



Predictions Against Foreign Nations Isaiah 20-23

I. Judgments upon the Nations

A. Introduction: The Purpose of the Chapter (Isaiah 20)

Ashdod had been captured by Assyria. Judah was alarmed by this and the rapid growth of Assyrian invasions. In fear, Judah decided to join her allies in looking to Egypt for help. The purpose of Isaiah's symbolic act, or object lesson, was to keep the king and people from relying on this foreign country. It would be but a short time until Egypt herself would be invaded by Assyria, taking multitudes of her people prisoners.

B. Sargon, King of Assyria (Isaiah 20:1)

This chapter introduces us to a new king of Assyria not mentioned by name elsewhere in Scripture. Sargon is recorded in history as being one of the greatest of the Assyrian rulers. Extensive inscriptions of Sargon II have been found, translated and published. The time of his reign is recorded by the Assyrian canon as the years B.C. 722-705. Isaiah prophesied in Israel from about B.C. 750-698 and Sargon must have been contemporary with him. The mention of an Assyrian king named Sargon had received no confirmation at all from profane history until the Assyrian inscriptions were deciphered. The inscriptions of Sargon and other Assyrian documents have now shown that he was a distinct monarch, and that his reign of seventeen years intervened between those of Shalmaneser and Sennacherib. The history Isaiah gives to the name Sargon exactly coincides with the historical records.

Ashdod was a border town of the Philistines and in itself was not of much importance; however, the Tartans and Sargons took Ashdod because it was the key to the conquest of Egypt and Ethiopia. In Jerusa-

lem at this time there were those who favored an alliance with Egypt to relieve Judah of having to pay tribute to Assyria, which had been instituted during the reign of Ahaz. Once again, Judah was relying on other nations for their security rather than on the Lord. This is the reason for the symbolic act of Isaiah as directed by God.

C. The Lord's Instruction to Isaiah (Isaiah 20:2-6)

"Go, and remove the sackcloth from your body, and take your sandals off your feet." Isaiah, by divine direction, makes himself personally a sign of warning to the people of Judah by taking off his outer garment and removing the sandals from his feet. This was the costume of a man who had been robbed and disgraced, or of a beggar, or a prisoner of war. Isaiah's symbolic act was to represent to his people the future naked and destitute condition of the nations in whom they were foolishly placing their confidence. These African powers had become the "glory" and "expectation" of Isaiah's countrymen. To impress the Jews with the folly of their vain hopes, Isaiah was instructed to announce a coming victory for Assyria over Egypt and Ethiopia combined. The result would be a great removal of captives belonging to both nations, from the banks of the Nile to those of the Tigris, bringing shame to the conquered and great glory to the conquerors. God did not want Judah to trust in the armor of Egypt for their protection, but in Himself alone.

There is a lesson in this for us today. When we consider the turmoil in the world — the threat of nuclear war and destruction of nations — the natural man could be overcome with fear. The more informed we are the more fearful we become. The

Lord would have us remember that He is in control, and as Christians, our trust should be in Him. He is our proper source of strength and He will never fail. Judah should have known this, but their hearts had rebelled against Him and their expectation was in the arm of flesh rather than in God. How merciful the Lord is in warning us through His Word and often through circumstances to keep us from pitfalls.

II. Prophecy Concerning the Conquest of Babylon, Edom and Arabia (Isaiah 21:1-10)

A. The Vision of Babylon's Fall (Isaiah 21:1-10)

The prophecy against Babylon is a magnificent example of Hebrew poetry in its abrupt energy and passionate intensity. It is a grievous vision that passes before the prophet. As the whirlwinds rush from the desert, so a mysterious terror seizes Isaiah. An awful voice is heard, summoning his attention to the metropolis of the world; the vast and populous stronghold of Babylon on the distant Mesopotamian plains. The air grows full of voices and the darkness of mysterious shapes come and go. He can see nothing clearly, nor hear any distinct speaking. At last the darkness opens, the curtains of the night are drawn aside, and he beholds a stately palace blazing with lights and ringing with the sounds of revelry. It is the palace of Belshazzar, King of Babylon. A banquet is being held for a thousand of his lords. The prophet reports what he sees: They cover the table. They set the watch that they may have their celebration undisturbed. They eat. They drink. Their drunken revelry is at its height when a voice quick with alarm is heard through the halls crying the familiar battle-cry, "arise, you princes, Anoint the shield!" While the prophet watches to see what happens next, the whole scene disappears, the lights go out, the palace disappears and he is left on his windy watch-tower in terror and suspense. As he gazes into the night, he sees shadows moving swiftly through the darkness. He faintly sees the spear and shield. He becomes aware that a mighty army is advancing under the cover of night against the city in which the king was banqueting with his lords. It is the Median cavalry, riding in pairs, and the Persians with their long array of camels. The prophet knows now that the Medes and Persians of Cyrus have plunged down the mountain to attack the mighty city of the plains which had in its possession the wealth of the world.

