

Isaiah Chapter 21, Hebrew Text with Translation and Footnotes
Three Obscure, Puzzling Oracles / Utterances
Concerning the Fall of Babylon, with Isaiah's Emotional Reaction,
Plus Words for Edom, and Arabia,
Including Instructions for Caring for Refugees¹

¹**Chapter 21** has eight end-notes: (1) Elam and Media in the Ancient Near East; (2) Merodach-Baladan and Amel Marduk / Ewil-Merodach of Babylon; (3) The Medes and Media; (4) Nabonidus(-Cyrus) Chronicle; (5) The Nabonidus Chronicle; (6) The City of Babylon; (7) Herodotus 1. 80 and 5. 129; (8) Sennacherib and the Destruction of Babylon in 689 B.C.E.

Oswalt entitles **Isaiah 21:1-22:25** "Judgment On Babylon And Her Allies."

He comments that "The four oracles contained in **chapters 21-22** share a certain visionary character. They depend on less rational, more atmospheric elements for their impact (at least through **22:14**), and have in common a rather fearful watching for calamity, an expectation of death, in the midst of partying and hilarity...

"Judah was tempted to put her reliance on Babylon as well as in Egypt during the last years of the eighth century B.C.E. [800 to 701 B.C.E.]. This would have been especially true prior to 710 B.C.E. when Sargon II administered a stinging defeat to the Babylonian rebel Merodach-baladan and forced Babylon to submit to him. But Sargon did not destroy either Merodach's or Babylon's rebellious designs, and in the ensuing decade they continued to be a thorn in Assyria's side. During this time, as indicated by **Isaiah 39:1**, Babylon must have been encouraging revolt among Assyria's other tributaries, offering moral support if nothing else [probably—but all that **39:1** says is that Merodach sent condolences to Hezekiah in his sickness]...But such help as the Babylonians could offer was severely restricted by their defeat under Sennacherib in 702 B.C.E. and his final destruction of the city in 689 B.C.E. [still, Babylon was rebuilt following 689 B.C.E., and regained much of its former strength]...

"**Chapter 22** seems to deal with Jerusalem in the general light of this data. In the face of impending doom, given Babylon's collapse and failure, surely Jerusalem should repent and turn to God. Instead, they look to their weapons, hold parties, and build tombs. All this in the 'Valley of Vision!' (Pp. 388-89)

Slotki comments on **chapter 21** that it contains "Oracles on *the wilderness of the sea* (Babylon), *Dumah* (Edom) and *Arabia*. They are characterized by sympathy with these suffering nations." (P. 95)

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Alexander comments that “As three of the verses of this chapter begin with the word נִשְׁבַּע; (**verses 1, 11, 13**), it is now commonly supposed to consist of three distinct prophecies. It is also agreed that the first of these (**verses 1-10**) relates to the conquest of Babylon by the Medes and Persians; the second (**verses 11-12**) either to Edom, or the Arabian tribe Dumah; and the third (**verses 13-17**) to another Arabian tribe, or to Arabia in general. The second and third of these divisions are admitted by the recent [mid-19th century] German writers to be genuine, that is to say, composed by Isaiah himself, while the first is with almost equal unanimity declared to be the product of a later age. This critical judgment as in other cases, is founded partly on alleged diversities of phraseology, but chiefly on the wonderful coincidences with history, both sacred and profane, which could not be ascribed to Isaiah or to any contemporary writer, without conceding the reality of prophetic inspiration...

“As to the remainder of the chapter, while it cannot be denied that the connection of the parts, and the meaning of each in itself, are exceedingly obscure, it may be doubted whether there is sufficient ground for their entire separation as distinct and independent prophecies...

“However difficult it may be...to determine the connection of these parts, they may safely regarded as composing one obscure but continuous prediction. This is the less improbable, because they can all be brought into connection, if not unity, by simply supposing that the tribes or races, to which **verses 11-17** relate, were sharers with the Jews in the Babylonian tyranny, and therefore interested in its downfall. This hypothesis, it is true, is not susceptible of demonstration; but it is strongly recommended by the very fact that it explains the juxtaposition of these prophecies, or rather entitles them to be considered one.” (Pp. 370-71)

Yes, as Alexander says, all of this is only “probable,” and there is little certainty in its interpretation of this “obscure” text.

Gray states that **chapter 21** consists of three poems “plus a prose note,” **verses 16-17**. “Not improbably the poems are the work of a single writer, and were composed in Palestine shortly after the middle of the 6th century B.C.E. [that is, shortly after 550 B.C.E., and not by the historical Isaiah]. ‘Common to all three are (1) the obscure oracular utterance...(2) the strongly marked visionary element in the writer’s experience, and (3) a certain readiness of sympathy with the foreign nations concerned in the predictions’ [quoting Skinner]...

“A date between 549 and 538 B.C.E. best satisfies the historical situation presupposed in **verses 1-10**; the language in **verses 11-15** points to a date considerably later than Isaiah’s.” (P. 348)

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Again, as Gray says, all of this is “not improbable.” But neither is it at all certain.

Motyer entitles **21:1-23:18** “The second cycle of oracles. The world in the shadows.”

He comments that Isaiah continues to build oracles from many different points of origin into a mosaic world-view. The first cycle (**13:1-20:6**) is marked by buoyant certainty; the world is in the Lord’s hands and His promises will be fulfilled. This second cycle offers a complete contrast...

“It begins with a vision of judgment from which Isaiah recoils in horror (**21:3**) and proceeds to a lone voice in the darkness and a prediction of darkness yet to come (**21:11-12**). It reveals a Gentile world seeking but not finding help (**21:13-15**) and accuses the people of God of an unforgivable sin (**22:14**). Its one note of hope is a tribute to the Lord from Tyre, but even this is at the end of an oracle of devastation (**23:18**)...

“Thus, as Isaiah probes forward into the future he sees the world becoming darker. History does not ‘every day in every way become better and better.’ Divine judgments become starker, needs become deeper and more insoluble, the people of God are beset by a spirit of self-sufficiency and this-worldliness. Isaiah is not departing from his confidence in the promises of God, but he is relating them, realistically, to ever more desperate situations as time goes on...

“In this series Isaiah uses cryptic titles for four of the five oracles. In each case the oracle can in fact be identified with a place, but the cryptic element in the title means, as we shall see, that the place in question is not considered a historical entity but as the embodiment of a topic or principle.” (Pp. 171-72)

We are very suspicious of Motyer’s summary statements such as this, especially when he says “the place in question is not considered a historical entity but the embodiment of a topic or principle.” We do not think we would ever have drawn these conclusions simply by reading **chapters 13-23**. We do not sense that Isaiah is attempting to draw a “mosaic world-view” (a surface decoration made by inlaying small pieces of variously colored material to form pictures or patterns). But rather than attempting to evaluate his statement here, we will wait until we have come to the end of **chapter 23**, for an overall view of these oracles.

Chapter 13, even more than **chapter 21**, begins with a vision of judgment—the coming of the day of YHWH on Babylon, with destruction of soldiers and civilians, including infants. Both chapters in essence announce the destruction / fall of Babylon.

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Perhaps this is Motyer's reason for calling **chapter 21** the beginning of a second cycle of oracles.

Watts states that **21:1-10** "shifts back and forth from vision (**verses 2, 5**) to a cry of personal anguish (**verses 3-4**) to a dramatic confirmation of the vision (**verses 6-9**) to a closing address to the audience (**verse 10**).

"It can be read as a monologue by an unidentified speaker who is distressed at the news of Babylon's defeat...By implication, this must be someone in Jerusalem who is deeply involved in the party that supports Babylon's policies. Thus Babylon's overthrow brings distress to this speaker and his political stance.

"Ibn Ezra [Rabbi Abraham Ben Meir, 1089-1167 C.E., Jewish poet and philosopher of the Middle Ages] argued that this speaker could not be the prophet Isaiah 'since the prophet's views are known to be joy—not sorrow'...It is in fact not Isaiah who speaks here. Nothing in the context identifies him as the speaker.

"When we recognize that **chapters 21** and **22** form one larger whole...it is evident that the speaker is identified by name at the end of the scene. He is Shebna, the palace steward and chief minister (**22:15**)." (Pp. 271-72)

Perhaps...but to unite these seemingly disparate oracles into one larger whole is not indicated by the text.

Kaiser entitle **21:1-10** "Fallen, Fallen is Babylon."

He states that "It is not merely on the first reading that the reader has to struggle with the different impressions given to this oracle...He is also faced by a whole series of obscurities and tensions...

"What is it in fact that comes roaring out of the desert like a whirlwind in the south? Is it the revelation which rushes upon the poet in a violent but only fragmentary form, or the powerful army of the Elamites and Medes? Who is the false one and the destroyer, the attacker and the attacked? Or are these terms a cypher [code-word] understandable only to the poet's contemporaries, and indicating to them the coming of the day of Yahweh and the shattering event which it was to bring to the nations? It is presumably God Himself Who gives the Elamites and the Medes the order to attack. But whose sighing will He bring to an end, and who has caused it?...

"For whom is the table spread? Are those who are attacked sitting down unconcerned to their meal, while the attackers are already making the final preparations for their onslaught? Or is the object of this attack laying before them like a table that

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has been spread? Does the scene with the watchman give us an insight into a characteristic example of the split personality of a visionary, or does it describe to us a visionary dream-image?...

“What is the meaning of the carts, riders and beasts? Are they parts of the conqueror’s army? Are the victors carrying away their booty? Or do they perhaps represent the return home of those who were sighing under the rule imposed by Babylon?...

“And who is it who finally utters the cry of jubilation at the fall of Babylon, the watchman, or God giving an interpretation? And why is the prophet-poet so horrified at what he sees in so fragmentary a form, although it is not quite clearly an even bring the salvation for which his people have longed for so many year?” (Pp. 120-21)

Kaiser is not making up these questions. They are raised by the text. Serious interpreters must seek to answer them, avoiding passing over them, or giving easy answers to them.

Kaiser concludes his discussion of the overall nature of **21:1-10** by stating, “What seems at first to be direct description of an experience has finally been shown to be a deliberate work of art which we have no right to reduce to its component parts. This raises the question, whether it is an ancient prophecy from the period of the Babylonian empire or a late prophecy composed in the study or temple cell of a devout Jew.” (P. 122)

²Slotki comments on **verses 1-10** that they are an “oracle on the capture of Babylon by the Persians under Cyrus in 538 B.C.E. According to others, but with less probability, the reference is to the siege of Babylon in the reign of Merodach-baladan by Sargon in 710 B.C.E.” (P. 95)

Alexander comments on **verses 1-10** that “The first part of the prophecy opens with an emphatic intimation of its alarming character (**verses 1-4**). We have then a graphic representation of the march of the Medes and Persians upon Babylon (**verses 5-9**). This is followed by a hint of the effect which this event would have upon the people of Jehovah (**verse 10**). (P. 371)

Gray entitles these verses “A vision of the approaching fall of Babylon (before the Persians).” We wonder why he did not say “(before Elam and Media).”

He comments that “The poem describes four scenes seen in a vision, or a succession of visions:

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- (1) the horrors of war are proceeding, and a cry is heard summoning Elam and Media to attack a city (**verse 2**);
 - (2) preparations are made for a banquet, and the banquet is proceeding when suddenly there comes the cry, To arms! And the princes, or captains, are called from the table to the field (**verse 5**);
 - (3) troops mounted on horses, asses, and camels are advancing (**verse 9a-c**);
 - (4) Babylon is captured and all her Gods shattered to the ground [**verse 9d**].

“**Verse 1** is a prelude...In **verses 3-4** the seer describes the horror with which the first scene fills him...In **verses 7-8** the manner in which he receives the visions, and in **verse 10**, addressing his own much afflicted people, he ascribes his revelations to Yahweh as their source...

“The city (implied by the term ‘besiege’) of the first scene can hardly be other than that of the fourth [scene], that is, Babylon...The banquet of the second scene is a Babylonian banquet. The cry in the second scene carries events in the city down to the time after the advance of Elam and Media in the third scene, at a distance from Babylon, has begun...The fourth scene depicts the fall of Babylon before this attacking force of Elam and Media.

“Thus the capture of Babylon is still future to the writer, so also probably is the advance of Elam and Media...But we may infer that a political situation, which made such an advance probable, already existed. Such a situation existed between 549 B.C.E., when Cyrus had united under his sway Media as well as Elam, and 538 B.C.E., when Babylon opened its gates without a struggle to Cyrus’ Median and Elamite army. And to these years we may refer the oracle. It was not written after the event; for Babylon avoided ‘falling’ (in the sense probably intended by the writer) by immediate capitulation, and Cyrus, so far from shattering, made a point of honoring, the Gods of Babylon...[The writer] is apprehensive that the horrors of war will in the immediate future affect not only Babylon, but also her captives.” (Pp. 350-51)

In our reading of **verses 1-10**, we see no indication of this passage’s being a prophecy of something to occur in future times, some two centuries away. There is no such statement as “It will happen,” or “In days to come...” etc. Rather, the entire passage appears to be contemporary with or immediately before the fall of Babylon, as the armies of Elam and Media are seen advancing on Babylon. The passage claims to be a Divine oracle—but makes no claim to being a vision of the distant future. What do you think?

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Motyer entitles **verses 1-10** "The Desert by the Sea (Babylon): the fall of the Gods."

He comments that "The reference to Babylon in **verse 9** is usually thought to determine the date to which this oracle refers: the city's fall to Cyrus in 539 B.C.E. In consequence, the composition of the oracle is dated in some proximity to that event. This view is supported by the reference to the [Elamites and] Medes in **verse 2**, who were associated with the Persians [the Persians are not mentioned in the text] in conquering Babylon. The careless revelry of **verse 5** also suits what is known of Babylon at the moment of its fall (compare **Daniel 5**). But things are actually not so clearcut." (P. 172)

Oswalt states that "the oracle in **21:1-10** is among the more obscure in the collection, both as to its historical provenance and as to its content. **Verse 9** makes it appear that the entire address is to Babylon, but that is by no means clear, so that Penna and Kissane see **verses 1-5** speaking about Judah...

"The strange title only compounds the difficulty. Also, it is not clear what destruction of Babylon is being spoken of. The reference to Elam and Media (**verse 2**) seems to point to the Persian overthrow in 539 B.C.E. [how so? Why name Elam and Media, but not mention Persia?], as does **verse 5** with its apparent allusion to Belshazzar's feast (**Daniel 5** [but there is no mention of Belshazzar, and royal feasts were commonplace]). As a result...many commentators assigned the oracle a date of about 540 B.C.E (for example, Delitzsch)...

"Toward the end of the nineteenth century, however, such influential commentators as G.A. Smith and T.K. Cheyne reverted to the idea of Isaianic authorship on the grounds that the reference was to one of the defeats in 710, 702, or 689 B.C.E...

"More recently the move is back toward the 540 B.C.E. date or even later. The most recent treatment of the chapter concludes that both points of view are correct (A. A. Macintosh, **Isaiah XXI: A Palimpsest**)...by which he means that there was a sixth century rewriting of an eighth-century document. This point of view seems to represent the most accurate observation of the data, for materials reflecting data from both centuries seem to be present...However, one wonders if, granting the possibility of prediction, an eighth-century origin could not include both materials...

"From the Judean's point of view, between 715 and 700 B.C.E. it was important to say that Babylon could offer no lasting help to them at that time. That Babylon would fall to Cyrus in 539 would be of little significance...Thus the vision seems to combine

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the pictures of both the near and the far situations in order to give a complete statement...

“If **chapters 19-20** and **22** are taken into account as the context of this chapter, it seems even more certain that the function is not comfort, but warning—the continuing warning that the nations of this earth are under the judgment of God and are neither to be trusted nor feared as to our ultimate conditions and destiny.” (Pp. 389-90)

We think the fact that Elam and Media are named, and Persia is not so much as mentioned, indicates a time somewhat earlier than that of Cyrus and the Persians, and that the oracle envisions a different army attacking and conquering Babylon, resulting in Babylon’s Gods being shattered. Some think this must be with reference to Sennacherib’s destruction of Babylon in 689 B.C.E., but Sennacherib was the enemy of Elam, and Elam supported Merodach-Baladan, king of Babylon at that time. When Cyrus conquered Babylon, the gates were opened to his entry, and rather than shattering Babylon’s Gods he recognized the validity of the many Gods, and allowed their images to be returned to their native homes, from which the Babylonians had taken them. Thus we conclude that the oracle makes a prediction which never came to pass. What do you think?

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 1**, “*The burden of the desert of the sea. Like whirlwinds in the south, as to rushing (or driving) from the wilderness it comes, from a terrible land.* By the desert of the sea, Grotius understands the country of the Edomites, extending to the Red Sea, as it did in the days of Solomon (**1 Kings 9:26**). Other interpreters are agreed that the phrase is an enigmatical description of Babylonia as a great plain (**Genesis 11:1; Isaiah 23:13**), watered by a great river, which like the Nile (**Isaiah 19:5**), is sometimes called a sea (**Isaiah 27:1**)...

“This description 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 then had the appearance of a sea. The threatened danger is compared to the approach of a tempest from the south, i.e. from the great Arabian desert.” (P. 371)

Motyer comments on **verse 1** that “**Verses 1-2a** suggest familiarity with weather conditions in the Negebh and, therefore, a Palestinian rather than a Babylonian location for the author.” (P. 172)

He adds that “Erlandsson notes that the *Desert by the Sea* could be a Hebrew equivalent to the Akkadian *mat tamtim* (‘the land of the sea’), the area around the Persian Gulf, i.e. Merodach-Baladan’s habitat...It is simpler, however, to think in terms

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כְּסוּפֹת בְּנֶגֶב לְחֵלֶף

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of the Negebh, which was an environment familiar to Isaiah and may even have been the place where the vision was given.” (P. 174)

Watts translates by “a sea wilderness” or “swampland.” He comments that “The style of titles that listed nations in **13:1**; **15:1**; **17:1** and **19:1** changes here. In **21:1**, **11**, **13** and **22:1** obscure words sometimes taken up from the first lines are used.” (Pp. 270-71)

Kaiser notes that “Commentators differ in their view of the originality and meaning of the reading ‘wilderness of the sea,’ found or assumed in all witnesses to the text other than [**Rahifs**]. Those who retain it, understand it to refer either to the Babylonian lowland (Delitzsch), the desert south-east of Babylonia on the Persian Gulf (Dillmann-Kittel), or the Syrian-Arabian desert west of the lower Euphrates (Fohrer). But it is very unlikely that the original intention of the heading was one of such scholarly geographical precision and was not rather, as in **21:13** and **22:1**, compare **verse 5**, a keyword which seemed appropriate as a mnemonic quotation.” (P. 119)

He comments on **verses 1b-5**: “*The enemy is coming!* The poem begins with the mysterious but stirring announcement of what is to come. Like one of the much feared sandstorms, which our poet knows from experience in the steppe and desert south of the mountains of Judah, or of which he has heard tell, a power which is not named at first whirls out of the desert, the terrible land...It seems to mean not a revelation coming with violence upon the prophet, but the rushing advance of a mighty attacker.” (Pp. 122-23)

Kaiser quotes C. R. Raswan’s [**The Black Tents of Arabia**] description of an Arabian dust-storm:

“Two days afterwards we...felt the wind more stifling and driving dense dust-clouds before it. We weathered the first day of it, though it blew with unremitting fierceness and perseverance. But on the next day it developed into a veritable sandstorm of such violence, that one could barely keep one’s seat in the saddle...The third day was a repetition of the second, a howling gale, clouds, whirling sand, and no visibility beyond ten paces...Our hands and faces were chapped...the lips became parched...the breath came in pants; the blood hammered heavily in the heart and the temples...

“Our camels dragged themselves along only with the utmost effort, groaning and complaining. In one of the saddle-bags we carried one of our slaves, who had collapsed from exhaustion on the second day...On the fourth day the storm took on fresh fury. The wind howled more fiercely than ever. Our lungs were choked with dust. Worn out by the constant buffeting and sleepless nights, with aching joints, dead-tired, at the end of our strength, we groped our way forward.” (Pp. 122-23)

מַמְדַּבֵּר בָּא

מֵאֶרֶץ נִוְרָאָה:

Utterance / oracle of (the) wilderness-sea:³

Like storm-winds in the Negebh / south-land⁴ passing-by,⁵

³Slotki comments that Babylon is named in this oracle “wilderness of the sea.” He states that “Babylon is so described on account of its situation near the Persian Gulf. In the cuneiform inscriptions only South Babylonia is called ‘land of the sea,’ but the name may have been extended by the prophet to the entire country. Others render ‘wilderness of the west [taking ‘sea’ as referring to the Mediterranean Sea],’ Babylon being situated on the west of Persia and separated from it by a wilderness.” (P. 95)

Oswalt comments that “If the title is correct...it may be an ironic statement mocking a country which is really a desert in terms of its capacity to help others.” (P. 391)

Gray states bluntly, “No tolerable explanation of the phrase *wilderness of the sea* has ever been offered.” (P. 351)

We think that is overstatement, and agree with Watts that “*Swampland* is identified by **verse 9**.” But there is no avoiding the fact that the prophetic message is filled with obscurity and riddle.

