

Isaiah Chapter 21

Verses 1-10: The desert of the sea is unclear but seems to refer to Media and Persia, which lay beyond the desert and the Persian Gulf. Therefore, Elam and Media are pictured as going up against Babylon. Thus, in the vision, Isaiah sees the Medo-Persian invasion of Babylon. The reference to the night of my pleasure may well refer to Belshazzar's banquet (in Daniel 5), for on that night self-sufficient Babylon fell (539 B.C.).

Babylon is fallen, is fallen is repeated twice for emphasis. The same exclamation is used (in Revelation 14:8), to refer to the fall of symbolic "Babylon."

Isaiah 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."

The prophet referred to an area of southern Babylon near the Persian Gulf known for its fertility. "As windstorms in the south pass through" The simile drew from the suddenness with which storm winds come from the Negev and sweep through the land of Israel. So sudden is to be Babylon's overthrow.

This is thought to be the fall of Babylon, possibly by the Medes and Persians. The deserts of the sea would be a desert that joins on one side to the sea. The dust raised from a mighty army does look like whirlwinds.

The word "terrible" is speaking of their strength in war. Persia is modern day Iran.

Isaiah 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."

"Elam ... Media". The Elamites and Medes were part of the Persian army that defeated Babylon (in 539 B.C.).

This vision of Isaiah was sad to him. He did not want to give it, because it was so terrible. He must give the message, because that is the very thing a prophet does. They warn of things to come. This is probably, the army of Cyrus that is spoken of as being treacherous.

Whoever it is, speaks of someone whose nature it is to deal in treachery. They "spoil the land" (take away the goods of others for themselves), just because of their greed. Babylon had caused great pain to the rest of the countries, but now they are under attack and will not be able to ruin others anymore.

In verses 3-4 The severity of the violence about which Isaiah must prophesy caused him extreme agitation.

Isaiah 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]."

Comparing this to a woman at childbirth, means this attack will come suddenly and without warning. The pain will continue until the entire city is taken. The battle is so fierce and ruthless that Isaiah can scarcely bare to even bring the message.

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

The prophet experiences the feeling of the prophecy he is to bring. Sometimes the message is in a vision, sometimes it is in a dream, but the prophet feels the pain with those he prophesies against.

Isaiah 21:5 "Prepare the table, watch in the watchtower, eat, drink: arise, ye princes, [and] anoint the shield."

This part of the oracle recalled Belshazzar's feast (in Daniel 5), when amid the celebration came a call to fight the attacking enemy invading the city.

Prepare for war, is what this is saying. Watch and be ready, war is coming. The table being set shows that even though war is coming and they have set men to watch, they are still having their parties.

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

Isaiah stationed a watchman on the city walls.

This prophecy is not for immediate happening, because of the watchman being set. Watchmen watch for things that indicate a war. Then, they cry out of the impending danger.

Isaiah 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:"

"Couple", in this verse, probably does not mean there will be only two, but means they will be two horses side by side attached by harness. Horses, asses, and camels were all used to carry the men in the battle.

Horsemen, donkeys, camels: Isaiah heard the watchman warn of an approaching military force.

Isaiah 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 Lookout called "My Lord" according to the Dead Sea Scrolls. "The watchman cried, my Lord". The watchman whom Isaiah had stationed (verse 6), continued his report.

Isaiah 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."

The watchman proclaimed the tragic end of mighty Babylon, which initially fell to the Assyrians (in 689 B.C.), and again to the Persians (in 539 B.C.). Yet Isaiah's prediction looked forward to the ultimate fall of the great enemy of God, as verified by John's citation of this verse (in Rev. 14:8, 18:2; Jer. 50:2 and 51:8, 49).

The Babylonian idols were not destroyed in the early war, so this is looking beyond the time to the great fall of Babylon in the book of Revelation. Many of these prophecies have two fulfillments. That is the case here.

Revelation 14:8 "And there followed another angel, saying, Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication."

Read (Revelation 16:19 and Revelation 18:2). The only time all of her images are broken, is at the end of the age.

Isaiah 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."