Again the thick darkness closes over the scene. All is silent. There is no voice or sound. Then the darkness lifts and the air trembles with a shout of victory. The prophet looks and sees the Median army riding out of the city they have captured. He listens and hears their cry, "*Babylon is fallen, is fallen! And all the carved images of her gods He has broken to the ground.*"

This is our picture from Isaiah. It conveys to us as no mere history could do, the astonishment, terror and joy with which the world heard of the fall of that mighty Babylonian empire which seemed founded forever before the assault of the rude and almost unknown hill-tribes of Elam (Persia). It was this event which thwarted the captivity of Zion and by which the exiles of Israel in captivity were set free to return to their native land.

III. The Prophecy Concerning Dumah (Isaiah 21:11-12)

A. The Relationship between the Edomites and Jews

It is accepted by many scholars that Dumah is only a change of name for Edom. It means "silence," which gives a prophetic indication that the land of the Edomites will be the land of a horrible and deathly silence after the judgments have come upon it.

It may help us to understand the meaning of these verses if we keep in mind the relationship between the Edomites and the Jews. The Edomites were descendants of Esau, and the Israelites and Edomites were hostile toward each other. The Edomites hated the Israelites, and the sight of the prosperity of the sons of Jacob kept alive the old grudge of the less favored sons of Esau. These two nations become associated in our minds as the one with the people of God; the other with their enemies. The sons of Jacob were chosen in preference to the sons of Esau, to be the medium of carrying the divine blessings to all nations. As a result, the Edomites were filled with envy and hatred toward their brethren and lost no opportunity of attacking them with the rage of hatred. The fall of Babylon was good news for Judah, but what would it be for Edom? We are reminded of the voice of Esau when he cried out to his father Isaac, "*Bless me; me also, O my father. . . Have you not reserved a blessing for me?*"

(Genesis 27:34-36). Remember that Esau had carelessly sold his birthright and missed receiving the blessing from his father.

B. A Call from Edom or Dumah (Isaiah 21:11)

The man who calls from Edom to the prophet to learn of the fate of his people addresses the prophet as a watchman who could foresee the future of nations. He asks, "*Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night?*" In other words, what can you tell us about this terrible night of calamity now pressing upon us? It could also be put in these words: How far along are we in this awful night and when may we look for the day?

C. The Watchman Answers (Isaiah 21:12)

The response came from the watchman in these words: "*The morning comes, and also the night. If you will inquire, inquire; Return! Come back!*" Putting it another way, morning comes and night too; if you wish to inquire, ask on; come and ask again. Morning will come to the people of God, but no morning comes to you; nothing but the dark night of death. Well might Edom be in terror. In the hour of Judah's affliction, Edom responded with bitter hatred. In the books of the prophets Obadiah, Amos, Ezekiel and Jeremiah, you read traces of their crime. When the Jews fled before the advances of Nebuchadnezzar, the Edomites had cruelly massacred and intercepted the helpless fugitives and urged Nebuchadnezzar to destroy the Holy City. The Psalmist of the Exile alludes to this when he says, "*Remember, O Lord, against the sons of Edom The day of Jerusalem, Who said, 'Raze it, raze it, To its very foundation!'*" (Psalms 137:7). In other words, down with it, down with it, even to the ground. Naturally in the time of Judah's prophesied liberation from Babylon, the prophet did not have much in the way of comfort to give. He did cry to them, "*If you will inquire, inquire; Return! Come back!*" In other words, the oracle for you, Sons of Edom, is not just a prophecy about a mere earthly future. It is a warning to repent and an invitation to come to the salvation that is available in Israel's God and Messiah.

