

Egypt and Ethiopia on account of their armies and horses and chariots. Judah took no account of the fact that it is righteousness, truth and justice that makes a nation strong. These are the inner strengths of societal structure that protect nations against their worst enemies—their selves.

QUIZ

1. Who is "Tartan"?
2. What was Isaiah told to remove? What clothing did he have on?
3. What was Isaiah's condition to symbolize?
4. Who was Sargon? How has his existence been verified?
5. Whom had the people of Judah allied themselves with?
6. What was to happen to Egypt and Ethiopia?
7. What lesson should nations and peoples learn from this?

D. IRREVERENT ENEMIES - CHAPTERS 21-23

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

1. BABYLON, EDOM AND ARABIA

a. BABYLON

TEXT: 21:1-10

- 1 The burden of the wilderness of the sea. As whirlwinds in the South sweep through, it cometh from the wilderness, from a terrible land.
- 2 A grievous vision is declared unto me; the treacherous man dealeth treacherously, and the destroyer destroyeth. Go up, O Elam; besiege, O Media; all the sighing thereof have I made to cease.
- 3 Therefore are my loins filled with anguish; pangs have taken hold upon me, as the pangs of a woman in travail: I am pained so that I cannot hear; I am dismayed so that I can-

not see.

- 4 My heart fluttereth, horror hath affrighted me; the twilight that I desired hath been turned into trembling unto me.
- 5 They prepare the table, they set the watch, they eat, they drink: rise up, ye princes, anoint the shield.
- 6 For thus hath the Lord said unto me, Go, set a watchman; Let him declare what he seeth:
- 7 and when he seeth a troop, horsemen in pairs, a troop of asses, a troop of camels, he shall harken diligently with much heed.
- 8 And he cried as a lion: O Lord, I stand continually upon the watch-tower in the day-time and am set in my ward whole nights;
- 9 and, behold, here cometh a troop of men, horsemen in pairs. And he answered and said, Fallen, fallen is Babylon; and all the graven images of her gods are broken unto the ground.
- 10 O thou my threshing, and the grain of my floor! that which I have heard from Jehovah of hosts, the God of Israel, have I declared unto you.

QUERIES

- a. Who is the "wilderness of the sea"?
- b. Who is preparing the table and eating and drinking?
- c. Who is the "watchman"?

PARAPHRASE

This is the message of Jehovah concerning Babylon, that city sitting in a wilderness of waters. A storm of devastation is roaring down upon her from the territory of terror, like the cyclone sweeps out of the southern deserts of the Negev. I see a vision that makes me grieve. Babylon has deceived and exploited many peoples. So I command the Elamites and Medes to besiege her and bring her oppressions to an end. This will give peace and

healing to those she has oppressed. When I see what God has planned for Babylon I am overcome with horror and feeling for them. My stomach cramps and churns with sharp pain like that of a woman giving birth to a child. The awesomeness of it consumes all my senses so that I do not hear or see anything else around me. My mind reels; my heart palpitates; I am overwhelmed with the terror of it. The night—once affording me relaxation and rest and pleasure—has now become long hours of restless trembling. Look! They are engrossed in banqueting, watching their enemy approach. They are oblivious to their danger because they are reveling with eating and drinking. Suddenly, their enemy upon them before they know it, they will be crying, Quick, quick, grab your shields and anoint them for battle! We are being attacked! And the Lord told me, Put a watchman there to observe. Let this watchman tell what he sees. When this watchman sees soldiers, cavalymen in pairs, troops of donkeys, troops of camels, tell him to pay diligent attention to everything he sees and hears. So I put the watchman to watch and eventually he cried, O Sovereign Lord, I have been standing continually in my place of watching day after day and night after night, and suddenly troops of soldiers come, including troops of cavalymen. And the watchman reported what he had beheld, Fallen, fallen is Babylon and all her false gods lie broken on the ground. O my oppressed people, that which I, Isaiah, have heard from Jehovah, the God of Israel, I declare to you to comfort you and strengthen your faith.

