

The Book of the Prophet ISAIAH

Chapter 21

Theme: God would judge Babylon by Persia and then judge Edom and Arabia by Sennacherib of Assyria.

Outline:

- 1-2 Burden of Babylon – Summary
- 3-9 Burden of Babylon – Vision
- 10 Burden of Babylon – Conclusion
- 11-12 Burden of Edom
- 13-17 Burden of Arabia

Preparatory Reading: Isaiah 7-8; Isaiah 13-14; Isaiah 41-48.

Related Links:

- A. *Babylon – Historical and Mystical (slides)* ... <http://www.letgodbetruer.com/pdf/babylon.pdf>.
- B. *Interpreting Bible Prophecies (slides)* ... <http://www.letgodbetruer.com/pdf/prophecy-interpretation.pdf>.

Introduction:

- A. This chapter starts with a vivid, spectacular vision of Belshazzar's last night and the defeat of Babylon.
- B. The overthrow of Babylon is huge to the church of God, thus many different views of the same thing.
- C. There are various views of Mystical Babylon in the book of Revelation from different angles of defeat.
- D. Edom, the perpetual, mocking enemy of the Jews (Esau's descendants) is dealt with wisely (Ps 137:7).
- E. The Arabians, of whom the Bible has less to say, is also given a one-year warning of the Assyrians.

***** *Burden of Babylon – Summary – Verses 1-2* *****

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.

- A. The burden of Babylon = God's judgment prophesied against Chaldeans, a frequent use.
 - 1. Destruction by *Elam* (Persia) and *Media* (Media) require this to be Babylon (Is 21:2).
 - 2. It is stated clearly if you read ahead that Babylon fell under this burden (Isaiah 21:9).
 - 3. Note Babylon (Is 13:1), Philistia (Is 14:28-32), Moab (Is 15:1), Damascus (Is 17:1), Egypt (Is 19:1), Edom (Is 21:11), Arabia (Is 21:13), valley of vision (Is 22:1), Tyre (Is 23:1), beasts of the south (Is 30:6,27).
 - 4. And Nineveh (Nah 1:1), Phoenicia (Zech 9:1), Israel (Zech 12:1), Israel (Mal 1:1).
 - 5. God hated the Jews for mocking prophecies (*burdens*) of judgment (Jer 23:33-40).
 - 6. They were a *burden* to the prophets to deliver but especially to those being judged.
 - 7. Every reader should humble Himself before the warnings of scripture and repent.
- B. Trust and then learn the prophetic similitude here to describe the inland city of Babylon.
 - 1. It is called a desert for being an ugly plain and to be turned into an even uglier one.

2. It is called a plain of the sea for the Euphrates and canals (Is 14:23; Je 51:36,42-43).
3. The southern portion of Mesopotamia had the Tigris and Euphrates and other rivers.
4. Though Babylon was 300 miles from the Persian Gulf, it was a large, swampy area.
- C. Whirlwinds, or tornadoes, came out of the south, this destructive force from the desert.
 1. Elihu said whirlwinds came out of the south, which we call tornadoes (Job 37:9).
 2. A king with an army to destroy is compared to such weather events (Dan 11:40).
 3. Zechariah combined both elements into one prophecy of God's judgment (Zec 9:14).
- D. What is coming here is the combined armies of the Medes and Persians from the east.
 1. The land farther east, both northeast and southeast of Babylon was terrible like today.
 2. The old territories of Media and Persia would be within the bounds of modern Iran.
 3. Not only was the land quite terrible, but the people terrible as well (Is 13:4-5,17-18).
- E. For God's glory, remember this prophecy was made about 200 years before fulfillment.

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.

- A. Isaiah described his vision of Babylon's overthrow as a grievous vision for him to see.
 1. There is more to life than vengeance. Babylon had been terrible to Isaiah's people.
 2. However, consider the compassion in the Bible for enemies, which is to be learned.
 3. For much more on this exact point of grief, see this author's notes for Isaiah 15:5.
- B. For those that love to alter God's words, they change the treachery to Media and Persia.
 1. They rewrite the clause, *The treacherous dealer is now dealt with treacherously.*
 2. We need not do so. Babylon was treacherous and spoiler enough for the indictment.
 3. She now dealt treacherously against herself by wicked nobles Gobrias and Gadates.
 4. These traitors of Belshazzar joined Cyrus and led them into the city and to the palace.
 5. Belshazzar himself was blasphemously treacherous and spoiling with holy vessels.
 6. The Chaldeans had been treacherous and spoiling, but they took it to a new level.
 7. The arrogant blasphemy involved in Belshazzar's feast was unprecedented evil.
- C. God by His prophet ordered the Persians (Elam) and Medes (Media) to capture Babylon.
 1. Elam was a significant province of Persia and used for Persia (Jer 25:25; Dan 8:2).
 2. The two confederates were to besiege and take the city of Babylon, which they did.
- D. All sighing of the people and nations afflicted and tormented by Babylon would cease.
 1. Isaiah had earlier foretold of captive Jews taking Babylonians captive (Is 14:1-3).
 2. Furthermore, Isaiah described the end of Belshazzar and Babylon as rest (Is 14:7).