⁴Slotki notes that by the “south” [Hebrew נֶגֶב, *neghebh*], “the ‘dry’ (so literally) pastoral country, now a desert area, south of Palestine, whose storms and whirlwinds sweep on to the north.” (P. 95) The reason for Slotki’s saying the noun means “dry” is that the root in modern Hebrew means “be dry, parched.”

We understand the author as comparing the weather seen in his vision to the weather he has experienced in his homeland, Israel, as violent storms roar northward from its Negebh / Southland. We agree with Gray, who states that “the writer was probably familiar with the Negebh as a resident in its neighborhood...The seer, like the author of **Psalms 29**, had seen this country ‘shaking’ with storms.” (P. 352)

Indeed, **Psalms 29** is filled with this kind of language, in its depiction of the coming of YHWH’s “voice.” Here, in **Isaiah 21**, we think the description is that of Isaiah’s “stern vision” or “oracle” coming to him. And just as we would expect on the basis of **Numbers 12:6-8** and **1 Corinthians 13:9-12**, the vision / oracle is filled with puzzling obscurity, leading to greatly differing interpretations.

⁵Gray comments that “In the opening lines of the poem the seer explains how
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from a wilderness it is coming,⁶

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there has come to him, like tempestuous weather, news from a land that had ever been a cause of fear.” (P. 352) But Isaiah does not say “news” has come to him—rather, it is “a stern vision.” And we remember how the entire **Book of Isaiah** is entitled **חִזּוֹן**, **chazon**, “Vision.” Here the noun is **חִזּוֹת**, **chazuth**, a synonym.

⁶Slotki states that the phrase “from the wilderness” means “the flat region that intervenes between Babylon and Persia.” (P. 95)

But we wonder, how has Slotki come to that conclusion. The two phrases, **מִמְדְּבָר בָּא מֵאֶרֶץ נוֹרָאָה**, “from a wilderness / desert coming, from a fearsome / terrifying land,” could easily apply to other areas, such as the Negebh or the Wilderness Peninsula, or the Arabian Desert, or the African Sahara, etc. There is nothing in either **מְדְבָר**, “wilderness / desert” or in **אֶרֶץ**, “land,” “earth” that implies “flat.”

Oswalt comments that the phrase “*Like stormwinds from the Negebh* [it is coming] immediately thrusts the reader into the cognitive difficulties of the vision. For we are not told what comes.” (P. 391)

As Watts notes, “the subject is indefinite ‘he’ or ‘it.’” (P. 271) What do you think the “it” refers to?

We assume that it means the stern / hard vision is coming like storm-winds. But it could possibly be referring to the one acting faithlessly, the one destroying; or to the combined armies of Elam and Media.

Watts states that “that which comes is either an invading army or the news of such an invasion.” (P. 272)

Oswalt is right. The oracle is worded in such a way that interpretation is constantly demanded. He states that “the images are jumbled and incomplete. But they are entirely effective in conveying the impression of sudden, breathless doom... The vision itself may be what swept over the prophet like a storm...”

“Especially in the winter, as weather systems move to the north of Israel, strong windstorms come from the east and the southeast out of the wilderness...These storms come with terrifying suddenness and force. So this experience strikes the prophet.” (P. 391)

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from a terrifying land.⁷

21:2^{8, 1, 2} תְּזוֹת קָשָׁה הַגֵּר-לִי

⁶(...continued)

Do you agree with Oswalt that it is a picture of “doom” that is coming? Then isn’t that very close to saying it is a picture of the combined forces of Elam and Media bringing destruction and death to Babylon? Which, in fact, never happened?

⁷Slotki notes that “a dreadful land” means “Persia, which was the terror of Babylon’s inhabitants.” (P. 95)

But why then is Persia not mentioned in the passage—only Elam and Media specifically? We think that Babylon had many enemies, and for many years Babylon’s major enemy was Assyria. But here, in **Isaiah 21**, the enemy is named—it is the two nations immediately to Babylon’s east, depicted as descending like a storm from the Zagros mountains to the east of Babylon—Elam and Media.

⁸Alexander translates / comments on **verse 2**: “*A hard vision, it is revealed to me; the deceiver deceiving and the spoiler spoiling. Go up, O Elam; besiege, O Media: all sighing (or all its sighing) have I made to cease.*” (P. 372)

Gray entitles **verse 2** “First Scene.”

He comments that ‘The vision (תְּזוֹת)...is one of the stern (קָשָׁה [our ‘hard’])...realities of war. **Verse 2b, c** refers to the Persians [but the Persians are not mentioned --only Elam and Media!] descending from their mountain home, spreading ruin and disaster as they go...Elam is the great plain east of the lower Tigris, together with the mountains enclosing it on the north and east. Media is the country north of Elam with its center at Ecbatana. The combination of these two terms is the natural mode of reference by a late exilic writer to the dominion, or army, of Cyrus: post-exilic writers... might have used the term Persia, Persians.” (Pp. 352-53)

Motyer comments on **verse 2** that “The activities of Elam and Media in **verse 2** cannot be restricted to the fall of Babylon in 539 B.C.E. They were on and off stage all through the Assyrian and Babylonian periods.” (P. 172)

We certainly agree with Motyer, but confess how little we know about the activities of Elam and Media in the sixth century. See the articles from **Wikipedia** on Elam and Media in our end-note 1.

Motyer states that “The presence of Elam is a problem for those who link and date the oracle with the 539 B.C.E. Persian overthrow of Babylon, for, as Kaiser admits, Elam ‘ceased to be a serious opponent of the Mesopotamian empires as early as 639 B.C.E...It is more exact to date the oracle at the time of Merodach-Baladan’s embassy

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הַבּוֹגֵר׃ בּוֹגֵר׃
 וְהַשׁוֹרֵר׃ שׁוֹרֵר׃
 עֲלֵי עֵילָם׃
 צוֹרֵי מְדֵי
 כָּל-אַנְחָתָהּ הַשְּׁבֵתִי׃

A harsh / severe vision⁹ was declared¹⁰ to me:¹¹

⁸(...continued)

and to hear behind the assonantal [resemblance of sound] cry, ‘Up,. Elam’ [עֲלֵי׃ עֵילָם׃, ‘eliy, ‘eylam] the ambassadors’ assurance of Elam’s readiness to join the rebellion on Babylon’s side. Detached from its original context, it notes the continuance of the appeal to military solutions.” (P. 174)

But is this “an assurance of Elam’s readiness to join the rebellion on Babylon’s side”? We think not. We see the imperative statement as a call to Elam and Media to prepare for the conquest of Babylon. What do you think?

Watts comments that “Elam and Media were peoples from the Iranian highlands who were becoming active in Mesopotamian affairs near the end of the eighth century... Elamite collaboration had made possible Merodach-Baladan’s capture of Babylon in 720 B.C.E. Commentators have been very occupied with determining their roles here and in **Isaiah 22:6**...The outcry of the vision does not define their role, whether for or against Babylon, but it does establish their participation in the struggle.” (P. 272)

For Merodach-Baladan, see our end-note 2.

Kaiser states that in **verse 2** “The poet at once changes the theme and tells us of the revelation he has received, in order to let us know that he is not speaking of an actual event, but one seen in a vision.” (P. 123) We agree.

⁹Slotki’s translation has “a grievous vision,” and he comments that “the prophet expresses his sympathies and commiseration [sympathy, compassion] even with the foreign and harsh Babylonians in the calamity that hangs over their heads.” (P. 95)

We translate the phrase קִשָּׁה תְּזוֹת, by “a harsh / severe vision,” and see nothing in this language that is suggestive of sympathy for Babylon. We think Slotki is
 (continued...)

the one acting faithlessly acts faithlessly,
and the one destroying destroys!¹²

⁹(...continued)
reading this thought of compassion into the text at this point. In the following verses, sympathy for Babylon is expressed—but not here.

Oswalt comments that “A *severe vision* speaks of the nature of the events which the prophet foresees. Merely because he prophesies doom and bloodshed does not mean that he delights in these. The same sensitivity which made the prophets aware of what God was saying to them also made them emphasize with the human tragedies which their messages portended [warned against].” (P. 391)

¹⁰Alexander states that “**וְנִבְּא** [‘was declared’], the hophal perfect, is indefinite, and governs the preceding words; as if he had said, ‘A revelation has been made to me (consisting of) a grievous vision.’” (P. 372)

¹¹Motyer comments that “There is no reason why the fall of Babylon to Persia should be a matter of anguish (**verses 3-4**) to the prophet and a ‘dire vision’ (**verse 2**) to be reported to the ‘crushed’ people of God (**verse 10**).” (P. 172)

We agree. The report of Babylon’s fall to the Persians under Cyrus, as depicted in the Cyrus cylinder, should have been a matter of rejoicing for any prophet of YHWH, and certainly for the captive people of Jerusalem / Judah!

But this oracle’s prediction is a vision of the destruction of Babylon and its inhabitants, which would mean the death of many Israelites living there. Is that the reason for the prophet’s labeling the vision as “hard” or “harsh” or “dire”? How do you think Ezra would describe the fall of Babylon, as it meant the return of Israel’s precious temple vessels to Jerusalem, and the rebuilding of the fallen temple?

¹²Slotki’s translation of these two lines is “The treacherous dealer dealeth treacherously, and the spoiler spoileth,” same as **King James**. Other translations include “The betrayer is betraying, The ravager ravaging”; “the betrayer betrays, and the destroyer destroys”; “The traitor betrays, the looter takes loot”; “The traitor betrays and the despoiler despoils”; and ὁ ἀθετῶν ἀθετεῖ ὁ ἀνομῶν ἀνομεῖ, “the one rejecting rejects; the one acting lawlessly acts lawlessly.”

Slotki comments that the two lines are “descriptive of Babylon’s treatment of her captives.” (P. 95)

But the text does not identify who it is that is acting treacherously and betraying, and it may well be that the Babylonian treatment of captives was not nearly as harsh

(continued...)

¹²(...continued)

and unrelenting as commonly depicted both by some biblical statements, and by commentators throughout the centuries. We remember Jeremiah's letter to the captive people of Judah in Babylon in **Jeremiah 29:6-7**,

- 6 Take wives, and give birth to sons and daughters!
 And take wives for your sons!
 And give your daughters to men,
 and let them give birth to sons and daughters!
 And become numerous there!
 And don't become fewer in number!
- 7 And seek prosperity (for) the City where I have removed you!
 And pray for it, to YHWH!
 For in its prosperity will be your prosperity!"

And we remember how, when the captured Judahites were offered their freedom to return to Jerusalem / Judah and rebuild their temple by Cyrus, the majority of them refused to accept the offer, choosing rather to remain in Babylon—which in the ensuing centuries was to become the center of Rabbinic Judaism, where the "**Babylonian Talmud**" was written and published.

Oswalt comments that "The thing which grips the prophet is the perverseness of warfare. He is not seeing courage, self-sacrifice, and commitment but rather treachery and greed as the works of a lifetime, patiently built up and cared for, are destroyed in a violent moment by all that is ugly in humanity." (P. 391)

Yes, and regardless of who the perpetrators may be, whether the Babylonians or the Elamites and Medians, war with its destruction and death is never pretty, but always ugly. We saw this truth in the American Civil War; we saw it in the First and Second World Wars, with all of the destruction and death—including that caused by the Allied Forces as they destroyed cities and entire populations in Germany and Japan.

What do you think? Even if there is such a thing as a "just war," is there any way to deny its ugliness, as human beings slaughter one another, and destroy the works and hopes of lifetimes?

A close friend of mine landed on the Normandy beach on D-day, and then marched as a foot soldier all the way to Berlin—fighting against and killing enemy soldiers (and sometimes civilians) on the way. When he returned from the war, he could never get that experience out of his mind, as it continued to haunt him until his death. His favorite biblical passage was **Psalms 133**, which he quoted again and again when leading in a communion service, "Behold how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell together in unity! It is like the precious oil on the head, running down on

(continued...)

Go up, Elam!¹³
Besiege, Media!^{14, 3}

¹²(...continued)
the beard...It is like the dew of Hermon...For there the Lord has commanded the blessing, life forevermore.”

Kaiser states that “The first sentence of **verse 2b**, ‘The false one acts falsely and the destroyer destroys,’ has the effect of an outcry which can most easily be applied to Babylonian rule.” But he also suggests that it may be applied to “the woes of the final age which precedes the rule of God over this earth are now beginning.” (P. 123)

We say, Perhaps...but the text does not make it clear what the sentence is applied to—and any application we make of it is at best speculative.

¹³Kaiser comments that “The mention of the Elamites, particularly as they come first, is of course at first sight astonishing. For this country, lying east of Babylonia, ceased to be a serious opponent of the Mesopotamian empires as early as 639 B.C.E., when the Assyrian emperor Assurbanipal conquered Susa.” (P. 124)

¹⁴For the Medes and Media, see our end-note 3.

Kaiser states that the Median kingdom was brought to an end when “Cyrus II, the later conqueror of Babylon, crushed the king of the Medes, Astyages, in 553 B.C.E.” (P. 125)

Slotki comments on the mention of Elam and Media that “Both of these countries were under the rule of the Persian king Cyrus. Elam lay on the north of the Persian Gulf and east of the Tigris; Media extended to the north of it. Cyrus first ruled over Anshan in the north of the latter and conquered Media in 549 B.C.E., uniting both countries in one kingdom.” (P. 95) Kaiser states that “the likely conclusion here is that Elam and Medes are paraphrases for the Persian kingdom.” (P. 124)

But we ask, if both of these countries were under the rule of Cyrus the Persian, why not call upon Persia—why single out Elam and Media? We think the specific naming of these two countries as combining to attack Babylon points to a time prior to Cyrus of Persia, or at least prior to 553 B.C.E. What do you think? At best, the language of the prophetic message is obscure, lacking clarity.

Oswalt comments that “*Go up Elam; besiege, Media* [צוֹרֵי מְדִיָּנָה] is the command to Babylon’s enemies to attack her [to go up against her, to confine / shut in / besiege her]...

(continued...)

¹⁴(...continued)

“Elam, in what is today southern Iran along the east coast of the Persian Gulf, formed a major part of the Persian homeland, and it was the Persians with the Medes, who lived in what is today north-central Iran, who brought down Babylon in 539 B.C.E. Thus, this statement is an apt prediction of what lay ahead. But would it have had any meaning in the late 700's? Those who accept the late date normally point out that Elam and the Medes were allies of Babylon in the 700's and that this command could not have been understood then. But that does not follow...It is not necessary that there be some historical situation to which the prophetic word corresponds. The prophet may well be painting a general picture in which components are used in non-historical ways.” (P. 392)

We appreciate this comment by Oswalt. The fact is, we believe, the prediction made in **chapter 21:1-10** is non-historical; it was never fulfilled. But the language used does not depict a “general picture”—it is very specific—and it never came to pass.

Alexander states that “Babylon was actually taken by stratagem...The Medes and Persians were united under Cyrus, but the latter are here named first...because they were now in the [ascendancy].” (P. 372) That is, at the time of Isaiah, but not in the time of the actual fall of Babylon to the Persians. And Alexander is mistaken in saying that the Persians are here named first. They are not named at all in the Hebrew text of this passage!

Rahfs translation of these lines is ἐπ’ ἐμοὶ οἱ Αἰλαμίται καὶ οἱ πρέσβεις τῶν Περσῶν ἐπ’ ἐμὲ ἔρχονται, “upon / against me the Elamites and the officials of the Persians upon / against me are coming.”

Here, in the Greek translation, made in the late post-exilic period, is the first mention of Persia in this text—made by a translator who had the advantage of knowing the story of Babylon’s fall to Cyrus the Persian. 1QIs^a, also from the late post-exilic period, has Elam and Media, with no mention of Persia.

If Slotki is correct, this chapter is to be located in, or is dealing with the same time-frame as **chapters 40-55**, in the sixth century (600 to 501 B.C.E., not in the eighth century (800 to 701 B.C.E.) when the historical Isaiah lived, perhaps living into the first half of the 7th century.

Watts states that “The conquest of Babylon in 703 B.C.E. to which this vision refers presaged the collapse of all opposition to Sennacherib and disaster for those who advised it (as Shebna had) or who led it (as Hezekiah had).” (P. 273)

Watts is referring to the Assyrian vassal Marduk-apla-iddina II, known in the **Hebrew Bible** as Merodach Baladan, a Chaldean ruler who in 703 B.C.E, retook

(continued...)

All groaning¹⁵ I caused to cease.¹⁶

¹⁴(...continued)

Babylon from Assyria during an uprising—which was a contributing factor in the attack of Sennacherib, the Assyrian king, on Babylon in 689 B.C.E., resulting in a terrifying destruction of the city.

We say, Strange, is it not, that there is no mention of Merodach Baladan in the passage, and he did not destroy the city of Babylon, or slaughter its inhabitants.

¹⁵Slotki holds that this sighing / groaning that YHWH ended is that of “the victims of Babylon’s oppression.” (P. 95)

Alexander comments that “The final letter of הַתְּנַחֲמֵנִי is commonly regarded as a suffix [making the noun translate ‘her sighing / groaning’], though without *mappik* [a dot in the final letter י], that is, Babylon’s, i.e. all the sighing [groaning] it has caused by its oppression, or all the sighing of it, that is, the [exile] or captivity.” (P. 372)

Again we say, Perhaps...but the text does not make this clear. And we ask, Could it mean the sighing / groaning of the Babylonians, whose capital city and its inhabitants are being destroyed by the confederacy of Elam / Media, and silence replaces their dying moans?

Kaiser states that “It is not clear whether he [the late, post-exilic author] proposes to remove the reason for the lamentation of the exiles, the Jews living in the diaspora... at their slavery in Babylon, or more generally for the sighing of the whole creation (compare **Romans 8:19-21**).” (P. 124)

Kaiser comments that “Like one pursued the poet once again changes his theme and records the order which, in view of the concluding ‘All the sighing I bring to an end,’ can only be spoken by God (compare **Isaiah 13:2-3** [YHWH gives the order for His troops to attack Babylon]).” (P. 123)

Kaiser comments that “The Elamites are to draw near and the Medes to begin the siege (see **Jeremiah 46:9; 49:31; 51:27; Joel 4:9, 12^{Heb} / 3:9, 12^{Eng}; Jeremiah 6:6; 50:14-15, 29; 51:11; and Jeremiah 5:10; 6:4-6; 49:28; 50:21, 26, 29; Joel 4:13^{Heb} / 3:13^{Eng}; Micah 4:13**). The reader is kept even more in suspense, because he still does not know who is to be attacked. But contemporary readers would guess at once from the name of the nations to whom the order is given.” (Pp. 123-24)

¹⁶Gray comments that the phrase in the Hebrew text, “I have caused to cease,” “suddenly introduces Yahweh as Speaker, is improbable.” (P. 353)

(continued...)

¹⁶(...continued)

Oswalt comments that “I will stop all her groaning is another enigmatic statement. Generally it is taken to refer to groaning of complaining under Babylonian oppression when she became a world empire after 605 B.C.E. This is probably the ultimate meaning. One wonders if in the context of the late eighth century [the historical Isaiah’s time] the groaning was understood to be Babylon’s against the Assyrian empire. If so, God plans to put a stop to it, although not in quite the way Babylon hoped.” (P. 392)

Again, Oswalt is right. The statement is “enigmatic” [mysterious, puzzling]. And again, we are reminded of the statements made concerning God-given prophecy in **Numbers 12:6-8** and **1 Corinthians 13:9-12**. Those who speak for YHWH / God are not able to avoid speaking in enigmatic, mysterious, puzzling ways! Those who seek to interpret the prophets should always keep this in mind, and avoid the attempt to make everything they say clear and precise, void of enigma / puzzle!

¹⁷Slotki comments on **verses 3-4** that “The prophet, in sympathy with the suffering Babylonians, expresses his terror and bewilderment at the approaching disaster. On another interpretation, the prophet gives expression to the feeling of each of the Babylonian victims.” (P. 95)

Gray entitles these verses “The Seer’s emotion at what he has seen (**verse 2**).”

Oswalt comments on **verses 3-4** that “The violence of the vision which has come to the prophet is almost more than he can bear. He expresses this dismay in physical terms: abdominal cramps wrack him like birth-pains; he is doubled up and disoriented; his heart palpitates; he is seized with uncontrollable shuddering...

“One may ask why this should be. After all, Babylon was no true friend of Judah in 700 B.C.E., and she was an oppressor in 540 B.C.E...”

“No other prophet of the exile manifests such a concern for Babylon. Most manifest positive satisfaction over Babylon’s downfall [compare especially **Psalms 137:8**, where those who dash Babylon’s children against the rock are blessed!].

“The prophet’s deep humanity is revealed in this kind of response. With terrific intensity the prophet is aware of individual persons bleeding and suffering, of families ripped apart and destroyed, of hope shattered. The prophet who does not feel some empathy for the personal horrors which destruction of his enemies will entail is not reflecting accurately the character of the God for Whom he speaks.” (P. 393) Yes, indeed!