How many there are and will be who, when they hear the hoofbeats of calamity approaching, will want in a capsule form some enlightenment and com-

fort and assurance of that which Christians have for their guidance and guarantee. They will want to know in brief terms, concise and conclusive, a reason for the hope that the Christians have, and information about the faith once delivered to the saints. They live utterly irreligious and worldly lives with little or no time for Christianity, God or the church, but when signs of impending danger begin to grip their hearts and they sense that the world about them is on the verge of collapse, then they want quick assurances. How much better it is to be concerned about spiritual matters before that time comes. All men, women and children need a Saviour, and God has made provision through the Lord Jesus Christ for our salvation, peace and happiness. No need of being terrified about the past, present or future because God is in charge. "*Watchman, what of the night?*" and the watchman said, "*The morning comes.*" Good news for those who know the Lord. The watchman said, "*and also the night.*" Sad news for those who do not. It is important for us to encourage others to know the Lord and to have a knowledge of His Word.

IV. The Burden of Arabia (Isaiah 21:13-17)

This prophecy relates to Arabia. The Dedanites were members of an Arabian tribe who are pictured as seeking refuge from an unnamed oppressor. Driven from their homes, they found refuge in Tema, an oasis in the desert of Arabia. Kedar, another Arabian tribe, seems to be involved in the same catastrophe. It is interesting to note that Isaiah saw clearly that the Lord controlled the destinies of nations from the powerful Babylon down to and including the inhabitants of the desert.

V. The Prophecy Concerning Jerusalem (Isaiah 22)

A. The Valley of Vision (Isaiah 22:1-2)

In a series of prophetic judgments of guilty nations and cities (Babylon, Moab, Damascus, Samaria, Egypt and Arabia), a city so guilty as Jerusalem could not be overlooked. It was called the "*Valley of Vision,*" as Jerusalem was the city of many inspired prophets and where the Lord was pleased to give visions concerning His divine will. Because of the great light Jerusalem had from God, there is a special relevance to this and it was a principal factor in her guilt.

B. Jerusalem Soldiers Defect in Hour of Crisis (Isaiah 22:2b-4)

The prophet strikes boldly into the heart of his theme. He sees the city in a strange commotion, and he cries out, *“What ails you now?”* Jerusalem is in total turmoil. The people have gone to the flat roofs of their houses to see what was happening outside the city. Some scholars interpret verses two and three on the assumption that Jerusalem’s army in the field began to flee before it even had contact with the enemy. Many of their officers fled upon hearing and seeing the enemy approaching in the distance. Some of these deserters were shot down by archers, but many were taken prisoner. Officers and soldiers alike were chained together and taken prisoner in disgrace.

C. The Army of the Enemy Surrounding the City (Isaiah 22:4-7)

From verses four and five we know it was a time of trouble, of terror, and of perplexity. The enemy was at the very gate of the city of Jerusalem. The chariots and horsemen of Elam (Persia) and Kir were surrounding the city. Isaiah grieved for both the people and the city. His city, Jerusalem, the *“Valley of Vision,”* the city that had experienced God’s blessing and had known the advantages of blessing for following the Lord, would now experience God’s hand of judgment because they had chosen the path of disobedience. This was the Lord’s day for troubling, trampling down and confounding that guilty city, the *“Valley of Vision.”* Their city walls were being breached, and death cries were echoing far off to the mountains. This day the Lord brought His righteous judgment upon them.

D. Preparation for Defense (Isaiah 22:8-13)

The people work feverishly to repair the city walls and to refortify the city, trying everything within their power to defend their city. Their efforts would be futile because they had overlooked the real reason for their peril, God’s judgment upon a nation for its sin and disobedience to Him. They had ignored God for so long it did not seem to occur to them to call to Him for help and repent of their wickedness. How foolish we often find the rationale of man. Isaiah had been preaching to them and warning them, but without response. Instead of heeding the call *“for weeping and for mourning, For baldness and for girding with sackcloth.”* they did the opposite. Their

reply to the call to repentance was a flippant *“let us eat and drink: for tomorrow we die.”* Verse 13 in the text gives us the contrast of actual behavior with that to which God called them. They had a contemptuous determination to spend what they had in material things and time, on the pleasures of life. How sad, especially when they, of all people, had known God’s blessing. Let us remember that no privileges, religious or civil, can give immunity from the threatened judgments of a holy and just God when the people are guilty of rejecting God’s commandments.

