by reminding us of the true object of fear, the Lord, and the last section ends by reminding us of the true object of hope, again the Lord. This lesson goes far beyond Assyria, and is one we need to learn today.

We'll start with the central statement, and then consider the panels on either side.

### 28, The Heading

**28 In the year that king Ahaz died<sup>1</sup> was this burden.**--The relation to Ahaz is particularly significant because of his inclination to trust in Assyria. The surrounding material corrects two errors by Ahaz.

- He sought Assyria's help, but in the first panel (24-27), the Lord promises that Assyria will fall.

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<sup>1</sup> The year is not clear, even to within a decade, because of confusion over the chronology of this period. But it is not critical to the message. The point is that Ahaz is humbled with the fate of all men, while his policies are utterly discredited.

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- He felt that Assyria could protect him from other threats in the region, but in the second panel (29-32), the Lord promises that the region will experience subsequent trouble.

In the same year that Ahaz died physically, the Lord gave Isaiah this prophecy that shows the death of Ahaz's hopes. One wonders whether he gave this oracle to Ahaz on his deathbed, or after the death, to Hezekiah and the people.

## 24-27, The End of Assyria

The paragraph is an inclusio.

- The outer members, vv. 24 and 27, describe the immutability of the Lord's purposes in general.
- The central member describes the specific purpose in view here, the destruction of Assyria.

This division highlights a contrast between the fleshly adversary, Assyria, whom men ought not to fear, and the Lord, who alone should be the object of our fear.

**24 The LORD of hosts hath sworn,**--About 20 times in the OT, we read of the Lord's swearing an oath (see notes). The two most common categories are the patriarchal blessings of the land and his special relation to Israel, and his judgment (not only on Gentiles, as here, but on rebellious Israelites). Heb 6:16-18 tells us that this mode of speech is a condescension to us:

16 For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation *is* to them an end of all strife. 17 Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed *it* by an oath: 18 That by two immutable things, in which *it was* impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us:

God wants us to know that these things originate in his sovereign counsels, and not in the power of men.

He develops the authority of his sovereign will in three stages:

1. his past acts (24b, "as I have thought so has it come to pass")
2. the present case of Assyria (24c-25, "as I have purposed, so shall it stand")
3. his future dealings with all nations (26).

**saying, Surely as I have thought, so shall it [has] come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand:**--The two parallel clauses differ in tense; "come to pass" is past, while "shall stand" is (as translated) future. He claims credit for past conquests, while announcing a new one. So we ought to take comfort in considering God's past mighty works, as the assurance that he will continue to work.

This is a widespread principle in the Bible. It lies at the root of Jacob's blessing on the sons of Joseph:

Gen 48:15-16 And he blessed Joseph, and said,

[Three evidences of past blessing] God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God which fed me all my life long unto this day, 16 The Angel which redeemed me from all evil,

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[Three prayers for future blessing] bless the lads; and let my name be named on them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth.

Paul encourages believers with it in the NT:

Phi 1:6 he which **hath** begun a good work in you **will** perform it until the day of Jesus Christ:

Rom 8:32 He that **spared not** his own Son, but **delivered** him up for us all, how **shall** he not with him also freely give us all things?

**25 That I will break the Assyrian in my land, and upon my mountains [I will] tread him under foot:**--Note the chiastic emphasis on the Lord's agency and the Lord's authority over the land.

The Lord's sovereign "I will" here stands against the pathetic and failed "I will" of the Babylonian king in 14:13-14. Our purposes are always contingent on the Lord's pleasure. His purposes are absolute.

**then shall his yoke depart from off them, and his burden depart from off their shoulders.**--"Yoke" and "burden" appear together in the Hebrew Bible only in Isaiah, always with reference to Assyria, and always as part of a promise that God will deliver them (9:3; 10:27).

**26 This is the purpose that is purposed upon the whole earth: and this is the hand that is stretched out upon all the nations.**--So far, the oracle concerns only "the Assyrian" and "my land." Now suddenly we read of "the whole earth" and "all the nations." This is the third extension in the proclamation of God's sovereignty—it concerns not only Assyria and Israel, but all nations.

Most immediately, it may explain the "them" in 25b. Assyria has not only abused Israel, but all nations (14:6) and even her own people (14:20), so God's response to Assyria is of equally broad effect.

**27 For the LORD of hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul it? and his hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back?**--Note the sequence: "purpose" devises the plan, while "hand" carries it out. God's purposes are not only eternal (the three stages that we have seen), but also irresistible. No one can veto his decision or block his action.

