

# Book of Isaiah



## Chapter 21

*Theme: Three burdens: Babylon "desert of the sea," Edom "Dumah," and Arabia*

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## Chapter 21

<b>Isaiah: A Bible in Miniature?</b>	
<b>The Book of Isaiah has been described as the Bible in miniature, for it exhibits remarkable similarities to the Bible as a whole—in both its structure and its message.</b>	
<b>The Book of Isaiah</b>	<b>The Bible</b>
<b>66 chapters</b>	<b>66 books</b>
<b>Two sections: <u>chs. 1–39</u> and <u>chs. 40–66</u></b>	<b>Two parts: 39 Old Testament books and 27 New Testament books</b>
<b>Stress in <u>chs. 1–39</u> is on God’s righteousness, holiness, and justice.</b>	<b>Stress in 39 Old Testament books is on God’s righteousness, holiness, and justice.</b>
<b>Emphasis in <u>chs. 40–66</u> is on God’s glory, compassion, and grace.</b>	<b>Emphasis in 27 New Testament books is on God’s glory, compassion, and grace.</b>
<b>Chapters <u>1–39</u> depict Israel’s need for restoration.</b>	<b>The Old Testament depicts humanity’s need for salvation.</b>
<b>Chapters <u>40–66</u> predict God’s future provision of salvation in the Servant.</b>	<b>The New Testament describes God’s provision of salvation in the Messiah.</b>
<b>Isaiah begins with a description of Israel’s rebellion and ends with predictions of restoration.</b>	<b>The Bible begins with a description of humanity’s rebellion and ends with a depiction of salvation in Jesus Christ.</b>
<b>Message: A holy God will gain glory by judging sin and restoring His people.</b>	<b>Message: A holy God will gain glory by judging sin and saving those who call on the name of His Son Jesus.</b>

Isaiah is enumerating eleven "burdens," or judgments. In this chapter we are going to consider burdens seven, eight, and nine, which are against Babylon, Edom, and Arabia. These burdens are set forth by expressive symbols, and in the day they were given I am sure they were as clear to the people as the noonday sun. In fact, they were as clear to the people in Isaiah's day as the expressions "stars and stripes" and "Old Glory" are to every American. The insignia in this chapter are not quite so clear to us today, and as a result there has been some disagreement among Bible expositors about their meaning. They can be identified as Babylon, Edom, and Arabia, and each one will be considered separately as we go through this chapter. All were enemies or potential enemies of Israel. Each brought a particular misery upon God's people. Each has been judged in time.

This chapter is a neglected part of the Word of God. To prove this, let me ask you a question. When was the last time you heard a sermon or Bible study on this chapter of the Bible? I have a notion that you have never heard a study on Isaiah 21. This is another section of Scripture which confirms my position of a premillennial, pretribulation, dispensational interpretation of the Word of God. It is the only interpretation which would satisfy a passage like this, which is the reason all other systems stay clear of this chapter and other portions of God's Word with like teaching. The remarkable thing in this chapter is that symbols are used. Now I believe in a literal interpretation of Scripture, but when symbolism is used, it always pictures reality. That is an important thing to remember. Many expositors call a teaching of Scripture symbolism in an attempt to make it disappear. Like a magician says, "hocus-pocus," and it's gone -- so don't worry

about it. My friend, let's not try to evaporate this section of Scripture, but let's study it to see what God is saying.<sup>1</sup>

### **Seven Predictions -- Fulfilled:**

1. Destruction of Babylon would come from the desert and a terrible land like the whirlwind passing through from the south (Isa. 21:1).
2. Judgment upon Babylon was to come from the Elamites and the Medes (Isa. 21:2).
3. The destruction was to be so terrible that the prophet was filled with pains like a woman travailing. He was dismayed and filled with fear at seeing it (Isa. 21:3-4).
4. The King of Babylon would make a feast, setting watchmen in the watchtower to make the people feel secure in their reveling; but while they were eating and drinking the attack would come (Isa. 21:5). This was fulfilled exactly this way, as stated in Dan. 5.
5. Babylon was to fall by the coming invader (Isa. 21:6-9).
6. All the graven images of Babylon were to be destroyed (Isa. 21:9).
7. Babylon was to be trodden down like wheat on a threshing floor (Isa. 21:10).