COMMENTS

v. 1-5 VISION: That this is Babylon is evident from verse 9. Babylon was situated in the Mesopotamian lowlands, in the Euphrates River valley. In fact, the Euphrates River cut through the center of the great city. Hundreds of canals branched off the River into all the areas of the city making it literally a "wilderness of seas." It is not unusual for a river to be called a "sea" (Cf. Isa. 19:5). A cyclonic force of humanity from a "terrible land"

is to swoop down upon Babylon at some future time. If Isaiah made this prediction of Babylon's fall near 706-705 B.C. it would anticipate the actual historical event by approximately 170 years! Babylon did not win domination of the world until about 612 B.C. (at the battle of Carcemish). The Jewish captivity of Babylon began about 606 B.C. The conquest of Babylon by the Medes and Persians took place about 538 B.C. (See our comments on Daniel, chapter 5, for details on the conquest of Babylon by Medo-Persia). Why Isaiah deals with an empire yet to be born so many years in advance of its birth we shall speak of later. In verse 2 the prophet characterizes his feelings and the personality of the Babylonian empire. The vision grieves the prophet. The Babylonians will be deceitful and devious and a people who will despoil and exploit the whole world. It is nothing short of amazing that Isaiah should know 170 years in advance the very people, by name, who would conquer this unborn Babylonian empire! It can only be explained by supernatural revelation. The Elamites and the Medes (later to become the Medo-Persian amalgamation) were the very ones history records as Babylon's conquerors. This territory now belongs to Iran.

Isaiah was overwhelmed with grief at this vision. He writhed in anguish like a woman giving birth to a child. He could concentrate on nothing else. Its horror consumed him. Its awesomeness made his mind reel and his heart palpitate. He could not sleep at night. Why was he so gripped with its horribleness? Edward J. Young writes, "From this it appears that the prophet experienced deep emotion not merely over his own people, but even over the enemy. He was a man of tender compassion, and the news that stark events were to overcome the world brings upon him painful anguish. Perhaps if we knew today of the future catastrophic and cataclysmic upheavels in national and international structures we would be overwhelmed with grief and anguish. Any man of God grieves over the tribulation and oppression of others any time it occurs. Most Americans who can remember the atomic holocaust over Hiroshima, Japan, and its consequences, even though Japan was at the time America's enemy, remembers his horror and compassion for those Japanese

who suffered in it. Perhaps the stupidity and gross sensuality of the Babylonians visualized by Isaiah even as their enemies marched toward their city, also caused the prophet to be upset. Again, amazingly, Isaiah predicts the exact situation among the Babylonians upon the night of their downfall (Cf. our comments in Daniel, chapter 5). Belshazzar was eating and drinking with his noblemen when the handwriting appeared on the wall and Cyrus and the Medes appeared inside the city. The Medes were upon them so suddenly the Babylonians hardly had time to prepare ("anoint with oil from their pagan altars") their shields for war. This "anointing" was probably some superstition seeking the aid of their gods in battle.

V. 6-10. VERIFICATION: Who is this watchman? It is our opinion that God was instructing Isaiah to appeal to those who believed his prophecy to pass along this prophecy to future generations who would "watch" diligently as historic events fulfilled and verified Isaiah's predictions. These future generations of a "faithful remnant" would then read and remind all who would hear that Isaiah's prophecies were sure and certain. God would chasten His people, but He would also deliver them. Joel bids those who witnessed the locust plague to pass on the information from one generation to another in order to interpret God's actions of chastening in the world. Jeremiah predicted the death of Hananiah. Hananiah's death verified Jeremiah's authenticity as a prophet (Cf. Jer. 28:5-17). The Elamites used asses and the Medes used camels as animals of warfare. When the Judeans of the future should see this great mass of mounted warriors approaching Babylon they should know their deliverance from Babylon's captivity was near. All their songs and sighings of oppression in captivity would cease. The Persians in two short years would begin (536) the restoration of the Jews to their land. The word "lion" is not in the best, most ancient, Hebrew texts. It is not in the Isaiah manuscript of the Dead Sea Scrolls. The cry of those with faith to take Isaiah at his word and "watch" is: Fallen, fallen, is Babylon! Babylon's gods are impotent and they are ground into the dust of destruction.

