

The Watchman's Report

Isaiah 20-21

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Isaiah 20:1-6 – The Sign Against Egypt and Ethiopia

In the year that Tartan came to Ashdod, when Sargon the king of Assyria sent him, and he fought against Ashdod and took it, ² at the same time the Lord spoke by Isaiah the son of Amoz, saying, “Go, and remove the sackcloth from your body, and take your sandals off your feet.” And he did so, walking naked and barefoot.

³ Then the Lord said, “Just as My servant Isaiah has walked naked and barefoot three years for a sign and a wonder against Egypt and Ethiopia, ⁴ so shall the king of Assyria lead away the Egyptians as prisoners and the Ethiopians as captives, young and old, naked and barefoot, with their buttocks uncovered, to the shame of Egypt. ⁵ Then they shall be afraid and ashamed of Ethiopia their expectation and Egypt their glory. ⁶ And the inhabitant of this territory will say in that day, ‘Surely such is our expectation, wherever we flee for help to be delivered from the king of Assyria; and how shall we escape?’ ”

v1 – What is the timeframe for Isaiah acting out this sign?

In the year that Tartan came to Ashdod: This describes the time when the army of Assyria conquered the Philistine city of Ashdod. Isaiah's sign was a response to this victory of Assyria.

- This invasion has a concrete marking point in secular history: 711 B.C.
- The Philistines were both neighbors and thorns to Israel, and the fall of Ashdod would certainly make Judah think, “We’re next. We need protection.”

v2 – What was the sign Isaiah was given to act out?

Remove the sackcloth from your body, and take your sandals off your feet: Before this, Isaiah wore an outer garment of sackcloth — clothes of mourning. Now, God tells him to remove his outer garment of sackcloth and to take his sandals off.

And he did so, walking naked and barefoot: Isaiah probably was not completely nude. Instead, he only wore the inner garment customary in that day — sort of like wearing only your underwear or a nightshirt. The message wasn't nudity,

it was complete poverty and humiliation. Isaiah dressed as the poorest and most destitute would dress.

v3 – How long did Isaiah walk around naked and barefoot?

Isaiah probably did not walk around stripped all day, every day for three years. Just like Ezekiel lay on his side for 390 days the whole time without getting up (Ezekiel 4:9). Perhaps part of each day was used for those designated purposes. (Office hours.)

v3-4 – What was the message of the sign of Isaiah walking around naked?

It was a message against Egypt and Ethiopia because the king of Assyria would lead them away as prisoners.

- As the Assyrians took the Egyptians captive, they would humiliate them by stripping them and leading them away as prisoners to their shame.

What other prophets acted out prophecies?

Other prophets were asked to go through equally difficult experiences as signs to Israel. Hosea endured a trying marriage, and Ezekiel's wife died as an illustration for the nation (Ezekiel 24:16-24).

v5 – Who would be afraid and ashamed of Ethiopia their expectation and Egypt their glory?

When God judges Ethiopia and Egypt, it will be evident how foolish it was for Judah to look to them for protection against Assyria.

What principle comes to mind about our expectation or glory being in something wrong?

Whenever our expectation or glory is in something wrong, the LORD will find a way to make those things disappoint us. Judah set their expectation on Ethiopia, and looked to Egypt for glory, but now they are left afraid and ashamed.

- There is no security for God's people apart from the rule of God. All expectation not centered in God, is doomed to disappointment.

v6 – What impact did the demise of Egypt and Ethiopia have on Judah?

How shall we escape? The LORD allowed Judah to be backed into a corner, caught between two mighty Empires (Egypt and Assyria), without being able to trust either one. There was no escape — except in the LORD.

Isaiah 21:1-10 – The Fall of Babylon Proclaimed

The burden against the Wilderness of the Sea.

As whirlwinds in the South pass through, so it comes from the desert, from a terrible land.