This is a second prophecy of the destruction of Babylon, which was not then a world power but was soon to rise to greatness by overthrowing the Assyrian empire and becoming the next or third world empire to persecute Israel in the times of the Gentiles (see Eight Mountain Kingdoms and Israel). Here we have the immediate judgment upon Babylon by the Medes and Persians, while in the first prophecy the latter-day destruction of Babylon was the main theme (Isa. 13:1 -- Isa. 14:27), the Medes being mentioned in only two verses (Isa. 13:17-18).<sup>2</sup>

Cf. Isaiah 12, 14 and Jeremiah 50, 51; Revelation 17, 18.

Cf. Fall of Babylon: Dan 5; Isa 44, 45.

Many interpreters assume that since Elam (v. 2), Media (v. 2), and Babylon (v. 9) are mentioned, Isaiah must have been referring to the fall of Babylon to the Medo-Persian Empire in 539 b.c. However, passages referring to the fall of Babylon in 539 indicate that it was something about which Israel was to rejoice (because it soon resulted in the return of the Jews to their homeland), whereas this fall of Babylon was terrifying, something to be feared. "The Desert by the Sea" (v. 1) most likely refers to the area around the gulf known today as the Persian Gulf, that is, territory near Babylon.

As already mentioned, in Isaiah's previous oracles (chaps. 13-20) he wrote of the Assyrian incursion into other countries in the ancient world and the effects it had on the Syro-Palestine region. In 722 b.c. a Chaldean prince from the Persian Gulf region, named Marduk-apal-iddina (called Merodach-Baladan in 39:1), revolted against Assyria, captured Babylon, and was crowned king of Babylon. Elam, a nation northeast of Babylon, supported his revolt. Not till 710 b.c. was Sargon able to evict Marduk-apal-iddina from Babylon. After the death of Sargon in 705 Marduk-apal-iddina along with Elamite troops revolted against Sennacherib. In 702 Sennacherib finally defeated him (and Elam) and devastated his home area around the Persian Gulf. Undoubtedly Isaiah was prophesying about this situation. Hezekiah, king of Judah, and other members of his royal court felt that Marduk-apal-iddina would be able to break the strength of the Assyrian Empire. But Isaiah was warning them that this would not happen.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

<sup>2</sup> Dake's Annotated Reference Bible

<sup>3</sup> The Bible Knowledge Commentary

**<sup>1</sup>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.**

Whirlwinds: Cf. Zech 9:14; Job 37:9.

Some scholars say this prophecy was fulfilled at Babylon's fall in 539 B.C. (see Daniel 5). But others say this was a prophecy of Babylon's revolt against Assyria around 700 B.C.<sup>4</sup>

[desert of the sea] This refers to Babylon.

[As whirlwinds] Babylon will be destroyed by a mighty army passing through like a whirlwind that leaves destruction everywhere.

[south pass through] Whirlwinds are spoken of as coming from the south (Job 37:9; Zech. 9:14), and the north (Ezek. 1:4).

[from the desert, from a terrible land] The army that destroyed Babylon came out of the desert and mountainous country of the Medes and Elamites or Persians (Isa. 21:1-2).<sup>5</sup>

In this oracle (see comments on 13:1) Isaiah pictured an invasion of the Desert by the Sea (i.e., Babylon by the Persian Gulf) as being like an approaching desert storm. The invader was probably Marduk-apal-iddina (Merodach-Baladan) who arose suddenly from the desert regions to revolt against Assyria.<sup>6</sup>