E. Choices and Consequences (Isaiah 22:14)

The Lord gave Isaiah a message to give to the people as a result of their choice. *“Surely for this iniquity there will be no atonement for you, Even to your death,” says the Lord God of hosts.* This does not mean the people will atone for their sin through their death. Nowhere does the Scripture teach that a man’s own death will atone for his sin. It is a declaration that for this iniquity which the people have committed, there will be no pardon. The offense is treated like the unpardonable sin as taught in the New Testament (Matthew 12:32; Mark 3:29; Luke 12:10). Jerusalem had turned its back on the Sovereign One, the Lord of Hosts.

It would be easy to become discouraged after reading these passages on “burdens” or judgments on the nations, especially when we see disturbing similarities in our nation today. However, we should remember that fear does not come from God. We, as Christians, are to face squarely the issues at hand. We should be in daily prayer for our nation, our homes, the teaching of our children and that we would have a turning to Him — that ears, eyes and hearts would be open to Him. Prayer is a powerful tool. In I Samuel 1:9-18, we read of Hannah’s prayer for a son, in I Samuel 1:21-28 we read of her commitment as she faithfully fulfilled her promise to God and in I Samuel 2:1-11, we read of her praise and thanksgiving to God for answered prayer and for all that God would do in the future for His people. As Hannah, we should come before God with true worship in our hearts; ever mindful of who God is. We must share our deepest concerns and fears with Him. He alone can truly lift our burdens and give us comfort. As we pray and study God’s Word, we must also commit our lives, as Hannah did, and the lives of our children to

God. We must share with our children God's wonderful gift of salvation through Jesus Christ. We must instruct our children in God's laws and ways, and teach them to be responsible before God for their beliefs and their actions. Let us not be discouraged in reading these passages, but rather remember that these passages were given as a warning and that with these warnings comes a promise of deliverance for obedience to His Word. Let us be inspired to pray for our nation and to renew our commitment to Him.

VI. Prophecy Concerning Shebna and Eliakim (Isaiah 22:15-25)

A. Shebna (Isaiah 22:15-19)

To this point in our text Isaiah has given us the condition of the nation as disaster approaches. Now he gives a prophecy concerning two individuals, Shebna and Eliakim. There is no genealogy given of Shebna and it is generally considered he was a foreigner, possibly from Syria. The office he held was one of the highest a foreigner could hold, and the phrase "*which is over the house*" indicates a position next to the king himself. No doubt this position of responsibility would have a great influence on the people. Shebna is an example of one who misused his office for his own selfish desires. He was securing honor for himself by building a monument to himself. This monument was a large sepulchre (a tomb hewn out of the rock on a hillside) for all to see. Sepulchres of the type Shebna was building, were reserved for those of noble lineage. Isaiah told Shebna he would never use the tomb himself, for he would be taken away and die in captivity.

B. Eliakim (Isaiah 22:20-25)

Eliakim, designated "*my servant the son of Hilkiyah*," indicates that he was an Israelite. He would replace Shebna, having supervision of the royal household and also in making decisions as to who was or was not to be received into the king's service. In other words, he had unlimited control over the royal house and household and great political authority. Eliakim is presented to us as one who would be as a "*father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to the house of Judah*." One could conjecture from this that Shebna had not cared for others in his position, but used it for his own glorification. Eliakim would be as a "*peg*", as a high one, like a pole on which coats are hung, or as a peg driven in the wall at a dis-

tance from the ground. He would, in the beginning, properly execute the duties of his office sustaining the weight of great responsibility, and bring honor to the name of his family. However, after much success, Eliakim would misuse the power of his office, and he, the "*peg*", would be removed.

Great statesmen are in the hands of God and must be good and faithful servants. There must be no selfishness in their ambitions nor conceit because of the position God has given them. A person in a place of responsibility needs to keep priorities in proper perspective. Reverence to God and loyalty to country or nation will develop the proper relationships with family and neighbors. The prime lesson for us here is that we are nothing but in God. No peg once driven in can do without God. He drove it in and He can remove it again. We must live in obedience that we might live out the life that is hidden in the very mystery of God. It seems that Eliakim, in his high office of responsibility, gave way to favoritism to relatives. He made wrong use of his position for their benefit. It is easy to pass this prophecy over as a trivial incident, but when we have carefully analyzed each verse, given to the words their exact shade of meaning and set them in their proper contrasts, there are lessons that we can learn from these two individuals that will be a help to us. God is concerned about how we conduct ourselves in places of responsibility.

Isaiah says the peg driven into a sure place will be removed. It is a solemn statement and is characterized as spoken by the Lord of Hosts. It is said that the peg will be cut down and fall. The usefulness of Eliakim's place of responsibility came to an end when it did not serve the best interests of its intended function.

