
Isaiah 21

We turn to prophecies against Babylon, Edom and Arabia. There are spiritual and temporal elements implied in these revelations. We have been commanded to leave spiritual Babylon and turn to the Lord. Likewise, for LDS, Idumea, or Edom, has similar connotations. Some of the prophecies began their fulfillment during the time of the Assyrian invasion, others during the Babylonian period. We must be ever vigilant as we live in a period of increasing spiritual darkness.

v. 1–10. Isaiah is permitted to see the fall of Babylon.

1 ¶ THE burden of the desert of the sea.
As whirlwinds in the south pass through;
[so] it cometh from the desert, from a the
terrible land.

THE burden of the desert of the sea. The LXX (Ⓞ) has, “The vision of the desert.” Most exegetes feel the **מִן־הַדֶּשֶׁר** refers to Babylon. It has been suggested that *sea* is an appropriate term because Babylon was in the middle of the Euphrates and its frequent overflows. Nägelsbach explains that “Babylonia is on the Assyrian monuments often designated simply as ‘sea, sea-country.’” Lowth explains that these overflowing were a serious matter, that for some time dams were built (by the Assyrian queen, Semiramis) to protect against these overflows, but that at the end the dams were destroyed and flooding became normal one more time. Nägelsbach suggests a similarity with Revelation 17: “Babylon, the great whore, sits on many waters (ver. 1) and at the same time is the desert (ver. 3). The waters, however, are (ver. 15) interpreted ‘peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues.’” Delitzsch points us to Jeremiah, who uses the expression “O thou that dwellest upon many waters” (Jeremiah 51:13) in speaking of Babylon. ¶ *As whirlwinds in the south pass through; so it cometh from the desert, from the terrible land.* The Targum (Ⓢ) has, “As the waters of the sea, rushing along as the tempests: yea, they are coming by the way of the south, hurrying along; yea, they are coming from the wilderness, from the land, in which terrible things are done.” The LXX (Ⓞ) has, “As though a whirlwind should pass through the desert, coming from the desert, *even* from such a land.” The Syriac (Ⓢ) reads, “As a whirlwind from the south, sweeping through from the wilderness; so it comes from a far off land.” The Dead Sea Scrolls (Ⓞ) has “from a distant land.” The key word here is *as*, **כִּי**, comparing the forces of the Persians and the Medes to the devastating whirlwinds from the south. The destructive force of the

whirlwinds from the south are well known to Judah (Job 37:9; Zechariah 9:14). Whirlwinds are also an expression of military might (Jeremiah 4:13; Daniel 11:40) and often of the Lord’s punishment (Jeremiah 30:23; Amos 1:14; Zechariah 7:14). The word *south* or *Negev*, **נֶגֶב**, is used. ¶ *Terrible land.* Calvin here suggests that Babylon’s punishment would come through the *terrible land*, meaning *Judea* (see ISAIAH 18). “Although therefore Babylon was taken and plundered by the Persians and Medes, Isaiah declares that its destruction will come from Judea; because in this manner God will revenge the injuries done to that nation of which he had promised to be the guardian.”

2 A grievous[✓] vision is declared unto me;
the treacherous dealer dealeth
treacherously, and the spoiler spoileth. Go
up, O Elam: besiege, O Media; all the
sighing thereof have I made to cease.

✓ hard

A grievous vision is declared unto me; the treacherous dealer dealeth treacherously, and the spoiler spoileth. The Targum (Ⓢ) has, “The prophet said: A dreadful grievous &c.” giving us the distinct ideas that it is Isaiah who is speaking here. The word **בְּגִיֵּר**, can mean *treacherous*, or *unfaithful* (BDB, TWOT). The idea is here similar to the warning of Jesus that “all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword” (Matthew 26:52). So, as Babylon had been unrighteous, treacherous, and unfaithful, she would fall from the hands of a neighboring power, being made to feel what she had made others feel. ¶ *Go up, O Elam: besiege, O Media; all the sighing thereof have I made to cease.* Rawlinson explains: “The discovery that Cyrus, at the time of his conquest of Babylon, bore the title of ‘King of Ansan,’ not ‘King of Persia,’ coupled with the probability that ‘Ansan’ was a part of Elam, lends a peculiar interest to these words. Isaiah could not describe Cyrus as ‘King of Persia,’ and at the same time be intelligible to his contemporaries, since Persia was a country utterly unknown to them. In using the term

‘Elam’ instead, he uses that of a country known to the Hebrews (Genesis 14:1), adjoining Persia, and, at the time of his expedition against Babylon, subject to Cyrus.” Rawlinson continues: “Having given ‘Elam’ the first place, the prophet assigns to Media the second. Eleven years before he attacked Babylon, Cyrus had made war upon Astyages (Istuvegu), King of the Medes, had captured him, and become king of the nation, with scarcely any opposition (see the ‘Cylinder of Nabonidus’). Hence the Medes would naturally form an important portion of the force which he led against Babylon.”

3 Therefore are my loins filled with pain: pangs have taken hold upon me, as the pangs of a woman that travaileth: I was bowed down at the hearing [of it]; I was dismayed at the seeing [of it].