"The desert of the sea" is a strange expression. It is like saying "the dryness of the water" or "how dry the water is." This may not be too peculiar to us since we have "dry ice" and "cold heat." Dr. F. C. Jennings translates this verse, "As sweep the whirlwinds through the south, so comes it from the desert, from the land that strikes with terror." This is a good interpretation of the verse, but it does not identify the nation. But if you keep reading, the nation is identified in verse 9: "Babylon is fallen, is fallen." So we know "the desert of the sea" is Babylon. Before Babylon became a world power, her doom was again predicted. We have already seen that. The first burden in chapters 13 -- 14 was against Babylon. Babylon became so awe-inspiring and frightful, and represented so much in Scripture, that we have this further word concerning its doom. It was the first place of united rebellion against God at the Tower of Babel, and it represents the last stronghold of rebellion against God. We find this in Revelation 17-18. Religious Babylon is presented in Revelation 17, and commercial Babylon is set forth in Revelation 18.

The expression, "desert of the sea," is a paradoxical phrase. Babylon was geographically located on a great desert plain beside the Euphrates River. It was irrigated by canals from the river. Jeremiah gives this description of Babylon, "O thou that dwellest upon many waters, abundant in treasures, thine end is come, and the measure of thy covetousness" (Jer. 51:13). The desert and the sea form a weird amalgamation here. This same fusion of desert and sea is made by John in Revelation. "So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness: and I saw a

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<sup>4</sup> Life Application Study Bible.

<sup>5</sup> Dake's Annotated Reference Bible

<sup>6</sup> The Bible Knowledge Commentary

woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns" (Rev. 17:3). This is the desert where John beheld the mystery Babylon: "...Come hither; I will shew unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters" (Rev. 17:1). It was in the desert that John saw the "many waters." These two verses are symbolic, but they carry through the same pattern. We will find it again in Jeremiah.

Babylon, with its glitter and glamour and as the fountainhead of idolatry and false religion, was a mirage upon the desert. Isn't this tremendous! -- "desert of the sea" -- what a picture! Babylon was not a wonderful place. It was a mirage in the desert. It wasn't a spring or an oasis at all, but a place filled with idols and false religion. There was no life-giving water there for the souls of men. This is something that every pastor, every radio preacher, every church, and every church member ought to turn over in his mind. Is my church or am I a life-giving fountain, or am I just a mirage upon the desert of life?<sup>7</sup>

**<sup>2</sup>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.**

**Elam:** Cyrus = "King of Ansan" (Media, not Persia; Persian not known in Isaiah's day! Gen 10:22; 14:1,9; Isa 11:11; 22:6). Persian + Media conquers Chaldea, Ecbatana, Borsippa, Babylon (Dan 5).<sup>8</sup>

**[Elam]** Elam was the name of the country originally possessed by the Persians -- so-called from Elam, son of Shem (Gen. 10:22). It was east of the river Euphrates and the Persian Gulf. It was one of the earliest powers (Gen. 14:1,9). Shushan was its capital (Neh. 1:1; Esther 1:2-5; 2:3-8; 3:15; 4:8,16; 8:14-15; 9:6-18; Dan. 8:2). Elam is mentioned in prophecy (Isa. 21:2; 11:11; 22:6; Jer. 25:25; 49:34-39; Ezek. 32:24; Dan. 8:2).<sup>9</sup>

**[besiege]** Besiege Babylon -- fulfilled (Dan. 5).

**[Media]** Media was located north of Persia, east of the Euphrates, and south of the Caspian Sea and Armenia. It derived its name from Madai, son of Japheth (Gen. 10:2). It was long under the Assyrians, until Cyrus the Great (about 556 B.C.) who united Media and Persia, forming the Medo-Persian empire (Esther 1:3,14,18; 10:2; Dan. 6:8,12,15; 9:1). The Medes are mentioned in prophecy (Isa. 21:2; 13:17; Jer. 25:25; 51:11,28; Dan. 5:28-31; 8:20).<sup>10</sup>

