

The Destruction of Babylon Foretold

Isaiah 21:1-17

Halifax: 25 October 2009

Introduction:

As we move into chapter 21 today, we continue to look at God's dealing with Judah's neighbours.

- In the last three chapters, we have been looking at Africa (Egypt and Cush).
 - We saw how the Lord was going to work in Egypt and Cush over the centuries to humble them in order that He might bless them.
 - They would suffer under the oppression of Assyrian and Babylon and other world empires, but this would humble them to prepare them for Christ.
 - The days would come when they would see their need of Christ and turn to Him for salvation.
- But now as we come to chapter 21, we see something of a contrast to that with Babylon.
 - For Babylon, the future is much darker...
 - We are told that they will fall, not to be humbled that they may at last turn to the Lord, but only to be destroyed...
 - And we are told of two other peoples that will have the same demise...
 - The Edomites and the Kedarites—both oppressed by Assyria and Babylon, but for them it will only be a precursor into yet greater darkness.
 - It is a chapter that reminds us that not every one is elect.

And I also want you to consider something else about this chapter as I introduce it to you.

- I want you to understand that chapter 21 is, in many ways, a precursor to a great part of the entire book of Isaiah.
 - When you get to chapter 40, the prophet begins to focus on the yet future exile of Israel in Babylon...
 - and how God will deliver His people from there in order that having humbled them He may at last bring them to Jesus Christ.
 - This is such a huge theme that he speaks of it from chapter 40 all the way to the end of the prophecy in chapter 66—for 26 chapters!
 - The captivity itself does not save them,
 - but it prepares them for the salvation that comes from Christ.
- And here in chapter 21, Isaiah looks 150 years into the future (from his day) and sees the destruction that God will bring upon Babylon in 539 BC.

- Of course there are many who do not believe in predictive prophecy (because they do not believe in the God of prophecy).
 - These unbelievers argue that this chapter was not written by Isaiah.
 - They insist that it must have been inserted by a later hand as they also claim for chapter 40-66.
 - But they have no basis for this!
 - As it stands, the prophecy is written as a vision of Isaiah given to Him by the LORD who made Heaven and Earth.
 - And there is no reason but unbelief for us to not receive it as such, for this is the very Word of God.
- And because it is the Word of God,
 - You need to know that these things are written for us as well as for the people who lived in Isaiah's day.
 - In Romans 15:4, Paul, addressing the Christian church in his day who lived almost five centuries after the canon of the Old Testament was complete writes of those ancient scriptures:
 - Ro 15:4: For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.
 - This, of course, is no less true of us who believe today...
 - God has given us the scriptures for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.
 - In 1 Cor 10:11, he states that they were also:
 - 1 Cor 10:11: written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.

So with that in mind, I want to structure my message to you around three particular things that we ought to learn from Isaiah 21.

- First, we ought to learn that Babylon will be brought to a dreadful and complete end.
 - By Babylon, I mean not only the actual city of which Isaiah speaks, but also what we may call that anti-Christian spirit of Babylon that prevails in the world to this day.
 - We need to see the complete end to which Babylon will be brought so that we will not be tempted to join ourselves to her, but rather will warn her of her need to repent.
- Second, we ought to learn from Isaiah 21 that the LORD of history will use hostile world powers (Babylon) to thresh His people,
 - but only that He might at last bring us forth as pure grain at which time He will also destroy all their enemies.

- Threshing, you know, is done by beating the grain to separate the grain from the chaff.
 - God's people are threshed by God's gracious hand to purify them.
- Third, we ought to learn from Isaiah 21 that Babylon's victims will also be brought to a dreadful end if do not repent.
 - Often, our default position for those who suffer much oppression from a tyrannical world power (or even from sickness or other calamities in this world) is that things will get better for them.
 - We may suppose that the Stalins and Hitlers of this world will be judged, but not the poor victims of these tyrants.
 - But here we learn the hard lesson that unless these victims themselves repent and turn to the Lord, they too will be brought to a dreadful irreversible end.

To understand Isaiah 21 in this way is not to try to force it to saying something it doesn't say.

- The Holy Spirit Himself picks up the name Babylon to describe hostile anti-Christian forces in the book of Revelation,
 - And the whole event in world history of the Babylonian captivity followed by God's deliverance of Israel from that captivity is used to teach us about the deliverance we have in Jesus Christ from the tyranny of Satan who is the god of this world.
 - Therefore, let us come with confidence that this is God's word that we come to hear as we consider this passage today.