Fallen Babylon proclaimed the defeat of the great enemy of

God's people and their deliverance. In a certain sense, this is the basic theme of the entire book of Isaiah. It is the prelude to the triumphant messages of conquest and joy found in chapters 40—66. It is the same message John the apostle sees in a vision concerning the Roman empire in Revelation 18, which is symbolic of God's final defeat of His enemies and the deliverance of His people. Babylon was symbolic of all the forces opposed to God and His redemptive work in the earth. Especially did she symbolize the forces of sensuality and worldliness as they oppose God and His kingdom in luring humanity to commit "adultery" with the gods of carnality. That is why Babylon is called a "mistress" and a "whore." The overthrow of Babylon in the book of Revelation is a prelude to the joyous conquest of Revelation 21-22.

Isaiah's heart goes out to God's people, so long threshed by their oppressors. They have been ground into the earth as grain on a threshing floor, but the precious grain is God's. He will separate the wheat from the chaff by the Babylon captivity. And when the Medes have delivered Judah from Babylon, the wheat-seed will produce a harvest in the Messiah. What the aged prophet had heard from Jehovah, he tenderly but forthrightly declared to all who would listen and believe.

QUIZ

1. Why was Isaiah grieved at this vision?
2. How many years before the actual downfall of Babylon is Isaiah probably predicting it?
3. How would Isaiah know it?
4. In what detail does Isaiah predict it?
5. Why would Isaiah be told to set a watchman to tell of these events when they began to be fulfilled?
6. What does Babylon symbolize in the redemptive working of God?
7. Who is his "threshing"?

b. EDOM AND ARABIA

TEXT: 21:11-17

- 11 The burden of Dumah. One calleth unto me out of Seir, Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night?
- 12 The watchman said, The morning cometh, and also the night: if ye will inquire, inquire ye: turn ye, come.
- 13 The burden upon Arabia. In the forest in Arabia shall ye lodge, O ye caravans of Dedanites.
- 14 Unto him that was thirsty they brought water; the inhabitants of the land of Tema did meet the fugitives with their bread.
- 15 For they fled away from the swords, from the drawn sword, and from the bent bow, and from the grievousness of war.
- 16 For thus hath the Lord said unto me, Within a year, according to the years of a hireling, all the glory of Kedar shall fail;
- 17 and the residue of the number of the archers, the mighty men of the children of Kedar, shall be few; for Jehovah, the God of Israel, hath spoken it.

QUERIES

- a. Why is someone asking the "Watchman" of the night?
- b. What is the "caravan of the Dedanites"?
- c. What are "the years of a hireling"?

PARAPHRASE

The message of God for the land of deathly silence, Edom: Someone from among you keeps calling, calling to me, Prophet-watchman, What part of the night is it? Prophet-watchman, What part of the night is it? Will the morning of relief never come? The Prophet-watchman replies, Yes, there will be a morning of relief to those who take refuge in the Lord, but the night of death and destruction also comes to those who do not

see Him. If you wish to know the meaning of God's message to you, His command to you is turn from your rebellion and come to Him.

The message of God for the land of Arabia. Your land will be occupied by your enemies and be so dangerous that caravans from Dedan will have to hide for their lives. Travelers will have to be secretly given food and water by the people of Tema. The people of the land of Arabia will be fugitives in their own land from the swords and bows of war. An exact time has been fixed for the destruction of Arabia—like employers fix a definite time of hiring laborers. One year and the fame of Kedar shall disappear, and her once mighty fighting men will be reduced to only a handful of nomadic tribesmen. This will surely come to pass because Jehovah, the God of Israel, has said it.