God commands the twofold nation of Media-Persia to destroy and spoil the city. "Go up, O Elam [Persia]: besiege, O Media." That is exactly what happened. This is a prophecy that was given before the invasion took place.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

<sup>8</sup> Chuck Missler Notes on Isaiah, khouse.org

<sup>9</sup> Dake's Annotated Reference Bible

<sup>10</sup> Dake's Annotated Reference Bible

<sup>11</sup> Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

God gave Isaiah a vision about the Babylonian uprising against Assyria. The prophet heard the battle cry for Elam and Media (north of Elam) to attack Babylon and free it from Assyria. I refers to the invader in the vision (see comments on v. 1); he said he would stop the groaning... caused by the traitor, the Assyrian Empire which had caused most nations in the region to "groan" under the devastation caused by her conquests. Apparently Marduk-apal-iddina felt that he would be able to stop the Assyrian advance and thereby liberate the entire region.<sup>12</sup>

Go up, O Elam! Besiege, O Media: Elam and Media are the ancient names for the peoples of Persia, modern day Iran. The Persian Empire conquered the Babylonian Empire, and Isaiah her prophetically sees their armies marching on Babylon.

**<sup>3</sup>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.**

The prophet was so moved by the coming destruction of Babylon that as he described himself, he had the feelings of a woman in travail.

Isaiah's Sevenfold Description of Himself:

1. My loins are filled with pain (Isa. 21:3).
2. Pangs have taken hold of me, as the pangs of a woman in travail.
3. I was bowed down at hearing it.
4. I was dismayed at seeing it.
5. My heart panted (Isa. 21:4).
6. Fearfulness terrified me.
7. My pleasure was turned into fear.<sup>13</sup>

As the vision of these things passed by, Isaiah saw such indescribable and great sufferings in Babylon that he was appalled and pained with sympathetic feelings.

Once again Isaiah is moved with great feeling and emotion when he learns of the coming devastation. This is the heart of God revealed, desiring to show mercy and loath to judge even so frightful a foe. God's love is as evident here as in the tears of Jeremiah. No one can rejoice in the judgment of God. God says that His judgment is His "strange" work. He does want to judge you; He wants to save you, but the choice is yours. He doesn't want to judge nations either, and that choice is up to them.<sup>14</sup>

Isaiah now contrasted his feelings with the actions of those around him. Because of this prophecy he was about to utter he was in pain like that of a woman in labor, a simile often used by the prophets (see comments on 13:8 and cf. 26:17). Bewildered, he trembled and was in a state of horror (cf. 15:5-7; 22:4). By contrast, the people around him were living as if nothing was happening. They continued in a festive attitude (21:5a) not realizing the implications of what was happening. Perhaps Isaiah had in mind the feasting which would be done when Marduk-apal-

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<sup>12</sup> The Bible Knowledge Commentary

<sup>13</sup> Dake's Annotated Reference Bible

<sup>14</sup> Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

iddina's (Merodach-Baladan's) men came to Jerusalem (chap. 39). Isaiah realized that Babylon under Marduk-apal-iddina's control could not change what God had ordained. So rather than eating they should have prepared for battle, implied by the words oil the shields. Shields made of animal skins needed to be rubbed with olive oil to prevent their cracking.<sup>15</sup>

Notice that Isaiah seems exceptionally moved by this one - even more than the sadness he felt for the judgment of Moab back in chapters 15 and 16. He describes it as a "harsh vision." The word "harsh" in Hebrew is "kaw-SHEH," which means "severe, fierce, and intense." As Isaiah sees this harsh vision, he is bewildered, terrified, horrified, and trembling.<sup>16</sup>

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

[**panted**] Hebrew: ta`ah (HSN-<H8582>), to reel or stray; stagger; wander.

[**fearfulness affrighted me**] It seems that when Isaiah saw in the Spirit the destruction of Babylon, he experienced deep sufferings for the people facing such calamities, as though he were in their place.