So first of all...

I. Know from God's Word that Babylon will be brought to a dreadful end!

A. You can see that Isaiah is speaking about Babylon here...

1. This is made clear in verse 9 where Babylon is actually named... when it says, "Babylon is fallen, is fallen!"
 - a. This helps us to understand the more cryptic name that Isaiah gives to Babylon in verse 1—where he calls Babylon "the wilderness of the sea."
 - This title is well suited to Babylon because Babylon was a great plain that was watered by a great river (and rivers were often called seas).
 - J. A. Alexander says,
 - This designation was the more appropriate because the plain of Babylon, according to Herodotus, was often overflowed before Semiramis took measures to prevent it, and Abydenus says expressly that it had the appearance of a sea.
 - b. But there might be a question about *which* fall of Babylon this refers to.

- There was more than one around the time of Isaiah.
- The first was the great suppression of Babylon by Sennacherib in 689 BC.
 - Some commentators think this is what is in view here, but this view cannot stand
 - because we are told expressly that Elam (which is the older name for Persia) and Media are the instruments of Babylon's destruction.
 - These are mentioned in verse 2, and Assyria is not mentioned at all.
- Therefore, it is better to understand Isaiah to be speaking of the destruction of Babylon that came in 539 BC under the leadership of Cyrus the Persian.
 - This destruction was much greater because it occurred after Babylon had risen to, for a time, unchallenged supremacy,
 - having complete wiped out Assyria.
 - This destruction of Babylon by the Medes and Persians is thoroughly attested in history.

TRANS> It really seems there should not be so much confusion over this—

- If Assyria were the principle agent in the destruction Isaiah described, we would take it as the destruction in 689 by Assyria...
- But as the Medes and Persians are the agents and Assyria is not even mentioned, we take it to be the destruction in 539 under Cyrus.

2. Understand who Babylon is!

- a. This is the nation that brought Judah into exile.
 - This event was testified to before it happened by both Isaiah and Jeremiah.
 - Consider how this is brought out so clearly in Isaiah 39.
 - In Isaiah 39, we have the account of how the otherwise faithful King Hezekiah entertained envoys from Babylon just before the invasion of Sennacherib of Assyria in 701 BC.
 - Isaiah rebukes King Hezekiah and tells him that Babylon will bring destruction upon Judah and take them into exile.
 - In Isa 39:5-7, he says:
 - Isaiah 39:5-7: "Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, "Hear the word of the LORD of hosts: 'Behold, the days are coming when all that *is* in your house, and what your fathers have accumulated until this day, shall be carried to Babylon; nothing shall be left,' says the LORD. 'And they shall take away *some* of your sons who will descend from you, whom you will beget; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.'"

- Because Hezekiah entertained the Babylonian envoys and showed them his resources,
 - Isaiah told Hezekiah that in the generations to come the LORD would deliver Judah into the hands of the Babylonians who would destroy the Jerusalem,
 - and overthrow both the temple and the Davidic monarchy—
 - The very thing that God would not allow the Assyrians do,
 - He would allow the Babylonians to do!
- b. And of course this is exactly what happened in 586 BC when Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon destroyed Jerusalem.
- Daniel was among those who were brought into captivity with thousands of others.
 - The effort was to absorb Jerusalem into Babylon so that Babylon replaced Jerusalem as the city of blessing for the whole world.
 - I have spoken to you often about the tower of Babel and how it was an effort in the days after the flood to establish a city that was independent of the true God... very religious, but devoid of the true God.
 - Babylon of Daniel's day, which Isaiah speaks about in Isaiah 21, is just the same thing all over again.
 - There is an alternative wisdom, an alternative priesthood, and an alternative government, to that which God provides.
 - It is salvation by human effort rather than by divine provision.
 - So here, Isaiah is looking into the future when Babylon will rise to power and will attain world dominion and be the cause of Jerusalem's destruction...
 - but then be brought down by the Medes and Persians in 539 BC.
 - You see that this is a real event about a real city that Isaiah prophesies about in his vision.
- c. But you must not miss the fact that Babylon is the name that the Holy Spirit uses in Revelation to refer that city which sets itself up as an alternative to true faith in Christ.
- I am inclined to understand the Babylon of Revelation to refer to the Jews who, with Rome, went to war against Christ and his saints.
 - I say that because this Babylon is presented as a Harlot who commits adultery with the nations, having once been in covenant with God.