² *A distressing vision is declared to me; The treacherous dealer deals treacherously, and the plunderer plunders. Go up, O Elam! Besiege, O Media! All its sighing I have made to cease.*

³ *Therefore my loins are filled with pain; Pangs have taken hold of me, like the pangs of a woman in labor. I was distressed when I heard it; I was dismayed when I saw it.*

⁴ *My heart wavered, fearfulness frightened me; The night for which I longed He turned into fear for me.*

⁵ *Prepare the table, set a watchman in the tower, eat and drink. Arise, you princes, anoint the shield!*

⁶ *For thus has the Lord said to me: “Go, set a watchman, Let him declare what he sees.”*

⁷ *And he saw a chariot with a pair of horsemen, a chariot of donkeys, and a chariot of camels, and he listened earnestly with great care.*

⁸ *Then he cried, “A lion, my Lord! I stand continually on the watchtower in the daytime; I have sat at my post every night.*

⁹ *And look, here comes a chariot of men with a pair of horsemen!” Then he answered and said, “Babylon is fallen, is fallen! And all the carved images of her gods He has broken to the ground.”*

¹⁰ *Oh, my threshing and the grain of my floor! That which I have heard from the Lord of hosts, The God of Israel, I have declared to you.*

v1 – What is the Wilderness of the Sea?

The burden against the Wilderness of the Sea: Babylon is called the Wilderness of the Sea because the great plain of Babylon was divided with lakes and marshes, so it was referred to as a “sea.”

What was the whirlwind that would come against the Wilderness of the Sea?

That would have to be the Medes and Persia. Obviously, the terror of Babylon would have to come from a terrible land.

- The northern parts of Media and Persia, where most of their soldiers were from, was waste and mountainous, terrible to strangers that were to pass through it and producing soldiers that were very formidable.

v2 – What nation is represented by Elam and Media?

Elam and Media are the ancient names for the peoples of Persia, modern day Iran. The Persian Empire plundered the Babylonian Empire, and Isaiah here prophetically sees their armies marching on Babylon.

What sighing would cease with the demise of Babylon?

To the poor oppressed captives, it would be welcome news:

Psalm 12:5 – *“For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, Now I will arise,” says the Lord; “I will set him in the safety for which he yearns.”*

God will break the yoke from their neck, remove the rod from the wicked, and so make their sighing cease.

v3-4 – What would be the impact of God raising up Persia against Babylon?

Pangs have taken hold of me, like the pangs of a woman in labor: The wicked oppressors will collapse from fear and pain. Nothing is more hopeless than a wicked man in distress; both his life and hopes end together.

- Belshazzar, the night his city was taken, and himself slain, upon the sight of a hand writing mystic characters upon the wall:

Daniel 5:6 – *Then the king’s countenance changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his hips were loosened and his knees knocked against each other.*

- Daniel's deciphering the writing only increased his terror, and the arrival of the executioners at the door would be the completing of it.

What does it tell us that this prophecy and its fulfillment happened in the midst of a night of revelry?

When the Lord is not the source of your joy, He has a way of changing your circumstances to get you to focus on Him instead.

v5 – What should the king of Babylon have done rather than his night of debauched revelry?

He should have taken measures to see to the security of the city if he was so distracted by eating and drinking himself. And he should have taken measures for soldiers to respond to any threat the watchman identified.

v6 – What is this watchman that the Lord tells Isaiah to set?

As Babylon should have been watchful, Judah should be as the Lord called Ezekiel to be...

Ezekiel 33:7-9 – *So you, son of man: I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore you shall hear a word from My mouth and warn them for Me. When I say to the wicked, 'O wicked man, you shall surely die!' and you do not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand. Nevertheless if you warn the wicked to turn from his way, and he does not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul.*

What is a watchman?

It is a person who warns people about an imminent danger. In this case it was God's judgment in bringing down the Babylonian army to invade Jerusalem.

What kind of watchmen do we have today?

- Those who warn about the coming judgment of God, the Tribulation based on what God has revealed in His Word. So, essentially anyone who shares what God has revealed in prophecy is a watchman (or watchperson to be politically correct).
- Actually, all followers of Christ are called to be watchmen because unbelievers need to be warned about the consequence of not recognizing the Creator-God and His provision for salvation in their lives...

The great commission in Matthew 28:19-20 calls Us to make disciples by teaching them to observe all things Jesus commanded.

