

Wednesday, September 6, 2023 • Read Isaiah 21

Questions from the Scripture text: Against whom is the first burden in this chapter (v1a)? What is coming, in what manner (v1b–c)? What sort of vision is it (v2a)? What are they hoping Elam and Media can accomplish against Assyria (v2b–f)? How does Isaiah feel about his vision (v3–4)? But how do others feel about these military/conspiracy actions (v5)? From where has Isaiah received a vision of how this will turn out (v6a)? What does the watchman in the vision see (v6b–9a)? What is the result of these strange visions (9b–e)? What is the crushing pressure of Assyria doing to Israel (v10)? Against what city of Edom is the next burden (v11a)? What is the result of the interaction between the man of Seir (Edom) and his watchman (v11b–12c)? What does v12d imply about the timing of Edom's destruction? Against whom is the next burden (v13a)? From where are these exiles (v13c)? Through where are they going (v14a)? What will the Temanites do for these exiles (v14b–c)? From what have they run (v15)? What short-term prophecy (v16–17) confirms this longer term one? Who has spoken both of them?

Why must manmade hopes for deliverance fail? Isaiah 21 looks forward to the first serial reading in morning public worship on the coming Lord's Day. In these seventeen verses of Holy Scripture, the Holy Spirit teaches us that **manmade hope for deliverance must fail, because even the troubles of this world are part of God's design to bring forth the lasting fruit of His chosen people.**

The poetry in such passages can be difficult to navigate, but the context of Isaiah so far, and some knowledge of the historical context can help us to understand. Before Babylon became a great empire, they were a thorn in the side of the Assyrian empire. So Babylonian cities like Elam and Media were favorites among those who attempted to conspire against Assyria, as in v2b–e. They thought these could bring their sad sighs to an end (v2f).

But the Lord's word and hand lay heavy (remember, this is the main root of what is translated "burden" in v1, 11, 13) against any such hopes. And what Isaiah saw from the Lord in response to this "hope" was so dreadful that it afflicted him even physically (v3) in addition to psychologically (v4). There are those in the world who are so arrogant that they treat conspiracies like party games (v5), but the Lord turns their games (note "watchman" in v5, being taken over by the Lord in v6) into nightmarish horrors (v6–9). So the Babylonian hope must perish (v9c). History records that Sennacherib razed Babylon to the ground in 689BC, and he made a particular point of smashing their idols in front of them (cf. v9d–e).

Why? Because the Lord intends to use the Assyrian pressure for "threshing" Israel to bring the grain out of the chaff (v10a). Note the possessives "my" threshing and "grain of my floor." Israel is precious both to the prophet and to God. And since Israel's God is YHWH of hosts, literally everything that happens in the world is for their sakes. This continues to be true today. There is an Israel within Israel—an Israel of promise rather than ethnicity. And this Israel of God (cf. Gal 6:16) is chosen from all the nations, not just one. These are they who are identified not by circumcision but by refusal to hope in anything other than Christ and His cross (cf. Gal 6:14–16).

So also, the doom of the Edomites must come. Not now because Israel is turning to them for help, but because they have made themselves enemies and will make themselves worse. Though they are not currently under attack, vv11–12 make it plain that the eye of the Lord is yet upon them, and their day will come. This is important to keep in mind, whenever it seems that the wicked prosper (cf. Ps 11:2–3). Not only will their day come, but the providence of God is not idle. His eyes are upon all (cf. Ps 11:4) for the good of His people (cf. Ps 11:7).

The Arabians of Dedan, Tema, and Kedar had allied with one another, and with Babylon, in 704BC. But mutual aid for war will turn into mutual aid for refugees (v14) as their armies are routed (v15). As before with the Moab prophecy (cf. 16:13–14), the Lord gives a definite time of one year (v16) for the short-term fulfillment against Kedar to confirm the rest of what He has prophesied. Note again, all of this prophecy against all these nations, He makes as "YHWH God of Israel" (v17). It is His covenant commitment to His elect that drives history.

The Lord's word is faithful. The Lord's plan is sure. And the Lord's purpose is to gather to Himself the people that He is saving from among the nations.

What are you tempted to trust in, to feel safe spiritually? What are you tempted to trust in, to feel safe in this life? What is the only true safety for either of these? What will happen to all other hopes?

Sample prayer: Lord, forgive us. We are tempted to hope in those who rise up against present world powers—like Israel was tempted to hope in Babylon against Assyria. And sometimes, we are tempted to think that Your judgment is idle or late against those who harm us as Edom had harmed Your people. But we know that all manmade hopes must fail and that Your judgments are always right on time. So, give us to believe Your word, and give us to trust in You alone for salvation through Christ alone, through whom we ask it, AMEN!

Suggested songs: ARP11 "My Trust Is in the LORD" or TPH11B "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God"

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(The following is a machine-generated transcription. PLEASE BE AWARE of—and patient with—transcribing errors. If there is something confusing or obviously erroneous, you are invited to listen to the audio recording via hopewellarp.org)

Isaiah 21. These are God's words. The burden against the wilderness of the sea. As whirlwinds in the south passed through. So it comes from the desert from a terrible land, a distressing vision is declared to me. The treacherous dealer deals treacherously in the plunderer plunders. Go up. Oh elim.