- And ever since then, Babylon continues in the form of apostate, covenant breaking, organised religion.
 - The form changes, but the spirit of Babylon is the same—it is the spirit of antichrist.
 - The reformers were right to classify the Roman Catholic Church in this category.
 - There are true believers in the Roman Catholic Church, but the way of salvation that is proclaimed in that body is a substitute for true salvation in Jesus Christ...
 - The Roman Pontiff makes himself out to be a prophet (who proclaims new revelation), a priest (who offers sacrifices), and a king (who rules with absolute authority) in place of Jesus Christ.
- We may find many other Babylons as well.
 - There are those who turn away from Christ (as old Babylon in days just after Noah) and set up a religious city as an alternative to Christ.
 - We have those who replace salvation by Christ with political salvation as with liberation theology, or with therapeutic salvation, or with environmentalism or any number of other alternatives.
 - They leave Christ to serve at another altar.

B. Now see what Isaiah says will become of Babylon!

1. You see in verse 2 that he calls it a distressing vision that is declared to him.
 - There are perhaps two reasons why he finds it so distressing.
 - a. First, because of the things that come upon Babylon are so dreadful.
 - Even though Babylon is the enemy of true religion, the sight is so horrendous that it causes a sharp reaction from Isaiah.
 - This was a nation that he knew and his compassion is stirred as he sees the horrible things that will come upon them.
 - He sees here that Elam and Media are summoned to go up against Babylon and that by them,
 - the LORD is going to put an end to the sighing that Babylon has caused.
 - He is a man of tender compassion—there is no stony heart hear!

But I think there is a second reason for his strong reaction.

- b. Remember that when Isaiah sees this vision of Babylon's destruction, he also sees something else that would have been very disturbing to him...
 - When Isaiah saw this vision,

- Babylon was (in history) offering friendship and alliance with Judah, and Hezekiah was (wrongfully) warming up to Babylon's embrace.
- In this vision, Isaiah sees that Babylon has risen to great power and has dealt treacherously with Judah.
 - The thing he told Hezekiah would happen.
 - Having first embraced Judah in friendship, Babylon, in rising to power, has turned to become Judah's oppressor.
 - Such is the way of the false religion of antichrist.
 - She embraces the children of God and offers friendship to them,
 - but as soon as she has power, she oppresses them and tries to destroy them if they do not fully conform to her.
 - She cannot bear the true religion.
 - She has a fiery furnace for those who will not conform to her ways—she has a noose and she has a fire for the true sons of God who will not embrace her false ways.
- Of Babylon he says,
 - The treacherous dealer deals treacherously and the plunderer plunders.
 - Her true colours have come out and she is acting according to her own vile nature.
 - It is possible that Isaiah refers to those within the ranks of Babylon who were traitors—
 - dealing treacherously with this treacherous nation...
 - For the historians tell us of Gadatas and Gobryas, two important officers of the king of Babylon,
 - who went over to Cyrus and were his guides into the city of Babylon on the night she was overthrown.

TRANS> But whatever the case, Isaiah is distressed:

- because of the condition of his own people under the oppression of Babylon
 - and because of horror of what he sees coming upon Babylon.
- 2. And just look at how distressed he is—his distress shows us just how bad things are going to be for Babylon!
 - a. In verses 3-5, it seems that the prophet enters into the very distress that came upon the people of Babylon on the night of their fall!
 - The vision is so vivid that Isaiah identifies with them almost as if he is one of them...
 - We see this if we compare it with Daniel's account of what actually happened on the night Babylon fell in Daniel 5.

- Turn there, but keep your place in Isaiah 21 so you can see the comparison.

