

"Then the throne will be established in steadfast love, and on it will sit in faithfulness in the tent of David one who judges and seeks justice and is swift to do righteousness!" (Isaiah 16:5)

Last week, we discussed oracles concerning the nations of Cush (Ethiopia) and Egypt (in Isaiah 18-19), with the scene picking up from Isaiah 17:12-14, where "nations are rumbling like the rumbling of many waters"--while God is watching quietly over a troubled world, totally aware of what's happening, and in control over all world affairs, but waiting for the right moment to intervene! And when He does, in the case of Egypt, He destroys everything in which they put their trust--including their political unity, their economy, pagan religion, and worldly wisdom! (Moyter wrote that "the problems of society, economics, and politics are the outworking of divine purpose and directly traceable to the hand of God"!)

But Isaiah prophesied that things will drastically change in a day yet to come--when Christ returns to the earth to establish His millennial kingdom! And "in that day," among other things, the people of Cush will "bring homage, and come and worship God "in the place of the name of the Lord of hosts, even Mount Zion"! And, in that day, "five cities in the land of Egypt will speak the language of Canaan and swear allegiance to the Lord of hosts...and build an altar in the middle of the land...And the Lord will send a Savior...to deliver them!"

"Thus (Isaiah says) the Lord will make Himself known to Egypt, and the Egyptians in that day!" The ones who once held the children of Israel in bondage prior to the exodus! And "there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrians will come into Egypt and the Egyptians into Assyria, and they will worship the Lord together!" And, "in that day Israel will be a third party with Egypt and Assyria, and a blessing in the midst of the earth...!"

Then we saw how Isaiah ended Isaiah 19 with the memorable words: "Blessed is Egypt My people, and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel My inheritance!"

So it was a bit surprising to pick up our lesson last night, on Isaiah 20-21, with more "rumblings of the nations"! First, with the battle and capture by Sargon, king of Assyria, of Ashdod, one of the Philistine cities on the coastal plain east of Judah on the Mediterranean Sea, which had depended on Egypt and Cush for its security, but to no avail! (Ashdod just happened to be the same city where the Philistines had once held the captured ark of the covenant, placing it for a time in the "house" of their pagan god, Dagon, to their own great detriment, as recorded in I Samuel 5).

It was at about this time that the Lord told Isaiah to "go naked and barefoot for three years" as a "sign and token" against Egypt and Cush! Picturing, as verse 4 says, how the king of Assyria would "lead away the captives of Egypt and the exiles of Cush, young and old, naked and barefoot with buttocks uncovered, to the shame of Egypt"! To the dismay of the people of Ashdod because of "their hope in Cush and their boast in Egypt"! And to God's people as well who needed to learn to trust in the God of Jacob rather in worldly power!

Interesting too that Isaiah would accept a seemingly outrageous request, without question, from the Lord and that the Lord would not be ashamed to call a "naked" Isaiah, "My servant"! (Can't help but think of the so-called "three Hebrew children"--Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (of Daniel 3)--who believed in God enough to welcome the "fiery furnace" rather than to worship the "golden image" set up for them, or "serve" false gods!)

Isaiah 21 addresses the next oracle concerning "the wilderness of the sea"--speaking of the wilderness area north of the Persian Sea, where the "windstorms blew violently," and a Babylonian nation resided that was not yet the powerful empire it would one day become! But one of great concern to Isaiah, as he received a "terrifying vision" from the Lord! Then with his "loins full of anguish... and his mind reeling, and horrors overwhelming him," he sees a frightful "gathering" (in verse 5), believed by Motyer to be between the then king of Babylon, Merodach-Baladan, and Hezekiah, king of Judah, sometime in the early 700s B.C., with Baladan and the Babylonians seeking favor and an ungodly alliance with God's people to rid the world of the oppressive Assyrians! And so, the Lord (in verse 6) called for "a lookout to stand on the watchtower" and report what's about to occur!

Among Isaiah's concerns was the friendly nature of the gathering itself between Hezekiah and the pagan king Baladan, but then of even greater concern, according to the account of II Kings 20, was Hezekiah's willingness, and exuberance, in displaying for him all the treasures of his house"! An act which Isaiah would strongly condemn and denounce with the following (in II Kings 20:16): "Hear the word of the Lord! Behold, the days are coming when all that is in your house, and all that your fathers have laid up in store to this day will be carried to Babylon; nothing shall be left!"

"Then (Isaiah 21:8 says) the lookout called...and behold, here comes a troop of riders, horsemen in pairs (apparently returning from winning a battle)...with one saying, 'Fallen, fallen is Babylon; and all the images of her gods are shattered on the ground!"

According to MacArthur, the "watchman on the wall" proclaimed the tragic end of mighty Babylon, which initially fell to the Assyrians in 689 B.C. (when, you guessed it, when Baladan was king of Babylon), and again (after it was rebuilt) to the Medes and Persians in 539 B.C. But, in between all that (as we know), Babylon, under king Nebuchadnezzar, would one day (in 587 B.C., as told in Daniel 1) seize Jerusalem and carry away the children of Israel into Babylonian captivity--just as Isaiah had prophesied!

Wiersbe notes that, when it comes to Babylon, "Isaiah's prophecy describes something more significant than the ups and downs of an ancient city! MacArthur adds that Babylon's fall was "merely a short-term glimpse of the ultimate fall at the hands of God in the last days" (as pictured in Revelation 14:8 and 18:2-3, and Jeremiah 50 and 51, and elsewhere)!

But there's more in our lesson on Isaiah 21! The "oracles about Edom and Arabia"!

The Edomites were descendants of Esau who carried over their bitter hatred for the children of Israel, to the descendants of Jacob, who "stole the blessing" of their father, Isaac, from his brother, Esau. They're notable for their refusal to allow the children of Israel to pass through their borders on the way from bondage in Egypt to the land of Canaan (Numbers 20:18-21), as well as for apparently joining forces with Nebuchadnezzar in plundering the Jews when he besieged Jerusalem and carried away the children into Babylonian captivity!

Here, in Isaiah 21, an Edomite "keeps calling the watchman" about the "length of the night"--and is told that "morning is coming, but also night"! Meaning, according to MacArthur, that "it promises a short-lived deliverance from Assyrian oppression, but quickly adds the threat of Babylonian domination to follow"!

Meanwhile the plight for the Arabian merchants and refugees who have "fled to the desert from the sword" and "the press of battle," as well as for the "sons of Kedar," who were descendants of Ishmael, and "nomads," is only similarly dismaying! All subject to an upcoming conquest by Nebuchadnezzar!

Motyer notes, as we continue our study of Isaiah, that the days seem to be getting darker and darker! (Something we seem to be seeing in our own day!)

The question is raised for us all! Who do we go to in time of trouble? Where's our hope? And in whom are we trusting?

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