(continued...)

¹⁷(...continued)

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 3**: “*Therefore my loins are filled with pain; pangs have seized me like the pangs of a travailing (woman); I writhe (or am convulsed) from hearing; I am shocked (or agitated) from seeing.*” Alexander thinks it should be understood in terms of “the prophet’s own emotions.” (P. 372)

Instead of rejoicing over the fall of Israel’s captor / destroyer, the prophet expresses deep inner pain at seeing Babylon’s suffering and defeat. We are reminded of **Jeremiah 29:6-7** (see footnote 12), instructing the exiles in Babylon to pray for the city and seek its welfare, which will be their welfare.

Watts comments on **verses 3-4** that “the emotional reaction to the vision, premonition of news announced in **verse 8**, is the most prominent feature of the entire scene. The same kind of anxiety is observed in **22:4** and condemned by the speeches of that chapter. Shebna’s despairing response [Watts holds that this is the language, not of the prophet, but rather of Shebna, Hezekiah’s steward and city-manager of Jerusalem] shows that Babylon’s collapse is the first sign that the foundations of his foreign policy for Judah are crumbling.

“Merodach-Baladan’s successful campaign that captured Babylon and held it for a decade (720-10 B.C.E.) Had been the signal to other peoples that Assyria might be resisted. It sustained the hopes of Judah’s resistance party and led Hezekiah to move away from his father’s policies of loyal vassalage [to Assyria]. It encouraged Ashdod in its rebellion [against Assyria] of 714-11 B.C.E.

“Merodach-Baladan’s reassertion of his claim to Babylon after Sargon’s death (705 B.C.E.) sparked an attempted general uprising throughout the Empire (**chapter 39**). It led to Hezekiah’s decision to arm himself and to build a coalition of Palestinian states for such an uprising...

“The collapse of Babylon in 703 B.C.E. to which this vision refers presaged the collapse of all opposition to Sennacherib and disaster for those who advised it (as Shebna had) or who led it (as Hezekiah had).” (P. 273)

But not a word is said in **verses 1-10** about Shebna, nor Merodach-Baladan, nor Hezekiah, nor Ashdod, nor is there any basis in these verses for dating the collapse of Babylon to 703 B.C.E. All of this is being read into the text by Watts.

Kaiser comments on **verses 3-4** that “A glance at **Isaiah 15:5**[‘my heart cries out for Moab’]; **16:9, 11** [‘I weep...I drench you with my tears...my inner parts moan like a lyre for Moab’] and **Ezekiel 21:12** shows that assertions that the author is involved or affected may serve simply to emphasize the severity of the events foretold...

(continued...)

צִרִים אֲחֻזֵּי כְּצִירֵי יוֹלְדָה

נִעְוִיתִי מִשְׁמִיעַ

נִבְהַלְתִּי מִרְאוֹת:

For this reason my stomach was filled (with) anguish;

pains took hold of me, like pains of a woman giving birth.

I was bent down from hearing--

I was disturbed from seeing.¹⁸

¹⁷(...continued)

“Descriptions of the horror overcoming a prophet because of the future revealed to him become prominent in the late period (compare **Daniel 10:16** [‘by reason of the vision pains have come upon me’]). It becomes a stylistic device which is intended to make us believe that the experiences are genuine...

“Now the prophet here claims that he has literally heard and seen what he describes. Even the evening hour, when the winds coming from the sea bring people in Syria and Palestine relief from the heat of the day, has lost its joy for someone who has received such baleful [menacing] knowledge.” (P. 125)

¹⁸Translations of the last two lines of **verse 3** vary:

King James, “I was bowed down at the hearing of it; I was dismayed at the seeing of it.”

Tanakh, “Too anguished to hear, Too frightened to see.”

New Revised Standard, “I am bowed down so that I cannot hear, I am dismayed so that I cannot see.”

New International, “ I am staggered by what I hear, I am bewildered by what I see.”

New Jerusalem, “I am too distressed to hear, too afraid to look.”

Rahlf's, “Because of this my waist was filled with faintness, and pains took hold of me like the woman giving birth; I did wrong, in order not to hear; I hastened in order not to see.”

Watts notes that the Hebrew phrase מִשְׁמִיעַ, literally “from hearing,” is translated by **Rahlf's** as τὸ μὴ ἀκοῦσαι, literally “the not to hear.” He comments that these translations in a negative sense are commonly followed, “but a causative sense fits the context better,” i.e., “I am overcome by what I hear.” (P. 271)

21:4¹⁹ תַּעַה לְבַבִּי

פְּלִצוֹת בַּעֲתָתִנִּי

אֵת נִשְׁף חֲשָׁקִי

שֵׁם לִי לַחֲרָדָה:

My heart wandered;²⁰

¹⁹Alexander translates / comments on **verse 4**: “*My heart wanders* (reels, or is bewildered); *horror appals me; the twilight* (night or evening) *of my pleasure* (or desire) *he has put for* (or converted into) *fear* (or trembling) for me. There are two interpretations of the last clause. One supposes it to mean that the night desired as a time of rest is changed into a night of terror; the other, that a night of festivity is changed into a night of terror...The last brings the prophecy into remarkable coincidence with history...

“That the court was revelling when Cyrus took the city, is stated in general by Herodotus and Xenophon, and in full detail by the **Book of Daniel**. That the two first, however, did not derive their information from the prophet, may be inferred from their not mentioning the writing on the wall—a prodigy which would have seemed incredible to neither of them.” (Pp. 372-73)

Alexander is referring to the story of Belshazzar’s feast in **Daniel 5:1-31**.

Gray comments on **verse 4** that “The seer sees a vision and can describe it, but has lost the wits to fathom its fuller meaning; he is prophetically mad (**Jeremiah 29:26** [where the charge is made against prophets that they are ‘madmen’]); ‘he here reveals himself not indeed as a great prophet, but as a true visionary’ (quoting Duhm).” (P. 353)

Motyer states that “Careless eating and drinking (**verse 5a**) is found in **Isaiah 22:13** as a motif for the complacent and blinkered spirit of Jerusalem. Its suitability to Babylon on the night of its fall could be no more than coincidental.” (P. 172)

Motyer is doing all he can to avoid the conclusion that this oracle is predicting the fall of Babylon to Cyrus—since that would mean the prediction of destruction of the city and its Gods was not fulfilled.

²⁰Slotki’s translation has “My heart is bewildered,” and he comments that “In Hebrew usage, [the heart] is the seat of the intellect. *Bewildered* is literally ‘strayeth’; his mind reels.” (P. 96)

(continued...)

shuddering terrified me.²¹

My longing for twilight²²

²⁰(...continued)

Gray says that the verb תַעֲהוּ means “it wandered.” Translations vary, from “panted,” to “is confused,” to “reels,” to “falters,” to “is bewildered,” to πλανᾶται, “goes astray.”

1QIs^a has for this line תועה ולבבי, “wandering and my heart,” which makes little sense, and is probably a mistake by the copyist.

²¹For this line, **Rahfs** has καὶ ἡ ἀνομία με βαπτίζει, “and the lawlessness baptizes / overwhelms me.”

²²Slotki’s translation has “The twilight that I longed for,” and he comments that “Others render: ‘Twilight of my pleasure,’ i.e. the coolness of the evening which brings refreshment after the heat of the day. Now it causes terror.” (P. 96)

Watts translates by “the twilight of my love.”

Rahfs has ἡ ψυχὴ μου ἐφέστηκε εἰς φόβον, “my innermost-being turned to fear.”

Gray states, “*the twilight*...the cool of the day, generally *longed for*, brought on this occasion not pleasant rest, but this bewildering vision.” (P. 353)

Oswalt comments that “As is true of so much of the rest of the oracle, the reason why the prophet longed for twilight is not clear. Perhaps he hoped for rest at the end of the day. Alternatively, this may have been the time when he normally received visions. At any rate, his hope was dashed: he was unable to rest or his vision was fearful rather than hopeful. Whatever the reason may have been, the hearers get the point. If they could see what the prophet has seen, they too would be seized with trembling instead of relief.” (P. 393)

Watts states that the phrase “*the twilight of my love* [his translation] seems to picture the longed for future which is now put in jeopardy by the vision: Shebna’s dream of an independent and prosperous country, free from imperial oppression and taxation.” (P. 273)

Perhaps...but the text does not mention Shebna’s dream, and all of this that “seems” to Watts to be the meaning, is only based on his imagination.

was (re)placed for me into trembling / fear.²³

21:5^{24, 4, 5, 6} עָרַךְ תְּשִׁלְחֵן

²³Motyer comments on the content of **verses 3-4** that “The same imagery of suffering is used in the parallel Babylon oracle in the first series (**13:7-8**)...Physically (**verse 3**) and emotionally (**verse 4a**) Isaiah goes into shock. Racked...staggered...bewildered is (literally) ‘full of pain...racked / twisted...terrified.’”

Yes...but in **13:7-8** it is not the prophet’s suffering, but rather the people of Babylon who are suffering on the day of YHWH—and that’s quite a difference.

Motyer states that “Isaiah confesses he had longed to see the Lord come and put the world to rights but the *dire vision* has revealed the other side of such an intervention; not what it will mean for the saved but what it will mean for the lost (compare **2 Thessalonians 1:6-10**). He has seen the horror inseparable from the day of the Lord. On one level the horror is what is coming to the historical Babylon, with which Hezekiah is busy allying himself. On the level at which the oracle is now operating, however, it is the ultimate horror of the Lord’s final dealing with sin.” (Pp. 174-75)

Of course, all of this about “levels of operation” is Motyer’s own interpretation—of which the biblical text says nothing.

²⁴Slotki comments on **verse 5** that it is “A vivid portrayal of the Babylonian night revelry suddenly brought to an abrupt end by a peremptory [authoritarian] call to arms.” (P. 96)

Alexander translates **verse 5**: “*Set the table, spread the cloth, eat, drink: arise, ye chiefs, anoint the shield!*” (P. 373)

Gray entitles **verse 5** “The second scene.”

He states that “This picture of the banqueting Babylonians (compare **Jeremiah 51:39** [speaking of Babylon, ‘While they are inflamed I will prepare for them a feast, and make them drunk, that they may become merry, then sleep a perpetual sleep and now wake, declares YHWH’], is prophetic, not historic. It has, it is true, some resemblance to the legendary accounts of the capture of Babylon given in **Daniel 5, Herodotus I, 191**...The picture does not correspond to the actual course of subsequent events as recorded in the Nabonaid-Cyrus Chronicle...according to this, Nabonaid fled from Sippar, which was captured without resistance, to Babylon, which two days later likewise yielded without resistance.” (P. 353)

For the **Nabonidus-Cyrus Chronicle**, and **Herodotus 1.191**, see our end-note 4.

(continued...)

²⁴(...continued)

Motyer states that “The fall of Babylon in 539 B.C.E. was only one of many endured by the city and has no prescriptive [rigid, dogmatic] right to be the one referred to here. It fell to Sargon II in 710 B.C.E., to Sennacherib in 702 B.C.E. and [again in] 689 B.C.E. [a much more devastating destruction of the city], and to Assurbanipal in 648 B.C.E. Throughout this period Elam and Media were involved, but on Babylon’s side.

“The call to arms in **verse 2** does not have to refer to Cyrus’s attack in 539. An entirely different scenario is possible and preferable. Erlandsson argues persuasively that this oracle relates to the fall of Babylon in 689 B.C.E., which certainly, for ferocity, matched what Isaiah forecast. Sennacherib records that he filled the city with corpses, ‘the Gods dwelling therein—the hand of my people took them and...smashed them.’ The buildings and walls were razed and, says Erlandsson, ‘his final gesture was to have huge volumes of water released over the ruins...to obliterate every trace of that city which had been constantly in revolt.’ (S. Erlandsson, **The Burden of Babylon: A Study of Isaiah 13:2-14:23**, Coniectanea Biblica [C.W.K. Gleerup, 1970])

“The whole oracle can be understood from this perspective. The key is the ever-restless figure of Merodach-Baladan. In the years 722-710 and 705-702 B.C.E. this inveterate foe of Assyria secured the independence of Babylon and even made it a major threat to the continuation of the Assyrian Empire. He thrust his attentions upon Judah by the embassy he sent, ostensibly as a courtesy to the recuperating Hezekiah but actually to seek Judahite partnership in the anti-Assyrian cause [nothing is said in the text to this effect]...

“Hezekiah’s welcoming response received an immediate reply from Isaiah (**chapter 39**), but the present oracle is Isaiah’s considered response, his major attempt to turn Judah from an alliance with what he sees as a doomed Babylon. The oracle plays the same role in relation to Merodach-Baladan and Babylon as **19:1-15** does in relation to the Egyptian alliance, stressing the pointlessness, even in political terms, of an alliance with a doomed cause. In this light the passage can be reviewed as follows:

“To start with, a picture forms in Isaiah’s mind of whirlwinds coming one after the other across the Negebh by the Dead Sea. He becomes aware that the message behind the picture is dire (**verses 1b-2a**). Then, as if he were present, he hears what Merodach-Baladan’s ambassadors said to Hezekiah and his ‘Cabinet,’ that Assyria the traitor and looter cannot any longer be tolerated and that Elam and Media are ready to take up arms [but the text depicts, we think, Elam and Media as already coming against Babylon like a sweeping flood]. Merodach-Baladan is confident he can put an end to the groaning Assyria has caused (**verse 2g-d**). What is coming fills Isaiah with pain and terror, even though the twilight of Assyrian power was something he had longed for (**verses 3-4**).

(continued...)

²⁴(...continued)

“The sounds coming from the palace, however, are very different. The complacent politicians are celebrating their alliance with Merodach-Baladan at a banquet and it is as if Isaiah can overhear the well-fed, confident militarism of their after-dinner speeches (**verse 5**). In explanation of his violent reaction Isaiah reveals a secret which he has been told. It is as if he had appointed a lookout and given him something to watch for. But when eventually the given sign materialized it brought with it the announcement of the total fall of Babylon (**verses 6-9**). This message is faithfully reported. Crushed as Judah is under Assyria, it is no solution to link itself with doomed Babylon (**verse 10**).

“Thus, with no more ‘reading between the lines’ than highly charged, allusive poetry always requires, the oracle becomes a pertinent message to Hezekiah and his advisers. But, as ever, in this section of **Isaiah** we must ask another question. Isaiah does not entitle the oracle with reference to Merodach-Baladan etc. but offers the cryptic title ‘Concerning the Desert by the Sea.’ What purpose does the oracle fulfil in its present setting? Kaiser replies, ‘It seems to draw upon these events in order to portray the imminent fall of the world-city...the onset of the woes of the final age which precedes salvation’...

“This is exactly right. In this scheme of oracles...the actual Babylon of **13:1-14:23** here becomes the city behind the cryptic title and finally the ‘ruined city’ of **Isaiah 24:10**, symbolizing humankind’s ultimate attempt to organize the world without reference to God. It is this doom that is coming and it gives no joy to any beholder. Its onset is pushed out into the undated future, as the lookout’s prolonged wait suggests (**verse 8**), and in the meantime the Lord’s people remain crushed (**verse 10**). In these oracles interpretation must proceed on both the level of the original setting and the level of the new context in which the original truth comes to a wider and more mature flowering...

“Its focus is on the abiding issue facing the people of God: do they see their way forward in terms of accommodation to the world and its methods or do they react with horror to the thought of an association with that which is doomed (compare **Isaiah 52:11-12; Revelation 18:1-4** [‘Go out from Babylon!’])?” (Pp. 172-74)

We say No. As Motyer states, this is reading a great deal “between the lines,” and does not even remotely explain the mention of Elam and Media as attacking Babylon. The text does not so much as make mention of Merodach-Baladan or Sennacherib, or Hezekiah, or his ‘Cabinet,’ Motyer’s key-players in his explanation. This explanation does far more than “read between the lines”—it in fact re-writes the text, making it into something that it clearly is not, in our estimation!

(continued...)

²⁴(...continued)

We say, the passage depicts a looming battle of Elam and Media, confederates, against Babylon, in which Babylon will be destroyed, and much of its population killed—a vision that in fact did not come to fulfillment. What happened in 703 B.C.E., was not an attack of Elam and Media on Babylon, but Merodach-Baladan's retaking of the city.

What happened in 689 B.C.E. was an attack by Sennacherib of Assyria, not by Elam and Media, foes of Assyria. And if Elam and Media are taken as a code-name for Persia, the historical fact is that Cyrus did not destroy the city of Babylon, nor kill its inhabitants, nor shatter its Gods!

Nonetheless, the warning of the oracle is clear—Don't put your trust in Babylon; her end is sure, even if that end will not come about as this oracle pictures it!

Motyer comments on **verse 5** that it is “a scene of complacency and self-satisfaction...sketched in with four bold infinitives, the laying of tables, the spreading of rugs (arranging of seating), the eating, the drinking...”

“Historically, this is the banquet welcoming Merodach-Baladan's ambassadors. With *Get up...oil the shields* Isaiah makes as if he were overhearing the after-dinner speeches. Those speaking easily use the terminology of a holy war for, after all, are they not going to settle once and for all with the atrocious Assyrians? And this too is part of Isaiah's horror: lightly, thoughtlessly the people of God identify with the world, with a Babylon which Isaiah knows can offer no solution but is itself doomed...But on the deeper level, **verse 5** is a picture of a church content with the pleasures of this world, fighting in battles with carnal weapons. A church identifying with the world system which Babylon represents and at the end caught up in Babylon's judgment (compare **Revelation 18:1-4**).” (P. 175)

But we ask, where in the verse is anything said about welcoming Merodach-Baladan's ambassadors? Where is anything mentioned concerning “after-dinner speeches”? Where is anything said about “settling once and for all with the atrocious Assyrians”? And where is there any indication of the verse applying on “a deeper level,” meant to be applied to the church half a millennium or two and a half millennia away? Motyer is using the text as a springboard for his preaching / teaching his own theology, but is not, in our eyes, accurately commenting on the text itself!

Watts comments on **verse 5** that “the verse pictures the beginning of a military campaign in the field. The cryptic presentation does not show clearly whether this takes place in far-away Babylon or in Judah [but the picture is that of an attack which results in the fall of Babylon and the slaughter of its inhabitants—something hardly conceivable as taking place ‘in Judah’!]. The next orders for placing a guard suggest that the verse pictures Judean preparations for the inevitable Assyrian reprisal, when or

(continued...)

צַפָּה הַצִּפּוֹת

אֲכֹל שְׂתֵה

קִוְמוּ הַשָּׂרִים

מִשְׁחֵוּ מִגֶּן:

Spread / arranged (is) the table,

²⁴(...continued)

if their Babylonian campaign is successful [but we see no indications at all of ‘Judean preparations’].” (P. 273)

We think both Motyer and Watts are doing all they can to locate the text historically—but in our estimation, both have failed to do so.

Kaiser states, “We can do no more than guess at the interpretation of **verse 5**. The first half of the verse is usually regarded as a description of the nobles of Babylon unsuspectingly sitting down to their banquet, and suddenly interrupted as they carouse by the cry ‘To arms!’ In fact according to the description of **Herodotus I, 191**, people were still celebrating unconcerned in the center of Babylon when it was captured almost without a battle in 539 B.C.E., even though the outer suburbs had already fallen...

“Just as when a table is set and one needs only to sit down and reach out, so Babylon lies before its enemies. The concluding instructions to the leaders support this. The testing and necessary care of weapons are part of the immediate preparations for battle. The oiling of leather shields, which is also mentioned in **2 Samuel 1:21**, is presumably meant to increase their elasticity, in order to avoid their being split when struck by a stone, spear or other missiles.” (Pp. 125-26)

But as Kaiser says, this is only a guess, not by any means a certain interpretation of the text. The evidence shows that Cyrus the Great’s conquering of Babylon in 539 B.C.E. was accomplished with hardly a battle, and did not result in the destruction of the city, or the slaughter of its citizens, or the shattering of its Gods, as depicted in this passage. In the light of that evidence, we say Kaiser’s guess is mistaken. What do you think?

laid (is) the rug;²⁵
to eat, to drink—²⁶
the princes arise,
anoint (imperative plural) (the) shield(s)!²⁷

²⁵Gray comments that the rug is laid “on which to recline at the banquet.” (P. 353)

We are reminded that the Hebrew noun שֻׁלְחָן, commonly translated “table,” may have originally been a skin or leather mat spread on the ground (so, **Brown-Driver-Briggs** and **Holladay**), probably as used by common people and soldiers, and only used for wooden, upright tables by the wealthy, and in palaces and temples.

Watts notes that this line, צָפָה הַצָּפִית, literally, “to keep watch / to lay out the rug / carpet,” “‘spreading the rug’ has given the ancient versions and commentators trouble...**Brown-Driver-Briggs** suggests preparation of a meal which fits the context.” (P. 271) **Rahlfs**, the Greek translation, omits the phrase.