Therefore are my loins filled with pain: pangs have taken hold upon me, as the pangs of a woman that travaileth. The Targum (Ⓣ), instead, has the Prophet speaking about the fear to be experienced by Babylon: “Therefore their loins shall be full of terror: behold, fear shall seize them, like the pangs of a woman that travaileth.” ¶ *I was bowed down at the hearing [of it]; I was dismayed at the seeing [of it].* The Targum (Ⓣ), once again transferring the sentiments to Babylon, has: “They are become foolish, so that they cannot hear; they have erred, so that they cannot see (Chaldee, *not to see*).” A woman in travail is one in the process of giving birth.

4 My heart panted, ✓ fearfulness affrighted me: the night of my pleasure hath he turned ✓ into fear unto me.

- ✓ or, mind wandered
- ✓ ✓ put

My heart panted, fearfulness affrighted me. The Targum (Ⓣ) reads, “Their heart is bewildered; distress and terrors have seized them.” The LXX (Ⓞ) has, “My heart wanders, and transgression overwhelms (literally, *baptizes*¹) me.” The Syriac (Ⓢ) reads, “My heart failed, pangs made me quake.” The Douay has “My heart failed, darkness amazed me.” With Gill and a few others, I think these words represent the sentiments of the Babylonians. My reasoning is that the following expression, “the night of my pleasure” most likely

¹ That is, envelopes or surrounds. This is what happened the first time the Spirit testified to me of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon. I was completely enveloped or baptized by the Spirit.

refers to the sentiments of Babylon. ¶ *The night of my pleasure hath he turned into fear unto me.* The Targum (Ⓣ) reads, “Because the place of their confidence hath become destruction unto them.” The LXX (Ⓞ) has, “My soul is occupied with fear.” The Syriac (Ⓢ) has, “The beauty of my pleasures has been turned into terror to me.” The Douay has “Babylon, my beloved, is become a wonder to me.” If the Targum (Ⓣ) is correct in its rendering of these last few verses, then “the night of my pleasure” in ISAIAH 21:4 probably represents the vain confidence felt by Babylon.

5 Prepare the table, watch in the watchtower, eat, drink: arise, ye princes, [and] anoint the shield.

Prepare the table, watch in the watchtower, eat, drink. The Targum (Ⓣ) reads, “Set in order the tables, set the watchmen, eat *and* drink.” The LXX (Ⓞ) reads, “Prepare the table (literally, *set in order*), place the watchmen, eat ye, drink ye” The Syriac (Ⓢ) has plural for tables and watchtowers. The Douay has “behold in the watch-tower them that eat and drink.” The Dead Sea Scrolls (Ⓠ) has “They set the tables, they prepare the rugs, they eat, they drink!” ¶ Daniel 5 opens with a banquet in which King Belshazzar and his courtiers defamed the sacred vessels that his father, King Nebuchadnezzar, had removed from the temple in Jerusalem, by drinking wine from them while idolizing their false gods. Ibn Ezra suggests that Daniel 5 is the fulfillment of this Isaianic prophecy. Indeed, “In that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain” (Daniel 5:30). We read in Cyropaed² (quoted in Henderson), that Gobrias, one of Belshazzar’s generals, said of the occasion, “the city seems tonight to be in general revel...” Kay well says that if the Lord was willing to chastise the arrogance of Babylon, how much more would He punish Jerusalem, too: “Jerusalem has become assimilated to Babel. Must not, then, the decree soon go forth, ‘Fallen, fallen, is Jerusalem’? Indeed, it had already been published in ISAIAH 3:8.” Depressing indeed, but for the wonderful promises made to the children of Israel in Deuteronomy 30 and elsewhere. ¶ *Arise, ye princes, [and] anoint the shield.* The Targum (Ⓣ) reads, “Rise, ye princes, polish, and make bright the arms!” The LXX (Ⓞ) has, “Arise, ye princes, and prepare *your* shields.” The Douay has “take up the shield.” Continuing from Daniel 5, it is clear that among those invited to the great feast were the princes (Daniel 5:3). Henderson suggests that rather than those inside rising up to defend themselves, this was once again, a command uttered to the attacking forces to “calling

² *Cyropaedia*, by Xenophon.

upon them to seize the favorable moment of attack.” The idea of anointing the shields, was to make them oily and slippery to the weapons of the enemy (Henderson leaning on Wilkinson’s *Ancient Egyptians* I, p. 298; also Gill, leaning on Rashi). Barnes explains that many shields were made with an outer frame of metal or wood, covered with a thick hide of such animals as elephants, rhinoceros, hippopotamus, or some other animal. These needed to be kept supple with oil, lest they become brittle and tear easily in war.

6 For thus hath the Lord said unto me, Go, set a watchman, let him declare what he seeth.

The LXX (6) has, “For thus said the Lord to me, Go and station a watchman for thyself, and declare whatever thou shalt see.” The watchman here mentioned is probably Isaiah himself, who is permitted to see of the impending fall of Babylon in some detail, or rather the Lord who reveals all things to Isaiah. The Syriac (S) implies the latter: “I the Lord stand continually in the daytime, and I stand upon my watchtower every night” (v. 8). Habakkuk was another Prophet of God who stood as a watchman on a tower (Habakkuk 2:1).