Mark 1:15 – *the Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the gospel.*

What is the gospel?

- It is the good news that Jesus paid the penalty for the sins that separate us from God when He died on the cross in our place... substitutionary atonement.
- The Good News is God's provision for the ultimate consequence for sin... separation from Him in the lake of fire.
- You can't have the good news without the bad news... hell exists, it is eternal, but no one has to go there.

Why is there so much neglect of watchman responsibilities today?

- It is not considered polite to point out that living without Jesus is being on the broad road to destruction.
- Too many have convinced themselves that fear of hell is not a legitimate motivation for embracing Jesus,

- There is way too much compromising with the world in order to fit in, be like everyone else, avoid rejection and persecution.
- We live in an age of scoffers that has been lulled into complacency thinking there is no urgency to get on with what God has called us to be about...

2 Peter 3:4 – *saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they have from the beginning of creation."*

Given that God will hold us responsible for not warning the wicked... what are the consequences for not sharing the gospel?

Ezekiel 33:8 – *his blood I will require at the watchman's hand.'*

We will share the guilt of the wicked. There will be regret and loss of reward when we receive our ultimate performance review at the Bema Seat Judgment...

Romans 14:10-12 – *For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ... each of us shall give an account of himself to God.*

Salvation is not at stake for the follower of Christ when we are judged, just our rewards (1 Corinthians 3:11-15).

v7 – What would the watchman of Judah see in the days of the fall of Babylon?

This watchman discovered a chariot with a couple of horsemen attending it, which may represent the joint commanders-in-chief. He then saw another chariot drawn by asses or mules, which were much in use among the Persians, and a chariot drawn by camels, which were likewise much in use among the Medes; so that these two chariots signify the two nations combined against Babylon bringing tidings to Babylon.

v8-9 – What was the report of the watchman?

It was warning of the chariot with the two horsemen along with the fall of Babylon. The cry of a lion was not the report of a lion but using the same voice that would be made when warning of a lion, very loud and urgent.

Why did the watchman have to say he stood continually in the watchtower?

The watchman also restated his responsibility to be diligent, to be alert at his post day and night... this indicates he knew his responsibility and thus had been faithful to it.

- This reminds me of the First General Order I learned as an Army ROTC cadet: "I will guard everything within the limits of my post and quit my post only when properly relieved."

v9 – What does the proclamation that *Babylon is fallen* bring to mind?

This report has a prophetic application. Revelation 18:2 describes the cry of an angel when God judges the world system, Mystery 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 same panic and terror the people of Babylon felt when they were conquered by the Medes and Persians will be seen again. When the LORD strikes the world system, the political, spiritual and commercial End-Times Babylon, the world will be terrified and mourn the same way (Revelation 18:9-19). But God’s people rejoice over the fall of Babylon (Revelation 18:20).

What idols would be broken to the ground when God strikes End-Times Mystery Babylon?

It would mark the end of all anti-God, anti-Christ culture... all the “isms...” atheism, agnosticism, naturalism, materialism, universalism, amillennialism...

v10 – To whom was Isaiah declaring the Word of the Lord of hosts?

This was a message to the people of God, who were then captives in Babylon; that this prophecy of the downfall of Babylon was intended for their encouragement.

What did the grain mentioned here represent?

The grain represents God’s faithful remnant that was collected on God’s harvest floor as a result of threshing.

- Life is a test to see who will be gathered into God’s eternal barn and who will be blown away as chaff. Speaking of the Messiah, John the Baptist said:
Matthew 3:12 – *His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.*

True believers are the grain of God’s floor. Hypocrites are like the chaff and straw which are of no value though taking up a lot of room being mixed with the grain. But the grain and chaff will soon be forever separated.

Isaiah 21:11-12 – Proclamation Against Edom

¹¹ *The burden against Dumah. He calls to me out of Seir, “Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night?”*

¹² *The watchman said, “The morning comes, and also the night. If you will inquire, inquire; Return! Come back!”*

v11 – What nation is represented by Dumah?

This was another ancient name for the kingdom of Edom, in the mountainous region of Seir. The Edomites descended from Esau, the brother of Jacob (Israel). They settled in the land to the south-east of Israel and were the sometimes enemies of Israel.

