

Isaiah Lesson 21

Isaiah Chapter 21

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Introduction: The judgments continue. In this chapter, burdens (judgment) are pronounced against Babylon, Dumah, and Arabia.

I. Fallen, Fallen Is Babylon

Isa 21:1 The burden of the desert of the sea. As whirlwinds in the south pass through; so it cometh from the desert, from a terrible land.

Isa 21:2 A grievous vision is declared unto me; the treacherous dealer dealeth treacherously, and the spoiler spoileth. Go up, O Elam: besiege, O Media; all the sighing thereof have I made to cease.

The judgment continues with the impending judgment announced against what turns out to be Babylon. This is the burden of the desert of the sea. This enigmatic name is revealed in verse 9 as Babylon. It is here called the “desert of the sea.” The thought here may have the idea of the ‘desert of waters.’

Babylon was a city constructed in a desert-like country. There were waters of the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers nearby. There also were numerous other pools and lakes in the immediate area. It was a low region not far from the delta region of the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers.

The essence of the word translated as whirlwinds (hpwo soo-faw’) not only applies to cyclonic or tornadic storms but can also refer simply to storms as well. The region to this day is notorious for terrible sand storms which roll up from the south and the Arabian desert. With this symbolism, the prophet foretold how that judgment would someday come against Babylon. That of course, would be by the Medes and the Persians as noted in verse 2.

The thought is of how a terrible vision was declared to Isaiah. The implied meaning is that one who is treacherous is treacherous to all. One who is crooked is crooked to all. The application of these descriptions evidently pertains to Elam (i.e., Persia) and Media. These were kingdoms to the north and east of Babylon and were its historic enemies. This is recorded in Daniel 5:29-31.

Dan 5:29 Then commanded Belshazzar, and they clothed Daniel with scarlet, and put a chain of gold about his neck, and made a

proclamation concerning him, that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom.

Dan 5:30 In that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain.

Dan 5:31 And Darius the Median took the kingdom, being about threescore and two years old.

Isaiah foretold what would happen approximately 200 years before it came to pass.

Isa 21:3 Therefore are my loins filled with pain: pangs have taken hold upon me, as the pangs of a woman that travaileth: I was bowed down at the hearing of it; I was dismayed at the seeing of it.

Isa 21:4 My heart panted, fearfulness affrighted me: the night of my pleasure hath he turned into fear unto me.

The prophet describes the terrible consequences which would come upon Babylon at the hands of the Medes and Persians. Isaiah considered the prospect of the fall of Babylon as traumatic as a woman in labor. Why was Isaiah troubled at the prospect of the destruction of Babylon? It may be because at this time in the history of Judah, Babylon was not an enemy. The real perceived threat to Judah at the time was Assyria.

Recall that it was Hezekiah, Isaiah's contemporary king who showed Babylonian emissaries the riches of his kingdom. It very well may be that the leadership of Judah viewed Babylon as a counterweight in the balance of power with Assyria. Babylon at this time may have been viewed as a potential ally against Assyria. Therefore, Isaiah was distraught to hear that God planned to destroy Babylon. It may be that Isaiah knew what Judah would suffer in the aftermath at the hands of the Medes and the Persians.

II. Isaiah Warns to Prepare the Table and Watch in Watchtower

Isa 21:5 Prepare the table, watch in the watchtower, eat, drink: arise, ye princes, and anoint the shield.

Isa 21:6 For thus hath the Lord said unto me, Go, set a watchman, let him declare what he seeth.

The prophet instructed Judah to continue to live a normal life while setting sentinels in the watchtowers and preparing for war (anoint the shield). What is clear is that Judah was to set a watch as to what was taking place in Babylon.

Isa 21:7 And he saw a chariot with a couple of horsemen, a chariot of asses, and a chariot of camels; and he hearkened diligently with much heed:

Isa 21:8 And he cried, A lion: My lord, I stand continually upon the watchtower in the daytime, and I am set in my ward whole nights:

The watchman cried out loudly that he was diligently observing the horizon. The various chariots spotted by the watchman of Judah may be symbolic of the prophesied attack and conquest of Babylon by the Medes and the Persians.