VII. Prophecies Concerning Judgment on Tyre and Zidon (Isaiah 23)

A. Geographical Position

Tyre and Zidon were great and ancient cities of Phoenicia. They were situated on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean and very near the northwest corner

of the portion of Canaan occupied by Israel. They are mentioned frequently in Scripture, both in history and prophecy. They were best known for their commerce with their colonies on the islands and coasts of the Mediterranean. Through their commerce they reached every known country of the world.

B. The Message to Tyre (Isaiah 23:1-18)

The message begins with a call to the Tyrian merchants and to the sailors far away from their home to mourn over the ruin of their city. Tarshish is Tartessus in Spain. Chittim is Cyprus and sea coasts on the east of Europe. The prophet calls on them to mourn because Tyre is completely destroyed. No house or harbor remains. They learned this sad news at the land of Chittim, supposedly the land of Cyprus. The reference to Zidon (Sidon) in verses 2, 4, and 12, to the people of the coast in verse 2 and to Canaan in verse 11 shows that the whole of Phoenicia was included in the divine judgment. The news of the judgment spread rapidly and caused great concern throughout the surrounding country, especially in Egypt which had strong commercial trade links with Tyre. Tyre was dependent on the grain supply from the fertile Nile Valley.

The reason for judgment on this city was the corruption which so often comes with power and also the overbearing pride of Tyre. Verse 13 seems to suggest it was the Chaldeans (Babylonians), not the Assyrians, whom God used as an instrument to bring judgment on this city.

There is a promise of a partial restoration which will come after seventy years. But, Tyre, like a harlot, would prostitute her gifts and resources as before. There is also a promise that much later in time Tyre will be fully returned to her former prestige in trade, but the ends of that trade will be different. At that time, Tyre's gifts and resources will finally be dedicated to the Lord. Tyre's grain will contribute to the people who serve God and they will be blessed in rich measure. One evidence of a truly converted person is the willingness with which he gives to the Lord and recognizes that all he is and has belongs to Him.

Daily Bible Study Questions for Group Discussion

Note: Read notes and Scripture references before answering the questions. Some questions are for those more advanced in Bible study. Try to answer all questions but don't be discouraged if some seem a little hard. Unless otherwise instructed, use Bible only in answering questions.

FIRST DAY: Read notes on lesson 8.

1. List some interesting facts from your notes about Sargon, King of Assyria.
2. In the **20th chapter of Isaiah**, what was the reason for the symbolic act or object lesson the Lord instructed Isaiah to perform?
3. Give a little background history of the relationship between the Edomites and the Jews as found in your notes.
4. What lessons may be learned from the cry of the Edomites in trouble and the response Isaiah gave?
5. What was most interesting to you from the notes?

10. (a) What are the three things given as reasons for God's judgment on the whole earth?

(b) In your dictionary look up the words below and give brief definitions:
transgressed

ordinance

everlasting

covenant

FOURTH DAY: Read Isaiah 24:6-16a; Galatians 3:10; II Thessalonians 1:10-12.

11. After considering the principle stated in **Galatians 3:10**, do you see the logical connection and the inevitability of **verses 5 and 6** in this chapter?

12. Give some verses from this chapter that help us know a remnant that will survive the judgment.

13. In the **13th verse of chapter 24**, Isaiah uses examples of shaking the olive tree and gleaning grapes. In a previous chapter he also uses the same to express how few people are left on the earth after judgment. From your concordance or center column references find the chapter and verse where this was previously used.
14. How is it possible that the deliverance of the righteous remnant will bring glory to God, as in **24:14**? (**Read II Thessalonians 1:10-12.**)

FIFTH AND SIXTH DAYS: Read Isaiah 24:16b-23; Isaiah 25; II Thessalonians 1:7-9.

15. List some descriptive words used by Isaiah in this prophecy of the last great judgment that give us a little glimpse of the terribleness of that day.
16. Isaiah uses two metaphors which indicate a tremendous earthquake. What are they?
17. **Isaiah 25** says the Lord will “*wipe away tears from all faces.*” What are some of the sources of tears today?
18. What verse in this chapter shows expectation with confidence that their waiting will bring exceedingly joyful dividends?
19. From this **25th chapter**, what are some of the wonderful things that God did and will do for His people, causing them to exalt and praise His name?
20. What does the Lord prepare for His people of all nations? What does He take away from them?