1) In Daniel 5, you see that King Belshazzar is having a party—

- and at that party he is using the holy vessels that his grandfather Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple at Jerusalem when he destroyed it.
- Belshazzar is a great partier who is living off the past victories and accomplishments of the previous generations.
 - Though his fathers were ungodly,
 - they were courageous and hardworking and wise in a worldly way—achieving great things.
 - But Belshazzar is just a partier who has never worked for anything.
 - He is afraid of nothing because he is, as it were, on top of the world!
 - He is a lot like us in our prosperity that we inherited from our forefathers.
 - We would be incapable of building a society like we live in if it were up to us.
 - Any way, you see him at his party in verse 3 & 4:
 - Dan 5:3-4: “Then they brought the gold vessels that had been taken from the temple of the house of God which *had been* in Jerusalem; and the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines drank from them. They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze and iron, wood and stone.”
- But suddenly Belshazzar’s party is interrupted.
 - Look at verse 5:
 - Daniel 5:5-7: “In the same hour the fingers of a man’s hand appeared and wrote opposite the lampstand on the plaster of the wall of the king’s palace; and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote. 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. The king cried aloud to bring in the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers.
 - The king’s wise men are not able to read the writing on the wall, but then Daniel comes forth and declares that on that very night the great city of Babylon is going to be taken by the Medes and the Persians...
 - What horror! What anguish! What distress came upon the just now brazen king!

2) Now compare this to Isaiah's response as he sees his vision of this same event. He says:

- Isaiah 21:3: "Therefore my loins are filled with pain;
 - Just like King Belshazzar whose hip joints loosened...
- Isaiah 21:3 continues: 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*. My heart wavered, fearfulness frightened me;
 - Just like King Belshazzar whose countenance changed and whose thoughts troubled him.
- Isaiah 21:4 continues: The night for which I longed He turned into fear for me.
 - The night for which I longed is the night of pleasure—
 - This was supposed to be a great party but instead it became a night of terror!
- In Isaiah 21:5, the prophet describes the exact situation...
 - Isa 21:5: Prepare the table, Set a watchman in the tower, Eat and drink.
 - This shows the security.
 - The king felt perfectly safe inside the great walls of Babylon with his watchmen posted.
 - As far as He was concerned, there was nothing to fear.
 - It was time to eat and drink—he had no cares!
 - He was wealthy and he was secure and nothing could harm him!
 - But now, suddenly, there is need to call forth an army!
 - So verse 5 interrupts itself—with an imperative:
 - In the original, this is actually the first imperative in the verse. The other three statements are infinitives...
 - "Arise, you princes, Anoint the shield!"
 - This is a cry of alarm!
 - An enemy has come!

b. Oh my brothers and sisters, see what sudden destruction comes on those who try to live without God!

 - Belshazzar knew how God had humbled Nebuchadnezzar so that he had confessed that Jehovah was the most high God,

- but Belshazzar had not humbled himself—
 - so sudden destruction came upon him...
 - Suddenly all his riches, all his security, all his comforts, all his pride, was brought to an end—in just one night!
 - Do not be so foolish as to suppose you can get along if you do not humble yourself before God!
 - You need His salvation—there is no other way.
 - You can party and you can feast, but you will be weighed in God’s balance and found wanting—
 - and then terror will come upon you forever!
 - It is too high a price to pay for your pride and rebellion!
 - Your end will be so dreadful that even those who should see it will be greatly distressed by the horror of it.
3. And you see that Isaiah further describes this dreadful night of Babylon’s destruction through the eyes of an ideal watchman.
- He does this in verses 6-9
- a. This is not a real watchman, but an ideal watchman that Isaiah sees in his vision.
- This is not a real watchman because the event did not occur until over a century after Isaiah was dead...
 - Moreover, the watchman is described as one who is continually at his post both day and night...
 - Isaiah’s interaction with this watchman is just a way of dramatically telling us what is going to happen to Babylon on the night of its fall...
- b. Look at how this drama is presented to us:
- 1) In verse 6, Isaiah is commanded to set the watchman in place.
 - 2) In verse 7, the watchman is told to look out for a long procession of men mounted on horses, camels, and donkeys in pairs...
 - The language is difficult, but it can be understood in this way...
 - Xenophon, the Greek historian, reported that the Persians advanced two by two in their attack on Babylon.
 - 3) In verse 8, the watchman cries out like a lion (so it may be understood), declaring that he is faithfully at his post, watching day and night for a long time and seeing nothing—all is secure...
 - so it seemed to everyone in Babylon—a watchman was hardly needed...