The violent threshing of grain portrayed Babylon's oppression of Israel, and the resultant grain was Israel's deliverance by God. The concise saying offered God's people hope.

God is the One who separates the wheat from the chaff. Isaiah is expressing the fact that he has warned them exactly as the LORD has given him instruction.

Verses 11-12. Dumah refers to Edom, which was south of Moab. Seir is another name for the same area where the descendants of Esau settled. Here Edom is pictured as hiding in Seir wondering whether it is safe to come out. Isaiah is called a watchman and warns them of impending judgment unless they return (shub, repent).

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

Dumah here, is probably speaking of Edom. Burden means prophecy. This prophecy is to Edom. Edom of course, was the land of Esau. Seir was the possession of Esau's descendants, and the Israelites were forbidden to go there.

Seir is another name for Edom, located South of the Dead Sea and the home of Esau's descendants. This is the source of an inquiry directed to Isaiah.

"What of the night", was asking when the attack would come and how long would it last.

Isaiah 21:12 "The watchman said, The morning cometh, and also the night: if ye will inquire, inquire ye: return, come."

Edom is one country God said he would never forgive. They would not allow God's people passage to the Promised Land. Their ancestor Esau was a flesh man and not a spirit man.

The prophet promises a short-lived deliverance from Assyrian oppression, but quickly added the threat of Babylonian domination to follow soon.

I believe the Scripture above is speaking of times of prosperity the land had, followed immediately by war. They could inquire of God, repent and hope God would hear their prayer. We do not see where they do.

Verses 13-17: The burden upon Arabia refers to the various Arabian tribes of the desert beyond Edom. Dedanim refers to Dedan, a region in Arabia. Tema was an oasis where Nabonidus spent much of his time while his son Belshazzar ruled over Babylon. Kedar is a tribe of Ishmaelite descent. The prophet predicts that these desert tribes will be no match for the coming Assyrian invasion.

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

The Dedanites are really of Edom. They hide and run from place to place. They were traveling tradesmen. This expressly speaks of them hiding in the forests of Arabia. Arabia is a desert, so this forest probably means hiding places.

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

The prophet indicated that those fleeing the Assyrian army will need supplies. Tema was on the Red Sea route about 200 miles southeast of Dumah, in the northwestern part of the Arabian Desert.

Since these Dedanites are tradesmen, they probably trade these people out of water and bread for their families and animals.

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

It appears from this that those traders did not fight with the others, but went right on with their merchandising. They took no part in the war of their country. They fled to the desert where they could hide out.

The interior area of Arabia was a place of refuge for fugitives fleeing from the sophisticated armament of the Assyrians.

Isaiah 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:"

Now, we see that this prophecy even has a time for it to happen. It is what we would call an immediate prophecy. These Kedarenes were also traders in the desert. They were a little more prominently known than some of the others.

It matters not that they were more prominent, they will fall with all the rest within a year.

Kedar covers the area in the northwestern part of the Arabian desert. "Glory of Kedar shall fail": This prophecy anticipated the conquest of the region by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon (Jer. 49:28).

Isaiah 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]."

This prophecy was coming through Isaiah, but was spoken by the LORD God of Israel. The word "diminished" makes me believe they were not all killed. A large number of them did die, but not all. Residue means remnant.

Isaiah Chapter 21 Questions

1. Who overthrew them?
2. What kind of vision did Isaiah call this in verse 2?
3. Why did Isaiah give the prophecy?
4. What is meant by "spoil of the land"?
5. How did Isaiah feel in all of this prophecy?
6. What did he compare the pain to?
7. What is verse 5 saying prepare for?
8. Verse 6 says, set a _____.

9. What was pulling the chariots in verse 7?
10. What does "couple", in verse 7, mean?
11. What did the watchman cry out?
12. When will the Babylonian idols be destroyed?
13. Who separates the wheat from the chaff?
14. Who is Dumah in verse 11?
15. Edom was the land of _____.
16. What is the forest of Arabia?
17. Who were the Dedanites?
18. What does Tema do in the desert?
19. How quickly will the prophecy occur?
20. Why will all this happen?