The reference to Assyria takes us back to ch. 7. The correct solution to Assyria is neither to mount an independent attack (the approach of the Syrian-Ephraimite coalition) nor to send them tribute (as Ahaz wished to do), but to turn to the Lord.

## 29-32, The Word to Philistia

This section mentions "Palestina" (a word that appears also in Ex 15:14). This term and "Palestine" (Joel 4:4) both translate Heb פלשת, elsewhere rendered "Philistia." This term refers to the land occupied by the Philistines, the coastal plain and rolling hills to the west of Israel's mountainous spine.

As the first paragraph contrasted the false and true objects of fear, so this one contrasts false and true objects of hope. There, they were arranged chiastically; here, they occur linearly.

### 29-31, False Hope for Palestine

**29 Rejoice not thou, whole Palestina, because the rod of him that smote thee is broken:**--There is a

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good deal of discussion as to the nature of this rod. Some commentators, going back to the Talmud, see it as Ahaz, who has died, in which case the subsequent threat is the Messiah. Others associate it with Tiglathpileser III, who (according to one chronology) died the same year as Ahab. But for a number of reasons (see the notes), it is best to understand the “rod” as the Assyrian threat in general (as in 10:5, where the Lord calls the Assyrian, “the rod of mine anger”). The Philistine cities suffered extensively under the Assyrian invasion<sup>2</sup>, and the promise of vv. 24-27 would be very welcome to them.

**for out of the serpent's root shall come forth a cockatrice, and his fruit shall be a fiery flying serpent.**--The Assyrian threat is not the last; it will be succeeded by another, and then another. If “the rod” is TP3, these successors would be Sennacherib, Sargon, and Nebuchadnezzar. But if the rod is the Assyrian empire (as I understand it), then this imagery represents the successive world empires that Nebuchadnezzar saw: Babylon, Media-Persia, Greece, and Rome. All of these occupied the land of Palestine and oppressed its inhabitants.

The serpent imagery has two interesting connections.

First, it takes us back to Gen 3 and Satan. World empires are essentially Satanic. They are foreshadowings of the Antichrist, who is inspired by Satan.

Second, it reminds us of 11:8,

And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den.

Perhaps this is not just any child, but the Child of 9:6, demonstrating his dominion over the world's empires.

**30 And the firstborn of the poor shall feed, and the needy shall lie down in safety:**--This may refer specifically to the policies of the Babylonians. When they conquered Jerusalem, they left “the poor of the land” to keep the fields from returning to a wild state:

Jer 39:10 But Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard left of the poor of the people, which had nothing, in the land of Judah, and gave them vineyards and fields at the same time.

Jer 40:7 Now when all the captains of the forces which *were* in the fields, *even* they and their men, heard that the king of Babylon had made Gedaliah the son of Ahikam governor in the land, and had committed unto him men, and women, and children, and of the poor of the land, of them that were not carried away captive to Babylon;

Jer 52:16 But Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard left certain of the poor of the land for vinedressers and for husbandmen.

**and I will kill thy root with famine, and he shall slay thy remnant.**--The Philistines will not fare so well. As the next verse shows, they are mainly in their walled cities, which were starved out by siege.

**31 Howl, O gate; cry, O city; thou, whole Palestina, art dissolved:**--They have only sorrow and suffering to anticipate.

**for there shall come from the north a smoke,**--The traditional approach for Mesopotamian invasions, a common description in the prophets for the approach of Assyria or Babylon. The smoke may refer

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<sup>2</sup> H. Tadmor, "Philistia under Assyrian rule," *Biblical Archaeologist* 29 (1966): 86-102.

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either to the dust raised up by their marching or the results of the cities they have burned.

**and none shall be alone in his appointed times.**--As in 5:27, there are no stragglers.

Isa 5:27 None shall be weary nor stumble among them; none shall slumber nor sleep;

The invading army achieves its terrible mission with discipline and unity.

### **32, True Hope for Zion**

**32 What shall one then answer the messengers of the nation?**--Generic, what should Israel's response be to ambassadors in general?

Since this oracle is given in the year of Ahab's death, we may expect that it was intended at least partly to instruct his heir, Hezekiah. Thus it is interesting to compare it with an actual ambassadorial mission later in Hezekiah's life, in ch. 39.

Isa 39:1-2 At that time Merodachbaladan, the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a present to Hezekiah: for he had heard that he had been sick, and was recovered. 2 And Hezekiah was glad of them, and shewed them the house of his precious things, the silver, and the gold, and the spices, and the precious ointment, and all the house of his armour, and all that was found in his treasures: there was nothing in his house, nor in all his dominion, that Hezekiah shewed them not.