- who would dare to mess with this great city that was the terror of all the earth?
- 4) But in verse 9, the watchmen sees a chariot bringing him news...
- “Babylon is fallen, is fallen!”
 - Somehow the enemy got in!
 - Somehow they escaped his notice!
 - Despite his vigilance, they got in before he could sound the alarm!
 - The end has come without warning!
 - Her security system has failed and now it is too late.
 - And the words are added,
 - “Babylon is fallen is fallen, and all the carved images of her gods he has broken to the ground.”
 - All the idols, all the religion, is shown to be worthless!
 - What good is it to make up your own religion—to make up your own gods when the true God is revealed in Christ?
 - It will only bring judgement!
 - In Jeremiah, the LORD says:
 - Jer 51:47: “Therefore behold, the days are coming that I will bring judgment on the carved images of Babylon; Her whole land shall be ashamed, And all her slain shall fall in her midst.
 - Such are the gods men make up—they are worthless in the day of God’s judgement.
 - They are worse then worthless because they increase His anger in the day of reckoning.
- c. Learn from this that you are never safe without the true God.
- 1 Thessalonians warns you...
 - 1Th 5:3: 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.
 - That is what Babylon will have, and that is what you will have if you trust in Babylon.
 - Babylon will make you feel secure for a time, but the night will come when sudden destruction strikes and there will be no escape.

TRANS> Know from God’s Word that Babylon will be brought to a dreadful end.

- But of course it is good news for God’s people when God destroys Babylon.

- He does it to free His people from their oppression.
- He does this once He has completed the work that He purposed to do in His people through the oppression.
 - This brings us to our second point:

II. Know from God’s Word that the LORD of History will use hostile world powers to thresh His people and then delivers them from their hands.

A. See how the LORD speaks tenderly to His people in verse 10...

- Isaiah is speaking, but he is speaking as the Lord’s spokesman—as His mouthpiece.

1. Look at what he calls Judah:

- Isa 21:10: Oh, my threshing and the grain of my floor!
- What wonderful encouraging words these are! What tender words!
 - “**My** threshing—the grain of my floor!”
 - He speaks to us in our suffering as His people—even when it is the suffering of His chastening hand because of our disobedience!
 - We are His—He owns us! He cares for us! He is with us! He is working out His purposes in us!
- This is what He calls you who are His people—who trust in Him and belong to Him.
 - You are His grain in His granary...
 - You are His threshing.

2. Threshing is a violent procedure, but it is essential.

- The thresher must beat the grain by trampling over it with oxen or by dragging a threshing sledge over it or by beating it with a club again and again...
 - This is the way the grain is separated from the chaff.
- When there is so much chaff about us—so much of this body of sin—so much remaining corruption—
 - both individually and corporately...
 - God used oppressive nations to break us away from our sin.
- He used Babylon to separate His people from idolatry...
 - and indeed, after the captivity, they found other ways to sin, but they did not return to the idolatry—to the worship of Baal and Asherah or to the worship of Jehovah by lying images.
 - Of course there were many in Judah who were just absorbed into Babylon,

- they were the chaff...
 - but the true grain was refined and purified...
 - and even those who had not worshipped idols were refined by the hard days in Babylon.
 - God used them for the purification of His people!
 - He used the oppression to bring forth fruit in their lives!
- B. We need to realise that greatest threshing of all occurred when Jesus Christ came to be our mediator and redeemer.
1. As the one who represents us, He became God's threshing.
 - As Isaiah puts it in Isaiah 53, He was bruised for our iniquities and by His stripes we are healed.
 - God visited His people under Babylonian oppression for their sins...
 - but much more, He visited us when Jesus Christ was oppressed and afflicted for us!
 - That was the ultimate purification that was required to atone for our sin so that we might be pardoned and purified!
 - And it is only those who are joined to Him by faith that come forth as pure grain...
 - You must trust in what He has done for us.
 - Babylon only prepared Israel to come to Christ.
 - It did not atone for their sin—Christ alone does that.
 2. But make no mistake...
 - We are still called, as long as we are in this world, to be partakers of Christ's sufferings...
 - Not to atone for our sin, but to purify us and refine us as long as we are in this world that we might be separated from our sin.
 - It would be great if this could be done without suffering, but it cannot.
 - Suffering is necessary.
 - It is given to us not only to believe, but also to suffer for Him.
 - The kingdom of God is advanced through our suffering.
 - We enter the kingdom through much tribulation.
 3. And as we suffer with Christ now, so we shall also share with him in His resurrection...
 - The day is coming when we will be delivered from all oppression and all suffering.