²⁶Oswalt comments that “The verse accords well with the report of Belshazzar’s fall as contained in **Daniel 5**. At the moment when the king and his nobles are feasting in unconcern, the enemy troops are surrounding the city. Suddenly, in the midst of the feast, the call to arms is sounded, but it is already too late. This is always the story of judgment.” (P. 393)

It is true that the two passages have a feast in common, and it is true that immediately following the feast death comes to Belshazzar in **Daniel 5**, and defeat in terrifying destruction in **Isaiah 21**. But that does not mean that the two passages are describing the same feast. In fact, the historical fall of Babylon in 539 to Cyrus the Great did not result in destruction of the city or in the death of its inhabitants.

²⁷Slotki comments that “A shield was oiled to keep it smooth, and probably to make the enemy’s arrows glide off it.” (P. 96) Compare **2 Samuel 1:21b**, which states in a lamentation over the death of Saul, that “Saul’s shield—was not anointed with the oil.”

Alexander comments that “The anointing of the shield is supposed by some to be a means of preserving it or of repelling missiles from its surface, by others simply a means of cleansing and perhaps adorning it. Both agree that it is here poetically used to express the idea of arming or preparing for battle.” (P. 373)

Gray suggests that the shields were anointed so that “they may not cut into the flesh of those that wear them; less probably, [to] polish the shields to make them shine.”
(continued...)

²⁷(...continued)
(P. 354)

Rahfs translates the phrase by ἐτοιμάσατε θυρεούς, “Prepare / make ready shields.”

Alexander states that “There are two interpretations of the last clause [‘anoint (the) shield(s)!’]...

One makes it an address by Jehovah or the prophet to the Medes and Persians [should he not say ‘Elamites and Medes’?], as in the last clause of **verse 2**...the other a sudden alarm to the Babylonians at their feast...

“Both explanations, but especially the last, seem to present a further allusion to the surprise of the king and court by Cyrus. This coincidence with history can be explained away only by giving to the verse a vague and general meaning, which is wholly at variance with the graphic vividness of its expressions.” (P. 373)

²⁸Slotki comments on **verses 6-9**: “From the realistic but general description of the threatened doom of Babylon in the preceding verses, the prophet proceeds to delineate the graphic manner in which it was conveyed to him.” (P. 96)

Gray comments that “The Persian [but the text mentions only Elam and Media!] advance on Babylon and the fall of Babylon are reported as seen not by the speaker himself, but by a third person (compare **verse 2**)... called הַמִּצְפֵּה, ‘the watcher’: nevertheless, the substance of the third scene is communicated directly to the speaker by Yahweh (**verse 7**)...

“The watcher is the prophet’s second self, whom the seer objectifies and orders to make ready to receive a Divine communication. The nearest parallel in the **Old Testament** seems to be Ezekiel’s ecstasy, in which it seemed to him that his conscious self was borne away from the midst of his companions in Babylon to Jerusalem, and, after seeing much in Jerusalem, returned, and enabled him to tell his companions what Yahweh had shown him (**Ezekiel 8:1-3; 11:24-25**).” (P. 354)

Gray goes on to discuss analogies found in the comparative study of psychical phenomena, referring to Tylor’s **Primitive Cultures**.

We say, Perhaps...but we agree with Oswald’s criticism that “what is described in a vision ought not to be used to construct a theory of prophetic psychology.” (P. 394)

(continued...)

²⁸(...continued)

And not only does this criticism apply to Gray's analysis, but also to Motyer's. See his statement in footnote 39.

Kaiser comments that "The conclusion that while the prophet speaks of a watchman in the third person, he in fact means himself, goes beyond what the passage actually says...It is hardly possible to submit a poet writing thousands of years ago to a psychological diagnosis without possessing very exact details of the circumstances in which he lived and composed...To understand the passage, it is sufficient to state that the poet is describing to us a dream-like vision. Any psychological interpretation which goes beyond this is pure speculation." (Pp. 126-27) Indeed!

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 6**: "For thus saith the Lord to me: Go set (or cause to stand) the watchman (or sentinel); that which he sees let him tell... Instead of simply predicting or describing the approach of the enemy, the prophet introduces an ideal watchman, as announcing what he actually sees." (P. 373)

Oswalt comments on **verses 6-9** that "The scene now changes back from Babylon to Judah." (P. 394) But in fact, Judah is not so much as mentioned in the text. Oswalt is assuming that the comparative language in **verse 1** concerning whirlwinds coming out of the Negebh means the prophet is in his homeland Judah, but this is not by any means certain, or necessary.

He goes on to state "In his vision, the prophet is charged to post a watchman [yes] who must watch the eastern horizon for the signs of Babylon's fall [nothing is said in the text about 'watching the eastern horizon,' nor is anything said about 'the signs of Babylon's fall,' even though it turns out that what is seen in the vision has to do with Babylon's fall]." (P. 394)

He further states that "Virtually all commentators are agreed that the watchman is Isaiah himself." (P. 394) Perhaps so, but in fact the text does not identify the watchman.

He states that "This concept of the signs of the times is picked up by Jesus in his discourse on the last days [referring to **Matthew 24**, which instead of being a discourse on the last days / end of the world, is a discourse on the fall of Jerusalem]." (P. 394)

But again, nothing is said in the text about "the signs of the times." What the watchman sees is riders in pairs, going into battle, not some general "signs of the times"; and it is only the Divine interpretation of what the watchman has seen that enables it to be understood as signifying the fall of Babylon.

We make these criticisms of Oswalt's analysis, to point out how difficult it is for interpreters to "stick to the text," and how easy it is to read ideas into the text that are

(continued...)

לֵךְ הַעֲמֵד הַמְצַפֶּה

אֲשֶׁר יֵרְאֶה יְגִיד:

Because in this way my Lord spoke to me:²⁹

Go, station the one watching,³⁰

what he sees, let him declare!

וְרֵאָה רֹכֵב צֶמֶד פְּרָשִׁים^{31, 7}

²⁸(...continued)

not really there. And all of this is caused by the nature of the prophetic message—it is enigmatic, puzzling, anything but clear and easily understood. What do you think?

²⁹Slotki holds that this line “seems to refer back to the beginning of **verse 2**, a grievous vision is declared unto me.” (P. 96)

Motyer says that Isaiah is “testifying to a strong sense of Divine revelation.” (P. 175) We say, yes, but no stronger than usual.

³⁰Slotki’s translation has “Go, set a watchman.” He comments that “This is obviously figurative, and the watchman is the prophet himself. Often in accounts of prophetic ecstasy we meet with conditions which imply ‘a divided self’ or ‘dual consciousness.’” (P. 96) Compare Gray’s comments in footnote 28.

³¹Alexander translates / comments on **verse 7**: “*And should he see cavalry—a pair (or pairs of horsemen)—ass-riders—camel-riders—then shall he hearken with hearkening a great hearkening* (i.e. listen attentively). This is Ewald’s construction of the sentence, which supposes the Divine instructions to be still continued. All other writers understand the prophet as resuming his own narrative...In favor of the first construction is the form of the verbs, which are all in the preterite [‘past tense’] with *waw-conversive / consecutive*, because following the futures of the foregoing verses.” (Pp. 373-74)

Gray comments that “There is some uncertainty about the precise meaning of the terms in this verse...but the scene is probably the advance of a hostile army with horses, asses, and camels, in particular of a cavalcade [a line of riders, going in the same direction] advancing in double file, partly mounted on horses, partly on asses, and partly on camels...According to **Herodotus 1. 80** [see our end-note 7], Cyrus largely owed his victory over the Lydians to placing riders on his camels, and the Scythians were much hindered by the asses in Darius’ camp (**Herodotus 5. 129** [again, see our end-note 7]). Whether, however, the Persians used asses for riding in battle is

(continued...)

רֶכֶב חֲמֹר

רֶכֶב גָּמֶל

וְהִקְשִׁיב קֶשֶׁב רַב־קֶשֶׁב:

And he will see / he saw a chariot (with) a pair³² of horses,
a chariot with a donkey;
a chariot (with) a camel--³³

³¹(...continued)
doubtful.” (Pp. 354-55)

Kaiser comments on **verse 7** that “The Lord—the poet reverently avoids the name of God [he is evidently referring to the previous **verse 6**, where אֲדֹנָי, ‘my Lord’ occurs, rather than YHWH]—has commanded him to set a watchman who will tell him his observations. So that he, and especially the reader, can know what the purpose of this is, more exact instructions for the watchman follow: when a train of carts, pairs of riders, and caravans of donkeys and camels come into sight, he must pay very great attention!...

“It is not at all clear whether these expressions refer to parts of an army—possibly the conqueror’s baggage train carrying away booty—the caravans of liberated exiles returning home, or the setting out of a great army to perpetrate new outrages. Once again, one may ask whether the destroyer in **verse 2** is identical with the Medes and Elamites, as the conquerors of the final age.”

Kaiser wants very much to interpret the chapter in terms of the *eschaton*, the “final age,” oftentimes called “the end of the world.” But in fact, there is nothing said in the text concerning “the final age,” and Kaiser, along with others, is reading this into the text.

³²Alexander notes that צֶמֶד [Brown-Driver-Briggs defines as ‘couple’ / ‘pair’] is properly a yoke of oxen, then a pair in general. It is here collective, and means pairs of horsemen, i.e. horsemen in pairs, or marching two and two.” (P. 374)

³³The Hebrew word רֶכֶב is defined by Brown-Driver-Briggs as “chariotry,” “chariot,” “mill-stone,” and apparently also “riders.” Holladay has “collective, “chariotry,” “(group of) chariots,” especially “war-chariots”; “train of chariots” or “train of animals”; “a single chariot,” and “an upper mill-stone.”

(continued...)

and he will give and he gave attention, attention, great attention!³⁴

³³(...continued)

The copyist of 1QIs^a reads the last two occurrences of this noun as participles, the first of them by inserting a *waw* above the line, and the second by spelling it with the *waw*, ורכב, “one riding.”

Slotki’s translation has “troop,” but Slotki suggests “Better, ‘cavalcade’ (literally ‘chariot’ or the singular in a collective sense) symbolizing the Persians hosts in their advance.” He suggests that “These may have been used for transport behind the lines or, as some maintain, in actual battle.” (P. 96)

Alexander states that “We know from Herodotus and Xenophon that the Persians...used [camels and asses] in their armies for riding, partly or wholly for the purpose frightening the horses of the enemy. It is a slight but obvious coincidence of prophecy and history that Xenophon represents the Persians advancing two by two.” (P. 374)

But again we point out, our text says nothing concerning the Persians—it only mentions Elam and Media.

³⁴Such a strange sight—chariots pulled by donkeys and camels—would call forth the excited attention of the watcher. We are reminded of the statements in Herodotus concerning the effect of asses and camels in the army of Cyrus that frightened the horses of both the Lydians and the Scythians. See our end-note 7.

Translations of **verse 7** vary:

King James, “And he saw a chariot *with* a couple of horsemen, a chariot of asses, *and* a chariot of camels; and he hearkened diligently with much heed”;

Tanakh, “He will see mounted men, Horsemen in pairs -- Riders on asses, Riders on camels -- And he will listen closely, Most attentively.”

New Revised Standard, “When he sees riders, horsemen in pairs, riders on donkeys, riders on camels, let him listen diligently, very diligently.”

New International, “When he sees chariots with teams of horses, riders on donkeys or riders on camels, let him be alert, fully alert.”

New Jerusalem, “He will see cavalry, horsemen two by two, men mounted on donkeys, men mounted on camels; let him watch alertly, be very alert indeed!

Rahlfs, καὶ εἶδον ἀναβάτας ἵππεῖς δύο ἀναβάτην ὄνου καὶ ἀναβάτην καμήλου ἀκρόασαι ἀκρόασιν πολλήν, “And I saw two mounted ones (on) horses, a mounted donkey and a mounted camel. Listen (with) much listening!”

(continued...)

21:8³⁵ וַיִּקְרָא אֲרִיָּה

עַל-מִצְפֵּה אֲדָנָי אֲנֹכִי עֹמֵד תָּמִיד יוֹמָם

וְעַל-מִשְׁמַרְתִּי אֲנֹכִי נֹצֵב כָּל-הַלַּיְלוֹת:

³⁴(...continued)

Whether the two verbs in this verse, וַיִּרְאֵהוּ , and וְהִקְשִׁיב , should be translated as preceded by *waw-conversive consecutive* or not is not clear—thus the difference in translations: and he saw; He will see; When he sees; And I saw. Again, and he hearkened; And he will listen; let him listen, let him be alert; let him watch; Listen!

³⁵Oswalt comments on **verse 8-9** that “In these verses the watchman speaks, first telling of his perseverance...and second, announcing the appearance of the sign and its meaning for Babylon and her Gods...Certainly if the passage dates to 700 B.C.E. the wait was a very long one until the final signs of Babylon’s doom appeared.” (P. 395)

Gray comments on **verses 8-9a** that “The watcher announces that he now sees the cavalcade which he was to expect (**verse 7**).” (P. 355)

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 8**: “*And he cries—a lion—on the watch-tower, Lord, I am standing always by day, and on my ward (or place of observation) I am stationed all the night (i.e. all night, or every night, or both)...Possibly the true view of the passage is that “the prophet, on receiving the order to set a watch, replies that he is himself engaged in the performance of that duty. According to the usual interpretation, these are the words of the delegated watchman, announcing that he is at his post, and will remain there, and announce whatever he may see.”* (P. 374)

Kaiser comments on **verse 8** that “It can be taken for granted that the prophet is carrying out God’s command, so that this is not mentioned...Instead, we are witnesses of the impatient suspense of the watchman, remaining uninterruptedly at his post (compare also **Habakkuk 2:1** [‘I will take my stand at the watch-post / tower’ and see what YHWH says to me’]). This suspense is finally relieved in a cry addressed directly to God, which can best be described as a declaration of readiness.” (P. 127)

And a lion / the seer³⁶ cried out:³⁷

A lion!³⁸

³⁶Oswalt notes that in 1778, the biblical commentator Lowth suggested that the Hebrew text's noun **אַרְיֵה**, "lion," should be changed to **הַרְאֵה**, "the seer." This view has now become more acceptable, since this is the reading found in the Qumran scroll 1QIs^a. (P. 388)

Watts notes that the Masoretic text "then the lion called out" makes no sense. **Rahlfs** has *Ουριαν*, "Ourian," a proper name. Ibn Ezra interpolates the letter **כ** before the noun **אַרְיֵה**, "lion," resulting in the translation "like a lion('s voice)." (P. 271)

³⁷Slotki comments that "the subject is the watchman." (P. 97)

Alexander comments that "There are two explanations of **וַיִּקְרָא אַרְיֵה**, [literally 'and he cried out, a lion']...

"The first makes **אַרְיֵה** the beginning of the watchman's speech—he cries, a lion!, i.e. I see a lion coming, meaning the invader...

"The other hypothesis, now commonly adopted, that is, that **אַרְיֵה** forms no part of the sentinel's report, but is rather a description of the way in which he makes it. The true sense of the words is given in a paraphrase in **Revelation 10:3**, he cried with a loud voice as when a lion roareth." (P. 374)

Gray thinks **Revelation 10:3** "is a very poor parallel, for the ominous cry of the angel there might well be compared to a lion's terrifying roar (compare **Amos 3:8** []); but why should the watcher roar lion-like to God?" (P. 355)

Watts states that "The Masoretic Text's 'the lion called out' makes no sense...An emended text [see footnote 36] reads 'the seer.' The term lends the account an added dimension; the watchman is more than a military guard on watch. And the account is parallel to the vision of **verse 2**." (P. 273) Yes, but it is still an emended text, even with its appearance in 1QIs^a.

³⁸**King James** has "And he cried, A lion..." **Tanakh** has "And like a lion he called out..." (compare footnote 36) Our other English translations omit the word lion. Perhaps we should translate by "And he cried out: A lion upon a watch-tower...", that is, identifying himself as a lion watching constantly for its prey.

Motyer insists that the literal translation is "And the lion called." He comments

(continued...)

Upon a watch-tower, my Lord, I am standing constantly by day;
and at my post I am stationed all the nights.³⁹

21:9⁴⁰ וְהִנֵּה-זֶה בָּא

³⁸(...continued)

that “The force of the words is ‘And, lion that he is, he...,’ i.e. a man of resolute strength, not likely to be intimidated, etc. was chosen as the lookout and, in the event, proved his mettle.” We say, Perhaps...but other interpretations are equally possible.

The language of the oracle is anything but clear—it is both confused and confusing! Exactly what we should expect to find in a prophetic message in the light of **Numbers 12:6-8** and **1 Corinthians 13:9-12**.

³⁹Slotki suggests, “Or, ‘and on my sentry guard I take my stand through all the nights.’” (P. 97)

Motyer comments that the watcher / lookout “persevered ‘constantly, daily...all the nights...’ and in the end the sign was fulfilled [but was it? Did Elam and Media form a confederation and destroy Babylon, killing the majority of its population?].”

“Incidentally, **verses 6-8** cast light on the care taken by the prophets in the discharge of their vocation. They had to have intrinsic reliability of character, be men who would tell only what they saw (**verse 6**) and have a determination to get the right message and to get the message right, to wait for the clue to be given and then listen diligently (**verse 7**). They needed the discipline to wait for the word with all the intentness of a trusty sentry (**verse 8**; compare **Jeremiah 42:4, 7** [Jeremiah has to wait for 10 days before hearing the Divine message]; **Habakkuk 2:1** [Habakkuk compares himself to a watchman on a tower]). There must be no prevarication, laxity or uncertainty in the reception of what the Lord would say to His people.” (P. 175)

Yes, but is this really what this text is about? We think not—but rather, think Motyer is reading his theological convictions into the rather obscure biblical text. And we add that no matter how diligent the prophets may have been at their vocation, it did not diminish the enigmatic, puzzling nature of their message!

⁴⁰Slotki comments on **verse 9** that “The cavalcade [procession of riders] anticipated in **verse 7** is already approaching.” (P. 97)

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 9**: “*And behold, this comes (or this is what is coming), mounted men, pairs of horsemen. And he answers (i.e. speaks again) and says, Fallen, fallen is Babylon, and all the images of her Gods he has broken (or crushed) to the earth.*”

He comments that “The last verb is indefinitely construed, but obviously refers to
(continued...)

רָכַב אִישׁ צֶמֶד פָּרָשִׁים

וַיַּעַן וַיֹּאמֶר

נִפְלָה נִפְלָה בְּבָל

וְכָל־פְּסִילֵי אֱלֹהֵיהָ שָׁבַר לְאַרְצִי:

And look--this (is) coming--⁴¹

a chariot (with) a man (and) a pair of horses.⁴²

⁴⁰(...continued)

the enemy as the instrument of Babylon's destruction rather than to God...The omission of the asses and camels in this verse is explained by Knobel on the ground that the enemy is now to be conceived as having reached the city, his beasts of burden being left behind him. But the true explanation seems to be that the description given in **verse 7** is abbreviated here...

"In [**verse 8**], he reports himself as being at his post. In [**verse 9**], he sees the very army which had been described approaching...During the interval implied, the city is supposed to have been taken, so that when the watchman speaks again, it is to say that Babylon is fallen." (P. 375)

Kaiser likewise comments on **verse 9** that "The watchman has hardly finished [speaking] when the expected train of riders and horsemen comes in sight." (P. 127)

⁴¹The qal active participle כָּאֵלֶּיךָ, "coming," is translated by **Rahlfs** as ἔρχεται, present active middle, "is coming."

⁴²Translations of these first two lines of **verse 9** vary:

King James, "And, behold, here cometh a chariot of men, *with* a couple of horsemen."

Tanakh, "And there they come, mounted men -- Horsemen in pairs!"

New Revised Standard, "Look, there they come, riders, horsemen in pairs!"

New International, "Look, here comes a man in a chariot with a team of horses."

New Jerusalem, "Now the cavalry is coming, horsemen two by two."

Rahlfs, καὶ ἰδοὺ αὐτὸς ἔρχεται ἀναβάτης συγωρίδος, "and look--he (himself) comes, a rider of a couple (or horses?)."

Motyer, "And oh look! Here comes a mounted troop of men, pairs of horses."

Motyer comments that "Since they are still riding one horse and leading another [does the text say this? We think not], they must be returning as victors. They are not

(continued...)

And he answered, and he said,⁴³

It fell! It fell! Babylon (did)!^{44, 8}

⁴²(...continued)

fleeing on the best mount but bringing news of conquest: *Babylon* and its whole ideology (*its Gods*) are shattered. Historically, this refers to the obliteration of Babylon by Assyria in 689 B.C.E. [see our end-note 8 for Sennacherib and his destruction of Babylon in 689], but this has now receded into the background and Isaiah is looking forward to the eschatological Babylon and the day of the Lord.” (Pp. 175-76)

But where in the text is anything said about the “eschatological Babylon” or “the day of the Lord”? Both of these ideas are being read into the text by Motyer.

