

WHAT TO DO WHEN ALL SEEMS LOST

14²⁸This oracle came in the year king Ahaz died. ²⁹Do not rejoice, O Philistia, over the fact that the rod that struck you is broken; because from the root of that snake will spring up a viper, and the viper's offspring will be a darting, venomous serpent. ³⁰The poorest of the poor will find pasture, and the needy will lie down in safety. But I will destroy your root with famine, and your survivors will be slain. ³¹Howl, O gate! Wail, O city! You are melted away, O Philistia—all of you, for a cloud of smoke comes from the north, and there is not one straggler in his ranks. ³²What answer shall be given to the envoys of that nation? [They shall declare] that Jehovah has established Zion, and in her his afflicted people will find refuge. (Isa. 14:28-32)

Introduction

Three large women held tightly to the 15-year old Mexican boy; slapping him, kicking him, shouting at him to renounce his profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

"I'll die before I deny my Lord!" Mariano exclaimed as a crowd gathered. With fearful looks, his captors released him. Flushed with apparent victory, the strong-headed yelled at his attackers, claiming his rights as a free citizen and threatening to contact the government authorities. His words were barely out of his mouth before the crowd surged after him, ready to teach the mouthy youth a lesson for defying local beliefs. He ran but was quickly re-captured. Soon he was being struck with boards and sticks. One of the attackers raised a scythe.

Realizing his situation was one of life or death, Mariano cried out to the LORD. "I'm in Your hands. Do with me whatever You will." At that moment a tall man stood beside Mariano and shouted to the mob, "Whatever you do to this kid, you do to me!" Suddenly, torrential rain poured down and the crowd dispersed.

In the passage of Scripture presently before us, we find the Old Testament people of God in much the same situation as young Mariano. They appeared to be on the verge of being annihilated by the Assyrians, and their archenemy, the Philistines, were taking delight in the prospect of Judah's imminent destruction. But we also find the LORD promising to preserve His people and provide for them a mighty deliverance. As we study this passage of Isaiah, let us learn this lesson: When we find ourselves as Christians at our lowest point and all seems lost, let us remember God's unfailing promises.

I. Remember the LORD's Promise to Provide a Mighty Savior (Isa. 14:28-29)

This present prophecy was given "*in the year king Ahaz died.*" The nation of Judah had now lost its seasoned leader and was at a very low point in their history. Since the days of king David, the nation of Judah had repelled her archenemy, Philistia, and enjoyed much success against that enemy nation.

But this had begun to change in the days of king Ahaz. Part of the punishment the LORD brought upon Ahaz and the delinquent nation of Judah is described in 2 Chronicles 28:16-19;

At that time King Ahaz sent to the king of Assyria for help. ¹⁷The Edomites had again come and attacked Judah and carried away prisoners, ¹⁸while the Philistines had raided towns in the foothills and in the Negev of Judah. They captured and occupied Beth Shemesh, Aijalon and Gederoth, as well as Soco, Timnah and Gimzo, with their surrounding villages. ¹⁹Jehovah had humbled Judah because of Ahaz king of Israel, for he had promoted wickedness in Judah and had been most unfaithful to Jehovah. (2 Chron. 28:16-19)

Thus, under the reign of Ahaz there began the demise of Judah; and now, with the death of Ahaz, Judah finds herself without a seasoned leader and completely vulnerable.

Finding the Old Testament people of God at their lowest point caused their archenemy, Philistia, to rejoice in the prospect of Judah's imminent destruction at the hands of the advancing Assyrian armies. But the LORD now addresses the Philistines, exhorting them, *"Do not rejoice ... because from the root of that snake will spring up a viper, and the viper's offspring will be a darting, venomous serpent"* (vs. 29b.) The Philistines may view Ahaz as a snake who had been slain. But the LORD informs them that from the *"root"* of this snake shall come forth *"a viper"*—an even more deadly foe (this is a reference to king Hezekiah, note 2 Kings 18:7-8.) Referring to king Hezekiah, Scripture declares, *"And Jehovah was with him; he was successful in whatever he undertook. He rebelled against the king of Assyria and did not serve him. ⁸From watchtower to fortified city, he defeated the Philistines, as far as Gaza and its territory."* Furthermore, the offspring of this viper will be a *"darting, venomous serpent"*—the most potent enemy of all. Here is a reference to the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall completely defeat all of those who oppose God and His kingdom.

When all seems lost, and the enemies of your soul seem to anticipate with glee your spiritual demise, remember the LORD's promise to provide a Mighty Savior, even the Lord Jesus Christ—and place yourself under His care. As the LORD assured Abram, *"the word of Jehovah came to Abram in a vision, saying, Do not fear, Abram; I am your shield, and your reward shall be exceedingly great"* (Gen. 15:1.) In the words of the hymn writer, Samuel J. Stone,

The church shall never perish!
Her dear Lord—to defend,
to guide, sustain, and cherish—
is with her to the end.