- Babylon will be completely destroyed and brought to its place in the lake of fire, where it will no longer be able to reach us.
- So do not grow weary under the oppression of Babylon...
 - Let Babylon mock you, scoff at you, injure you, even kill you...
 - You will come forth as gold at last and Babylon will be destroyed.
 - God is threshing you because He loves you...
 - You are the grain on His floor that He is preparing to gather into His house forever and ever when the work is done.
 - Do not despair though your suffering be long...
 - There is an end.
 - Threshing is not forever.
 - Babylon will be brought down.

TRANS> Be encouraged...

- But do realise that the suffering brought on by Babylon—
 - while it **will** end for all of you who believe...
 - will **not** end for those who do not turn to the LORD.

III. Know from God's Word that Babylon's victims will also be brought to a dreadful end if they do not repent.

- Edom and Kedar were fellow-suffers with Jerusalem under the oppression of Babylon...
 - But Isaiah shows us very clearly that does not mean that they will be fellow-partakers of Jerusalem's deliverance when Babylon is destroyed!

A. Many times when we see people who are victims of an oppressor or of suffering,

- we are inclined to suppose that the period of darkness will surely end for them.
 - We take the general hope that belongs to the believer and we apply it universally—to others.
- We sympathise with those who suffer long (and it is right for us to do so),
 - but our sympathy is destructive if it causes us to hold out false hope for them or to encourage them in false hopes.
 - I have often been grieved to hear Christians say of unbelievers who die after much suffering on their death beds,
 - "Well, at least his suffering is over now."
 - Sometimes they will even say,
 - "Now he is in a better place."

- Whether they are trying to comfort themselves or trying to comfort others,
 - it is no comfort because it is a lying comfort!
 - If there is no repentance, the suffering is not over at all!
 - It has really only just begun!
 - Their suffering in this world was given to them as a warning, and without repentance is only a prelude to the suffering that is to come!
 - They are not in a better place at all!
 - They are in a much worse place.
 - We are neither faithful witnesses to God nor helpful witness to others if entertain the lie that there is some kind of morning for those who do not turn to Christ...
 - or that things will somehow get better some day.
 - Quite the opposite is true and we need to sound the warning,
 - for the honour and glory of God...
 - and in the hope that we might lead others to repentance if they know the truth.
- B. See how Isaiah is a faithful witness to Edom and Kedar as fellow sufferers under the oppression of Babylon...
1. In verses 11-12, the Edomites come to him and ask him with great earnestness...
 - “Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night?”
 - Incidentally, we know that this is Edom because it mentions Seir which is a principle city of Edom.
 - Dumah is also in Edom and is probably chosen for the initial address because it means “stillness” referring to the stillness of the long night of oppression.
 - a. They are suffering under the long night of oppression—first under Assyria, then under Babylon...
 - 1) And they want to know how the oppression will continue.
 - This is a vision of Isaiah, but they come to him because they know that the answer is to be found only with the true God who is the God of Israel.
 - The question is repeated because of the urgency.
 - The sense of it is, “how much longer is this night of oppression?”
 - When will it end?
 - 2) And of course Isaiah has just seen that the night of oppression will end...
 - He has seen that Babylon, the treacherous plunderer, will be destroyed without remedy...

- He has seen that the morning is coming...
- b. But look at Isaiah's faithful answer to Edom in verse 12.
- Isa 21:12: The watchman said, "The morning comes, and also the night. If you will inquire, inquire; Return! Come back!"
- 1) The answer is a bit obscure, but the overall meaning is clear...
- He is not giving them any hope!
 - He declares that a morning is coming—yes, Babylon is going to be destroyed—the end of Babylon is coming...
 - But with the coming that new day, there is also the night!
 - The end of Babylonian oppression will not be the end of oppression!
 - The Lord will have many more nights of suffering for them to endure leading to the greatest darkness of all that will come at the end.
 - Any relief will only be temporary for Edom...
 - That is,
 - unless they repent!
- 2) And so the faithful prophet calls them to seek the LORD.
- First he says, "If you will inquire, inquire!"
 - If you really want to know about the end of oppression then you have a lot more seeking to do...
 - Ask of me and I will tell you...
 - Ask and it shall be given to you...
 - But not just the superficial deliverance you are asking for now... ask for salvation that is of God!
 - If you seek, you will find!
 - He goes on to say, Return, come back!
 - God has great things in store for His people—
 - something much more important than mere relief from the oppression of Babylon!
 - He is bringing forth a new day in Jesus Christ...
 - The light of the world!
 - He is coming to bring salvation to the world...
 - If you will return, you will find it.
 - But if not, you can expect darkness upon darkness.
- c. My friends, this is the message you must bring to those who suffer!