7 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:

And he saw a chariot [with] a couple of horsemen, a chariot of asses, [and] a chariot of camels. The Targum (T) reads, “And he saw a chariot, a man, and with him a couple of horsemen: a rider on an ass, a rider on a camel.” The LXX (6) has, “And I saw two mounted horsemen, and a rider on an ass, and a rider on a camel.” The Syriac (S) and Douay (based on Vulgate) also makes it riders on an ass and on a camel. The Dead Sea Scrolls (Q) has “When he sees chariots, each man with a pair of horses, riders on donkeys or riders on camels.” Skinner explains that both asses and camels were used by the Persians in combat. Rawlinson, has this: “...rather a *troop of horsemen riding two and two*. This is exactly how a cavalry force was ordinarily represented by the Assyrians. Chariots are not intended either here or in ISAIAH 21:9. They were not employed by the Persians until a late period of their history (see *Ancient Monarchies* 4:113, 122).” Similarly, Rawlinson explains that it was “*men mounted on asses and on camels*.” The Hebrew word, רֶכֶב, presents some confusion, as it can stand for either *riders* or *drivers of*

chariots, or *chariots* (Gesenius, BDB, HAL). TWOT makes an interesting observation, that רֶכֶב was particularly used for the riding of other animals—not just horses—such as asses and mules, which fits well with our context here. The ASV thus reads, “And when he seeth a troop, horsemen in pairs, a troop of asses, a troop of camels, he shall hearken diligently with much heed.” NASB has: “When he sees riders, horsemen in pairs, A train of donkeys, a train of camels, Let him pay close attention, very close attention.” ¶ *And he hearkened diligently with much heed.* The Targum (T) puts the Prophet in the watchtower, “The prophet said, I listened diligently, and, behold, I saw mighty armies (Royal Polyglot, *great armies are coming*)!” The LXX (6) seems to mix parts of this verse with the next, “Hearken with great attention, and call thou Urias to the watch-tower.”

8 And he cried, A lion: ✓ My lord, I stand continually upon the watchtower in the daytime, and I am set in my ward whole nights: ✓ ✓

- ✓ or, cried as a lion
- ✓ ✓ or, every night

And he cried, A lion. The Targum (T) has, “The prophet said, the voice or armies, coming with coats of mail, is as a lion.” Note the margin ||, “As a lion.” The Douay has “And a lion cried out.” The Dead Sea Scrolls (Q) has “The lookout shouted.” Ibn Ezra, as with the margin ||, suggests that the watchman cried out with the voice and strength of a lion. This fits in well with ISAIAH 31:4, “For thus hath the LORD spoken unto me, Like as the lion and the young lion roaring...” Barnes well points out that other instances exist of the prefix *as*, אֲסֵ, being *left out*, and gives ISAIAH 62:5 as an example: “For *as* a young man marrieth a virgin, *so* shall thy sons marry thee: and *as* the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, *so* shall thy God rejoice over thee.” A few other examples include ISAIAH 22:23; 47:8; and 66:3. Faussett, leaning on Horsley, suggests that it was not so much the roaring voice of a lion that was involved here, but rather, his watchfulness. Gill suggests that Cyrus, a type of Christ in the destruction of Babylon, was meant here as the lion: “the Lion of the tribe of Judah, by whom antichrist, or mystical Babylon, will be destroyed.” ¶ *My lord, I stand continually upon the watchtower in the daytime, and I am set in my ward whole nights.* The Targum (T) reads, “And I stand continually upon the watchtower before the Lord in the day, and as a guard I stand all night.” The LXX (6) has, “The Lord has spoken. I stood continually during the day, and I stood in the camp all the night.” The Syriac (S), as we have already noted in verse six, has: “Then

the watchman cried into my ears, saying, I the LORD stand continually in the daytime, and I stand upon my watchtower every night.” The Douay has “I am upon the watch-tower of the Lord, standing continually by day: and I am upon my ward, standing whole nights.” Calvin explains that the expression refers to the certainty with which these things will come to pass: “...for they whom God has appointed to keep watch are neither drowsy nor dim-sighted.” Alexander suggests that the Masoretic pointing is important and explains that instead of אֲדֹנָי, often used to denote “my lord” or “sir,” we have אֲדֹנָי, “one of the divine names.”

9 And, behold, here cometh a chariot of men, [with] a couple of horsemen. And he answered and said, Babylon is fallen, is fallen; and all the graven images of her gods he hath broken unto the ground.

And, behold, here cometh a chariot of men, [with] a couple of horsemen. The Targum (Ⓣ)³ reads, “And behold this came, a cavalcade of men and with them a pair of horsemen.” Henderson points to the unexpectedness of the attack, and quotes Herodotus (lib. 1:191). Alexander explains that רָכַב אִישׁ means “mounted men.” ¶ *And he answered and said, Babylon is fallen, is fallen.* The LXX (Ⓣ) has, “And he answered and said, Babylon is fallen, is fallen.” The same expression is found in the book of Revelations, “Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen” (18:2). Most exegetes point out that the expression אָנָּה, *and he answered*, is used in the Hebrew to mean that the interlocutor has resumed speaking. Gesenius rather explains that אָנָּה “...is applied to anyone who pronounces anything solemnly and with a loud voice” and is also used when “uttering an oracle.” So a better translation might be: “And he declared &c.” CEV uses the word *shouted*. ¶ *And all the graven images of her gods he hath broken unto the ground.* The Targum (Ⓣ) renders it, “And all the images of her idols shall be dashed to pieces to the ground.” The LXX (Ⓣ) has, “And all her images and her idols have been crushed to the ground.” The Dead Sea Scrolls (Ⓛ) has “They have shattered all the images of her gods.” Henderson quotes Josephus and the low regard that the Persians had for images of gods (lib. 1:131), and thus Henderson concludes, “They would, therefore, naturally break them in pieces, whenever they fell in their way.” Rawlinson has, “No doubt there was also, in the sack of the city, much damage done to many of the idols by a

