

THE FALL OF WICKED NATIONS.

A

SERMON,

DELIVERED IN THE

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, NEWARK,

September 9, 1813,

A DAY OF FASTING AND HUMILIATION.

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FAST SERMON,

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ISAIAH lx. 42.

FOR THE NATION AND KINGDOM THAT WILL NOT
SERVE THEE SHALL PERISH.

THERE never was a nation upon earth, which consisted principally of good people, a nation of whom the greater part were friends to God. A more obvious and a more melancholy fact than this, is not found in the history of the world. The great portions of the human race, which Divine Providence has thrown together under various social bonds and compacts, whether more civilized or more savage, have exhibited a striking moral resemblance.

Of the nations, before the deluge, it was said, *the imagination of their heart is only evil and that continually.* The Psalmist represents mankind as having all gone out of the way: there is none, saith he, that doeth good, no not one. Look into the history of the numerous tribes and nations, which anciently overspread the regions of Asia

and Africa, and you will see little but what indicates the reign of the passions—the subversion of reason, temperance and equity—the prevalence of vice and immorality. The histories of Egypt and Carthage, of Arabia, Syria and Canaan, of the immense countries of Scythia, of the central and northern wilds of Asia and Europe, present a gloomy region of barbarity, darkness and misery.

In this mournful and widely extended survey, our only consolation is, that the Most High has in all ages, had a kingdom in the world. At times it has been almost invisible, and its boundaries have never been known. We are not able to form any probable estimate of its numbers: they are to be made up out of every kindred, people, nation and language. It is not a kingdom of this world; nor will it appear in its full glory till this world shall have past away.

We are the children of a sinful unhappy race of creatures. What has brought us together this day? The supreme authority of this nation has by a solemn declaration, acknowledged that we are a sinful nation—nay, that our sins are so aggravated, that a day of humiliation before God, has become proper and necessary. This is the day set apart for that purpose: the day also conditionally recommended and appointed by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, for us to humble ourselves before God, and seek his favor by penitence and reformation.

On this occasion, then, it is proper for us to take a faithful and severe retrospect of our lives ; to consider how much we have added to the national guilt ; to trace the calamities which we both feel and fear, as a nation, to their proper sources. In short, no time can be more proper than this, to take a view of the dangers which threaten us as a people ; and of that impending ruin, which nothing can avert, but great and general reformation.

I propose to set before you, in the following discourse, *the fall of wicked nations*, which is clearly and awfully announced in our text. *The nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish ;* “yea,” continues the prophet, “those nations shall be utterly wasted.”

In this and the adjoining chapters of Isaiah’s prophecy, is contained a majestic description of the Messiah’s kingdom. The evangelical prophet dwells with sublime and animated strain on the glory of the Redeemer ; the nature, extent and prosperity of his kingdom ; the final, exalted and endless triumph of his Church, and the perfection and grandeur of his administration. He looks far beyond all the trials and afflictions of the Church. He sees the kingdoms of the world fall to ashes, and the crowns and sceptres of earthly potentates crumble to dust. In this glorious vision, addressing himself to the Messiah’s kingdom, or, perhaps, more strictly to the almighty Redeemer himself, he exclaims—“ the

nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish.”

1. Let me direct your attention particularly to the time when this awful threatening against wicked nations was given. It was more than seven hundred years before the birth of Christ. At this time the Assyrian empire, the first of the four great monarchies which were to rule the nations, and, from time to time, to scourge God’s chosen people, was standing in its strength. “Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees’ excellency,” was then at the height of its power and splendor.

Had one of us lived at that time, could we have believed, how soon and how irrecoverably that mighty fabric would fall? Nothing seemed more improbable or more distant than its overthrow. Like a tower of adamant, it seemed to bid fair to stand for ever. How would this prediction have been treated by one of the proud flatterers of the Assyrian court, had he been told it bore express reference to Babylon?

But how soon and how deeply it fell! The wheel of revolving ages has rolled many times over its desolate ruins. As it was the first of empires—the most exalted—the head of gold, divine providence determined its ruin should be the most complete and dreadful. The place where it stood is unknown. No one can mourn over its ruins, and say “this was Babylon!” It has lain without inhabitant from generation to generation.