Besiege a media. All it's saying i have made to cease. Therefore my loans are loins were 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, my heart waiver to fearfulness frightened me the night for which i longed he turned into fear for me.

Prepare the table set a watchman in the tower each and drink a rise. You princess. Anoint the shield For us as the lord said to me, go set a watchman, let him declare what he sees. 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. And then he cried a lion, my lord. I stand continually on the watch tower in the daytime. I have sat at my post every night. And look, here comes a chariot of men. Over the pair of horsemen. Then the answer and said, Babylon is fallen as fallen.

And all the carved images of her gods, he has broken to the ground. Oh, my threshing and the grain of my floor. That which i have heard from, yahweh of hosts, the god of israel, i have declared to you. The burden against duma. He calls to me out of severe watchman, one of the night watchman.

What are the night? The watchman said. The morning comes and also the night. If you will inquire inquire return, come back. The burden against arabia. In the forest and arabia, you will lodge a traveling companies of deedonite. So, inhabitants of the land of tama bring water to him. Who is thirsty with their bread?

They met him. Who fled? For they fled from the swords from the drawn sword from the bent bow and from the distress of war. For thus, you always said to me, Within a year according to the year of a hired man. All the glory of Kadar will fail. And the remainder of the number of archers, the mighty men, the people of Gadar.

We'll be diminished. For y'all, they god of Israel. Has spoken it. So far the reading of god's inspired and And there ain't worked. Chapter continues, the themes of Men's hopes in themselves and in their plans failing and the Destruction that the lord has ordained and commanded being carried out despite all of their efforts.

Something that we have seen Not only in the nations but especially going back. Even Uh, to the video to the beginning. When the lord has made his case against Israel, and then he prophesies against Israel and Judah. Those wonderful prophecies in the early chapters. In which their hope and themselves would fail, and they would indeed Receive much affliction.

But in which there was always that promise of a king. Who is coming? And we rejoice to know that that king is the lord Jesus. But then the lord had turned from addressing Israel and Judah to addressing other nations. Who are also trusting in themselves. We're also Uh, resisting the lord.

And, All of their. Hopes and themselves are going to fail. The lord is going to bring affliction upon them all And so in chapter 21, we have this burden against the wilderness. Of the sea. And then the burden against Duma. And the burden against Arabia. The burden against the wilderness of the sea.

The description here is Of someone who is hoping in, Babylon to help them, some of the cities of Babylon, they are the ones who are saying, go up out Elim and besiege Media. Um, But the lord is not going to allow. The hope in. Uh in Babylon to succeed.

In fact, he makes the vision of what happens to Babylon, something of a nightmare. For Isaiah, and he He? Tells how terrible the vision is before he describes. What division is? So, the distressing vision is declared to me. Then he sets the context and the rest of verse 2, by those who are hoping in Babylon.

And we have the outcome later. In the end of verse 9 Babylon has fallen as fallen. All the carved images of her gods, he has broken to the ground. And this indeed happened. Uh, before Babylon became an empire, the The cities of Babylon like, Um, Uh, like Media, like Elim.

Uh, did try to rebel several times against Assyria and on one occasion. Uh, synachrome did enter in 16? Not 16. 6, 89 bc. He entered. Babylon, and smashed all Her idols. Uh, Tibet's. So, this vision did end up. Uh, coming true. As as I had prophesied. But in the middle of it, he he gives us the context at the beginning and the outcome at the end.

But the middle of it is all about How distressing and dreadful it is. Physically afflict him. Uh, my loins are filled with pain. Pangs have taken hold on me, it emotionally and mentally afflicted, verse 4, my heart, wavered fearfulness frightening me the night for which I longed, he turned into fear.

For me. And then you have, Uh, a return to the context again, the people who have conspired with Babylon and they Want to see how things are going. And so they're setting up a feast while the watchman is in the tower. They're having a party because of how hopeful and confident they are And their plans.

So Eat and drink arise, you princess anoint the shield. Um, And so, there's a It's uh it's a party over. How wonderful. They think their military prospects are Uh, but the watchman. Sees nightmarish stuff. At first, you see is a chariot with a pair of horsemen and then he sees a chariot of donkeys, the chariot of camels and eventually he sees a chariot with a lion.

It's similar to the. Uh you know some of the visions and Ezekiel and Daniel where you have many different creatures faces. Uh, Either on one creature or Uh, in sequence of creatures. Describing. Coming and increasing fierceness of kingdoms etc. And, The. The basically, the vision is a nightmare and the conclusion is That which man hopes in.

And in this case, The Babylonian. Um, resistance to a Syria. It will be crushed. We'll take verse 10. At the end. Uh, verse 11 and 12 then. Against Duma of severe which is part of Edham. Say, here's another name for you to do my his A city in Edam theirs is not coming yet.