⁴³We wonder, Who is speaking? Is it the watchman? Is it the man with a pair of horses? Is it YHWH? The text does not identify the speaker—and since it does not, neither should the interpreter. The prophetic message leaves it to the hearer / reader to guess at who is speaking.

⁴⁴**Rahlf**s omits the second “fallen.”

Oswalt comments that “*Fallen, fallen is Babylon* strikes the ear with a sonorous [imposingly deep and full] kind of finality. The repetition of the verb adds to the impact of the statement. The mighty city, glory of mankind, is gone (compare **Revelation 18:2**.” (P. 396)

But in fact, the text says nothing of “the mighty city,” or “the glory of mankind,” or even that Babylon “is gone”—only that Babylon is fallen. Later in **Isaiah 24-26** we will have reason to speak about the chaotic city of this world contrasted with YHWH’s city, but such is not found in this verse, or in **chapter 21**. The interpreter should beware of reading the **Book of Revelation’s** theological symbolism, where “Babylon” stands for “Rome,” into **Isaiah 21!**

Compare **Jeremiah 51:8**,

Suddenly Babylon fell, and she was broken!
Howl (plural imperative) over her!
Take balsam / mastic for her pain!
Perhaps she will be healed!

Probably the language of **Isaiah 21:9** is the basis for the similar words in the **New Testament Book of Revelation, 14:8** and **18:2**.

Kaiser states that “The triumphant ‘Fallen, fallen is Babylon...’ is an imitation of the secular funeral lament (compare **2 Samuel 1:11-12, 17-27; Amos 5:2** [the virgin

(continued...)

And all (the) idols of her Gods, he shattered to the earth!⁴⁵

⁴⁴(...continued)

Israel is fallen] and **Lamentations 1:15** [the virgin daughter Judah is fallen; [we should hardly call these laments ‘secular’!)]...

“The time of the hated world power is over. Its idols, the essence of its hostility to God, lie shattered on the ground (compare **Jeremiah 51:8** [see above] and **Isaiah 47:1-2** [not at all a funeral lament!]). (**Revelation 18:2** takes up this cry of triumph and relates it to the fall of the world capital of the final age, Rome [but is Revelation really about ‘the final age’? Is it not rather about the victory of Christianity over the Roman Empire?]) Did the watchman see the returning exiles? Did he see the victors hastening to further conquests? We cannot break down the obscurity that lies over the poem.” (P. 128)

We certainly agree with Kaiser’s last sentence: “We cannot break down the obscurity that lies over the poem,” or for that matter, that lies over the prophetic message! What do you think?

⁴⁵We wonder who is being spoken of in this last phrase, **לְאֲרִיץ שָׁבַר**, “He was shattered to the earth”? Is the statement affirming that it’s YHWH’s action, destroying the idol-God(s) of Babylon? Or is it Babylon itself, who is depicted as having shattered its own idols for their failure to protect Babylon against Elam and Media? The language is ambiguous at this point, and different understandings naturally arise.

Slotki comments that “The destruction of a people’s Gods was an indication of its utter defeat by the enemy.” (P. 97)

Alexander states that “The allusion to idols in the last clause is not intended merely to remind us that the conquest was a triumph of the true God over false ones, but to bring into view the well known aversion of the Persians to all images. Herodotus says they not only thought it unlawful to use images, but imputed folly to those who did it. Here is another incidental but remarkable coincidence of prophecy even with profane history.” (P. 375)

But was this the case? Did Cyrus destroy the idol-Gods of Babylon? Our understanding is that Cyrus honored the various Gods worshiped in Babylon, and sent their images back to their native homelands, supplying the funds to rebuild their places of worship—including, according to the **Book of Ezra**, sending the items taken from the Jewish temple in Jerusalem, and including his orders to rebuild the temple there.

See on the Internet the “Cyrus Cylinder,” in which Cyrus tells how he repaired the ruined temples in the cities he conquered, restored their cults, and returned their sacred
(continued...)

⁴⁵(...continued)

images as well as their former inhabitants which Nabonidus had taken to Babylon.

The Cyrus cylinder was discovered in 1879; Alexander's commentary was completed in 1847, meaning that he couldn't have known anything about that writing.

1QIs^a reads the plural, שִׁבְרוּ, in accordance with the subject, a plural noun, "they shattered."

Watts comments that "The shattering of the images may be intended to depict the physical destruction of temples. But it also reflects the loss of prestige and respect resulting from their inability to protect the city. The recognition that neither Sargon nor Sennacherib destroyed the city, but only re-occupied it, would support the latter meaning." (P. 273)

We think Watts is correct with reference to Sargon II's reoccupation of Babylon, but it is our understanding that Sennacherib's invasion of Babylon in 689 B.C.E. resulted in the destruction of the city and its temples, resulting in the city's having to be rebuilt.

⁴⁶Slotki comments on **verse 10** that "The prophet addresses Israel." (P. 97)

Alexander translates **verse 10**: "*O My threshing, and the son of My threshing-floor! What I have heard from Jehovah of hosts, the God of Israel, I have told you.*"

He comments that This part of the prophecy closes with an apostrophe [when a character in a literary work speaks to an object, an idea, or someone who doesn't exist as if it is a living person], showing at once by whose power and for whose sake the downfall of Babylon was to be brought about." (P. 375)

Gray comments that in this verse "The Divine revelation, which he has just received, the seer now declares to his long and much afflicted people who have been held in thrall by Babylon." (P. 356)

Motyer, in his interpretation that makes the oracle a prediction of the final judgment of the world, states that "Picking up the verb *tell* from the opening section (**verse 2a**, 'shown'), Isaiah rounds the poem off. He saw a *dire vision* (**verses 1b-2a**), and he has now reported it as a message. Therefore, in the oracle's original setting, let Hezekiah be warned. Merodach-Baladan may be plausible, but to identify with him is to identify with the doomed.

The cryptic title (**verse 1a**) indicates that Isaiah is looking beyond a historical

(continued...)

אֲשֶׁר שָׁמַעְתִּי מֵאֵת יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל

הַגֵּרְתִּי לָכֶם:

My threshed one, and son / child of my threshing-floor,⁴⁷

⁴⁶(...continued)

incident [we ask, How so? How does the phrase ‘wilderness of the sea’ or ‘land of the sea’ point to an incident beyond history, or to the **Book of Genesis**?] to the Babylon which first appeared in Shinar (**Genesis 11:1ff.**) and encapsulated the spirit of self-sufficiency, the confidence of human beings that they could find security through their own technological expertise. It is that Babylon he has in mind, as he warns the people of God to maintain their separate identity (compare **Isaiah 52:11** [the Divine command to ‘go out’ from Babylon].” (P. 176)

But surely this is making too much of this passage, reading into it “the final judgment of the world,” reading Hezekiah and Merodach-Baladan into it, although neither of them are mentioned, and referring to the **Genesis 11** story of the tower of Babel, with its “spirit of self-sufficiency...technological expertise” and the resultant scattering of humanity all across the world, speaking different languages. If that is the Babylon that **Isaiah 21** has in mind, we wonder why the passage says nothing about it!

Kaiser entitles **verse 10** “The conclusion.” He comments that “Even the poet’s concluding words do not remove the doubt as to whether he is foretelling merely the fall of Babylon or going beyond it to the subsequent horrors. Full of compassion, he addresses himself to his people, so often put to shame and mistreated in the course of history...It is likely that the female person addressed is the daughter of Zion, the city of Jerusalem, which the Babylonians treated so cruelly when they conquered it in 587 B.C.E. (Compare the **Book of Lamentations** and **2 Kings 14:18-25:21**)...

“But perhaps the poet had in mind not only the sufferings associated with this, but also the sufferings which Zion was to face in the final age, when he goes on to speak of the ‘child of the threshing-floor’ and so develops a comparison which Isewhere was applied to the enemies of Israel (compare **Isaiah 41:15** [YHWH makes of Israel herself a ‘threshing-sledge’—the ones being threshed are Israel’s enemies!]; **Jeremiah 51:33** [the daughter of Babylon is like a threshing-floor when it is trodden]; **Micah 4:12-13** [the daughter of Zion threshes many nations] and **Habakkuk 3:12** [YHWH threshed the nations in His anger].” (P. 128)

We say, it may well be, in the light of these passages, that YHWH’s “threshed one” means Israel’s enemies, the nations of the world—not just Israel. What do you think?

⁴⁷Slotki comments that a better translation than *O thou My threshing, and the* (continued...)

⁴⁷(...continued)

winnowing of My floor would be *O My trodden one and child of My threshing-floor.* Israel had been oppressed and trodden down by the Babylonian tyrant.” (P. 97)

But does not this verse claim that the threshing-floor belonged to YHWH? Is the claim that while Babylon may have been the instrument doing the threshing, it was in fact YHWH's threshing, putting His people through the experience?

Gray states that “For other uses of the figure of threshing to express the hard or cruel treatment of a land or people, compare **Isaiah 41:15** [where YHWH claims He makes Israel His ‘threshing-sledge’], **Amos 1:3** [Damascus has threshed Israel with iron threshing-sledges]; **Micah 4:13** [where the daughter of Zion is called to thresh the nations, and bring the gain to YHWH] and **Habakkuk 3:12** [where YHWH is said to thresh the nations in anger].” (P. 356)

Compare also **Jeremiah 51:33**, where the “daughter of Babylon” is compared to a threshing-floor at the time of threshing. We are reminded of the fact that “threshing” is not done to harm the crop being threshed. Just the opposite—it has to be done in order to make the crop fruitful and useful for human consumption. Especially, we think of the threshing of flax, and the hard work of breaking the flax stems in order to bring forth the inner strands of the flax plant that can then be used in the manufacture of linen.

And we ask, was it not the Divine purpose in allowing Judah to go into Babylonian exile, to thresh His people, in order to make them His instruments of blessing to the world? How do you view the hardships you have gone through? Have they been a time of threshing, or a time of destruction?

We also ask, if it is Babylon and its people that are destroyed in this depiction of threshing, can it be that YHWH is speaking to the people of Babylon, calling them His Own? Compare **Isaiah 19:24-25**.

Watts comments that “Threshed ones and threshing-floor are literal renderings of words apparently intended to show sympathy for the Judean people who have already suffered so much.” (P. 273) But where in the text are the Judean people so much as mentioned?

Watts adds that “Shebna is forced by the vision to recognize Isaiah's position which, until now, he has refused to do. His emotional collapse is understandable.” (P. 273) But again, where is Shebna mentioned in the text? Where is anything said concerning his “emotional collapse”?

Kaiser concludes his commentary on **21:1-10** by stating, “The strange obscurity
(continued...)

that which I heard from YHWH of Armies, Israel's God,
I declared to you (plural)!

21:11⁴⁸ מִשָּׁנָה הַיּוֹמָה

⁴⁷(...continued)

which envelops this poem, the artificiality, in our view, of its prophetic features, the transitions which can be observed in the use of traditional themes and its deliberate but by no means naive dramatic construction make it doubtful whether it can really be understood as a prophecy composed before the conquest of Babylon in 539 B.C.E...

“It seems rather to draw upon these events in order to portray the imminent fall of the world city, and to see in it the onset of the woes of the final age which precedes salvation.” (P. 128)

But do you see such a thing in the text? Is anything said about “the world city,” or “the woes of the final age which precede salvation”?

⁴⁸Slotki entitles **verses 11-12**: “An oracle on Dumah or Edom.”

Gray entitles these verses “An ambiguous answer to a question from Edom.”

He comments that the verses are “a brief, but obviously complete, oracle. Some Edomites inquire of the seer how far gone is the night of oppression through which they are now passing. The seer replies that a change is coming, but whether with it any permanent relief is at present obscure to him. If his questioners care to do so, let them ask again another day.

“If this oracle is by the same author and approximately at the same date as **verses 1-10**...it was written between 549 and 538 B.C.E. The night that now is, is the Babylonian oppression; the morning which he sees to be coming, is the imminent overthrow of Babylon by the Persians [but only Elam and Media are mentioned!]. The night beyond is the dominion of the Persians from which Edom and Judah will not escape, and which may prove as veritable a night as that of the Babylonians. The vision of the Persian advance is here a vision of night. As in **verse 3** it is a vision filling the seer with anguish.

“Apart from its probable connection with **verses 1-10**, there is nothing that would closely define the date of this oracle.” (Pp. 357-58)

Motyer entitles the two verses “Silence (Edom): the prolongation of time.”

And we ask, Is this oracle really about “the prolongation of time”? We do not see
(continued...)

⁴⁸(...continued)

how such an idea can be read from the text.

Motyer asks, “Does this oracle arise from the approach of an individual Edomite to Isaiah for guidance (compare **2 Kings 8:7ff.** [where a Syrian ruler asks for advice from Elisha of Israel] or is it Isaiah’s imaginative response to some crisis (perhaps Sargon’s Arabian campaign of 715 B.C.E.) through which Edom was passing? We have no means of knowing but we feel the poignancy of a lone voice crying out in the darkness.

“In the wider context, this oracle corresponds to Isaiah’s message to the Philistines, in which the Gentiles misunderstood the times and thought the Davidic dynasty to be defunct. Here, they do not understand the times at all. This comparison fits the development of the pattern of the oracles in **chapters 13-27**. As history moves forward, greater darkness envelopes the world, bringing greater uncertainty—‘Where is everything going?’...

“An unknown Edomite asked if things will change for the better and if the night will lift and light return (**verse 11b, c**), and the prophet replied, ‘Not yet, but give it time.’ (**Verse 12**). Thus a solitary Gentile experience mirrors world history: the end will come, the end is not yet. Hope lies in the undated future (**verse 12a, b**), and though it is deferred it is sure (**verse 12c, d**).” (Pp. 176-77)

Much of this, we think, is pure speculation on Motyer’s part, reading it into the text, not getting it from the text.

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 11**, “*The burden of Dumah. To me (one is) calling from Seir. Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night?*”

He comments that “Most interpreters regard this and the next verse as an independent prophecy; but that the use of the word נֹשֵׂא is an insufficient reason, while the extreme brevity of the passage, and the recurrence of the figure of a sentinel or watchman, seem to indicate that it is a continuation of what goes before, although a new subject is here introduced.” (P. 376)

He comments that the oracle’s date “is uncertain, but may be identical with that of the preceding oracle.” (P. 97)

Kaiser states that “This short passage [**verses 11-12**] is one of the most enigmatic in the whole **Book of Isaiah**, which [itself] is not without its obscurities. A British churchman of the last [19th] century [T.K. Cheyne] stated that for all its practical significance for his contemporaries and for later generations it might just as well not

(continued...)

⁴⁸(...continued)

have been written. But since the person who incorporated it into the oracles against foreign nations in the **Book of Isaiah** must have had some purpose in mind, such a statement shows only that we lack the key to its understanding...

“The problems begin with the heading itself. Does Dumah refer to the oasis *dumat al-jandal* or to *al-jauf* at the edge of the *nafud* desert in inner Arabia? Or was the redactor [editor who combines sources] referring to a Dumah in the area of ancient Edom, which was well known in post-Christian times? Since there is an immediate mention of someone calling from Seir, the mountains south-east of the Dead Sea...a reference to Edom is certainly likely. Thus [Rahfs] replaced Dumah by Seir...Finally, however, דָּמָה, ‘Dumah,’ or ‘silence,’ can also be simply and straightforwardly translated ‘silence’...

“Because of the enmity which existed between the Jews and the Edomites after the destruction of the temple in 587 B.C.E., some commentators believe that the oracle cannot have been composed during or after the exile, and affirm its Isaianic authorship...

“Galling attempted to find a definite place in history for the oracle. After the withdrawal of the last neo-Babylonian emperor, Nabonidus, from Arabia, the freedom-loving Arabs had come from Edom to a prophet in Judah to inquire from him whether their servitude under the Babylonians was coming to an end...

“If we ignore the introduction in **verse 11b**, the short poem recounts a perfectly everyday episode. A number of unnamed persons ask a watchman how much of the night has passed, i.e. whether it will soon be morning. The double question betrays the impatience with which the questioners await the dawn. The watchman replies that morning is coming, but that now it is still night. His reference to the coming of the dawn—which might in fact be paraphrased: ‘The morning will soon come!’ is an answer to the impatience of those who are questioning him. But since it is still dark, he can ultimately only console them by asking them to repeat their question. So far so good.

“Now the introduction in **verse 11b** undoubtedly implies that the episode is more than an everyday occurrence, quite apart from the fact that so ordinary an episode would be out of place within a book of prophecy. The ‘watchman,’ however, is clearly a Judean...

“Thus we must understand the whole scene in a symbolical, metaphorical sense. In the **Old Testament** night and the darkness usually symbolize misery, distress or disaster...while light and dawn symbolize redemption and salvation...Consequently, to ask when the night will end must be understood as a question about the end of the distress, and the reply as an indication that while the distress will certainly end, the time
(continued...)

אֵלֵי קָרָא מִשְׁעִיר

שֹׁמֵר מִהַמְּלִיכָה

שֹׁמֵר מִהַמְּלִיל:

Utterance / oracle of Dumah / Silence:⁴⁹

⁴⁸(...continued)
is not yet known...

“In view of the Aramaisms in **verse 12**, which rule out a date of composition before the exile, and probably also during the exile, one must be content to conclude that our knowledge of Edomite history in post-exilic times is too sparse to provide a historical setting for the oracle...

“If it is regarded as the saying of a genuine prophet, it remains strange that he did not go beyond his fundamental certainty of the coming of an age of salvation or the end of a period of oppression or distress; and, all kinds of speculation remain possible as to why a Judean should give an oracle upon Edom.” (Pp. 131-32)

⁴⁹Instead of the Hebrew text's דִּמְיָה, “Dumah,” or “silence,” two Hebrew manuscripts and Rahlfs read אֶדְוִים, “Edom,” and Rahlfs has Ἰδουμαίας, “of Idumea.” One Greek manuscript reads Ἰουδαίας, “of Judea.”

Slotki states that *Dumah* is “synonymous with Edom which was known in ancient Egyptian as Aduma and in Assyrian as Udumu. The literal meaning is ‘silence’ which imparts to the oracle an element of mystery. One authority maintains that there was in Edom a town called Dumah. Others identify the name with one of the sons of Ishmael mentioned in **Genesis 25:14**.” (P. 97)

Alexander states with regard to this that “The greater importance of Edom, and the frequency with which it is mentioned in the prophets, especially as an object of Divine displeasure [combine to recommend the understanding that Dumah here means Edom].” (P. 376)

Gray, however, states that “The Hebrew title, *The oracle of Dumah*, presents an unsolved riddle. No important Edomite town of the name of *Dumah* is known, and it is wholly improbable that an oracle concerned with Edom as a whole would be named after some insignificant place. *Oracle of silence*...would be contrary to the analogy of the other titles, whether it be explained as meaning *oracle of* (the land that is to be reduced to) *silence*, or as a poor witticism [pun, jest] suggesting that the oracle does not
(continued...)

To me (a voice / he) is calling⁵⁰ from Seir:⁵¹
Watcher,⁵² what (news) from (the) night?

⁴⁹(...continued)
say much.” (P. 358)

Perhaps...but we are reminded of how often we have prayed, and seemingly received no answer, no response; how often we have gone to church, or to the priest / minister, expecting to hear a Divine answer to our doubts and questions, and have come away disappointed. And we remember how the preacher, wanting very much to be able to speak a word that will answer the longings / questions of his hearers, knows that his message has fallen flat, that in fact he has had no adequate answer to give. Is this oracle an example of this? Is the watcher just as empty of information as are his inquirers?

Watts comments that in **verse 11** “a second *Burden* [our ‘oracle / utterance’] has an even more ambiguous and mysterious title: *Silence*. The Hebrew sound is similar to ‘Edom’ and the reference to Seir in the next line leads [Rahfs] to insert that name here.” (P. 275)

⁵⁰Gray comments on the qal active participle קָרָא, “is calling,” that it means “urgently and insistently, as the repetition of the question suggests.” (P. 358)

⁵¹Slotki comments that שֵׁעִיר, *se’iyir*, “sometimes called mount Seir and synonymous with Edom.” (P. 97)

Gray agrees, and adds that “It is the nation as a whole that asks the question, but as the reply is to a plurality of persons, the question was probably conveyed to the seer by certain Edomite individuals. People of one country might consult the seers of another (**2 Kings 1:2-3** [where king Ahaziah inquires of Baal-zebub, the God of Ekron]. So, apparently, the fame of this, to us unknown, Jewish seer extended to Edom, on or near whose borders his home may have lain.” (Pp. 358-59) “Probably... apparently”—but not for sure. The text is obscure.

⁵²Slotki notes that whereas in **verse 6** the word used for watchman is הַמְצַפֵּה, a piel masculine singular participle, “the watchman,” here in **verse 11** the word used is שָׁמַר, a qal masculine singular participle, “one keeping / watching, preserving,” or as Slotki has it, “guardian.” (P. 97)

Watts observes that “The theme of a lookout or watchman is continued from **verses 6 and 8.**” (P. 275)

Watcher, what (news) from (the) night?⁵³

21:12⁵⁴ אָמַר שִׁמּוֹר

⁵³Slotki translates the question coming from a guardian of Seir “what of the night?,” and states that it means “how far is the night spent? How long is the darkness with its frightening uncertainties to last? How near is the dawn of redemption?” (Pp. 97-98)

However, the phrase is literally “what from (the) night,” and we think this implies “what news can you tell from your night’s watch?”