The Persian empire also past away, swept off by a mighty deluge of wickedness. At the time Isaiah delivered this prophecy the Medes and Persians were fast rising to power and dominion. They were appointed to execute divine wrath on Babylon, and in their turn, to sway the sceptre of universal dominion. They enjoyed their day of prosperity, and their day of retribution at length arrived.

When the prophet Isaiah lived, the Greeks and Romans were passing through a long and obscure infancy, destined one day to fill the world with the monuments of their power and the grandeur of their triumphs. Italy and Greece were then unknown to fame, and were considered as barbarous, inhospitable wilds, unworthy the ambition of a conqueror. But the Spirit of truth foresaw to what height they would rise, and what would be their end.

2d. It is a most melancholy truth that the great body of every nation which has been destroyed was exceedingly wicked; and particularly in the latter periods of those nations. As already remarked, among all the nations which are past away, not one was a holy or virtuous nation. As they increased in wealth, power and dominion, they grew more corrupt, and their vices broke through all restraint. Their sun set in clouds—their end was miserable. Nor is it less true of those nations which were destroyed by these great powers in their way to empire. Many of them are scarcely known.

and their history was not written but with blood. They fell in like manner by their vices.

The history of all nations, in a moral point of view, is nearly the same. They generally begin with some appearance of justice, temperance and moderation. The first part of their career is externally virtuous. Thus, for the most part, began many of the ancient nations, among whom we may reckon Egypt, Chaldea, Persia, and even Rome. I have been surprised to learn the virtue and public spirit of the ancient Romans. Their statesmen and heroes were above the allurements of wealth, and many of them died in virtuous poverty. They preferred the welfare of their country to their own aggrandizement: nor did they sacrifice the public good at the shrine of private ambition.

But alas! the virtuous days, if such they may be called, of every nation quickly pass away, and never return. What page of history informs us of any great nation ever radically and permanently reformed? They plunge into every vice: they sink deep in infamy and ruin. The career of conquest is an accelerated progress to destruction. A war set on foot for conquest, is robbery and murder on the largest scale.

“One murder makes a villain, millions a hero.” The four great empires already mentioned, rose one after another, by conquest, by murder and robbery, to extensive dominion, and then, under the righteous frown of almighty providence, they sunk like wandering stars into everlasting darkness.

Their days of prosperity and glory are only remembered to add a deeper gloom to their ruin, and render their infamy more black and dreadful. The cruel and sanguinary wars they waged, may be lightly called by the historian, wars of honor, fame, and glory; but almighty providence recorded their innumerable murders, and appointed them a dreadful day of retribution.

It availed these nations nothing that they were planted on the borders of divine and heavenly light: that the oracle of God was near them. It was their own fault that the beams of divine truth did not fill their borders with everlasting day. They shut their eyes, their doors, their gates against it. They studied, they plotted, they fought against it. They would not serve the king of Zion. With all their advantages to know God, and to improve in virtue, their progress in vice was rapid, until iniquity proved their ruin. The threatening of our text in all its severity has, long since, taken its full effect upon them.

They were suffered by the ruler of nations to accomplish their most favorite schemes of ambition, and in that accomplishment was involved their ruin. Egypt from being the garden of the world, from being not only emphatically called the cradle of science, but the school of wisdom, has long been overrun with the rankest, the most bitter productions of vice and wickedness. Though under the Grecian dynasty, the Ptolemies, divine providence seemed willing to give Egypt a long and

illustrious opportunity to be virtuous, happy and great, even after her cup of iniquity had been once full, yet it availed her nothing. Egypt was dismantled and prostrated by the Romans. Under the Saracens she sunk still deeper. And now under the Turks, her wretchedness is complete. Would you know what it is for a nation to be miserable, look into the state of Egypt for the last three hundred years.