[**the night of my pleasure hath he turned into fear unto me**] This was no doubt the night of Belshazzar's drunken feast (Dan. 5). Isaiah called it his pleasure, writing as though he himself was in Babylon when the city was taken. That night began with the pleasure of banquet, but ended in terror. Watchmen were in the watchtower, and the people ate and drank in apparent security. Then suddenly they had to fight, for the Medes and Persians had gained entrance to the city. It was time for it to fall as predicted (Isa. 21:3-5; Dan. 5).<sup>17</sup>

**<sup>5</sup>Prepare the table, watch in the watchtower, eat, drink: arise, ye princes, and anoint the shield.**

If the prophecy refers to the fall of Babylon in 539 B.C., this may picture the feast in Daniel 5.

[**anoint the shield**] Many shields were made of multilayered leather stretched over a metallic rim, and strengthened and ornamented with pieces of metal. An occasional rubbing with oil -- especially before a battle -- was necessary to prevent the leather from becoming dry and cracked, and to keep the metal from rusting.<sup>18</sup>

This verse reads as if it were an eyewitness account of the destruction of Babylon as recorded by Daniel (see Dan. 5). Remember, this was recorded about two hundred years before it transpired. In the midst of the banquet of Belshazzar, the Median general, Gobryas, detoured the river that

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<sup>15</sup> The Bible Knowledge Commentary

<sup>16</sup> <http://rondaniel.com/library/23-Isaiah/Isaiah1428.php>

<sup>17</sup> Dake's Annotated Reference Bible

<sup>18</sup> Dake's Annotated Reference Bible

flowed through the city and marched his army on the dry river bed underneath the walls of the city. He took the city by surprise and shock. This is something that God said would take place.<sup>19</sup>

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

[me, Go, set a watchman, let him declare what he seeth] Isaiah still writes as though in Babylon; that is, he seemed to be there in the vision. The Lord commanded him to set a watchman in the tower to announce what was to come to pass. The watchman saw chariots (some render it cavalry two abreast) marching to the destruction of Babylon (Isa. 21:6-7), horsemen and chariots approaching with the speed, fierceness, and terror of a lion upon its prey; and a voice cried: "Babylon is fallen, is fallen" (Isa. 21:8-9). "Is fallen" was repeated for emphasis, to denote certainty. See notes on Jer. 50-51.<sup>20</sup>

Watchmen on the city walls often appear in prophetic visions of destruction. They are the first to see trouble coming. The prophet Habakkuk was a watchman (Habakkuk 2:1). The vision of the riders on horses could represent the Medes and Persians attacking Babylon in 539 B.C.<sup>21</sup>

**Vs 6-10** God told Isaiah to have someone be on the lookout for the battle between Babylon and Assyria. The watchman was to look for anyone who would come his way to report on the battle (vv. 6-7). The watchman looked day after day till finally someone came with the message that Babylon had fallen and its gods lay shattered on the ground (v. 9). The emotional impact of this message on the people of Judah, who were hoping Babylon's revolt would be successful, would be stunning. They had hoped that the alliance Hezekiah made with Babylon would break the Assyrian domination. But it was not to be. Sennacherib pushed Marduk-apal-iddina out of Babylon and as stated earlier (see comments on chap. 13), the Assyrian king eventually destroyed the city in 689 b.c. Babylon's fall seemed like the last straw. Now no one could stop the Assyrian Empire. So Judah felt crushed emotionally like grain on the threshing floor (cf. Jer. 51:33).<sup>22</sup>

**7And 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:**

“Chariot” = troop, 2x2. Troops mounted, not in chariots.

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

“...as a lion: My Lord...”: Dan 7? Of Judah? Rev 5:4.

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<sup>19</sup> Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

<sup>20</sup> Dake's Annotated Reference Bible

<sup>21</sup> Life Application Study Bible.