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.

- A. Isaiah the prophet used the first person here for Belshazzar the king of Babylon himself.
 - 1. We take this position due to this and the following two verses, especially verse 5.
 - 2. This is not the same as earlier places we have encountered with Isaiah's compassion.
 - 3. The figure of speech is called *hypotyposis*, the vivid description of a scene or event.
 - 4. Isaiah will celebrate this great deliverance of Jews in chapters to come (Is 45:1-8).
 - 5. He had just written that the sighing of the Jews would cease with that night's events.
 - 6. He had just described the treacherous Babylonians dealing treacherously (Is 21:2).
- B. The inspired historical account of the night matches this description well (Dan 5:5-6).
- C. Insider information! Many talk about it, but this is like being in Belshazzar in Babylon!

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

- A. We continue to understand this spoken by Isaiah in the person of the king of Babylon.
- B. Isaiah had no reason for fearfulness frightening him or a night of pleasure being ruined.
- C. We know what happened then ... the hand, handwriting, and interpretation were terrible.
- D. Insider information! Many talk about it, but this is like being in Belshazzar in Babylon!

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

- A. We continue to understand this spoken by Isaiah in the person of the king of Babylon.
- B. Isaiah did not have such a table, neither a watchtower or any threat, or princes, or shield.
- C. This is Belshazzar getting his feast going and then a change as he called for a reaction.

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

- A. Isaiah told his audience how the Lord gave him a vision of the last night of Babylon.
- B. What he had described thus far was from the Lord, and what he would next describe.
- C. In this spectacular vision of Babylon's defeat, God arranged a watchtower exchange.

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:

- A. Isaiah's vision, including a watchman on a watchtower, was supplied to Isaiah by God.
 - 1. The watchman saw three chariots – one of horsemen, one of asses, one of camels.
 - 2. The watchman diligently examined what he could observe with great care for details.
 - 3. This vision from God to Isaiah and to Judah was based on carefully observed details.
- B. Trusting our KJV English, we do not alter the text in order to honor Hebrew confusion.
 - 1. That the Hebrew is confused (I Samuel 13:1) ... <http://www.letgodbetrue.com/pdf/bible-babel.pdf>.
 - 2. The Hebrew is confused (II Sam 21:19) ... <http://www.letgodbetrue.com/bible/scripture/who-killed-goliath.php>.
 - 3. That the Hebrew is confused (Proverbs) ... <http://www.letgodbetrue.com/pdf/proverbs-babel-2.pdf>.
- C. We see three chariots, the first with two horsemen and two others with asses and camels.
 - 1. Let us see Darius and Cyrus riding horses in a chariot as the leaders of a coalition.
 - 2. Then we can see two more chariots using animals these two nations sometimes used.

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:

- A. The dutiful, observant watchman shouted the watchword – *A lion!* – a dangerous enemy.
 - 1. There is nothing like the approach of a lion, if we trust the Bible view (Pr 30:29-31).
 - 2. There is nothing like the approach of an invincible, conquering king (Pr 30:29-31).
- B. The watchman then explained in vision to Isaiah his carefulness to justify his warning.
- C. Let every watchman on the wall of Mt. Zion, the pastors of Christ the Lion, do as well.

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.

- A. The watchman continued his observation of earlier of chariots and horsemen (Is 21:7).
 - 1. He uses the attention-grabbing word *behold* to indicate they were closer and active.
 - 2. From what follows, it is apparent that the watchman saw them enter Babylon proper.
- B. He declared further – the watchman to Isaiah in vision – that Babylon had been taken.
 - 1. Jeremiah foretold details of posts running in the city to tell the king (Jer 51:31-32).
 - 2. The N.T. prophets Jesus and John declare it of mystical Babylon (Rev 14:8; 18:2).
- C. The watchman also declared all the idols and images of Babylon's gods were destroyed.
 - 1. Isaiah later mocked all the worthless (and heavy) idols of Babylon (Isaiah 46:1-2).
 - 2. Jeremiah also mocked the deities of Babylon – Bel and Merodach (Jeremiah 50:2).
- D. For much more about historical Babylon ... <http://www.letgodbetrue.com/pdf/babylon.pdf>.

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.