Of the fate of the Assyrian Empire we have already spoken. God raised them first to power, and of the great image of worldly dominion they formed *the head of gold*. Their soil and climate were anciently rich, and delightful beyond conception. Herodotus, the ancient father of history, who travelled through Mesopotamia, gives the most surprising account of the fertility of the soil. He says it was no uncommon thing for the earth to produce four hundred fold; and that a blade or leaf of their wheat was of a the breadth of a man's hand. This spot, indeed, is supposed to have comprehended the glorious region of Paradise.

But of what use was the glory of Babylon to that unhappy people? She rose but to acquire the qualities and the name of the mother of harlots, to corrupt the whole world with her vices, and in her fall, to draw after her all the nations of Asia.

By the wealth and pollutions found in Babylon, the Medes and Persians were corrupted and undone. When the towers of Belus fell beneath the conquering arms of Cyrus and Darius, a mauso-

leum of plagues was opened, whose malignant vapors were as fatal to the conquerors as to the conquered. We soon see Darius Hystaspes wasting seven hundred thousand men in an abortive invasion of Scythia; and Xerxes, the great, destroying five millions in a similar invasion of Greece.

The immense and populous regions of Persia became a prey to vice and misery, till Alexander, as a destroying angel, entered, and executed upon them the just indignation and wrath of heaven. But here the Greeks drank the same deadly draught which the Persians had done in the conquest of Assyria. Nor was Alexander, though but a youthful conqueror, suffered to prosper long. While meditating the restoration of Babylon, and determined to make it a metropolis worthy of his great empire, he fell before the monster vice. He could not defeat the word of God, which had said, that Babylon should never be restored.

The destiny of Rome has been peculiar. When her head of temporal dominion was wounded to death, the deadly wound was healed. She was restored under a new and fearful form; claiming a spiritual dominion—usurping the seat of God—and wearing the false garb of the church of Christ. She exercised for many ages, the most horrible tyranny over the consciences of men, and was made the terrible instrument of inflicting the wrath of God on wicked nations. But even this strange tide of wickedness has, at length, spent its force, and shall rise no more forever.

Nothing can be more melancholy than a view of the deplorable fate of the nations of the earth. When we consider that man is placed in this world on a probation for his final and immortal existence, the conduct and the fall of nations cannot but reflect a mournful light on the future condition of inconceivable multitudes of mankind. For we are constantly pursued by this immutable truth, that *virtue exalteth a nation*. When we look back four thousand years, we behold the sun of prosperity shining bright on the infancy of every nation; at length they become rich, powerful and corrupt; they plunge in wickedness, misery, darkness and destruction. We are compelled to pronounce them destitute of all virtue. In every one of them the threatening of our text is awfully verified.

3. From nations that are dead, and whose fate can only serve as a beacon to warn us of the rocks where they dashed, let us turn to the living, and view them in the clear and awful light of our text.

These nations, for I speak of Europe in general, were not planted merely on the borders of light, but in a region of full meridian day. For nearly 1800 years they have enjoyed all the evidence of truth, all the advantages of divine instruction. This long period they have squandered away in perpetual wars, set on foot by the vilest ambition, and carried on by every species of wickedness. It seemed rational to hope, the church having suffered ten general persecutions under the heathen Roman emperors, on the conversion of Constan-

tine the great to christianity, that the fiend of persecution would forever abandon Europe. It was far otherwise. Christians began to persecute one another, and innocent blood has been shed sufficient to stain all Europe with crimson. They have shed the blood of saints and the blood of prophets, and God has given them blood to drink for they are worthy.

But now divine providence assumes a new and terrible aspect toward them. Their race is evidently almost run—Their cup is full. Politicians may calculate and project, and warriors may fight and rage, but these nations have not served the King of Zion; and their doom is pronounced. The day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that come upon them make haste. They have served nothing but their own lusts, and the prince of darkness, and the time of their retribution is nigh.