COMMENTS

v. 11-12 DEATH: *Dumah* is probably the Hebrew word *A-dom* (Edom—"red") which the prophet has used as a pun by removing the *a* sound from the beginning of the word and placing it at the end—*dum-A*. *Dumah* means "stillness" like the silence of death. Edom is the subject of some of the severest judgments of the Old Testament, (Cf. Isa. 34:5ff; Jer. 49:7ff; Amos 1:11-12; Obadiah 1-21, for examples). Edom is the only neighbor of the Israelites who was not given any promise of mercy from God. She was a nation descended from Esau, brother of Jacob, and thus the Edomites were brothers of the Jews. Esau was a "profane" person who irreverently sold his birthright for pottage. But Edom was haughty, insolent, irreverent, insensitive and implacable. She not only applauded every tribulation that came upon the Jews, she exploited their misfortunes to her own gain. (see our comments on Obadiah in *Minor Prophets*, College Press). God pronounced Edom's obliteration. They disappeared as a nation in about 70 A.D. So "silence of death" fell upon the region of Mt. Seir, Edom's ancient stronghold.

"Watchman, what part of the night is it?" would be a more

literal translation of that phrase. The idea is like that of an ill person suffering through a long night of affliction, repeatedly asking, "How long until morning?" The question is, "Will the night of judgment you pronounce upon us ever break with the dawning of a morning of relief?" The watchman (Isaiah) answers, "Yes, morning will come—relief comes, but so does the night." In other words, relief comes to those who "turn" and seek the Lord, but night continues to come to those who do not. That this is the answer is apparent from the phrase, "if ye will inquire . . ." That is, "If you are really inquiring, Edom, then make your inquiry in the form of a penitent turning unto the Lord, and the morning will come to you. If you do not, then the night comes."

v. 13-17 **DESTRUCTION:** The Arabians were descendants of Ishmael, half brother of Isaac. Esau married Ishmael's daughter so the Edomites and Arabians were related. Kedar was one of the 12 sons of Ishmael. Arabia was therefore closely related to the Jews. Ishmael began mocking the Jews when he was 16 (Gen. 21:9). Their hatred for the Jews was, like Edom's, born of envy, and nurtured over many centuries. Jeremiah tells us something of their desert, nomadic existence (Jer. 49:28-33). Their territory was (Kedar) in the northern part of the Arabian desert. The prophet Isaiah describes their coming judgment. Their land will be so thoroughly overrun and occupied by enemy troops that caravans will be unable to travel in safety. They will have to hide in the forests. They will be fugitives in their own country. They will be fed and given water secretly. They will be outlaws in their own land. They will be outnumbered and "out-gunned." Those mighty archers and horsemen of Arabia, those fierce fighting nomads of the steppes will have to flee from the superior forces of an enemy occupying their lands. Their number will be reduced to "few." It is not difficult to see the fulfillment of this. There has long been a darkness over this land with the false religion of Islam. They have been a weak, nomadic, disunited people warring against one another for centuries. This has been due to their irreverence for the deity and exclusiveness of God's True Prophet, Jesus Christ. "Morning" can never come to these

two brothers of Israel until they "turn" to God's Messiah. The Edomites had the audacity to put forth Herod, the Idumean as "king of the Jews." The Herod family, in its insolence toward Jehovah, contributed to the crucifixion of Christ. The Arabians had the audacity to declare that Mohammed was a Prophet equal to Jesus. Whoever does not "kiss the son" will die (Psa. 2:11). The insolence and irreverence of these two peoples is the cause of their judgment. Haughtiness toward God's covenant people is haughtiness toward God Himself. God's faithful servants are "the apple of His eye." Love God, love His children. Those today who haughtily despise the church of Christ will reap God's judgment.

QUIZ

1. What does "Dumah" mean?
2. What is the watchman's answer about the night?
3. What relationship did Edom and Arabia have to the Jews?
4. What is the main cause of their judgment?
5. How have these prophecies been fulfilled?

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

2. JUDAH

a. IRREVERENT ATTITUDES

TEXT: 22:1-14

- 1 The burden of the valley of vision. What aileth thee now, that thou art wholly gone up to the housetops?
- 2 O thou that art full of shoutings, a tumultuous city, a joyous town; thy slain are not slain with the sword, neither are they dead in battle.
- 3 All thy rulers fled away together, they were bound by the