greedy soldiery, who may have carried off many images of gold or silver, and broken up others that were not portable, and stripped off the plates of precious metal from the idols of ‘brass, and iron, and wood, and stone’ (Daniel 5:6).” Rawlinson and a number of the exegetes contend, however, that to a great degree the Persians tolerated the false idols of the Babylonians even though they were given no importance, so that the idols had no respect from the conquering forces. Either way, the idols were impotent and shattered. Young points to several scriptures that show the fall of Babylon and the impotence of her idols to stop it: “Therefore, behold, the days come, that I will do judgment upon the graven images of Babylon: and her whole land shall be confounded, and all her slain shall fall in the midst of her” (Jeremiah 51:47, see also Jeremiah 51:52).

10 O my threshing, and the corn of my floor: that which I have heard of the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, have I declared unto you.

✓ son

O my threshing, and the corn of my floor. The Douay has “O the threshing, and the children of my floor.” Skinner explains: “The application of Israel, addressed as **my threshing** (i.e., threshed one) **and my child of the threshing-floor**—forcible figurative epithets of Israel as a nation crushed and down-trodden by the brutal tyranny of Babylon.” Nägelsbach well says, regarding the expression וְבֶן-תֵּבֶן, “and son of my threshing floor⁵,” that this is a forceful way to say “A son of the threshing-floor is one who lies on it, and is threshed, and that not merely briefly and accidentally, but for a long time, as it where habitually.” Indeed, Babylon had threshed Israel and the people of the Lord, but now it was her turn to be threshed: “The daughter of Babylon is like a threshing-floor, it is time to thresh her” (Jeremiah 51:33). Rawlinson provides this beautiful image: “Her chastisements have long been ‘threshing’ Israel, separating the grain from the chaff, and will do so still more as time goes on. The prophet’s message is for the comfort of those who shall have gone through the process and become the true ‘children of the threshing-floor’—pure wheat, fit to be gathered into the garner of God (Matthew 3:12).” ¶ *That which I have heard of the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, have I declared unto you.* The Targum (Ⓣ) puts these words as coming from the prophet, אֲמַר נְבִיא, “The Prophet said.” The LXX (Ⓣ) has, “Hear what things I have

³ Stenning.

⁴ Not maize, but rather *grains* (see ISAIAH 17:5).

⁵ Often translated as “corn of my floor” as in the AV.

heard of the Lord of hosts *which* the God of Israel has declared to us.” The Syriac (S) reads, “That which I have heard of the LORD God of Israel, I have declared to you.” Indeed, this is the job of a prophet, to declare the words of life, as received from the Lord, to the people.

vv. 11–12. Henderson explains that exegetes are in disagreement as to whether Syrian Dumah is meant, “so called from being situated on the confines of Arabia Petraea and the Syrian desert” or whether it is meant as “merely an abbreviation of אֶדְוִים, Edom.” Most all of the exegetical works I consulted strongly prefer to follow the LXX (G), and the view that Edom is meant. Most exegetes also feel that the night is an allusion to the end of the Babylonian captivity, with a new night referring to future troubles that would affect Edom while for Judah there would be a morning of deliverance. Just as Babylon had both physical and spiritual representations, here also Dumah has both. According to the ISBE, the word דְּוִמָּה, among its various significations, may be understood as “the land of **silence** or **death**, the grave (Psalm 94:17; 115:17).” In scripture, death has a number of interesting allusions that fit well with these verses. Ludlow does well in turning our attention to D&C: “For I am no respecter of persons, and will that all men shall know that the day speedily cometh; the hour is not yet, but is nigh at hand, when peace shall be taken from the earth, and the devil shall have power over his own dominion. And also the Lord shall have power over his saints, and shall reign in their midst, and shall come down in judgment upon *Idumea*, or *the world*” (D&C 1:35–36, emphasis added). Then Elder Harold B. Lee warned that the dangers from the unseen world, here represented by the night, were even greater than those from the world we do perceive. There also are allusions to the Second Coming. As there are possible representations of the states of apostasy and restoration.

11 ¶ The burden of Dumah. He calleth to me out of Seir, Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night?

