

**Is. 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.**

This prophecy of Isaiah is addressed to the “desert of the sea.” The commentaries all have different ideas as to why this phrase is used, but I agree with their deduction that it is a reference to Babylon as identified in verse 9. It is a message of destruction to come with the force of a whirlwind (hurricane) in the south (the Persian Gulf area). This destructive force, however, will be coming from the desert, from a terrible land identified in the next verse.

**Is. 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.**

“grievous” – severe, cruel, heavy

The Lord is calling Elam (Persia/Iran) and Media (possibly the Kurds of today located in Turkey and northern Iraq); the Lord is the one who has decreed this destruction. It seems to be saying that the nations will no longer have to fear Babylon, who has dealt treacherously with and spoiled other nations.

**Is. 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.**

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

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

Isaiah has empathy for the suffering to come upon the people, just as he had for the people of Moab in chapter 15. He actually suffered pain that he compared to the pain of a woman giving birth. It caused his heart to race in fear. This must have been a vivid vision. The IVP New Bible Commentary noted that Isaiah’s feelings “are the very feelings of one to whom (as to the exiles) Babylon seemed both prison and home. If Isaiah was indeed to ‘speak tenderly’ (‘to the heart’; 40:1) of a later generation, as if he were himself one of them, this deep involvement is clearly a prerequisite....”

Some commentators connect this “night of pleasure” with a picture of the feast of Belshazzar at the time that Cyrus conquered Babylon basically without a struggle (Daniel 5). I’m just not sure. Maybe it is a picture of the same type of attitude that will prevail at the time of Babylon’s final destruction in the tribulation.

*Revelation 18:7 How much she hath glorified herself, and lived deliciously, so much torment and sorrow give her: for she saith in her heart, I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow.*

“I was dismayed at the seeing of it.” – This phrase stood out to me this time through. It makes me think that the primary application has to reference the

future fall of Babylon during the tribulation. When the Medes and Persians conquered Babylon in Daniel's day, it was not in a way as to provoke such sorrow in Isaiah. A quote from the Cyrus Cylinder states: "Amid jubilation and rejoicing, I entered Babylon in peace to establish a just government and strive for peace. My troops wandered peacefully throughout Babylon. In all of Sumer and Akkad, I gave no cause for fear and no one was terrorized."

Maybe it will again be Iran (Persia) and the Kurds (the Medes) who will be the instruments of Babylon's final destruction.

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

The Lord tells Isaiah to go and put a watchman on duty to call out when he sees anyone approaching. Isaiah is in Judah. This would seem to indicate having someone waiting to hear news about the fulfillment of this prophecy.

**Is. 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:**

**Is. 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:**

**Is. 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.**

It would seem that we have a description of a watchman who is on 24-hour watch duty. He is diligent to call out whenever he sees anyone approaching. Finally, he is able to announce that men have come with the news that Babylon is fallen and her idols have been broken—proven useless at thwarting the purposes of Almighty God.

Note the similarity in the wording used in verse 9 and the following verses in Revelation 14 and 18.

*Revelation 14:8 Then another angel followed him through the skies, shouting, "Babylon is fallen—that great city is fallen—because she seduced the nations of the world and made them drink the wine of her passionate immorality."*

*Revelation 18:2 He gave a mighty shout, "Babylon is fallen—that great city is fallen! She has become the hideout of demons and evil spirits, a nest for filthy buzzards, and a den for dreadful beasts."*

**Is. 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.**

"threshing" = down-trodden people

Isaiah is again reminding his people that he is declaring the word of the God of Israel.

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

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

Dumah is identified as the sixth son of Ishmael who settled in the Arabian Desert in the area of Edom. Seir is a mountainous area occupied by the Edomites (descendants of Esau). It would fit in with Isaiah's poetic style of writing to be referencing the same place using different labels.

The wording of this verse seems to imply that Isaiah is the watchman. In scripture, the night/darkness is associated with evil and the morning/light with good.

*Job 30:26 When I looked for good, then evil came unto me: and when I waited for light, there came darkness.*

*Matthew 6:23 But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness.*

*John 3:19 And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.*

The man from Edom is asking the watchman how long this night is going to last. The watchman tells him that the morning is coming, but will again be followed by night; in other words, better times are coming but so is more trouble. The watchman gives him the freedom to question him as he desires, but he also advises him to return. The meaning of *return* is to turn back which is a picture of repentance.

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

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

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

This next prophecy concerns Arabia. Dedan is identified as a son of Abraham through Keturah and Tema as a son of Ishmael, the son of Abraham. The Dedanim are identified as merchants.

*Ezekiel 27:15 The men of Dedan were thy merchants...*

The people of Tema are shown bringing water and bread to the Dedanim who were fleeing from attack.

**Is. 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:**

**Is. 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 is identified as another son of Ishmael whose descendants were another group of Bedouin (nomadic Arabs) in Arabia. According to verse 17 they were known for their archery as well as their strength and valor; they were warriors. This message seems to target the wealthy and mighty men of renown of the Arabian Desert. Within a year of the time that Isaiah utters this prophecy, it will come to pass. This group of Arabs will be defeated. Chuck Smith notes that this prophecy was fulfilled when Sargon conquered these people in 716 BC.

The message again ends with the emphasis, that all will happen as determined by the Lord God of Israel. Again, it will confirm Him as God, the One and Only, when it comes to pass as He has foretold.