He showed off his riches, and said nothing of the Lord. This is not the appropriate way for believers to respond to those who congratulate them. They ought to use the occasion to focus attention on the Lord, and in particular on two points:

**That the LORD hath founded Zion,**--They are to give credit to the Lord, to draw attention to his place as the founder and protector of the nation. This is the objective basis of our confidence, the role of the Lord in founding and defending his people

**and the poor of his people shall trust in it.**--They should emphasize that it is not riches, but trust, that gives God's people security. This is the subjective basis of our security.

## Notes

### **God's Oath**

What matters are serious enough for God to guarantee them with an oath?

### **Patriarchal Blessings**

Gen 22:16 And said, By myself have I sworn, saith the LORD, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son:

Deut 7:8 But because the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

Deut 13:17 And there shall cleave nought of the cursed thing to thine hand: that the LORD may turn from the fierceness of

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his anger, and shew thee mercy, and have compassion upon thee, and multiply thee, as he hath sworn unto thy fathers;  
Deut 19:8 And if the LORD thy God enlarge thy coast, as he hath sworn unto thy fathers, and give thee all the land which he promised to give unto thy fathers;

Deut 28:9 The LORD shall establish thee an holy people unto himself, as he hath sworn unto thee, if thou shalt keep the commandments of the LORD thy God, and walk in his ways.

Deut 31:7 And Moses called unto Joshua, and said unto him in the sight of all Israel, Be strong and of a good courage: for thou must go with this people unto the land which the LORD hath sworn unto their fathers to give them; and thou shalt cause them to inherit it.

Jer 11:5 That I may perform the oath which I have sworn unto your fathers, to give them a land flowing with milk and honey, as *it is* this day. Then answered I, and said, So be it, O LORD.

Isa 62:8 The LORD hath sworn by his right hand, and by the arm of his strength, Surely I will no more give thy corn *to be* meat for thine enemies; and the sons of the stranger shall not drink thy wine, for the which thou hast laboured:

## Judgment

### on Enemies

Exo 17:16 For he said, Because the LORD hath sworn *that* the LORD *will have* war with Amalek from generation to generation.

Isa 14:24 The LORD 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:

Jer 49:13 For I have sworn by myself, saith the LORD, that Bozrah shall become a desolation, a reproach, a waste, and a curse; and all the cities thereof shall be perpetual wastes.

Jer 51:14 The LORD of hosts hath sworn by himself, *saying*, Surely I will fill thee with men, as with caterpillars; and they shall lift up a shout against thee.

### on Israel

Jud 2:15 Whithersoever they went out, the hand of the LORD was against them for evil, as the LORD had said, and as the LORD had sworn unto them: and they were greatly distressed.

Jer 44:26 Therefore hear ye the word of the LORD, all Judah that dwell in the land of Egypt; Behold, I have sworn by my great name, saith the LORD, that my name shall no more be named in the mouth of any man of Judah in all the land of Egypt, saying, The Lord GOD liveth.

Amos 4:2 The Lord GOD hath sworn by his holiness, that, lo, the days shall come upon you, that he will take you away with hooks, and your posterity with fishhooks.

Amos 6:8 The Lord GOD hath sworn by himself, saith the LORD the God of hosts, I abhor the excellency of Jacob, and hate his palaces: therefore will I deliver up the city with all that is therein.

Amos 8:7 The LORD hath sworn by the excellency of Jacob, Surely I will never forget any of their works.

## Davidic King

2 Sam 3:9 So do God to Abner, and more also, except, as the LORD hath sworn to David, even so I do to him;

Psa 110:4 The LORD hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou *art* a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.

Psa 132:11 The LORD hath sworn *in* truth unto David; he will not turn from it; Of the fruit of thy body will I set upon thy throne.

## Reference of the Rod and the Serpents

Two main interpretations, each supported by different features of the text:

Feature	Davidic Dynasty & Messiah	Assyria
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vv. 24-27, defeat of Assyria		+
Targum	+	
v. 28, death of Ahaz	+	(on assumption of synchrony with death of TP3)
Serpent figure	Gen 49:15 for Dan (cf. Sampson and Philistines)	+
Destruction "from the north"		+

Really, only the death of Ahaz is a serious support for the davidic option, and even that requires extrapolation from Ahaz to the davidic house, since the Philistines actually were dominant over Ahaz. The Targum is just another secondary interpretation. The synchrony with TP3 requires too much extrabiblical knowledge, and is too tied up with the confused Ahaz-Hezekiah chronology, to be divinely intended, at least for this age.

But what then should we make of the reference to Ahaz? Handle it more organically, as above.