- Mount Seir is the ancient and biblical name for a mountainous region stretching between the Dead Sea and the Gulf of Aqaba in the northwestern region of Edom and southeast of the Kingdom of Judah.

Why would God include this proclamation against Edom here?

It is a warning to Israel not to depend upon them, or any of the nations around them for relief in a time of danger, but upon God only.

- The principle is this: all worldly security will fail, so trust in the Creator, not the creation (or, in other words, reject idolatry).

What is the question the Edomite asks the watchman?

What of the night? It is a serious question put to a proper person, the watchman, whose office it is to answer such enquiries. He repeats the question, as one earnestly seeking an answer.

- God’s watchmen do not sleep on their watch as do those who live only in the world. So, the Edomite was essentially asking, what did you see on your watch while I was sleeping?

What is the principle here?

As God’s people, we are on watch and should be watching so it is high time we should wake out of our sleep.

Romans 13:10-11 – *Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfillment of the law. And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now, our salvation is nearer than when we first believed.*

We need to get on with what God has called us to and as watchmen (or to be politically correct, watchpersons), warn people of the coming danger.

What does asking this question tell us about the Edomite?

It is something a seeker would ask, someone who was ready to receive the report of the watchman... what did you see while I was sleeping?

What is the danger of being asleep and not heeding the warning of the watchman?

1 Thessalonians 5:2-4 – *the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, “Peace and safety!” then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief.*

Jesus told us to be watching for Him and gave us signs of His return in His Olivet Discourse. Those who are not watching will be caught by surprise and robbed of their eternal life like a thief in the night. Those who are watching as God’s children will not be surprised nor robbed of eternal life.

v12 – How does the watchman respond to the question of the Edomite?

By way of prediction: "There comes first a morning representing light, peace, and opportunity; but afterwards comes a night representing trouble and calamity." The morning is now when you receive the report of the watchman, but night is coming. As Jesus said:

John 9:4 – *I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work.*

Why does the watchman invite the Edomite to inquire, return and come back?

It is our wisdom to improve during the day in preparation for the night that is coming. Be inquisitive, be repentant, be willing and obedient.

- It is our choice for what to do: “If you will enquire, enquire; if not, it is at your peril.”
- Those that return and come to God will find they have a great deal of work to do and but a little time to do it in, and therefore they have need to be busy.

Isaiah 21:13-17 – Proclamation Against Arabia

¹³ *The burden against Arabia. In the forest in Arabia you will lodge, O you traveling companies of Dedanites.*

¹⁴ *O inhabitants of the land of Tema, bring water to him who is thirsty; With their bread they met him who fled.*

¹⁵ *For they fled from the swords, from the drawn sword, From the bent bow, and from the distress of war.*

¹⁶ *For thus the Lord has said to me: “Within a year, according to the year of a hired man, all the glory of Kedar will fail; ¹⁷ and the remainder of the number of archers, the mighty men of the people of Kedar, will be diminished; for the Lord God of Israel has spoken it.”*

v13-15 – Who else would suffer from the turmoil between nations?

The burden against Arabia: Isaiah pictured the refugees from an attack on Arabia. They are traveling companies of Dedanites; they are thirsty, and they need bread, because they fled from the swords and from the bent bow, and from the distress of war.

v16 – When would Arabia be attacked?

Within a year...the glory of Kedar will fail: The attack upon Arabia would come soon, within a year.

- *the year of a hired man* is an exact year; hirelings diligently observe and wait for the end of the year when they are to receive their wages.

What applications come to mind from our discussion?

- Whenever our hope is in something wrong, the LORD will find a way to make that hope disappoint us.
- When the Lord is not the source of our joy, it will change to remind us to focus on Him instead.
- We are called to be watchmen warning about the consequence of not worshiping the Creator-God.
- Unfaithful watchmen will be judged for not warning the wicked.
- All idolatry will cease when the Lord returns to establish the Millennial Kingdom.
- God tells us of the judgment of His enemies to encourage us.
- As God’s people, we should be watching so it is high time we should wake out of our ideological sleep.