<sup>22</sup> The Bible Knowledge Commentary

The watchman on the walls of the city tells the people inside what he sees. He says, "As I look out on the desert, here comes a chariot of men, with a couple of horses." They are messengers, and their message is "Babylon is fallen, is fallen." The watchman brings word to the king of Babylon that it has fallen (see Jer. 51:31-33). All of Babylon's graven images of her gods are broken unto the ground. This is a sign of sorrow as well as relief. Babylon was the source of all idolatry.<sup>23</sup>

**<sup>9</sup>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.**

Mounted; not chariots.

"Babylon is fallen, is fallen": Rev 18:2.

Cyrus did not destroy their idols! He restored them, repaired the Merodach temple, prayed to Bel and Nebo for long life. Son Cambyses: new year celebration.

This reference must be yet future.<sup>24</sup>

**[graven images of her gods]** Babylon was noted for its idolatry; perhaps it was where idolatry started. The principal god was Bel (Isa. 46:1; Jer. 50:2; 51:44).<sup>25</sup>

Babylon was not only a great and powerful city, it was also filled with horrible sin (idolatry, witchcraft, and temple prostitution). Babylon was, and remains, a symbol of all that stands against God. Despite all its glory and power, Babylon would be destroyed, along with all its idols. They would give no help in time of trouble.<sup>26</sup>

Herodotus, the Greek historian of the fifth century b.c., describes in detail the fortification of Babylon, which was also protected by a wide artificial moat. This moat diverted the course of the Euphrates, making it run in serpentine fashion between the walls of the city. According to Herodotus, Cyrus's engineers drained the moat by turning its waters into a nearby marshland. Thus the Persians were able to enter the city while the Babylonians were feasting and dancing.

The report comes to the watchman: Babylon is fallen, is fallen! This dramatic scene was fulfilled when the Medo-Persian Empire conquered Babylon, but it also has a prophetic application. Revelation 18:2 describes the cry of an angel when God judges the world system, both commercial Babylon and spiritual Babylon: And he cried mightily with a loud voice, saying, "Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and has become a dwelling place of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird!" The repetition of the phrase is fallen, is fallen connects the two passages.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

<sup>24</sup> Chuck Missler Notes on Isaiah, khouse.org

<sup>25</sup> Dake's Annotated Reference Bible

<sup>26</sup> Life Application Study Bible.

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.studyight.org/commentaries/guz/isaiah-21.html>

**<sup>10</sup>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.**

“Threshing”: Cf. Ruth, chapter 3?

**[threshing, and the corn of my floor]** The destruction of Babylon is compared to threshing wheat by treading it under foot in a threshing floor (Jer. 51:33).<sup>28</sup>

Harvest is the time of judgment. In John 4:35 our Lord said, "Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest." Our Lord said this at the end of the age of law, when judgment was coming against Israel who had had the Law for almost fifteen hundred years. Harvest is the time of judgment.

There is a book I would like to recommend to you at this point, because we are going to study more about Babylon in the Books of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. Hislop's book *The Two Babylons*, would be a valuable addition to your library.<sup>29</sup>

Threshing and winnowing were two steps in ancient Israel's farming process. The heads of wheat (often used to symbolize Israel) were first trampled to break open the seeds and expose the valued grain inside (threshing). The seeds were then thrown into the air, and the worthless chaff blew away while the grain fell back to the ground (winnowing). Israel would experience this same kind of process: The sinful, rebellious people (worthless chaff) would be taken away, but God would keep the good "grain" to replenish Israel.<sup>30</sup>

Isaiah reiterated that his message was from God. He was only telling what he had heard from the Lord Almighty (cf. comments on 1:9). Judah must not rely on the Babylonians to save them. This man from the Desert by the Sea (Marduk-apal-iddina) would not be successful.<sup>31</sup>

**<sup>11</sup>The burden of Dumah. He calleth to me out of Seir, Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night?**

This prophecy refers to Dumah, a son of Ishmael (Isa. 21:11; Gen. 25:14; 1Chr. 1:30). Seir was the name of a mountain range in Edom, so that prophecy concerns Edom. Isaiah was the watchman (Isa. 21:6,11), and inquiry was made to him out of Edom about the night, which no doubt refers to calamity that had fallen upon the Jews as well as themselves. The prophet replied that daylight would soon come, and also another night, meaning another calamity. The night probably refers to the invasion of the land of Judah by the great Assyrian people who were then conquering one nation after another, including Syria, Ephraim, Philistia, Moab, Edom and much of Judea. They were about to take Jerusalem, but this would soon pass like the night. There

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<sup>28</sup> Dake's Annotated Reference Bible

<sup>29</sup> Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

<sup>30</sup> Life Application Study Bible.