Alexander holds that the question means “What part of the night is it?,” and he adds that “This may have been a customary method of interrogating watchmen...Some regard this as a taunting inquiry addressed to Judah by his heathen neighbors. It is much more natural, however, to explain it as an expression of anxiety arising from a personal concern in the result.” (P. 376)

Motyer comments that “Isaiah expresses in his own delicate poetry, *What is left of the night?*, whatever tale of distress was brought to him.” (P. 177)

In fact, the line is obscure, and many different explanations can be and have been given to it—with no certainty.

The first phrase in line is מִלַּיְלָה, millayelah, “from a night,” using the ordinary word for night, לַיְלָה, layelah, which occurs some 234 times in the **Hebrew Bible**. The second phrase in line is מִלַּיִל, milleyl, also “from a night,” but using the shortened form לַיִל, leyl, the construct spelling of לַיְלָה, layil, which occurs by itself only at **Exodus 12:42**. 1QIs^a spells both nouns for night by the shortened form.

⁵⁴Alexander translates **verse 12**: “The watchman says, Morning comes and also night; if ye will inquire, inquire; return, come.”

He comments that “Grotius understands this to mean that though the natural morning light might return, the moral or spiritual night would still continue. Gesenius explains it as descriptive of vicissitude: morning comes, but night comes after it. Most writers understand it as relating to different subjects: morning comes (to one) and night (to another); which would seem to mean that while the Jewish night was about to be dispelled, that of Edom or Arabia should still continue.” (P. 376)

But the answer, we think, is a non-answer. The watchman has no news to give
(continued...)

אתה בִּקֵּר וְגַם לַיְלָה

אִם-תִּבְעִיּוֹן בְּעִיּוֹ

שָׁבוּ אֵתֶיךָ:

A watcher said:

Morning came, and also night.⁵⁵

If you (plural) will inquire, inquire!⁵⁶

Return! Come!⁵⁷

⁵⁴(...continued)

to the inquirers. We say to the watchman, If you have no answer—simply say so. Don't make up an answer—which all too often the watchman is tempted to do.

⁵⁵Slotki's translation has "The morning cometh, and also the night." He states that this is "an enigmatic answer which leads the enquirer to guess the meaning. *Morning* is symbolic of deliverance, *night* of darkness, uncertainty and oppression. The answer may mean morning comes for the righteous and night for the wicked, or a period of prosperity will be followed by one of adversity." (P. 98)

⁵⁶Slotki comments: "Though a clear answer cannot or would not be given now, a repeated inquiry on some future day may be more successful." (P. 98)

⁵⁷Slotki suggests the translation "Come again." He comments that "Some explain: return first from your evil ways and then you may come to enquire about your destiny." (P. 98)

What do you think? We feel that commentators are seeking to gain answers from the non-answer.

Motyer comments on **verse 12** that "God's programme [planned series of future events] is carried forward not only in great dramatic acts (**verse 9** [the fall of Babylon]) but also in long tracts of time when nothing seems to be happening." (P. 177)

But where do you read in this text anything concerning "God's programme" that is being "carried forward in long tracts of time"? Nights of watching and wondering can seem long—no doubt. But "long tracts of time," reaching out to the final end of time as Motyer reads into the text? Hardly.

Watts comments on **verse 12** that "The answer says nothing specific, only recognizing that it is proper to ask, even when nothing can be given in reply. It reflects

(continued...)

⁵⁷(...continued)

the times when people want to know what is happening, anxiously anticipating great and fearful events, yet recognizing that those events have not come into sight.” (P. 275)

⁵⁸Slotki entitles **verses 13-17** “An oracle on Arabia.”

He comments that “The date [of the oracle] is uncertain, but the reference may be to one of the military expeditions of Tiglath-pileser III or Sargon. We know from the cuneiform inscriptions that Arabian rulers paid tribute to Tiglath-pileser III in 738 and 734 and to Sargon in 720 and 715.” (P. 98)

Gray entitles these verses “Fugitives escaping from war into Arabia.”

Motyer entitles **verses 13-17** “Desert evening (Arabian tribes): needs but no solutions.”

And again we ask, Where in the text is it said that there are “no solutions”? We say the text gives a solution—it is for those hearing the oracle to bring help (water) to the thirsty, and for the inhabitants of Tema to give them food.

Motyer comments that “Tema (**verse 14**) was an oasis city and caravan center a hundred miles south of Elath and two hundred miles east of the Red Sea. The Dedanites were an Arabian tribe of the same general locality and Kedar (**verse 16**) was an Arabian tribe which gave its name to the northern extension of the desert...In 715 B.C.E. Sargon II campaigned against the tribes between Tema and the Gulf of Aqabah, and in 703 B.C.E. the Arabs joined in rebellion with Merodach-Baladan and were subdued by Sennacherib. There is, therefore, no need to consider a later date for this piece. Even though we cannot pinpoint the situation Isaiah is sketching, his picture is clear. Tema is urged to succor [provide help in time of need] those fleeing from war. This is all we need to know—a Gentile world in trouble and providing help within its own borders.” (P. 177)

But where, we ask, does the text mention “a Gentile world”? Later he states that the cryptic title means “Gentiles in a darkening world.” But we ask, do the two Hebrew words מִשָּׂא בְעֶרְבִי, “Burden / oracle in the desert-plateau / steppe” mean “Gentiles in a darkening world”? We cannot see how such a meaning can be given to these two words. While it is true that בְּעֶרְבִי can be read as “in the evening,” that leaves no mention of Arabia or the Gentiles. In fact, translations in our English versions vary

(continued...)

⁵⁸(...continued)

greatly, but none of them comes close to Motyer's:

King James, "The burden upon Arabia."

Tanakh, "The 'In the Steppe' Pronouncement."

New Revised Standard, "The oracle concerning the desert plain."

New International, "A prophecy against Arabia."

New Jerusalem, "Proclamation about the wastelands:"

Rahfs, omits the title.

Alexander translates **verse 13**: "*The burden of Arabia. In the forest in Arabia shall ye lodge, oh ye caravans of Dedanim.*"

He comments that "The prophet here passes from Edom to Arabia, or from one Arabian tribe or district to another. The answer in **verse 12**, that the dawn was approaching for the Jews but not for them [Edom and Arabia] is here explained. The country was to be in such a state that the caravans which usually traveled undisturbed would be obliged to leave the public road, and pass the night among the bushes or thickets...the interruption of whose journey is mentioned as a proof of the condition of the country." (P. 377)

But do you see anything said in the text about "the dawn approaching for the Jews, but not for Edom and Arabia"? We do not. The dark night is common to all, and so is the coming of dawn.

Watts entitles **verses 13-17** "Burden: In the Wasteland."

He comments that "The third ambiguous title may mean 'against Arabia,' 'in the evening,' or 'in the wasteland.' A tendency to expect the name of a country in such a title, connected with the names Dedon and Tema in **verses 13** and **14**, supports the first ['against Arabia']." But he concludes that "The overwhelming impression again is mystery and ambiguity." (Pp. 276-77)

Kaiser entitles **verses 13-15** "Caravans in Flight."

He comments that "without any introduction to explain the situation, the poet plunges us into a dramatic action which reveals, line by line, the outlines of a genre painting [depicting scenes from ordinary life]. The caravans of the Dedanites, who are found in the **Old Testament** both as the inhabitants of the oasis city of Tema and also as merchants traveling long distances (compare **Ezekiel 27:20** [Dedan traded with Tyre in saddle-cloths]...**Job 6:18-19** [which speaks of caravans going off course, including caravans of Tema]), are told to seek their night quarters away from the caravan route out in the trackless desert terrain..."

(continued...)

בִּיעֵר בְּעֵרֵב תִּלְיִנוּ

אַרְחֹת דְּדַנִּים:

Utterance / oracle against Arabia:⁵⁹

In the thicket,⁶⁰ in the Arabia,⁶¹ you (plural) will spend the night,
caravans of Dedanites--⁶²

⁵⁸(...continued)

“This command makes clear the extraordinary danger to which they are exposed, for after a strenuous day’s travel under a burning sun, through desolate, waterless ravines and baking plains, sometimes covered with sand...a caravan urgently needs to find a waterhole in the evening if the men and animals are not to die of thirst. Without outside help the thirsting travelers would soon be doomed. The poet consequently calls upon the Temanites to bring water and bread to the fugitives who are hungry and almost dead with thirst...

“The fact that the Dedanites are described as fugitives makes it clear that on their journey they have encountered an overwhelmingly strong enemy...[They have been] faced with drawn swords, drawn bows and a violent attack [and] the caravans have had to take flight.” (Pp. 133-34)

⁵⁹**Rahlfs** omits the title completely.

⁶⁰Slotki comments that this phrase, which he translates “in the thickets,” means “Away from the regular caravan route which is rendered dangerous by the inroads of the enemy.” (P. 98)

Gray comments that “According to the unpointed Hebrew text (also **Rahlfs**), the persons addressed are to spend the night בִּיעֵר, *in the forest...or thicket, scrub*. (P. 360)

⁶¹Gray states that “A second definition, possibly also of place, follows: בְּעֵרֵב, which may, indeed, mean *in the evening* (so **Rahlfs**, ἑσπέρας, ‘in the evening’)...but it has also been rendered (1) In Arabia...or (2) in the steppe, in this case בערבה... **Rahlfs** has ἐν τῷ ὄρει, ‘in the wood’] all very uncertain.” (P. 360)

⁶²Slotki comments that the Dedanites “were an important trading tribe of Arabs living near Edom, somewhere to the north of the Gulf of Akaba.” (P. 98) See **Ezekiel 27:20**, where the tribe of Dedan is mentioned as trading in saddle-cloths.

(continued...)

⁶²(...continued)

Gray similarly states, “Dedan was a tribe with permanent seats in south and central Arabia, and trading settlements in the northwest’ [quoting **Encyclopedia Biblica**, p. 1053)...In **Jeremiah 25:23** Tema is mentioned immediately after Dedan.” (P. 360)

⁶³Alexander translates / comments on **verse 14**: “*To meet the thirsty they bring water, the inhabitants of the land of Tema; with his bread they prevent* (i.e. meet or anticipate) *the fugitive.*”

“The men of Tema, another Arabian tribe, also engaged in trade (**Jeremiah 15:23; Job 6:19**), are described as bringing food and drink, not to the Dedanim mentioned in **verse 13**, but to the people of the wasted country...The ancient versions make the verbs imperative and understand the sentence as an exhortation to the people of Tema. This construction, which is adopted [by some], requires a change in the pointing of the text, for which there is no sufficient authority, much less a necessity. On the contrary, the context makes it far more natural to understand the prophet as describing an act than as exhorting to it.” (P. 377)

We deeply respect Alexander’s Hebrew scholarship, but here we partially disagree. Where he says the ancient versions make the verbs imperative, the fact is that the first verb in the Hebrew text, הִתְיַיֵּן is most probably the hiphil imperative masculine plural, “bring (water)!”; the second verb קָדְמוּ is piel perfect, “with his bread) they met (one fleeing).” Thus we think the text demands the understanding that the prophet is both exhorting / commanding a compassionate act, and at the same time describing a compassionate act as happening.

Translations of **verse 14** vary:

King James, “The inhabitants of the land of Tema brought water to him that was thirsty, they prevented with their bread him that fled.” (“Prevent” in Old English was oftentimes used to mean “to be in readiness for; to meet or satisfy in advance.” Both verbs are translated as “perfects”—they brought, they prevented.)

Tanakh, “Meet the thirsty with water, You who dwell in the land of Tema; Greet the fugitive with bread.” (Both verbs are translated as imperatives.)

New Revised Standard, “Bring water to the thirsty, meet the fugitive with bread, O inhabitants of the land of Tema.” (Both verbs are translated as imperatives.)

New International, “bring water for the thirsty; you who live in Tema, bring food for the fugitives.” (Both verbs are translated as imperatives.)

New Jerusalem, “Bring water for the thirsty! The inhabitants of Tema went with bread to greet the fugitive.” (Both verbs are translated as imperatives.)

(continued...)

הַתִּיּוֹ מֵיִם
 יִשְׁבִּי אֶרֶץ תֵּימָא
 בְּלַחְמוֹ קָדְמוֹ נָדָד:

(If happening) to meet a thirsty person,

bring (hiphil masculine imperative plural) water!

Those dwelling (in the) land of Teyma,⁶⁴

⁶³(...continued)

Rahlf's, εἰς συνάντησιν διψῶντι ὕδωρ φέρετε οἱ ἐνοικοῦντες ἐν χώρᾳ Θαίμαν ἄρτοις συναντᾶτε τοῖς φεύγουσιν, “for meeting one thirsting, bring water! Those dwelling in (the) country of Thaiman, with breads / foods meet the ones fleeing!” (Both verbs are translated as imperatives.)

Motyer comments that “For these Dedanite travelers in their insecurity, the people of Tema bring food. It is probably best to treat both verbs as perfect tense. The form of the first *bring* (הַתִּיּוֹ) can be either imperative (**Brown-Driver-Briggs**; [Holladay]) or perfect (**Gesenius-Kautzsch-Cowley**)...Hence a literal translation would be ‘To meet the thirsty, the inhabitants of the land of Tema brought water; with his bread [i.e. the food he needed] they were there to meet the wanderer.’ Thus Isaiah watches a rescue operation in progress...The Dedanites are cared for by their own, but they find no security there (**verses 16-17**).” (P. 178)

⁶⁴Slotki comments that this is “modern “Teima in the north of Arabia on the edge of the Arabian desert, east of the pilgrim route from Damascus to Mecca. Its inhabitants were engaged in commerce and presumably stood in friendly intercourse with the Dedanites.” (P. 98) See on the Internet pictures of modern Teima. It not only was a beautiful oasis in the ancient Near East, but still is such today.

Gray states that “Tema, modern Teima in the Hejaz [area in the western coast of Saudi Arabia on the Red Sea] in northwest Arabia, is a place with a famous water-supply, and was for long an important commercial station.” (P. 361)

Kaiser states that “Tema, the present-day *taima*, was an oasis city with plentiful supplies of water, and lay at the point where the caravan route to the Persian Gulf crossed the ancient incense route leading from southern Arabia to the north. Dedan, which was still known in the Middle Ages as *ad-daidan*, was close to the present-day *al-‘ula*, southwest of *taima*...

“The caravans were coming either from the Persian Gulf, or more probably, from
 (continued...)

with his bread / food they met someone fleeing!⁶⁵

21:15 ⁶⁶ כִּי־מִפְּנֵי חֲרָבוֹת נִדְדוּ
כִּי־מִפְּנֵי חֲרָבוֹת נִדְדוּ

⁶⁴(...continued)

the north. In any case their flight homewards would have taken them through the region of Tema...

“We do not know very much about the history of northern Arabia in pre-Christian times...In 703 B.C.E. the Arabs took part in the movement of revolt against Assyria stirred up by the Babylonian Marduk-aplu-iddina (Merodach-Baladan) but were ultimately defeated by Sennacherib, like the Judeans. In 689 B.C.E. Sennacherib had once again to pacify the Arabs, suppressing a revolt led by the Kedar...Finally, the last neo-Babylonian emperor Nabonidus moved his royal residence for ten years to Tema.” (Pp. 134-35)

⁶⁵Slotki comments that “Unable to procure their food supplies from the normal stations on the regular route, the Dedanite caravans, thirsty and hungry, are dependent on the mercy of the tribes that occupied the country bordering on the less-frequented paths.” (P. 98)

Gray calls **verse 14** an ambiguous fragment. He states that it “may be imperative, O caravans...bring, O inhabitants...meet; and the caravans of Dedanites may belong to **verse 13** (Masoretic Text), as it is generally understood to do. But if these translations are correct, the fugitives are not defined in the fragment. On the other hand, if the correct translation is, Ye must spend the night, O caravans of Dedanites. To meet the thirsty bring (or they brought) water, etc., the fugitives of **verse 15**, though there spoken of in the third person, may be the Dedanite caravans addressed in **verse 13**...

“Then we might assume that the situation is as follows: Arab caravans, instead of finding their usual mart and returning with merchandise, have found war, and have fled without being able to provision themselves. To avoid being overtaken they have turned aside from the caravan track and the regular stations on it where water would be found. Consequently their friends in Tema meet them, or are bidden to meet them, with food and drink.” (Pp. 358-59)

⁶⁶Alexander translates / comments on **verse 15**: “*Because (or when) from the presence of swords they fled, from the presence of a drawn sword and from the presence of a bended bow, and from the presence of a weight of war...*”

“This verse describes them as not only plundered but pursued by a blood-thirsty enemy.” (Pp. 377-78)

Motyer comments that “The fugitives have been caught up in the actuality of
(continued...)

מִפְּנֵי חֶרֶב נִטְוֵשָׁה
וּמִפְּנֵי קִשְׁת׃ הַרְוּכָה
וּמִפְּנֵי כְּבֹד מִלְחָמָה:

Because from facing swords they fled;
from facing a sword he was forsaken;
and from facing a bent bow;
and from facing vehemence of war.⁶⁷

21:16⁶⁸ כִּי־כָה אָמַר אֲדֹנָי אֱלֹהֵי

⁶⁶(...continued)

warfare and so took to flight...*From the sword / swords'* shows they were caught between two opposing forces...The battle was joined—*the sword was drawn* and the *bow was bent* / 'trodden,' i.e. strung for action—and the *heat of battle* / 'the weight of war' drove them from their homes." (Pp. 178-79) "From their homes"? Or "from their usual route"?

Watts states that in **verse 15** "An explanation cites military invasion as the cause. There are no specific data on which to attempt to historical identification as to time or event." (P. 277)

We see the evidence for fleeing from warfare, but see nothing about "military invasion." The language could just as well describe a civil war, or simply criminals.

⁶⁷Slotki explains that the swords, etc. are those "of the raiding bands which infested the caravan routes." (P. 98)

Kaiser states that "It has been suggested that the poem belongs in the period of the Arab revolt against Sargon [Sargon II, who reigned from 722 to 705 B.C.E.], and that Isaiah was its author. Others point to the similarity with **Isaiah 21:1-10**, and date both prophecies in the years before the capture of Babylon by Cyrus [the Great, in 539 B.C.E.]..."

"If we are not satisfied with the conclusion that we can no longer know anything about the situation envisaged in the poem [of **verses 13-15**], we must consider the possibility that the eschatological threat from unnamed enemies coming from the north, to which the poem is taken to refer in its present context in the oracles against foreign nations, was in fact already intended by the poet who composed it." (P. 135)

⁶⁸Slotki calls **verses 16-17** "a prosaic [lacking poetic beauty] conclusion of the
(continued...)

בְּעוֹד שָׁנָה כְּשָׁנֵי שְׂכִיר
וְכָלָה כָּל-כְּבוֹד קֶדָר:

⁶⁸(...continued)
oracle on Arabia.” (P. 99)

Gray calls these two verses “a note in prose added to the last poem, and announcing the almost total destruction of the Arabs within a definitely fixed time. The future of the Arabs is darker here than in **verses 13-15**; there Arabia is the place of flight from danger. Here no escape is possible.” (P. 361)

Motyer entitles these two verses “Interim fulfilment.”

And we ask, where in these verses is anything said about an “interim fulfilment”? We see evidence for a title like “Divine word predicting a soon-coming end of Qedar,” or something like that, but “Interim fulfilment”? Motyer hasn’t derived this title from the text, but rather has read it into the text.

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 16**: “*For thus saith the Lord to me, In yet a year (or in a year longer) like the years of a hireling (i.e. strictly computed) shall fail (or cease) all the glory of Kedar...*”

“This verse seems to fix a time for the fulfilment of the foregoing prophecy...The Arabians who suffered with the Jews, so far from sharing their deliverance, should, within a year after the event, be entirely destroyed.” But he goes on to say that “due allowance should be made for diversity of judgment [in interpretation of this verse] in a case so doubtful.” (P. 378)

Kaiser entitles **verses 16-17** “The Destruction of the Bene Kedar.”

He comments that “Perhaps the author of this passage is the same apocalyptic writer, claiming to know God’s plan for history, who speaks in **17:13-15** and who correctly understood that Dedan lay in the country of the Bene Kedar. Thus he enlarges the preceding prophetic warning, on the basis of what was certainly a burning expectation of God’s decisive intervention in history. Within three years the prophecy which he already located among the oracles against foreign nations will be fulfilled against the Bene Kedar. Then the power of the Arab tribe, which was clearly well known not only for its merchants but also for its archers, would be broken, and its numbers reduced.” (P. 136)

Kaiser prefaces his statement by “Perhaps.” And this is appropriate, for there is no way to be certain about the relationship of this passage with the earlier oracle against Damascus.