The burden of Dumah. The Targum (T) has, “The burden of the cup of cursing to give Dumah (דְּוִמָּה) to drink.” The Dead Sea Scrolls (Q) also has Dumah. The LXX (G), on the other hand, has *The Vision of Idumea* (Edom), τὸ ὄραμα τῆς Ἰδουμαίας. Indeed, in Genesis 32:3, we read “...the land of Seir, the country of Edom.” Calvin has, “Mount Seir, as we learn from the book of Genesis, was a mountain of the Edomites.” D&C, once again, represents Edom as the world, very

similarly as the term Babylon. ¶ *He calleth to me out of Seir, Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night?* The Targum (T) has, “He thundered unto me from the heavens, Prophet! explain unto them what shall hereafter come to pass.” The LXX (G) has for the complete verse only these words, “Call to me out of Seir; guard ye the bulwarks.” The Syriac (S) reads as the Masoretic text (M), “He called me from Seir, Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night?” Exegetes suggest that the question is being asked of the prophet, along the lines of how much time is left of the night. When will the morning come? ¶ In *Rain in Due Season* we have: “And among these nations shalt thou find no ease, neither shall the sole of thy foot have rest: but the LORD shall give thee there a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind: And thy life shall hang in doubt before thee; and thou shalt fear day and night, and shalt have none assurance of thy life: In the morning thou shalt say, Would God it were even! and at even thou shalt say, Would God it were morning! for the fear of thine heart wherewith thou shalt fear, and for the sight of thine eyes which thou shalt see” (Deuteronomy 28:65-67). ¶ The idea of the night is interpreted by a time of stress. Then Elder Harold B. Lee of the Quorum of the Twelve explained in General Conference, “In a revelation to the Prophet Joseph Smith the Lord said that Satan drew after him a third part of the spirits whom God created, and that they with Satan became the force in the world to try to destroy the work of righteousness.” Here, Elder Lee compares this Isaianic verse with the role of the watchman on the tower at Mount Seir: “‘Watchman, what of the night,’ suggesting that, more to be feared than the enemies that could be perceived with the physical senses or could be seen by physical eyes were the powers of darkness that came unseen by physical eyes. That same thought was in the mind of the Master, no doubt, when he said: ‘And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell’ (Matthew 10:28). The Apostle Paul seemed to understand very clearly this same power when he declared: ‘For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places’ (Ephesians 6: 12).”⁶ President Ezra Taft Benson also quoted this scripture, and explaining it as *not all being right with Zion and the tactics of the adversary*: “*Watchmen—what of the night?* We must respond by saying that all is not well in Zion. As Moroni counseled,

⁶ General Conference, October 1949, Elder Harold B. Lee, of the Council of the Twelve Apostles, pp. 55–58. Suggested reading, also, is Chapter 34, ‘Your Coat of Armor’ in *Stand Ye In Holy Places: Selected Sermons and Writings of President Harold B. Lee*. Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book, 1988, pp. 327–339.

we must cleanse the inner vessel beginning first with ourselves, then with our families, and finally with the Church . . . the Book of Mormon warns us of the tactics of the adversary in the last days: ‘And others will he pacify, and lull them away into carnal security, that they will say: All is well in Zion; yea, Zion prospereth, all is well—and thus the devil cheateth their souls, and leadeth them away carefully down to hell’ (2 Nephi 28:21). There are many ‘awake’ passages in the Book of Mormon, such as: ‘O that ye would awake; awake from a deep sleep, yea, even from the sleep of hell . . . awake . . . [and] put on the armor of righteousness. Shake off the chains with which ye are bound, and come forth out of obscurity, and arise from the dust’ (2 Nephi 1:13, 23). As a people, it seems we can survive persecution easier and better than we can peace and prosperity. The plaguing sin of this generation is sexual immorality. This, the Prophet Joseph said, would be the source of more temptations, more buffetings, and more difficulties for the elders of Israel than any other (see *Journal of Discourses* 8:55). President Joseph F. Smith said that sexual impurity would be one of the three dangers that would threaten the Church within—and so it does (see *Gospel Doctrine*, pp. 312–13). It permeates our society.”⁷ Elder Vaughn J. Featherstone alluded to this verse in Isaiah twice—once in terms of defending the youth from darkness and the other of defending the Constitution of the United States: “My testimony to all of you wonderful brethren who preside over and lead the Aaronic Priesthood is that you are more important to the Church than you would ever dare to suppose. In Isaiah, the prophet asks, ‘Watchman, what of the night?’ This generation of youth will be the torchbearers in the future, possibly in the darkest period of the world”⁸; and “We are the nation’s watchmen—no other people collectively love the Constitution and honor it and hold it as a divinely inspired document as do the Latter-day Saints. The duty of the watchman is to watch over and safeguard his people. And remember the thought-provoking question by President Harold B. Lee, ‘But watchman, what of the night?’ As a generation of those who love this glorious country, we must ask ourselves, ‘But watchman, what of the night?’ Have our youth enough of the fires of freedom kindled in them to withstand the darkness? We must teach them in our homes, churches, and schools. The sound must go across this land from one end to the other.”⁹

⁷ Benson, President Ezra Taft. *Cleansing the Inner Vessel*. April 1986 General Conference.

⁸ Featherstone, Elder Vaughn J. “Called As If He Heard a Voice from Heaven.” October 1983 General Conference.

⁹ Featherstone, Elder Vaughn J. *But Watchman, What of the Night?* October 1975 General Conference.