Turn your eyes toward Europe and see what prospects there present. From the straits of Gibraltar to the frozen ocean, from the Atlantic ocean to the black sea, the storm of war rages with unparalleled violence. Divine providence has raised up a man in whom the ambition of Cæsar and the fierceness and cruelty of Attila are far surpassed. What armies have been raised, what battles fought, what multitudes destroyed. It is reckoned that more than ten millions of people have already perished in this eventful war. But three independent powers survive this horrid shipwreck of na.

tions. What groans and tears, what distress and desolation, have marked the course of these calamities. These nations begin to drink the cup of the fierceness and wrath of almighty God. They have still more to suffer. For the nation and kingdom that will not serve him shall perish; yea those nations shall be utterly wasted.

The remaining days of Europe will probably present the last struggles of the beast and the kings of the earth. It is probable that their armies are already gathered together, and that the present war in Europe is the battle of God Almighty spoken of in the Revelation; in which the fowls of the air are invited to the supper of the great God.

If this be the case, and I see little reason to doubt it, we may expect surprising events in quick succession. These nations are not humbled; there appears nothing like reformation. They have no thought of turning to God and seeking his favor by repentance and becoming gratitude. Is it a light thing that for numerous ages they have enjoyed the light of science, and revelation? Many of the ancient nations, who treated with less wantonness privileges of less magnitude and for a much shorter time, were cut off in great wrath for their ingratitude. These nations show marks of reprobation which scarcely consist with longer impunity.

Yet God has his church among them, and perhaps some of them may be yet spared for Zion's sake. There are in Europe I trust many thousands,

I hope many millions who have not worshipped the beast nor his image, nor received his mark. If ten righteous might have prolonged the days of Sodom, these may influence the destiny of the nations among whom they are dispersed. These jewels of God will not be lost: they will be sifted out of the wreck of kingdoms, and extracted from the chaos of dissolving nations. They will be gathered to the skies; they will hereafter plant the heavens.

It is worthy of remark, that the calamities of the present time are falling chiefly on those nations where the papal power has been for the longest time most firmly established; on Italy, and France, and Spain, and Portugal, and Germany. Not however to the entire exemption of others, even where popery was never established; such as the northern powers of Europe. Though free from the papal heresy, they have sunk in corruption little less deadly and fatal. God appears to be inflicting his judgments on wicked nations in general. The present state of Arabia, Persia and India is extremely miserable. Nor would it be surprising if some great and wasting revolution should suddenly overturn and scourge the vast empire of China.

4. From distant empires, let us, in the last place, turn our eyes to the nation of which we are members, and in which our lot is cast. We also have our portion in this subject, as the present day of mourning and humiliation declares. God was pleased to open for our ancestors an asylum in

this new world. To them the savages were caused to resign these fair regions. At the sound of the axe and the hammer the wild demon of barbarity and darkness fled away, and flourishing villages and cities rose; and states, as large as many of the kingdoms of the east, spread their prosperous settlements through most of the climates of the temperate zone. No nation ever made such progress in population, wealth and power. Commerce, agriculture, the mechanical and elegant arts, the sciences, schools, academies, and colleges increased with unexampled rapidity. We seemed to lack nothing. Divine providence smiled upon us in every way that any nation was ever blest.

In two great movements, in which an union of states so distant and dissimilar was not to be expected but by a special favor of heaven, we were united, and acted with the facility and dispatch of a single community. I mean the declaration of Independence, and the adoption of a Federal Government. In consequence of the first of these, we were subjected to a long and dangerous war. God gave us such a man to lead our armies, through that war, as many centuries do not produce. No great and sweeping pestilences, no sore and distressing famines afflicted us. Whatever we did, prospered; and we did, as a nation, whatever we desired.

How did this tide of prosperity affect us? Did we see and adore the hand of providence in it all? Did wealth and power make us grateful to the

God of the universe? Far otherwise. We grew proud, and wicked and perverse. Probably no nation ever made such rapid progress in vice. This is not the vague conjecture of some blind misanthropist; it is the general opinion of the most enlightened and understanding men, in all parts of our country, founded on actual and careful observation. Go through the United States and survey all ranks of society, examine the town and the country; explore the morals of the rich and the poor, the master and the servant, the old and the young, and you will see such an enormous front of vice and irreligion as is sufficient to appal an infidel, and make a heathen tremble.