Because in this way my Lord spoke to me:

In still a year, like years of a hired worker,⁶⁹
and all Qedar's⁷⁰ abundance / glory will be finished!

21:17⁷¹ וְשָׂאֵר מִסִּפְר־קִשְׁתַּי גְּבוּרֵי בְנֵי־קֶדָר יִמְעָטוּ
כִּי יִהְיֶה אֱלֹהֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל דְּבַר:

And (the) number of mighty men of (the) bow⁷² left remaining will be few!

⁶⁹Compare **Isaiah 16:14**, where we have quoted Slotki as stating, “As a hireling does not work a moment longer than the stipulated time, so the fall of Moab will not be deferred for a moment longer than the three years’ period mentioned.” (P. 81)

⁷⁰Slotki comments that Qedar was “a pastoral tribe in the Syrian desert (compare **Isaiah 60:7**). In the context it is synonymous with Arabia.” (P. 99)

Gray states that it is the name of a particular Ishmaelite tribe, but here and in some other passages (**Isaiah 42:11; 60:7; Jeremiah 2:10**) it is probably a comprehensive term for nomadic peoples of the deserts east and south of Palestine.” (P. 361)

Watts comments that the Qedarites “were a considerable force that pre-occupied the Assyrians under Sennacherib, Assurbanipal, and Esarhaddon. Sennacherib writes of defeating Hazail, king of the Arabs / Kedarites.” (P. 277)

⁷¹Alexander translates / comments on **verse 17**: “*And the remnant of the number of bows (or archers), the mighty men (or heroes), of the children of Kedar, shall be few (or become few), for Jehovah God of Israel hath spoken it...*”

“The last clause intimates that God, as the God of Israel, has a quarrel with Kedar, and at the same time that His power and omniscience will secure the fulfilment of the threatening...”

“It is not impossible that future discoveries may yet throw light upon these brief and obscure prophecies.” (P. 378)

⁷²Slotki’s translation has “archers.” He comments that “the Hebrew is literally ‘bow.’ Archery was practiced among the northern Arabs from remote antiquity. According to **Genesis 21:20** their ancestor Ishmael was an archer in the wilderness.” (P. 99)

(continued...)

Because YHWH, Israel's God spoke!

1. **Elam and Media in the Ancient Near East**

“Ancient Elam lay to the east of Sumer and Akkad, in the far west and southwest of modern-day Iran, stretching from the lowlands of Khuzestan and Ilam Province. In the Old Elamite period about 3200 B.C.E., it consisted of kingdoms on the Iranian plateau, centered in Anshan, and from the mid-2nd millennium B.C.E., it was centered in Susa in the Khuzestan lowlands. Elam was absorbed into the Assyrian Empire in the 9th to 7th centuries B.C.E., however the civilization endured up until 539 B.C.E., when it was finally overrun by the Iranian Persians.” (Wikipedia, 9/29/2016)

Neo-Elamite II (about 770–646 B.C.E)

“The later Neo-Elamite period is characterized by a significant migration of Indo-European speaking Iranians to the Iranian plateau. Assyrian sources beginning around 800 B.C.E. distinguish the "powerful Medes", i.e. the actual Medes, Persians, (Parthians, Sagartians, Margians, Bactrians, Sogdians etc.). Among these pressuring tribes were the Parsu, first recorded in 844 B.C.E. as living on the southeastern shore of Lake Urmiah, but who by the end of this period would cause the Elamites' original home, the Iranian Plateau, to be renamed Persia proper. These newly arrived Iranian peoples were also conquered by Assyria, and largely regarded as vassals of the Neo-Assyrian Empire until the late 7th century.

⁷²(...continued)

Motyer concludes his comments on **verse 17** with “Gentiles in distress have only human power to look to; Israel has omnipotence on its side.” (P. 179)

But again we ask, does this verse say anything like that? The verse states that the remainder of Qedar's warriors will be few, as YHWH has said, but it doesn't mention Israel or the “Gentiles in distress.”

Watts comments that “The announced destruction of Kedar is an explicit and specific word from Yahweh...

“For Shebna the vision / news of Babylon's fall and the vision of Arabian refugees (**verses 13-14**) interpreted by the prophecy of **verses 16-17** prepare for a very negative evaluation of Judah's position, as Assyria advances.” (P. 277)

Perhaps...but the text makes no mention of Shebna, and there is no indication that this utterance / oracle is to be interpreted in the light of the next utterance / oracle.

“More details are known from the late 8th century B.C.E. (800 to 701 B.C.E.), when the Elamites were allied with the Chaldean chieftain Merodach-baladan to defend the cause of Babylonian independence from Assyria. Khumbanigash (743–717 B.C.E.) supported Merodach-baladan against Sargon II, apparently without success; while his successor, Shutruk-Nakhkhunte II (716–699 B.C.E.), was routed by Sargon's troops during an expedition in 710 B.C.E., and another Elamite defeat by Sargon's troops is recorded for 708 B.C.E.. The Assyrian dominion over Babylon was underlined by Sargon's son Sennacherib, who defeated the Elamites, Chaldeans and Babylonians and dethroned Merodach-baladan for a second time, installing his own son Ashur-nadin-shumi on the Babylonian throne in 700 B.C.E..

“Shutruk-Nakhkhunte II, the last Elamite to claim the old title "king of Anshan and Susa," was murdered by his brother Khallushu, who managed to briefly capture the Assyrian governor of Babylonia Ashur-nadin-shumi and the city of Babylon in 694 B.C.E. Sennacherib soon responded by invading and ravaging Elam. Khallushu was in turn assassinated by Kutir-Nakhkhunte, who succeeded him but soon abdicated in favor of Khumma-Menanu III (692–689 B.C.E.). Khumma-Menanu recruited a new army to help the Babylonians and Chaldeans against the Assyrians at the battle of Halule in 691. Both sides claimed the victory in their annals, but Babylon was destroyed by Sennacherib only two years later, and its Elamite allies defeated in the process.

“The reigns of Khumma-Khaldash I (688–681 B.C.E.) and Khumma-Khaldash II (680–675 B.C.E.) saw a deterioration of Elamite-Babylonian relations, and both of them raided Sippar. At the beginning of Esarhaddon's reign in Assyria (681–669 B.C.E.), Nabu-zer-kitti-lišir, an ethnically Elamite governor in the south of Babylonia, revolted and besieged Ur, but was routed by the Assyrians and fled to Elam where the king of Elam, fearing Assyrian repercussions, took him prisoner and put him to the sword.

“Urtaku (674–664 B.C.E.) for some time wisely maintained good relations with the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal (668–627 B.C.E.), who sent wheat to Susiana during a famine. But these friendly relations were only temporary, and Urtaku was killed in battle during a failed Elamite attack on Assyria.

“His successor Tempti-Khumma-In-Shushinak (664–653 B.C.E.) attacked Assyria, but was defeated and killed by Ashurbanipal following the battle of the Ulaï in 653 B.C.E.; and Susa itself was sacked and occupied by the Assyrians. In this same year the Assyrian vassal Median state to the north fell to the invading Scythians and Cimmerians under Madius, and displacing another Assyrian vassal people, the Parsu (Persians) to Anshan which their king Teispes captured that same year, turning it for the first time into an Indo-Iranian kingdom under Assyrian dominance that would a century later become the nucleus of the Achaemenid dynasty. The Assyrians successfully subjugated and drove the Scythians and Cimmerians from their Iranian colonies, and the Persians, Medes and Parthians remained vassals of Assyria.

“During a brief respite provided by the civil war between Ashurbanipal and his

own brother Shamash-shum-ukin whom their father Esarhaddon had installed as the vassal king of Babylon, the Elamites both gave support to Shamash-shum-ukin, and indulged in fighting among themselves, so weakening the Elamite kingdom that in 646 B.C.E. Ashurbanipal devastated Susiana with ease, and sacked Susa. A succession of brief reigns continued in Elam from 651 to 640 B.C.E., each of them ended either due to usurpation, or because of capture of their king by the Assyrians. In this manner, the last Elamite king, Khumma-Khaldash III, was captured in 640 B.C.E. by Ashurbanipal, who annexed and destroyed the country.

“In a tablet unearthed in 1854 C.E. by Henry Austin Layard, Ashurbanipal boasts of the destruction he had wrought:

Susa, the great holy city, abode of their Gods, seat of their mysteries, I conquered. I entered its palaces, I opened their treasuries where silver and gold, goods and wealth were amassed...I destroyed the ziggurat of Susa. I smashed its shining copper horns. I reduced the temples of Elam to naught; their Gods and Goddesses I scattered to the winds. The tombs of their ancient and recent kings I devastated, I exposed to the sun, and I carried away their bones toward the land of Ashur. I devastated the provinces of Elam and on their lands I sowed salt.

Neo-Elamite III (646–539 B.C.E.)

“The devastation was a little less complete than Ashurbanipal boasted, and a weak and fragmented Elamite rule was resurrected soon after with Shuttir-Nakhkhunte, son of III (not to be confused with Shuttir-Nakhkhunte, son of Indada, a petty king in the first half of the 6th century). Elamite royalty in the final century preceding the Achaemenids was fragmented among different small kingdoms, the united Elamite nation having been destroyed and colonised by the Assyrians. The three kings at the close of the 7th century (Shuttir-Nakhkhunte, Khallutush-In-Shushinak and Atta-Khumma-In-Shushinak) still called themselves "king of Anzan and of Susa" or "enlarger of the kingdom of Anzan and of Susa", at a time when the Achaemenid Persians were already ruling Anshan under Assyrian dominance.

“The various Assyrian Empires, which had been the dominant force in the Near East, Asia Minor, the Caucasus, North Africa, Arabian peninsula and East Mediterranean for much of the period from the first half of the 14th century B.C.E., began to unravel after the death of Ashurbanipal in 627 B.C.E., descending into a series of bitter internal civil wars which also spread to Babylonia. The Iranian Medes, Parthians, Persians and Sagartians who had been largely subject to Assyria since their arrival in the region around 1000 B.C.E., quietly took full advantage of the anarchy in Assyria, and in 616 B.C.E. freed themselves from Assyrian rule.

“The Medians took control of Elam during this period. Cyaxares the king of the Medes, Persians, Parthians and Sagartians entered into an alliance with a coalition of fellow former vassals of Assyria: Nabopolassar of Babylon and Chaldea, and also the Scythians and Cimmerians against Sin-shar-ishkun of Assyria, who was faced with unremitting civil war in Assyria itself. This alliance then attacked a disunited and war weakened Assyria, and between 616 and 599 B.C.E. at the very latest, had conquered its vast empire which stretched from the Caucasus Mountains to Egypt, Libya and the Arabian Peninsula, and from Cyprus and Ephesus to Persia and the Caspian Sea.

“The major cities in Assyria itself were gradually taken; Arrapha (modern Kirkuk and Kalhu (modern Nimrud) in 616 B.C.E., Ashur, Dur-Sharrukin and Arbela (modern Erbil) in 613 B.C.E., Nineveh falling in 612 B.C.E., Harran in 608 B.C.E., Carchemish in 605 B.C.E., and finally Dur-Katlimmu by 599 B.C.E. Elam, already largely destroyed and subjugated by Assyria, thus became easy prey for the Median dominated Iranian peoples, and was incorporated into the Median Empire (612-546 B.C.E.) and then the succeeding Achaemenid Empire (546-332 B.C.E.), with Assyria suffering the same fate.

“The prophet Ezekiel describes the status of their power in the 12th year of the Hebrew Babylonian Captivity in 587 B.C.E.:

Elam is there, and all her multitude around her grave, all of them slain, fallen by the sword, who went down uncircumcised into the world below, who spread their terror in the land of the living; and they bear their shame with those who go down to the pit. (**Ezekiel 31:29, English Standard Version**)

“Their successors Khumma-Menanu and Shilhak-In-Shushinak II bore the simple title "king", and the final king Tempti-Khumma-In-Shushinak used no honorific at all. In 540 BC, Achaemenid rule began in Susa.

Ancient Media:

“The Medes were an ancient Iranian people who lived in an area known as Media (northwestern Iran) and who spoke the Median language. They mainly inhabited the mountainous area of northwestern Iran and the northeastern and eastern region of Mesopotamia and located in the Kermanshah-Hamadan (Ecbatana) region. Their arrival in the region is associated with the first wave of migrating Iranian peoples into Iran from the Late Bronze Age collapse from around 1000 B.C.E. to around 900 B.C.E.

“This period of migration coincided with a power vacuum in the Near East with the Middle Assyrian Empire (1365–1020 B.C.E.), which had dominated northwestern Iran and eastern Anatolia and the Caucasus, going into a comparative decline. This allowed new peoples to pass through and settle. In addition Elam, the dominant power in Iran, was suffering a period of severe weakness, as was Babylonia to the west.

“From the 10th to the late 7th centuries B.C.E., the western parts of Media fell under the domination of the vast Neo-Assyrian Empire based in northern Mesopotamia,

but which stretched from Cyprus to Iran, and from the Caucasus to Egypt and the Arabian Peninsula. Assyrian kings such as Tiglath-Pileser III, Sargon II, Sennacherib, Esarhaddon, Ashurbanipal and Ashur-etil-ilani imposed Vassal Treaties upon the Median rulers, and also protected them from predatory raids by marauding Scythians and Cimmerians.

“During the reign of Sinsharishkun (622–612 B.C.E.) the Assyrian empire, which had been in a state of constant civil war since 626 B.C.E., began to unravel. Subject peoples, such as the Medes, Babylonians, Chaldeans, Egyptians, Scythians, Cimmerians, Lydians and Arameans quietly ceased to pay tribute to Assyria.

“An alliance between the Medes and rebelling Neo-Babylonian Empire, Scythians, Chaldeans, and Cimmerians, helped the Medes to capture Nineveh in 612 B.C.E., which resulted in the eventual collapse of the Neo-Assyrian Empire by 605 B.C.E. The Medes were subsequently able to establish their Median kingdom (with Ecbatana as their royal centre) beyond their original homeland and had eventually a territory stretching roughly from northeastern Iran to the Kızılırmak River in Anatolia.

“After the fall of Assyria between 616 and 605 B.C.E., a unified Median state was formed, which together with Babylonia, Lydia, and ancient Egypt became one of the four major powers of the ancient Near East.

“The Median kingdom was eventually conquered in 550 B.C.E. by Cyrus the Great, who established the Achaemenid Empire. However, nowadays there is considerable doubt whether a united Median empire ever existed. There is no archaeological evidence and the story of Herodotus is not supported by sources from the Neo-Assyrian Empire nor the Neo-Babylonian Empire.

“A few archaeological sites (discovered in the "Median triangle" in western Iran) and textual sources (from contemporary Assyrians and also ancient Greeks in later centuries) provide a brief documentation of the history and culture of the Median state. Apart from a few personal names, the language of the Medes is unknown. The Medes had an Ancient Iranian Religion (a form of pre-Zoroastrian Mazdaism or Mithra worshiping) with a priesthood named as "Magi." Later during the reigns of the last Median kings, the reforms of Zoroaster spread into western Iran.” (**Wikipedia**, 9/29/2016)

2. Merodach-Baladan and Amel Marduk / Ewil-Merodach of Babylon

“Marduk-apla-iddina II, in the **Bible** Merodach-Baladan, also called Marduk-Baladan, Baladan and Berodach-Baladan, literally, ‘Marduk has given me an heir,’ was a Chaldean prince who usurped the Babylonian throne in 721 B.C.E. and reigned from 722 to 710 B.C.E., and from 703 to 702 B.C.E.

“Marduk-apla-iddina II was known as one of the kings who maintained Babylonian independence in the face of Assyrian military supremacy for more than a decade.

“Sargon of Assyria repressed the allies of Marduk-apla-iddina II in Elam, Aram and Israel and eventually drove (about 710 B.C.E.) him from Babylon. After the death of Sargon, Marduk-apla-iddina II briefly recaptured the throne from a native Babylonian nobleman. He reigned nine months (703 to 702 B.C.E.). He returned from Elam and ignited rebellion in Babylonia. He was able to enter Babylon and be declared king again. Nine months later he was defeated near Kish by the Assyrians, but managed to flee to Elam. He died in exile a couple of years later.”

See **2 Kings 20:12** and **Isaiah 39:1**. He was a contemporary of the historical Isaiah of Jerusalem.

2 Kings 20:12-15:

- 12 At that time Merodach-baladan the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent envoys with letters and a present to Hezekiah, for he heard that Hezekiah had been sick.
- 13 And Hezekiah welcomed them, and he showed them all his treasure house, the silver, the gold, the spices, the precious oil, his armory, all that was found in his storehouses.
There was nothing in his house or in all his realm that Hezekiah did not show them.
- 14 Then Isaiah the prophet came to King Hezekiah, and said to him, "What did these men say? And from where did they come to you?" And Hezekiah said, "They have come from a far country, from Babylon."
- 15 He said, "What have they seen in your house?" And Hezekiah answered, "They have seen all that is in my house; there is nothing in my storehouses that I did not show them."

Amel-Marduk / Ewil-Merodach

“Amel-Marduk; Biblical Hebrew: **אֵוִיל מְרֹדַךְ**; English: Ewil-Merodach), 'man of Marduk' (died about. 560 B.C.E.) was the son and successor of Nebuchadnezzar II, king of Babylon.

“His name, along with the length of his reign, are recorded in the 'Uruk King List' and the Canon of Ptolemy, however no surviving cuneiform document records anything concerning his life or deeds. Berossus writes that he was murdered in a plot orchestrated by Nergal-sharezer, his successor and brother-in-law. Berossus also notes that ‘he governed public affairs after an illegal and impure manner,’ possibly an allusion to actions that infuriated the priestly class, including reforms made to the policies of Nebuchadnezzar.

“One such reform is recorded in the **Hebrew Bible**, where Evil-Merodach is remembered for releasing the Jewish king Jehoiachin from prison after thirty seven years in captivity.

“Later Jewish and Christian texts expand the Biblical account. Josephus and the Avot of Rabbi Natan state that the king believed that Jehoiachin was held by his father without cause, and thus decided to release him upon the latter's death. Originally, Josephus assigned eighteen years to his reign, but in a later work, Josephus states that Berossus assigned a reign of two years. **Seder Olam Rabbah** assigned twenty-three years to his reign. **Leviticus Rabbah 18:2** states that Evil-Merodach was made king while Nebuchadnezzar was still living, and was punished for this act of rebellion by his father, who had him imprisoned. In Esther Rabbah, Evil-Merodach, owing to his father's actions before his death, is heir to a bankrupt treasury. (**Wikipedia**, 10/2/2016)

See **2 King 25:27** and **Jeremiah 52:31**. He was a contemporary of Cyrus the Great.

Jeremiah 52:31-34:

- 31 And in the thirty-seventh year of the exile of Jehoiachin king of Judah,
in the twelfth month, on the twenty-fifth day of the month,
Evil-merodach king of Babylon, in the year that he began to reign,
graciously freed Jehoiachin king of Judah and brought him out of prison.
- 32 And he spoke kindly to him
and gave him a seat above the seats of the kings who were with him in
Babylon.
- 33 So Jehoiachin put off his prison garments.
And every day of his life he dined regularly at the king's table,
- 34 and for his allowance, a regular allowance was given him by the king,
according to his daily needs,
until the day of his death, as long as he lived. (**English Standard Version**)

We wonder why **English** language **Bibles** continue to give the first part of his name as “Evil,” which has negative connotations in English. The word in Hebrew is actually “Ewil,” and it is based on the Babylonian name Amel, which means “Man,” that is, his name means “Man of Marduk.”

3.

The Medes and Media

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The Median kingdom was eventually conquered in 550 B.C.E. by Cyrus the Great, who established the Achaemenid Empire. However, nowadays there is considerable doubt whether a united Median empire ever existed. There is no archaeological evidence and the story of Herodotus is not supported by sources from the Neo-Assyrian Empire nor the Neo-Babylonian Empire.” (**Wikipedia**, 10/10/2016)

4.

Nabonidus(-Cyrus) Chronicle and Herodotus 1. 190b-191

“The Nabonidus Chronicle is an ancient Babylonian text, part of a larger series of Babylonian Chronicles inscribed in cuneiform script on clay tablets. It deals primarily with the reign of Nabonidus, the last king of the Neo-Babylonian Empire, covers the conquest of Babylon by the Persian king Cyrus the Great, and ends with the start of the reign of Cyrus's son Cambyses, spanning a period from 556 B.C.E. to some time after 539 B.C.E. It provides a rare contemporary account of Cyrus's rise to power and is the main source of information on this period; Amélie Kuhrt describes it as ‘the most reliable and sober [ancient] account of the fall of Babylon.’

“The chronicle is thought to have been copied by a scribe during the Seleucid period (4th-1st century B.C.E.) but the original text was probably written during the late 6th or early 5th century B.C.E. Similarities with the Nabonassar to Shamash-shum-ukin Chronicle, another of the Babylonian Chronicles, suggest that the same scribe may have been responsible for both chronicles. If so, it may date to the reign of Darius I of Persia (about 549–486 B.C.E.).