- Do not tell them their suffering will end unless they turn to Christ!
 - Tell them it will get worse.

- 2. And you see that Isaiah brings a similar message to Kedar of Arabia.
 - a. They too suffered under the oppression of Assyria and Babylon.
 - Interestingly, he addresses them as Arabia at the beginning which is also chosen for its meaning, for it means darkness.
 - And here their darkness is described...
 - The Dedanites who travelled in caravans, trading as they went from one great city to another,
 - were greatly oppressed by Assyria and Babylon such that they could not take to the main roads.
 - They had to slink off into the “forests” of which in this area could hardly be called forests—more like the thickets (v. 13).
 - In verse 14, they are described as fleeing to Tema to escape their oppressors—coming with hunger and thirst...
 - Tema was a place where they frequently stopped for supplies when they were on business, but now they are coming as those fleeing from hostile forces.
 - And in verse 15, you see that they are seen escaping the sword.
 - We have record of two invasions of Arabia by Assyria—one in 732 and another in 725.
 - Then in Jeremiah, we are told that the Nebuchadnezzar also went after them.
 - Oppressive powers will not rest until the whole world is under their control.
 - You might think these Arabs who were out of the way would not gain the attention of Assyria and Babylon,
 - but it seems that no one is safe under a dominion taking nation.
- b. Here again, you might suppose that God’s destruction of Babylon would bring relief to these peoples...
 - That as they had suffered with Judah under the hand of Babylon and Assyria,
 - so they would enjoy the deliverance that God had promised to Judah from Babylon by His prophet.
 - But once again, no such false comfort is given.
 - Instead we are told that their glory would depart from them... even the glory they had now!

- Verse 16-17 says:
 - 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; 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."
 - There is no uncertainty about it...
 - The LORD God of Israel has spoken it.
 - And it is true that these people sank from their former greatness into virtual insignificance after the demise of Babylon.
- c. Those who mind their own business and revel in their own glory should not suppose that they will escape God's judgement...
 - Just because they were out of the way does not mean that they did not need to repent.
 - Just because Assyria and Babylon are the class bullies does not mean that quiet little Judy Jones or Billy Black do not also need to repent.
 - They have their own little glory that walk in and that glory will be taken away just the same as Babylon's if they do not turn to the Lord.
 - Isaiah does not give any false comfort to such persons and neither should you.
 - The oppression they experience now is only a foretaste of the wrath to come if they do not turn to the God who made them and become His servants—indeed His slaves—through Jesus Christ.
 - They must become His because if they are not His, they are their own and they are in opposition to the living God.
 - Their destruction will come swiftly if they do not repent.

Conclusion

So my brothers and sisters, let me encourage to always remember that God Almighty is over Babylon and all that Babylon does!

- As we conclude, I want you to notice how Isaiah speaks of Him in this chapter...
 - At the end of verse 10, where He calls us God's threshing and the grain on His floor,
 - He says to us:
 - "That which I have heard from the LORD of Hosts, the God of Israel, I have declared to you."
- He describes our God as the LORD of Hosts—the God of all powers in heaven and earth—as the one whose words He speaks!
 - He is the one who raises up nations and brings down nations!

- He is the one who raises up Babylon and then brings down Babylon.
- He is the one who uses Babylon to thresh us and make us holy,
 - And He is the one who uses Babylon to begin His judgement upon those who will not repent.

- The rise and fall of nations is no accident...
 - It is all in accordance with His predetermined will and purpose concerning the world and concerning His people...
 - It is all part of the process of bringing about His kingdom and us in that kingdom.
 - It is for you to fully trust in Him through all the changes of history.
 - With rock solid certainty and direction,
 - He is bringing about His complete and gracious purpose for His church.