Of the political disputes which agitate our country, I shall say nothing. These fall within the province of the statesman. I wish to turn your attention wholly to the operation of moral causes. We have suddenly become a wicked, ungrateful and rebellious people before God. We have refused to serve the king of Zion; have revolted more and more deeply from his service. Our amazing prosperity has set open all the floodgates of luxury, dissipation, profligacy and corruption. Those who have not travelled or read, can have little idea over what extensive tracts of country the sabbath is turned into a day of the most dissipated amusements. They cannot conceive what horrible profaneness pollutes the whole atmosphere of America. In the article of profane swearing

very competent judges think we surpass every nation in Europe.

Nor is the vice of intemperance less prevalent than that of profaneness. Were there no future state of rewards and punishments, did God exercise no moral government over the world, still the unparalleled prevalence of this vice ought even to rouse the attention of government and be made, more definitely the object of legislative provision. Among the ancient nations the saying "DRUNK AS A THRACIAN" was well known. Now, the word *American* may be substituted for that of *Thracian*. It has come to that, that many thousands in our country, annually fall a prey to this ruinous vice. Nor is it to be doubted, that the late appearance of strange, surprising and mortal epidemics, in various parts, may have some connexion with the immoderate use of ardent spirits.

Intemperance in its incipient and mildest state throws wide the door to every vice: the slightest excitement of ardent spirits brings on a state of mind no less prejudicial to every mental operation, than to the practice of every virtue. God in very ancient times pronounced a woe on this sin. *Wo to the crown of pride, to the drunkards of Ephraim.* By Ephraim is here intended the house of Israel, or the ten tribes. This was preparatory to their final overthrow. It must be left for the wise and virtuous part of the community to determine by what measures this overwhelming tide may be turned away from our devoted coun-

try : or how we shall meet the judgments of God which will follow it.

The storm of divine indignation, which is now showering plagues and destruction on the nations of Europe, has at length reached us. A skirt of the dark cloud has extended across the Atlantic, and eclipsed our sun. There is reason to fear the night will be long and gloomy, that "the morning is distant far." God has begun to deal with us in judgment, and our prosperity has suddenly vanished away. Think not to repel this argument by adverting to the injustice of foreign powers. When the nation of Israel sinned against God *they had war in the gates.* By whatever injustice or wickedness this war has been occasioned, it has fallen on us for our sins. *Deliver my soul, says David, from the wicked which is thy sword, from men which are thy hand, O Lord.**

Let not the rhapsodies of poets, nor the reveries of dreaming politicians amuse and dazzle you with the vain promises of a great and lasting empire. We are destitute of that *virtue which exalteth a nation.* Besides that the oracles of God on other grounds, seem to forbid the expectation. The four great monarchies represented under the image of gold, and silver, and brass, and iron, are past. The glory of temporal dominion is about to fade forever. The potentates of the world will soon become like chaff of the summer threshing floor. It is not likely that another great empire

* Psalm xvii. 14. 15.

will rise. The whole chain of prophecy seems clearly to indicate that the prosperity and triumph of the empires of the world is nearly at an end.

But our history and moral state, nay the oracles of unerring and eternal truth, tell us what to expect, whatever may be the import of prophecy. We shall never more see prosperity without reformation and repentance. And this must not be in a corner, but through the nation. I call on you my hearers, this day, to judge for yourselves, of the awful necessity, but extreme improbability of a general reformation in this country: a reformation whose renovating influence shall reach the seats of power, and run through those ranks of men, who give tone to the morality of a nation. Will this people serve the almighty king of Zion? Will they turn to the Lord and seek his face, by deep repentance and thorough reformation? If they turn not, he will whet his glittering sword, and cause his right hand to take hold on vengeance. He will assuredly plead against them with his great power. For the nation that will not serve him shall perish.