- A. Isaiah, the devoted and faithful pastor to Judah, declared the Jews the people of God.
 - 1. The Jews were the threshing and corn of God's nation; He had removed their chaff.
 - 2. John the Baptist would later use very similar language about the Jews (Matt 3:12).
- B. But we do not like that convenient and spiritual interpretation due to the violent context.
 - 1. We choose rather the threshing is of Babylon – a beating and pulverizing judgment.
 - 2. Threshing is defeat (Jer 51:33; Is 41:15-16,10-14; Am 1:3; Mic 4:11-13; Hab 3:12).
- C. The majority of the preceding prophecy is Babylon's pain, not salvation of the remnant.
- D. Isaiah declared the vision true – its content was from Israel's God, the LORD of hosts.
 - 1. Every minister of Christ should be as faithful – to declare only, *Thus saith the Lord!*
 - 2. Whether in season or out of season to declare God's truth, he must *Preach the word!*

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

- A. This very short prophecy – a burden of only two verses in length – is incredibly obscure.
- B. This prophecy is against Edom – the neighbor nation of descendants of the hated Esau.
 - 1. We make this choice of interpretation based upon Seir (Gen 32:3; 36:8; Deut 2:4-5).
 - 2. Dumah is a son of Ishmael (Gen 25:12-16), but Arabia is the next burden (Is 21:13).
- C. The arrangement here, opposite of the previous vision, is Edom calling out to Isaiah.
 - 1. Isaiah as prophet had introduced a watchman in the previous warning to Babylon.
 - 2. Here Isaiah presents another watchman, and the people of Edom are addressing him.
 - 3. Isaiah said they called to him with the first person *me*, but the next verse is not so.
- D. The question put to Isaiah as the watchman of God is repeated twice to prove scoffing.
 - 1. The Jews did this as well, mocking Jeremiah (Jeremiah 23:33-40; 17:15; II Pet 3:4).
 - 2. Even if the repetition were in seriousness, it does not change the interpretation much.
 - 3. We know it is scoffing by Isaiah's response distinguishing a true inquiry from this.
- E. Recall how the hateful scorners reacted to Nebuchadnezzar taking Jerusalem (Ps 137:7).

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

- A. That is the watchman of Isaiah's vision, which he had introduced as himself (Is 21:11).
- B. The answer was short and abrupt, no more than scoffers or scorners deserve in clarity.

1. The morning is coming, in which you will have some measure of safety and success.
 2. But the night is also coming, in which your worst fears of trouble will be realized.
 3. Everyone knows information like this – night comes after day and then a morning.
- C. The watchman exhorted haughty Edom to inquire seriously, repent, and come to him.
1. Their initial inquiry was scornful, not sincere, thus Isaiah’s warning to get serious.
 2. If you want to hear the truth, then ask soberly; repent of your folly and come to me.
- D. And that is all! Because that is all scorners deserve – enough to shut their vain mouths.

***** *Burden of Arabia – Verses 13-17* *****

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

- A. This is the third burden – or prophecy of judgment – against Arabia, south of Judah.
1. Arabia paid tribute to David and Solomon (I Kgs 10:14-15; II Chronicles 9:13-14).
 2. They were descendants of Ishmael and Keturah’s sons (Genesis 25:1-3,12-16).
- B. Though used to typical nomadic trading, travel, tents, they would be hiding in a forest.
- C. Jeremiah included them in the nations given to Nebuchadnezzar (Jer 25:15-26; 25:24).

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

- A. The land of Tema is near Arabia (Jer 25:23-24); they gave food to the fleeing Arabians.
- B. The Arabians, desert dwellers they are, would ordinarily have food stocks for survival.

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

- A. God had them in His sights for destruction – the burden of Arabia – war and all its grief.
- B. Sometimes men must wage wars, but they are terribly destructive and grievous to all.

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:

- A. The years of an hireling has been explained before – no more and no less (Isaiah 16:14).
- B. God informed Isaiah that this prophecy would be fulfilled within a year on the Arabians.
1. Kedar had been a glorious place of Arabia, but its glory would be greatly reduced.
 2. By including the next verse, the war action against it would only diminish Arabia.
 3. This is the same warning given to Moab, though theirs was three years (Is 16:14).

- C. Therefore, we understand that like Moab they would get worse from Nebuchadnezzar.
 - 1. Moab was warned of total destruction that would come separately (Is 16:13-14).
 - 2. Arabia was a nation given to Nebuchadnezzar to destroy (Jer 25:15-26; 49:28-33).
- D. Therefore, we understand this to be Sennacherib's invasion (Isaiah 16:14 cp Is 36:1).
 - 1. Since he was in the area ... Judah ... and Moab ... it was no problem to hit Arabia.
 - 2. There might have been some agreement with Tirhakah the Ethiopian (Is 37:8-10).

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.

- A. Kedar had been a well-protected place, but now its power would be greatly reduced.
- B. The most important words of all revelation and communication – *thus saith the Lord.*