12 The watchman said, The morning cometh, and also the night: if ye will enquire, enquire ye: return, come.

The watchman said, The morning cometh, and also the night. This is the other half of the Scripture we have already cited above, from *Rain in Due Season* (Deuteronomy 28:65-67). The Targum (Ⲛ) here is, once again, drastically different: “The prophet said, there is a reward to the righteous, and there is punishment to the wicked.” In other words, for Edom or the world, there is a time of comfort coming after one of stress and anxiety, but this will be fleeting. Barnes well points out how Edom would be glad to see the overthrow of Jerusalem: “Remember, O LORD, the children of Edom in the day of Jerusalem; who said, Rase it, rase it, even to the foundation thereof” (Psalm 137:7). To Judah—or to the righteous—there would come a more enduring period of comfort. It is pointed out, for instance, that Edom may have for a while lived periods of day and night. Delitzsch writes: “. . . even if the morning dawns, it will be swallowed up again directly by night. And the history was quite in accordance with such an answer. The Assyrian period of judgment was followed by the Chaldean, and the Chaldean by the Persian, and the Persian by the Grecian, and the Grecian by the Roman. Again and again there was a glimmer of morning dawn for Edom (and what a glimmer in the Herodian age!¹⁰), but it was swallowed up directly by another night, until Edom became an utter דְרִימָה,¹¹ and disappeared from the history of the nations.” The exegetes explain that in contrast Judah would find relief. With Victor Ludlow, I feel that the morning represents the Second Coming and the Millennial Reign of the Lord, as this will truly mark a period of relief and salvation. There is much yet that Israel and Judah will suffer before that day. The night well represents the rule of Satan over the world, and the allusion fits well for the Millennial period as the righteous will come forth in the morning of the resurrection while the unrighteous will suffer in the Spirit World until they are ready for the resurrection.¹²

¹⁰ The Herodian family was Idumean.

¹¹ Recall the meaning, *silence or death*.

¹² This is not the place for an extensive treatise of the suffering of the unrighteous in the Spirit World, but I wish to say a few things about my understanding of this suffering. “Therefore I command you to repent—” the Savior said. “Repent, lest I smite you by the rod of my mouth, and by my wrath, and by my anger, and your sufferings be sore—how sore you know not, how exquisite you know not, yea, how hard to bear you know not. For behold, I, God, have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer if they would repent; But if they would not repent they must suffer even as I; Which suffering caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit—

¶ When Isaiah says that “the morning cometh, and also the night,” yet another glorious interpretation comes to mind. Isaiah may well be referring to the First Coming of the Lord, when the long night of darkness of apostasy would be shaken, such that “The people that walked in darkness [would come to see] a great light” (ISAIAH 9:2). But another night is spoken off, that is an even longer night of apostasy that would envelope the world until that glorious morning in the Sacred Grove, when the Father and the Son would appear to Joseph Smith, the boy prophet, and dispel the darkness of ignorance and prejudice. Notice carefully John 9:5, when the Savior says, “As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” When we remember that latter-day revelation has put Edom for the world, or worldly things, we then see clearly that the world is full of darkness without Jesus Christ. When the Savior makes himself manifest, He brings us light and truth. This issue of apostasy and restoration or turning unto Christ also fits well with the next expression, “*return, come*” שָׁבוּ אֲתֵינוּ. The invitation “*turn ye*” שָׁבוּ, or שָׁבוּ, is found throughout the Old Testament, as a tender invitation to follow the Lord. ¶ *If ye will enquire, enquire ye: return, come.* Nägelsbach suggests: “The words for ‘come’ and ‘inquire’ belong rather to the Aramean than to the Hebrew dialect, the word for ‘inquire’ occurs farther in this sense, only in Daniel, and in the prophecy of Obadiah, of which Edom is the subject. Further, the singular verbal ending, which Isaiah here multiplies, making a sort of rhyme out of it, was probably current in the Idumean idiom. He mocks the inquirers, therefore, with Idumean sounds, ‘Return, come,’ is a pleonasm employed for the sake of the rhyme in Hebrew.” One alternative, then, is that the Edomites were being taunted. Another that has been offered is that the Edomites were taunting the Prophet by their question and suggestion that he should prophecy. C. J. Vaughan (in Butler Bible Work) writes regarding this verse: “How often, in these times, do we

and would that I might not drink the bitter cup, and shrink— Nevertheless, glory be to the Father, and I partook and finished my preparations unto the children of men” (D&C 19:15–19). These are sobering words indeed. It is my understanding that in the Spirit World we will come to know how our actions, if we have not done right, pained and affected others. I saw a wonderful movie that has given me much to reflect upon, “The Last Emperor” (1987), directed by Bernardo Bertolucci. We see the difficult transformation through which the last Emperor of China, Pu Yi (1906–1967), had to evolve and mature. As a youth Pu Yi had so many servants and was so spoiled he did not even have to get up to go to the bathroom. Pu Yi’s life of comfort and luxury came to an abrupt end as he had to begin a normal, unpampered existence. It was excruciatingly difficult for him to adjust. The movie takes us through the long and painful process that it took for Yi to finally find joy and peace through service to others and tending the Peking Botanical Gardens. It is my feeling that we will, in the Spirit World, likewise have to face our weaknesses. We have been taught that making these changes here on earth is easier than doing so in the Spirit World.

find persons utterly irreligious and worldly, entering into questions concerning God and His truth, concerning revelation, inspiration, miracle and prophecy, as though they had a right to all the enlightenment and comfort and assurance which the saints of God have for their guidance and upholding... To the careless questioner all truth is an enigma.”