<sup>31</sup> The Bible Knowledge Commentary

would be another morning and a day and then another night, which would be the coming Babylonian invasion of all these same nations, when they would be taken into captivity.<sup>32</sup>

Who is "Dumah"? Dumah is a symbolic word. Isaiah played upon words to bring out a deeper meaning. We have already seen that. He used words to carry a message to the people. "Dumah" is Edom with the E removed. You take the E off Edom, and you have Dumah which means "silence." Our word dumb is closer to the intent and purpose of Isaiah. Edom is still a land of deathlike silence.

Seir means "rough or hairy." Esau was the first Seir man (see Gen. 25:25). He was hairy, and he dwelt in Mount Seir (see Gen. 36:8). Seir also means "storms." It was a land swept with storms. "Silence and Storm." What a play on words, and what a message!

Edom is obviously the country involved. Out of the land of silence and storm comes this inquiry, which is twice repeated: "Watchman, what of the night?" In other words, "How much of the night is gone?" How long will it be before God's glory will be revealed when the "...Sun of righteousness [shall] arise with healing in his wings..." (Mal. 4:2)?<sup>33</sup>

This brief oracle (see comments on 13:1) seems to be against Edom because of the reference to Seir (21:11). Seir is an alternate name for Edom because the mountains of Seir were given as a possession to Esau and his descendants (Josh. 24:4). The name Dumah may be a wordplay on "Edom" since Dumah means silence or stillness (cf. niv marg.) and the watchman in the oracle saw no activity. More likely, however, Dumah is a transliteration of Udumu or Udumai, the Akkadian designation for Edom. Both Tiglath-Pileser (in 734) and Sargon (in 711) mentioned taking tribute from Udumu. Was there any chance Edom's political situation would change? The answer was no, not immediately. Even though morning was coming, another night would follow. It did not look as if the situation would change soon.<sup>34</sup>

"Dumah" was a region of Idumea, or Edom, near the mountain of Seir. It was inhabited by the descendants of Esau. Dumah (Heb.) means "silence" or "place of silence" and therefore symbolizes the destiny of Edom, the perpetual enemy of Israel. "Night" is symbolic of evil, death, judgment, and hell or eternal punishment (cf. John 13:30; Rom 13:12).

Edom had been a constant enemy of God's people. It rejoiced when Israel fell to the Assyrians, and this sealed Edom's doom (34:8ff; 63:4). Seir was another name for Edom because the hill country of Seir was given to Esau and his descendants (see Joshua 24:4). Obadiah foretells, in great detail, the destruction of Edom.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Dake's Annotated Reference Bible

<sup>33</sup> Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

<sup>34</sup> The Bible Knowledge Commentary

<sup>35</sup> Life Application Study Bible.

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

**[return, come]** Some understand this to mean conversion to God; but it could only mean that Isaiah invited the inquirers to return if they wanted more information of the present night, the new day, and the new night to follow the morning.<sup>36</sup>

You see, both morning and night are coming. What will be glory for some will be doom for others. What will be light for God's people will be night for Edomites, the men of the flesh who have rejected God.<sup>37</sup>

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

The places listed here are all in Arabia. They are border cities that controlled the trade routes throughout the land. This is Isaiah's prediction of disaster.

Dedan, Tema, Kedar (Gen 25:13) = Arab tribes. Dedanites: chief traders on Arabia peninsula (Ezek 27:21; in tents, Ps 120:5; Jer 49:29; villages, 42:11). Cf. Jer 49.