“The Nabonidus Chronicle is preserved on a single clay tablet now kept at the British Museum in London. Like the other Babylonian Chronicles, it lists in an annalistic (year-by-year) fashion the key events of each year, such as the accession and deaths of kings, major military events, and notable religious occurrences. It follows a standard pattern of reporting only events of immediate relevance to Babylonia, making it of somewhat limited utility as a source for a wider history of the region. The tablet itself is fairly large, measuring 5 ½ inches wide by 5 ½ inches long, but is significantly damaged with its bottom and most of the left-hand side missing. The text was composed in two columns on each side, originally consisting of some 300-400 lines. What remains is extremely fragmentary; little more than 75 lines of text are still legible. The missing portions consist of most of the first and fourth columns, along with the bottom of the second and the top of the third. There appears to have been a colophon at the bottom of the tablet, but it too is largely missing.

“Although the writing is of a good standard, the copying was decidedly imperfect and the scribe made a number of errors that are visible in the text.

“The tablet was acquired by the British Museum in 1879 from the antiquities dealers Spartali & Co. Its original place of discovery is unknown, though it has been presumed that it came from the ruins of Babylon. It possibly represents part of an official collection of annals in the possession of the Achaemenid governors of Babylon.

“The text, known at the time as “the Annals of Nabonidus”, was first discussed in print by Sir Henry Rawlinson in the *Athenaeum* magazine of 14 February 1880, with the first English translation being published two years later. It has since been translated by

a number of scholars, notably Sidney Smith, A. Leo Oppenheim, Albert Kirk Grayson, Jean-Jacques Glassner, and Amélie Kuhrt.

“The text of the chronicle begins presumably with the accession of Nabonidus in 556 B.C.E., though the start of the text is so poorly preserved that none of this portion is legible. It mentions campaigns by Nabonidus against a place named Hume and unnamed localities in "the West" (Arabia?). Cyrus's pillaging of Ecbatana, the capital of Astyages, is recorded in the sixth year of the reign of Nabonidus. The chronicle goes on to describe in several entries the self-imposed exile of Nabonidus in the Arabian oasis of Tema (mentioned as Teiman in Hebrew in the Dead Sea Scrolls fragment 4Q242 known as the Testimony of Nabonidus dated to 150 B.C.E. and the disruption that this caused to the Akitu (New Year) festival for a period of ten years. The king spent ten years in Arabia and left Babylonia administered by his son, Bel-shar-usur (Belshazzar of the **Book of Daniel, chapter 5**). The eighth year is purposefully left blank; apparently the scribe did not have any significant events to record for that year. Another campaign by Cyrus is recorded in the ninth year, possibly representing his attack on Lydia and capture of Sardis.

“Much of the rest of the text is fragmentary. A possible reference to fighting and Persia appears in what is presumably the entry for the sixteenth year. A long surviving section describes the events of Nabonidus's seventeenth and final year as king, when Cyrus invaded and conquered Babylonia. The celebration of the Akitu festival is recorded, indicating Nabonidus's return to Babylon. The chronicle provides no information on why Cyrus chose to invade Babylonia at that time but records that the Gods of various cities "entered Babylon," apparently referring to an in-gathering of cultic statues in advance of the Persian invasion--perhaps a measure taken by Nabonidus to prevent the Persians capturing the Divine idols. It provides a terse description of the Battle of Opis, in which the Persians decisively defeated Nabonidus's army, massacred the retreating Babylonians and took a great haul of loot. The Persian army went on to capture the cities of Sippar and Babylon itself without further conflict. Cyrus is reported to have been received with joy by the city's inhabitants and appointed local governors. The Gods that had previously been brought to Babylon were returned to their home cities on the orders of Cyrus. The legible portion of the text ends with a lengthy period of mourning for the lately deceased king's wife (presumably meaning the wife of Cyrus, as Nabonidus was no longer king by this time) and a mention of Cambyses, the son of Cyrus. Only a few scattered words are legible in the remainder of the tablet.”
(**Wikipedia**, 9/29/2016)

Herodotus 1. 190b-191

“A battle was fought at a short distance from the city [of Babylon], in which the Babylonians were defeated by the Persian king, whereupon they withdrew within their defenses. Here they shut themselves up, and made light of his siege, having laid in a store of provisions for many years in preparation for this attack. For when they saw

Cyrus conquering nation after nation, they were convinced that he would never stop, and that their turn would come at last.

“Cyrus was now reduced to great perplexity, as time went on and he made no progress against the place. In this distress either some one made the suggestion to him, or he bethought himself of a plan, which he proceeded to put in execution.

“He placed a portion of his army at the point where the river enters the city, and another body at the back of the place where it issues forth, with orders to march into the town by the bed of the stream, as soon as the water became shallow enough. He then himself drew off with the unwarlike portion of his host, and made for the place where Nitocris [female Queen of Babylon; credited with building projects], dug the basin for the river, where he did exactly what she had done formerly. He turned the Euphrates by a canal into the basin, which was then a marsh, on which the river sank to such an extent that the natural bed of the stream became fordable. Hereupon the Persians who had been left for the purpose at Babylon by the river-side, entered the stream, which had now sunk so as to reach about midway up a man’s thigh, and thus got into the town.

“Had the Babylonians been apprised of what Cyrus was about, or had they noticed their danger, they would never have allowed the Persians to enter the city, but would have destroyed them utterly. For they would have made fast all the street-gates which gave upon the river, and mounting upon the walls along both sides of the stream, would so have caught the enemy, as it were, in a trap. But, as it was, the Persians came upon them by surprise and so took the city.

“Owing to the vast size of the place, the inhabitants of the central parts (as the residents of Babylon declare) long after the outer portions of the town were taken, knew nothing of what had chanced, but as they were engaged in a festival, continued dancing and reveling until they learnt the capture but too certainly. Such then, were the circumstances of the first taking of Babylon

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“The text of the chronicle begins presumably with the accession of Nabonidus in 556 B.C.E., though the start of the text is so poorly preserved that none of this portion is legible. It mentions campaigns by Nabonidus against a place named Hume and unnamed localities in "the West" (Arabia?). Cyrus's pillaging of Ecbatana, the capital of Astyages, is recorded in the sixth year of the reign of Nabonidus. The chronicle goes on to describe in several entries the self-imposed exile of Nabonidus in the Arabian oasis of Tema (mentioned as Teiman in Hebrew in the Dead Sea Scrolls fragment 4Q242 known as the ‘Testimony of Nabonidus’ dated to 150 B.C.E. and the disruption that this caused to the Akitu (New Year) festival for a period of ten years. The king spent ten years in Arabia and left Babylonia administered by his son, Bel-shar-usur (Belshazzar of the **Book of Daniel**). The eighth year is purposefully left blank; apparently the scribe did not have any significant events to record for that year. Another campaign by Cyrus is recorded in the ninth year, possibly representing his attack on Lydia and capture of Sardis.

“Much of the rest of the text is fragmentary. A possible reference to fighting and Persia appears in what is presumably the entry for the sixteenth year. A long surviving section describes the events of Nabonidus's seventeenth and final year as king, when Cyrus invaded and conquered Babylonia. The celebration of the Akitu festival is recorded, indicating Nabonidus's return to Babylon. The chronicle provides no information on why Cyrus chose to invade Babylonia at that time but records that the Gods of various cities "entered Babylon, apparently referring to an in-gathering of cultic statues in advance of the Persian invasion—perhaps a measure taken by Nabonidus to prevent the Persians capturing the Divine idols. It provides a terse description of the Battle of Opis, in which the Persians decisively defeated Nabonidus's army, massacred the retreating Babylonians and took a great haul of loot. The Persian army went on to capture the cities of Sippar and Babylon itself without further conflict. Cyrus is reported to have been received with joy by the city's inhabitants and appointed local governors. The Gods that had previously been brought to Babylon were returned to their home cities on the orders of Cyrus. The legible portion of the text ends with a lengthy period of mourning for the lately deceased king's wife (presumably meaning the wife of Cyrus, as Nabonidus was no longer king by this time) and a mention of Cambyses, the son of Cyrus. Only a few scattered words are legible in the remainder of the tablet.

“The Nabonidus Chronicle appears to have been composed by the (Babylonian) priests of Marduk, the chief God of Babylon. It has been characterized as "a piece of propaganda at Cyrus's service" and as possibly "the result of the propaganda of the priesthood of Marduk to vilify Nabonidus." Julye Bidmead attributes the priests' hostility to Nabonidus's unsuccessful attempts to introduce the worship of the moon God Sîn. In particular, the chronicle repeatedly asserts that the Akitu festival could not be held because of Nabonidus's absence. This is dubious, as others could have participated in the celebration in Nabonidus's place. The chronicle is seen as part of a series of pro-Persian documents, including the Cyrus cylinder and Verse Account of Nabonidus, that attack Nabonidus for alleged religious infidelity and contrast his actions with those of Cyrus and Cambyses.” (**Wikipedia**, 10/1/2016)

6.

The City of Babylon

“During the rule of the Neo-Assyrian Empire (911–609 B.C.E.), Babylonia was under constant Assyrian domination or direct control. During the reign of Sennacherib of Assyria, Babylonia was in a constant state of revolt, led by a Chaldean chieftain named Merodach-Baladan, in alliance with the Elamites, and suppressed only by the complete destruction of the city of Babylon. In 689 B.C.E., its walls, temples and palaces were razed, and the rubble was thrown into the Arakhtu, the sea bordering the earlier Babylon on the south. Destruction of the religious center shocked many, and the subsequent murder of Sennacherib by two of his own sons while praying to the God Nisroch was considered an act of atonement. Consequently, his successor Esarhaddon hastened to rebuild the old city and make it his residence during part of the year. After his death, Babylonia was governed by his elder son, the Assyrian prince Shamash-shum-ukin, who eventually started a civil war in 652 B.C.E. against his own brother, Ashurbanipal, who ruled in Nineveh. Shamash-shum-ukin enlisted the help of other peoples subject to Assyria, including Elam, Persia, Chaldeans and Suteans of southern Mesopotamia, and the Canaanites and Arabs dwelling in the deserts south of Mesopotamia.

“Once again, Babylon was besieged by the Assyrians, starved into surrender and its allies were defeated. Ashurbanipal celebrated a "service of reconciliation," but did not venture to "take the hands" of Bel. An Assyrian governor named Kandalanu was appointed as ruler of the city. After the death of Ashurbanipal, the Assyrian empire destabilized due to a series of internal civil wars throughout the reigns of Assyrian kings Ashur-etil-ilani, Sin-shumu-lishir and Sin-shar-ishkun. Eventually Babylon, like many other parts of the near east, took advantage of the anarchy within Assyria to free itself from Assyrian rule. In the subsequent overthrow of the Assyrian Empire by an alliance of peoples, the Babylonians saw another example of divine vengeance.

Neo-Babylonian Chaldean Empire

“Under Nabopolassar, a previously unknown Chaldean chieftain, Babylon eventually escaped Assyrian rule, and in an alliance with Cyaxares, king of the Medes and Persians together with the Scythians and Cimmerians, the Assyrian Empire was finally destroyed between 612 and 605 B.C.E. Babylon thus became the capital of the Neo-Babylonian (sometimes and possibly erroneously called Chaldean) Empire.

“With the recovery of Babylonian independence, a new era of architectural activity ensued, particularly during the reign of his son Nebuchadnezzar II (604–561 B.C.E.). Nebuchadnezzar ordered the complete reconstruction of the imperial grounds, including the Etemenanki ziggurat, and the construction of the Ishtar Gate—the most prominent of eight gates around Babylon. A reconstruction of the Ishtar Gate is located in the Pergamon Museum in Berlin.

“Nebuchadnezzar is also credited with the construction of the Hanging Gardens of Babylon—one of the seven wonders of the ancient world—which is said to have been

built for his homesick wife Amyitis. Whether the gardens actually existed is a matter of dispute. Excavations by German archaeologist Robert Koldewey are thought to reveal its foundations, though many historians disagree about the location, and some believe it may have been confused with gardens in the Assyrian capital, Nineveh.

“Chaldean rule of Babylon did not last long; it is not clear whether Neriglissar and Labashi-Marduk were Chaldeans or native Babylonians, and the last ruler Nabonidus (556–539 B.C.E.) and his co-regent son Belshazzar were Assyrians from Harran.

Persian conquest

“In 539 B.C.E., the Neo-Babylonian Empire fell to Cyrus the Great, king of Persia, with a military engagement known as the Battle of Opis. Babylon's walls were considered impenetrable. The only way into the city was through one of its many gates or through the Euphrates River. Metal grates were installed underwater, allowing the river to flow through the city walls while preventing intrusion. Cyrus (or his generals) devised a plan to enter the city via the river. During a Babylonian national feast, Cyrus' troops diverted the Euphrates River upstream, allowing Cyrus' soldiers to enter the city through the lowered water. The Persian army conquered the outlying areas of the city while the majority of Babylonians at the city center were unaware of the breach. The account was elaborated upon by Herodotus and is also mentioned in parts of the **Hebrew Bible (Isaiah 44:27; Jeremiah 50-51)**.

“According to **2 Chronicles 36**, Cyrus later issued a decree permitting captive people, including the Jews, to return to their own lands. Text found on the Cyrus Cylinder has traditionally been seen by biblical scholars as corroborative evidence of this policy, although the interpretation is disputed because the text only identifies Mesopotamian sanctuaries but makes no mention of Jews, Jerusalem, or Judea.

“Under Cyrus and the subsequent Persian king Darius the Great, Babylon became the capital city of the 9th Satrapy (Babylonia in the south and Athura in the north), as well as a center of learning and scientific advancement. In Achaemenid Persia, the ancient Babylonian arts of astronomy and mathematics were revitalized, and Babylonian scholars completed maps of constellations. The city became the administrative capital of the Persian Empire and remained prominent for over two centuries. Many important archaeological discoveries have been made that can provide a better understanding of that era.”

“The early Persian kings had attempted to maintain the religious ceremonies of Marduk, but by the reign of Darius III, over-taxation and the strain of numerous wars led to a deterioration of Babylon's main shrines and canals, and the destabilization of the surrounding region. There were numerous attempts at rebellion and in 522 B.C.E. (Nebuchadnezzar III), 521 B.C.E. (Nebuchadnezzar IV) and 482 B.C.E. (Bel-shimani and Shamash-eriba) native Babylonian kings briefly regained independence. However these revolts were quickly repressed and Babylon remained under Persian rule for two centuries, until Alexander the Great's entry in 331 B.C.E.” (**Wikipedia**, 10/1/2016)

7.

Herodotus 1. 80 and 5. 129

1. 80 “The two armies [of Croesus and Cyrus] met in the plain before Sardis. It is a vast flat, bare of trees, watered by the Hyllus and a number of other streams, which all flow into one larger than the rest, called the Hermus. This river rises in the sacred mountain of the Dindymenian Mother, and falls into the sea near the town of Phocaea.

“When Cyrus beheld the Lydians arranging themselves in order of battle on this plain, fearful of the strength of their cavalry, he adopted a device which Harpagus, one of the Medes, suggested to him.

“He collected together all the camels that had come in the train of his army to carry the provisions and the baggage, and taking off their loads, he mounted riders upon them accoutred [equipped] as horsemen. These he commanded to advance in front of his other troops against the Lydian horses; behind them were to follow the foot soldiers, and last of all the cavalry.

“When his arrangements were complete, he gave his troops orders to slay all the other Lydians who came in their way without mercy, but to spare Croesus and not kill him, even if he should be seized and offer resistance.

“The reason why Cyrus opposed his camels to the enemy’s horse was because the horse has a natural dread of the camel, and cannot abide either the sight or the smell of that animal. By this stratagem he hoped to make Croesus’s horse useless to him, the horse being what he chiefly depended on for victory.

“The two armies joined battle, and immediately the Lydian war-horses, seeing and smelling the camels, turned round and galloped off; and so it came to pass that all Croesus’s hopes withered away. The Lydians, however, behaved manfully. As soon as they understood what was happening, they leaped off their horses, and engaged with the Persians on foot.

“The combat was long; but at last, after a great slaughter on both sides, the Lydians turned and fled. They were driven within their walls, and the Persians laid siege to Sardis.”

5. 129 “There was one very strange thing which greatly advantaged the Persians [in their battles against the Scythians], and was of equal disservice to the Scyths, in their assaults on the Persian camp. This was the braying of the asses and the appearance of the mules.

“For, as I observed before, the land of the Scythians produces neither ass nor mule, and contains no single specimen of either animal, by reason of the cold. So, when the asses brayed, they frightened the Scythian cavalry, and often, in the middle of a charge, the horses, hearing the noise made by the asses would take fright and wheel round, pricking up their ears, and showing astonishment.

“This was owing to their having never heard the noise, or seen the form, of the animal before and it was not without some little influence on the progress of the war.”

8. **Sennacherib and the Destruction of Babylon in 689 B.C.E.**

“Sennacherib was the king of Assyria from 705 to 681 B.C.E. He is principally remembered for his military campaigns against Babylon and Judah, and for his building programs--most notably at the Akkadian capital of Nineveh. He was assassinated in obscure circumstances in 681 B.C.E., apparently by his eldest son (his designated successor, Esarhaddon, was the youngest).

“The primary preoccupation of his reign was the so-called "Babylonian problem," the refusal of the Babylonians to accept Assyrian rule, culminating in his destruction of the city in 689 B.C.E. Further campaigns were carried out in Syria (notable for being recorded in the **Bible's Books of Kings**, in the mountains east of Assyria, against the kingdoms of Anatolia and against the Arabs in the northern Arabian deserts. His death was welcomed in Babylon as divine punishment for the destruction of that city.

“Sennacherib's first campaign began late in 703 B.C.E. against Marduk-apla-iddina (now Marduk-apla-iddina II), who had once more taken the throne of Babylon. The rebellion was defeated, Marduk-apla-iddina fled, and Babylon was taken and the palace plundered, although the citizens were not harmed. A puppet king named Bel-ibni was placed on the throne and for the next two years Babylon was left in peace.]

“In 701 B.C.E., Sennacherib turned from Babylonia to the western part of the empire, where Hezekiah of Judah, incited by Egypt and Marduk-apla-iddina, had renounced Assyrian allegiance. The rebellion involved various small states in the area: Sidon and Ashkelon were taken by force and a string of other cities and states, including Byblos, Ashdod, Ammon, Moab and Edom then paid tribute without resistance. Ekron called on Egypt for help but the Egyptians were defeated. Sennacherib then turned on Jerusalem, Hezekiah's capital. He besieged the city and gave its surrounding towns to Assyrian vassal rulers in Ekron, Gaza and Ashdod. There is no description of how the siege ended [the biblical depiction is of a Divine intervention with the destruction of Sennacherib's army], but the annals record a list of booty sent from Jerusalem to Nineveh. Hezekiah remained on his throne as a vassal ruler. (The campaign is recorded with differences in the Assyrian records and in the biblical **Books of Kings**).

“In 699 B.C.E., Bel-ibni, who had proved untrustworthy or incompetent as king of Babylon, was replaced by Sennacherib's eldest son, Ashur-nadin-shumi. Marduk-apla-iddina continued his rebellion with the help of Elam, and in 694 B.C.E. Sennacherib took a fleet of Phoenician ships down the Tigris River to destroy the Elamite base on the shore of the Persian Gulf, but while he was doing this the Elamites captured Ashur-nadin-shumi and put Nergal-ushezib, the son of Marduk-apla-iddina, on the throne of Babylon. Nergal-ushezib was captured in 693 B.C.E. and taken to Nineveh, and Sennacherib attacked Elam again. The Elamite king fled to the mountains and Sennacherib plundered his kingdom, but when he withdrew the Elamites returned to Babylon and put another rebel leader, Mushezib-Marduk, on the Babylonian throne. Babylon eventually fell to the Assyrians in 689 B.C.E. after a lengthy siege, and

Sennacherib put an end to the "Babylonian problem" by utterly destroying the city and even the mound on which it stood by diverting the water of the surrounding canals over the site. (In fact the problem had not been solved: in 612 B.C.E. a coalition of Babylonians and other enemies of Assyria sacked Nineveh, marking the end of the Assyrian empire)." (**Wikipedia**, 10/3/2016)

In another article, the statement is made that "During the reign of Sennacherib of Assyria, Babylonia was in a constant state of revolt, led by a Chaldean chieftain named Merodach-Baladan, in alliance with the Elamites, and suppressed only by the complete destruction of the city of Babylon. In 689 B.C.E., its walls, temples and palaces were razed, and the rubble was thrown into the Arakhtu, the sea bordering the earlier Babylon on the south." (**Wikipedia**, 10/3/2016)

Marduk-apla-iddina II and Merodach-Baladan are the same king of Babylon, with the latter name the biblical name for this Babylonian ruler. The problem that we see with identifying the attack on Babylon in **Isaiah 21** with Sennacherib's destruction of the city in 689 B.C.E. is that Elam was a strong supporter of Marduk-apla-iddina II / Merodach-Baladan, his ally—not his enemy, attacking him and his city.