President Kimball¹³ wrote with much strength to those who might enter into day and leave darkness behind: “If men are really humble, they will realize that they discover, but do not create, truth. ... [Man] may acquire knowledge in any field, though it requires much thought and effort ... Why, oh, why do people think they can fathom the most complex spiritual depths without the necessary experimental and laboratory work accompanied by compliance with the laws that govern it? ... With preconceived religious notions stubbornly held, one is not teachable. The Lord has promised repeatedly that he will give you a knowledge of spiritual things when you have placed yourself in a proper frame of mind. He has counseled us to seek, ask, and search diligently. These innumerable promises are epitomized by Moroni in the following: ‘And by the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things’ (Moroni 10:5). What a promise! How extravagant! How wonderful!... The time will come when there will be a surrender of every person who has ever lived on this earth ... it will be an unforced surrender, an unconditional surrender. When will it be for you? ... I send to you a solemn warning; and when you stand before the judgment bar in the not-too-distant future, you will know then that I spoke the truth with your eternal welfare in mind. Please remember that I have tried to bring this matter to your attention with such force that it would impress you... I promise you faithfully that if you will study and pray, keeping your mind open, you will receive the light, and it will be to you as the dawning of a new day after having gone through the night of darkness.” ¶ Alexander suggests that rather than a taunt, this expression from Isaiah is “an expression of anxiety arising from a personal concern for the result.” In summary, let us look at this expression “*return, come*” שָׁבוּ אֲתֵינוּ as an invitation. We find full support for this interpretation in the Targum (Ⓒ). “If ye will repent, repent ye, whilst ye are able to repent.” This reminds us of Alma 34:33, “And now, as I said unto you before, as ye have had so many witnesses, therefore, I beseech of you that ye do not procrastinate the day of your repentance until the end; for after this day of life, which is given us to prepare for eternity, behold, if we do not improve our time while in this life, then cometh the night of darkness wherein

¹³ President Spencer W. Kimball, “Absolute Truth,” Ensign, September 1978, p. 3

there can be no labor performed.” This, indeed, is the mission of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, to invite all to come unto Christ.

vv. 13–17. Even Arabia would be caught up in the powerful southern incursions beginning with Assyrian forces and continuing with those of Babylonia.

13 ¶ The burden upon Arabia. In the forest in Arabia shall ye lodge, O ye travelling companies of Dedanim.

The burden upon Arabia. The Targum (Ⓣ) has, “The burden of the cup of cursing to give the Arabians to drink.” Henderson suggests that it probably refers to “*Arabia Deserta*, or the northern, being that which the Hebrews were most familiar. It is peopled by Bedouins, i.e., *inhabitants of the desert*, who have no fixed habitation, but live in tents, and move from place to place [in caravans, אֲרָחוֹת or *travelling companies*], according as they require pasturage for their flocks.” Cheyne explains regarding the word *forest*, “The caravans had had to leave the beaten track, and take refuge in a less exposed part of the desert, where shrubs and thorn-bushes secured them to some extent from observation.” Barnes suggest that the word *forest*, יַעַר, means something different in Hebrew than “a tract of land covered with trees” and instead may well mean a place that is *inaccessible*, with few roads. ¶ *In the forest in Arabia shall ye lodge, O ye travelling companies of Dedanim.* Delitzsch suggests: “Just as אֲדוֹם [Edom, Idumea] becomes דְּוִמָה [Dumah, silence, death], inasmuch as a night without morning dawn falls upon the mountain of Seir, so will בְּעֶרְבָה (in Arabia) soon be בְּעֶרְבָה (in the evening), inasmuch as the sun of Arabia is setting.” Evening is also used in the LXX (Ϟ) (ἑσπέρας), Targum (Ⓣ), Syriac (Ⓢ) and Vulgate (Ⓥ). Rawlinson says, “The Dedanim, or Dedanites, were among the chief traders of the Arabian peninsula. They had commercial dealings with Tyre, which they supplied with ivory, ebony, and ‘precious clothes for chariots’ (Ezekiel 27:15, 20).” Dedan was the grandson of Abraham and Keturah (see Genesis 25:1–3).

14 The inhabitants of the land of Tema brought water to him that was thirsty, they prevented with their bread him that fled.

The inhabitants of the land of Tema brought water to him that was thirsty. The Targum (Ⓣ), LXX (Ϟ), and Syriac (Ⓢ) (as well as numerous moderns) put this forth