Isa 21:9 And, behold, here cometh a chariot of men, with a couple of horsemen. And he answered and said, Babylon is fallen, is fallen; and all the graven images of her gods he hath broken unto the ground.

Isa 21:10 O my threshing, and the corn of my floor: that which I have heard of the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, have I declared unto you.

As a chariot and horsemen approached, the watchman declared that Babylon had fallen, and its idols had been destroyed. Significant is the phrase “Babylon is fallen, is fallen”. This phrase is found in Jeremiah 51:8, Revelation 14:8 and Revelation 18:2 in an eschatological context. The application here primarily pertains to the coming conquest of Babylon by Media-Persia. However, the phrase lends credence to what will come in the tribulation by way of history.

Isaiah concludes this section by crying out, “O my threshing, and the corn of my floor: that which I have heard of the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, have I declared unto you.” The threshing and corn (of my floor) is a reference to Judah. They are both referred to as pertaining to Isaiah. The prophet announces that which he had heard from God, he had declared to them.

Isa 21:11 The burden of Dumah. He calleth to me out of Seir, Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night?

Isa 21:12 The watchman said, The morning cometh, and also the night: if ye will enquire, enquire ye: return, come.

This next ‘burden’ is quite mysterious. The burden of Dumah. Dumah was one of the sons of Ishmael and is also thought to be another name for Idumea or the region of Edom. This likely is pertains to one branch of the Arabs who lived in the region of Edom at that time. Seir was a mountain and a region in Edom. Both places would be in the southern part of the state of Jordan in modern geography.

The thought may be allegorical of one calling from Edom to the watchman in Judah. His cry, "Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night?" could be understood to be 'what is going on in the night, watchman?' Or, perhaps, 'Watchman, what time is it?' The watchman said, "The morning cometh, and also the night: if ye will enquire, enquire ye: return, come."

The thought may be that a morning as well as a night is coming. The idea may be of judgment coming soon. The second phrase may have the sense, 'if you are going to enquire, then do so, but return again later.' Though mysterious, this thought coupled with the greater context seems to imply that judgment would soon fall upon Dumah (i.e., Edom).

III. Burden Upon Arabia

Isa 21:13 The burden upon Arabia. In the forest in Arabia shall ye lodge, O ye travelling companies of Dedanim.

Isa 21:14 The inhabitants of the land of Tema brought water to him that was thirsty, they prevented with their bread him that fled.

Isa 21:15 For they fled from the swords, from the drawn sword, and from the bent bow, and from the grievousness of war.

The burden upon greater Arabia is pronounced. Dedanim was a region in southern Arabia inhabited by the descendants of Dedan, a grandson of Keturah. They were another tribe of the greater Arab nation of that day. The thought here is that the traveling merchants of Dedanim would spend their nights in the wild thickets of Arabia for fear of the invading Assyrians. Tema was another branch of the Arabic nation descended from Ishmael. Because of the ravages of war, the Temanites would bring water to the merchants of Dedanim hiding in the forests.

The greater thought here is of Arabia being invaded and ransacked by the Assyrians. Dark days were ahead for Arabia. That is the burden pronounced upon them.

Isa 21:16 For thus hath the Lord said unto me, Within a year, according to the years of an hireling, and all the glory of Kedar shall fail:

Isa 21:17 And the residue of the number of archers, the mighty men of the children of Kedar, shall be diminished: for the LORD God of Israel hath spoken it.

Kedar was another region of Arabia. The Kedarites were the most prosperous and wealthy of the Arabic nation. The “years of an hireling” refers to the time when the contract of a hired servant (employee) expired. The greater thought therefore is that within a year, even the wealthiest part of the Arabic nation would be destroyed.

The invading conquerors undoubtedly were the Assyrians. Kedar had the most capable military force of the Arabs. Yet, before the judgment of God at the hand of the Assyrians, they would be crushed. The greater thought here in each of these ‘burdens’ is that God was about to send judgment against nations that had rejected Him. In most cases, the judgment would come at the hand of the expanding Assyrian empire. In the case of Babylon, the judgment would be by the Medes and the Persians.

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Prov 4:18 But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

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