**[Arabia]** Arabia, a large country south of Syria and Trans-Jordan, west of Euphrates and the Persian Gulf, north of the Red Sea and east of Palestine (1Ki. 10:15; 2Chr. 9:14; Jer. 25:24; Ezek. 27:21; Gal. 1:17; 4:25).

**[forest in Arabia]** There aren't great forests in Arabia, but thick underbrush makes some places very rugged and inaccessible.

**[travelling companies]** Caravans or roving tribes of Arabs.

**[Dedanim]** Dedanim, descendants of Dedan, son of Abraham by Keturah (Gen. 25:3; Jer. 25:23; 49:8; Ezek. 25:13; 27:15,20; 38:13).

"Arabia" seems clear enough, but again this is a word with a double meaning. It can be made to mean evening by changing the vowel points. The Hebrew language is a language of consonants with no vowels. Instead it had vowel points, which are little marks above the consonants. Scholars have added vowels to the Hebrew words to make them more readable. In this verse the meaning is quite obvious: it was evening in the history of Arabia. It was later than they thought. Arabia was the land of the Ishmaelites, the Bedouin tribes of the desert -- the modern Arabs. It is interesting that God speaks of them. Abraham's sons, Ishmael and Isaac, never did get along. Their descendants don't get along today either. The Arabs and the Jews are still at each other's throats. If Abraham could see what is going on now, I wonder if he would think the sin he committed was a small sin. My friend, sin never ceases working itself out in the human story.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Dake's Annotated Reference Bible

<sup>37</sup> Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

<sup>38</sup> Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

**Vs 13-17:** The Assyrian threat is the background of this oracle (see comments on 13:1) too. The Dedanites (21:13) were a tribe from southern Arabia. Tema (v. 14; cf. Job 6:19; Jer. 25:23) was a well-known oasis in northwestern Arabia, and Kedar (Isa. 21:16-17; cf. 42:11) was in northern Arabia. This oracle discusses the difficult times the people of Arabia would soon experience at the hands of the Assyrians. Within one year Kedar's pomp would end (Kedar was known for its tents, Ps. 120:5; Song 1:5; also cf. Jer. 49:28-29, which were a beautiful black). The warriors of Kedar would experience a great defeat (Isa. 21:16-17). The Arabians would be fugitives, running for their lives from the sword. The oracle would be fulfilled, for the Lord, the God of Israel, had spoken (v. 17). In 715 Sargon II wrote that he had defeated a number of Arabian tribes and had them deported to Samaria.<sup>39</sup>

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

[Tema] Tema, descendants of Abraham through Hagar and Ishmael (Gen. 25:15; 1Chr. 1:30; Job 6:19; Jer. 25:23).<sup>40</sup>

**<sup>15</sup>For they fled from the swords, from the drawn sword, and from the bent bow, and from the grievousness of war.**

**<sup>16</sup>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:**

“Years of a hireling”: carefully counted.

[**Within a year**] Another time-element prophecy; it could be tested as true or false in one year.

There was a coming judgment upon this land and its people. This chapter of poetic beauty and heart sorrow should not end on this note. It may be "evening" here, but God's day is reckoned "the evening and the morning" -- "...the evening and the morning were the first day" (Gen. 1:5). The morning is coming; the night of weeping will soon be over, and the new day will dawn. Man's evening of failure, sin, and darkness will end, and God's morning will be ushered in by the coming of the Sun of Righteousness.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> The Bible Knowledge Commentary

<sup>40</sup> Dake's Annotated Reference Bible

<sup>41</sup> Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

**<sup>17</sup>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]** Another descendant of Abraham through Hagar and Ishmael (Isa. 21:16-17; 42:11; 60:7; Gen. 25:13; 1Chr. 1:29; Ps. 120:5; Song 1:5; Jer. 2:10; 49:28; Ezek. 27:21).<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Dake's Annotated Reference Bible