Great wrath is already kindled against us. This may be surely inferred from what God has done to all wicked nations, from his express and severe threatenings; from our high privileges and extreme misuse of them. But are we left to come at this awful truth by inference? Our state and prospects loudly declare the divine displeasure. Our great and extensive commerce abolished—an

immense sea board threatened by powerful fleets—
an immense frontier exposed to the privations, the
the terror, the midnight alarms, the incessant in-
roads of a savage and merciless warfare—our men
falling in battle—our treasures exhausted—the
arm of industry palsied—the nerves of power cut
asunder—the spirit of enterprise, both on land
and sea, extinguished—the eye of hope roving in
vain over prospects of gloomy uncertainty—all
the demoralizing effects of war—the misery that
surrounds camps and garrisons, or marks the pro-
gress of marching armies; these evils we now feel.

How can they be averted? Who can bring
about the great and necessary reform, in this wide-
ly extended and populous country? None but the
God of the spirits of all flesh. In this hour of
danger and distress, let us repair to His throne of
grace. When Jacob was about to meet his bro-
ther Esau, at the head of a hostile army, and bur-
ning with resentment and desire of revenge, he
wrestled all night in prayer to God. And God
said to him, as a prince hast thou power with God
and with man, and hast prevailed. When Aaron
saw the plague had begun in the camp of Israel,
he took a censer and ran between the living and
the dead: he prayed to God and the plague was
stayed. When David saw the destroying angel
stretch out his dreadful sword over Jerusalem, he
hastened and fell down before God, he confes-
sed, and humbled himself, and prayed and entrea-
ted the divine favor, and the destroying angel
withdrew.

It is not from the skill of the politician, nor the prowess of the hero, as the first cause, that our relief must come. Let us take up the solemn inquiry, how far our own sins may have conspired to awaken the divine anger : lest we increase that anger by the impious prayers of the impenitent. It will be to no effect, that we pray to God to remove those judgments which our own sins have occasioned, while we are blind to our pollutions, or perhaps plunging deeper in them. With sincere repentance and self-loathing, let us cry to God for our afflicted country. We have no other remedy at hand, and the case admits of no delay. Sure I am we do not feel the weight of this subject. We could not feel thus calm, thus indifferent, thus careless if we did. Have you, my brethren, considered the stake you have in this country? Your children, and your children's children, to all posterity, are planted here. They rise or fall with the fortunes of this nation.

Perhaps, indeed, your own souls are secure in heaven's almighty protection. Perhaps angels will seize you as they did Lot, and snatch you from involving flames—from impending desolation : perhaps they will bear you away, to a land of security and endless joy. But what became of the family of Lot? The destruction threatening this land may be progressive, less sudden than that of the cities of the plain : but not less certain, remaining as it is now ; not less dreadful, progressing as this nation does in wickedness.

You must often have adverted to the great improbability of any thorough and general reformation in our country. No great nation was ever known as a body to turn to God by repentance. I have pointed you to the fate of Egypt, Carthage, Assyria, Persia, Greece, Rome, and of innumerable nations, and states, and kingdoms of less note in civil history. According to the probable progress of human events, and indeed of divine dispensations, we shall more or less gradually get into the deep and overwhelming waves of calamity and perdition, till we sink to rise no more.

And now the voice of war roars at a distance, but from your quiet and central situation, remote from scenes of danger, and fields of blood, you feel nothing of the distress, the privations and anxiety, with which thousands of families are afflicted. Do you wait to see and feel more distress, before a remedy shall be thought of. Beware that you do not wait too long.

I feel bound in spirit to say and to testify, that nothing but a great and general reformation can save us. Without this we are undone. Let the infidel sneer at prediction; let the self-confident statesman point to our resources and tell what enemies we can repel and what wars sustain; let the castle builder erect for us an empire; its foundation is laid in his imagination, and its happiness shall be a painted dream. Without we return to the God of heaven, from whom we have revolted, we shall perish. All other remedies

will be as a straw in the grasp of the drowning man, like a song to charm the agonies of death. O my country, it is God that calls thee. Thou art warned by the oracles of truth, by the history of nations, by thy present state and prospects, to return to Him and seek His favor.

Brethren, God has given us existence at an eventful period ; at the moment of an awful crisis in the affairs of other nations and of our own. The omniscient God alone knows how it will turn. Let us hasten to his throne of mercy. There is the only place where we can safely wait the destiny of nations and of nature.