II. Remember the LORD's Promise to Provide a Mighty Victory (Isa. 14:31,30b)

At the present moment of history, the nation of Judah appeared to be on the brink of annihilation, and this caused her archenemy to rejoice. But not only does the LORD exhort the Philistines not to rejoice (vs. 29), He further instructs them to howl and wail for what is about to befall them:

I will destroy your root with famine, and your survivors will be slain. ³¹Howl, O gate! Wail, O city! You are melted away, O Philistia—all of you, for a cloud of smoke comes from the north, and there is not one straggler in his ranks. (Isa. 14:30b-31)

What is described in verses 30b-31 is the complete destruction of these enemies of God who posed a threat to His people and would rejoice in the destruction of His people. "*A cloud of smoke ... from the north*" is a reference to the Assyrian armies who not only attacked Judah but would go on to conquer the land of Philistia. But, as verse 30b indicates ("*I will destroy your root with famine, and your survivors will be slain,*") the Assyrian conquest of Philistia is a model and is representative of the final conquest of the LORD against all His enemies, all those who would threaten His people.

When the Old Testament people of God found themselves at their lowest point, when all seemed lost, when their archenemy rejoiced in the prospect of their imminent destruction, the LORD foretold the complete and final destruction of those very enemies themselves! As a previous historical example of this phenomenon, consider the LORD's deliverance of His people from the hands of the Egyptians:

Then Jehovah said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea so that the waters may flow back over the Egyptians and their chariots and horsemen." ²⁷Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at daybreak the sea went back to its place. The Egyptians were fleeing toward it, and Jehovah swept them into the sea. ²⁸The water flowed back and covered the chariots and horsemen—the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed the Israelites into the sea. Not one of them survived ... ³⁰That day Jehovah saved Israel from the hands of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians lying dead on the shore. (Ex. 14:26-28,30)

Revelation 20:10 foretells the final fate of the devil himself: "*And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night forever and ever.*"

When all seems lost, remember the LORD's promise to provide a mighty victory—even Christ's victory at Calvary followed by His glorious resurrection from the dead, the full application of which is yet to be administered. Let us take comfort

and assurance from our Lord's own testimony: *"I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation. But have courage; I have conquered the world"* (Jn. 16:33.) Note, too, the Apostle Paul's confident testimony:

We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. ⁹Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened so that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. ¹⁰He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us. (2 Cor. 1:8-10)

III. Remember the LORD's Promise to Provide a Mighty Refuge (Isa. 14:30a)

Throughout this passage God's people are depicted as being feeble and vulnerable. In verse 30a they are described as being *"the poorest of the poor"*—literally, *"the first born of the poor;"* an expression that means, *"the poorest of the poor"* (Commentary on Isaiah, Joseph Alexander, p.209.) In verse 30b they are described as *"the needy [who] shall lie down"*—the description is that of a flock of defenseless sheep; but note, also, that the poorest of the poor "will find pasture" (vs. 30a.) In verse 32 they are described as *"his afflicted people"*—they are attacked, abused, and viewed as easy prey. It is precisely because of their apparent vulnerability and defenselessness that their enemies gleefully anticipate their destruction.

Although God's people are feeble, the LORD our God is mighty, and He promises to provide a mighty refuge for us. Isaiah declares, *"Jehovah has established Zion"*—He has made Zion to be a firm and sure place of refuge, Zion being the place and presence of the LORD Himself. In Zion *"his afflicted people will find refuge"*—the LORD has prepared a mighty fortress for His people; and now, as they are besieged by their enemies, they are depicted as finding shelter in that divine refuge provided by the LORD.

There are times when the church of Christ, or we ourselves as individual believers, are very much aware of how feeble and vulnerable we are before the world and the devil. Personally, you may recall times in your life when you have had to cry out with the Psalmist: *"Listen to my cry, for I am in desperate need; rescue me from those who pursue me, for they are too strong for me"* (Psl. 142:6.) When all seems lost, let us remember God's promise to provide a mighty refuge for us and let us flee to that divine refuge for our souls. As Proverbs 18:10 assures us, *"The name of Jehovah is a strong tower; the righteous run into it, and are safe."* Let us also take comfort and confidence in the Psalmist's testimony, *"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble"* (Psl. 46:1.)

Conclusion

The Old Testament people of God found themselves at a very low point, and their enemies delighted in the prospect of their imminent destruction; but the LORD promised to preserve and provide for His people.

When you find yourself at a low point and all seems lost, remember God's unfailing promises and avail yourself of them. Remember God's promise to provide us with a mighty Savior, His one and only Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Remember God's promise to provide us with a mighty victory—the cross of Calvary, the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, and His sure return in power and great glory. Remember God's promise to provide us with a mighty refuge, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

That young man, Mariano, found the LORD dramatically fulfilling His promises on his behalf. When we look to Christ and rely upon Him, we will find Him to be true to His promises on our behalf, too.