

# INITIATION INTO ISAIAH

by

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## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

### THEME:

Three Burdens: Babylon (Desert of the Sea); Edom (Dumah): and Arabia.

### REMARKS:

The three burdens in this chapter are set forth by expressive symbols. These represent certain nations and apparently were as clear to the people of Isaiah's day as the stars and stripes are to us. These insignia in this chapter are not quite so clear to us and as a result there has been some disagreement among Bible expositors.

Each one will be considered separately under COMMENTS, but we may identify them here as Babylon, Edom, and Arabia. All were enemies or were potential enemies of Israel. Each brought a particular misery upon God's people. Each has been judged in time.

### OUTLINE:

1. **Burden of BABYLON** ("Desert of the sea"). Verses 1-1
2. **Burden of EDOM** ("Dumah"). Verses 11-1
3. **Burden of ARABIA** ("Evening"). Verses 13-17

### COMMENT:

Verse 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.**

"**Desert of the Sea**" is a strange expression. It is like saying "the dryness of the water." However, that may not be too peculiar since today we have "dry ice" and "cold heat."

Jennings translates this portion: "*As sweep the whirlwinds through the south so comes it from the desert, from the land that strikes with terror.*"

This does not identify the nation, but verse 9 does identify it. Before Babylon became a world power her doom was again predicted. The first burden in chapters 13-14 was against Babylon.

Babylon became so awe inspiring, 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 (Babel) and it represents the last stronghold of rebellion against God (Revelation 17 and 18).

“**Desert of the sea**” is a paradoxical phrase. Babylon was geographically located on a great desert plain. It was irrigated by canals from the Euphrates River. Jeremiah gives this description of Babylon, “**O thou that dwellest upon many waters**” (Jeremiah 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.

Revelation 17:3—“**To the wilderness**”—This is a desert where he beheld mystery Babylon.

Revelation 17:1—“**Sitteth upon many waters.**”—It was in the desert that John saw the many waters. The two here are symbolic but carry through the same pattern. (See also Jeremiah 5:1 for another contrast).

Babylon with its glitter and glamour and as the fountainhead of idolatry and false religion was a mirage upon the desert—no life giving water for the souls of men.

Verse 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.**

God commands the twofold nation of Media-Persia to destroy and spoil the city. “**Go up, O Elam (Persia) besiege, O Media.**”

Verse 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.**

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

Here again the prophet 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 loathe to judge even so frightful a foe. God’s love is as evident here as in the tears of Jeremiah.

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

This reads as if it were an eyewitness account of the destruction of Babylon as recorded by Daniel (Daniel 5).

This was recorded about 200 years before it transpired. In the midst of the banquet of Belshazzar, the Median captured the city with a surprise and shock. (See also Jeremiah 51:8-9).

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

Verse 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:**

Verse 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:**

Verse 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.**

Verse 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 watchman brought word to the King of Babylon that it had fallen (See Jeremiah 51:31-33).

**“Babylon is fallen, is fallen; and all the graven images of her gods he hath broken unto the ground.”**

This is a sigh of sorrow as well as relief. Babylon was the source of all idolatry. (Consult Hislop’s *The Two Babylons*).

Verse 11—**The burden of Dumah, he calleth to me out of Seir, Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night?**

“**Dumah**” is a symbolic word. Isaiah played upon words to bring out a deeper meaning. Dumah is Edom with the “E” removed. Dumah means “*silence*.” Our word “*dumb*” is closer to the intent of Isaiah. Edom is still the land of death like silence.

“**Seir**” means “*rough or hairy*.” Esau was the first Seir man (Genesis 25:25). Esau dwelt in Mount Seir (Genesis 36:8). It also was a land swept with storms. Seir also means storms.

What a play upon words! “Silence and Storm.” Here is another paradox. Edom obviously is 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?**”

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

Both morning and night are coming. What will be glory for some will be doom for others. What will be light for Israel will be night for Edom.

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

“**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. 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 Arab.

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

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

Verse 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:**

Verse 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.**

There was a coming judgment upon this land and 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.**”

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.**”

~ end of chapter 21 ~

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