Uh, so you have a similar thing. Um, anxiously asking to watchmen. And it's It's the anxious asking of someone who knows that his doom is sure. And just wants to know when it's happening. And the fact that the watchman doesn't see it yet. Just keeps them in suspense. Uh, so the watchman says morning comes and also the night Um, if you'll inquire, inquire a return come back.

He has no news yet. Uh, but one day It shall come. And then you have the Arabian coalition. Um, With the With one. Group of Arabs. And there are Um, There are D tonight, Arabs who are traveling and there are team at night Arabs who are receiving them. And Kadar also is prophesied against.

And basically they had a coalition that they they hoped would hold together but their coalition quickly turns into refugee care. In verse 14 and 15 as those who have been Defeated need the coalition not for military strength. Uh, but For giving. Bread. To the starving and water to those dying of thirst because they are those who have been scattered from the war.

Well, why does all of this happen? To Babylon by Assyria and coming doomed to eat them. They know not when or where and that which is Coming upon Arabia is happening because the lord Is beating the chaff out of his people. He is going to produce for him. The good fruit that he wants from his people and that's where verse 10 stands in the midst.

In the middle of this group of prophecies, As giving the The reason for all this. Oh, my threshing. And the grain of my floor. That which I have heard from your way of hosts, god of Israel, I've declared to you. And so, So Isaiah is reflecting the love and care and concern of god for Israel.

A love that is currently threshing them. It's not, it's not always a pleasant love, but the point of the threshing is to produce the good grain. The point of the threshing, the pressure that god is Applying the beatings. That god is giving historically. Even among other nations is, especially for the purpose of bringing forth good grain among his people, and it is in love, you know, notice the first person possessives my threshing, my floor.

Uh, you always of armies, all we have hosts, Uh, is the god of Israel. And he rolls an overrules all things in all lands. To bring forth. Uh, that true Israel. Not the Israel. That is Israel ethnically. As he says in Romans 9, of course. Um, Not all who are descended from Israel or Israel, but the Israel of promise and an Israel of promise that we've already begun hearing about in the book of Isaiah is going to include those who he Those who are his elect people, from all lands.

Those to him, the end of Galatians 5, refers as the Israel of god who are in Israel, not by circumcision. But an Israel by faith in Jesus Christ, which is the point of the whole book of Isaiah. To stop trusting in yourself to stop trusting in your religion to to stop trusting in your idols and mad made religion.

Even Especially to trusting in your military to trusting in your alliances to stop touched it to stop trusting in your In your wealth. But to trust only in god and his promised king Who, of course, is got as we've already begun to hear and will continue to hear. In the book, god's Israel that he is producing.

Are those who are his By faith in Jesus Christ. And therefore we must not be surprised that he does whatever is necessary to bring us to faith in Christ. And once we

are in christ, he does whatever is necessary to bring us to that holiness that is required for us to see the lord.

He tells us the same thing, doesn't he? Um, in hebrews chapter 12 that those are who are his true sons, he chastens and he does He gives that, which is painful in the moment, but it's producing the peaceful fruit of righteousness and the holiness without which we would not see the lord.

And again, as the lord is teaching these lessons through the course of historical events. He gives them a temporary or a, an immediate prophecy that will be fulfilled. This time you remember, for instance, with Moab, it was three years and Earlier with ahaz, it was The time of the weaning of a child, which is probably about three years as well.

This this one at the end. Um, Uses the year of the hired man language, it's similar to the end of the Moab prophecy for. Thus, you always said to me within a year according to the year of a hired man. All the glory of guitar wealth fail. And the remainder of the number of archers, the mighty man and the people of Gadar will be diminished for yahweh.

God of israel. Has spoken it. And so the lord the god of israel gave. Short-term prophecies that were fulfilled, so that we might all the more know to heat. So you might press upon us all the more that we should heed. What he says in particular. That we should remember not to be arrogant or trusting himself.

But to help only in him to hope only. And christ. And may the lord grant us to do. So even in the midst of the upheavals that are in the world in our day, Upheavals in the world have not stopped. The characters have changed on the world stage. And yet.

The reality is the same. The god of his israel. Is gathering to himself a people whom he is bringing to faith in christ and whom he is perfecting, this is the great engine that drives all history. And it pleads with us. Not to be afraid of man, but to fear god, not to put our hope in man, but to put our hope in the lord.

And to seek the good of his church. Starting with seeking our own good by humbling ourselves before him trusting ourselves. Uh, to him, yielding. Ourselves to him. May the Lord grant that we would do, so Let's pray. Our gracious. God and our heavenly father, we thank you for this portion of your word.

We pray that your spirit would help us. Uh, particularly as This is it deals with? Times and places and countries and events that I'll remove from us by some distance. How about we do? Thank you for Reminding us clearly that you who rule over all the nations are our own god.

And that. The work that you do in the upheavals of nations and armies and alliances is especially Uh, for our sake, that we are yours, and we belong to you in your determined. How to do everything that is necessary. To make us. Good fruit in the end as it were And so, we pray that you would give us.

To. Trust you. To trust in the lord jesus to belong to you by faith. And to understand rightly, then. What is happening in history? Lord let make us to live our lives day by day. Trust in you obeying you We ask in jesus name. Amen.