as a command to the people of Tema to go out and bring water to the thirsty fugitives. The Syriac (Ⓢ) reads, “Meet the thirsty, bring water, O you inhabitants of the land of the south!” Ibn Ezra writes, “The prophet tells them to be kind to the caravans, and to give them water, for Moab was rebuked for not having done so (Deuteronomy 23:5).” Alexander, almost alone, argues that the KJV descriptive approach is correct here, “The context makes it far more natural to understand the Prophet as describing an act than as exhorting to it.” Tema is mentioned as one of the descendants of Ishmael, in Genesis 25:15. There is some disagreement between the exegetes as to whether the Tema spoken of is located in “the Hauran, on the caravan route between Palmyra and Petra (Rawlinson) or “the Tema on the pilgrim road from Damascus to Mecca, between *Tebuk* and *Wadi el-Kora*” (Delitzsch). Young, who also leans on the latter, that is on the northwestern Arabian Peninsula suggests: “The mention of Teima shows how far into the desert the scourge of Assyria had reached... Teima is in the northern Hedjaz, a large oasis, with abundant water supply. Tiglath-Pileser III also mentions it. (Cf. ANTET, pp. 283f., 306, 313).” We are unsure, however, if the devastation meant was to come from the Assyrian or Babylonian invasions—or both. ¶ *They prevented with their bread him that fled.* קָרְמוּ, for the somewhat archaic ‘prevented,’ from the root קָרַם, means to *anticipate the needs* or *to go before* (“to be in readiness for; to meet or satisfy in advance; to act ahead of; to go or arrive before” *Merriam-Webster*, I., 2003), in this case, of the hungry fugitives. So the ASV has, “the inhabitants of the land of Tema did meet the fugitives with their bread.” Many moderns follow the Targum (Ⓣ), LXX (Ϟ) and Syriac (Ⓢ) to make this an order to go out and be ready to assist the fugitives. The Targum (Ⓣ) has, “Bring bottles (or, rivers, abundance) of water before (literally, to the face) the thirsty, who dwell in the land of the south; prepare for the fugitives the daily food (Royal Polyglot, *bread*) which ye eat.” Ye that dwell in the land of the south, prepare ye of that which ye are eating for the fugitives.” The LXX (Ϟ) has, “Meet the fugitives with bread, because of the multitude of the slain, and because of the multitude of them that lose their way.” The Syriac (Ⓢ) reads, “Meet those who are fleeing with your bread.” The Douay has “meet with bread him that fleeth.” The Dead Sea Scrolls (Ⓣ) has “meet the fugitive with bread.”

15 For they fled from the swords, from the drawn sword, and from the bent bow, and from the grievousness of war.

For they fled from the swords, from the drawn sword. The Targum (Ⓣ) has, “Because, on account of the

slaughter they have fled: from the face of the drawn sword.” For they have fled from before the slaughter, from before the drawn sword.” The LXX (Ⓞ) has, “And because of the multitude of swords.” The Dead Sea Scrolls (Ⓢ) has “For he has fled from the swords.” ¶ *And from the bent bow, and from the grievousness of war.* The Targum (Ⓣ) has, “And from the face of the bent bow; and from the face of the strength of the battle.” The LXX (Ⓞ) has, “And because of the multitude of bent bows, and because of the multitude of them that have fallen in war.” Fausset suggests that these things are said of: “the fugitive Dedanites and other Arabs.”

16 For thus hath the Lord said unto me, Within a year, according to the years of an hireling, and all the glory of Kedar shall fail:

For thus hath the Lord said unto me, Within a year, according to the years of an hireling. The Dead Sea Scrolls (Ⓢ) has “Within three years.” A hireling counts the days of his bondage and freedom. So the implication, is that it is an exact time. ¶ *And all the glory of Kedar shall fail.* The Targum (Ⓣ) has Arabians instead of Kedar. The LXX (Ⓞ) has “sons of Kedar.” The Dead Sea Scrolls (Ⓢ) has “The pomp of Kedar will come to an end.” Nägelsbach explains: “Kedar is, first of all, according to Genesis 25:13, a son of Ishmael. But the name stands here, as very frequently in the later rabbinical usage, for the Arabs, i.e., for the inhabitants of Western Arabia, who alone were known to the Jews.” Delitzsch agrees: “The name *Kedar* is here the collective name of the Arabic tribes generally.” Gill considers Kedar as being just a specific tribe: “these were another sort of Arabians, as the Targum calls them: they descended from Kedar, a son of Ishmael, Genesis 25:13 their ‘glory’ were their multitude, their riches and substance, and which chiefly lay in their flocks; for the sake of which they moved from place to place for pasture, and dwelled in tents, which they

carried with them, and pitched where it was most convenient for them.”

17 And the residue of the number of archers, the mighty men of the children of Kedar, shall be diminished: for the LORD God of Israel hath spoken [it].

✓ bows

And the residue of the number of archers. The Targum (Ⓣ) has, “And the strength of the warriors (literally, *servants of war*).” Delitzsch writes: “They are numbered here by their bows (in distinction from the numbering by heads), showing that the fighting men are referred to,—a mode of numbering which is customary among the Indian tribes of America, for example (see the work of v. Marius on the Indians of Brazil, i. 395, 411, etc.).” Once again, we have possible fulfillments in both the Assyrian epoch and Babylonian. ¶ *The mighty men of the children of Kedar, shall be diminished: for the LORD God of Israel hath spoken [it].* The Targum (Ⓣ) has, “The mighty, the sons of the Arabians, shall be lessened, because by the Word of the Lord (בְּמִןְרָא), the God of Israel, it is thus decreed.” The LXX (Ⓞ) has, “And the remnant of the strong bows of the sons of Kedar shall be small: for the Lord God of Israel has spoken it.” These words **כִּי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל דִּבֶּר**, *for the Lord God of Israel hath spoken* give much power to the prophecy and it assures us that it will certainly come to pass. Whenever the Lord God speaks, we can take comfort in His words. I wish to testify that no matter how dark the situation seems at the moment, when the Lord speaks reassurance, it is because He will certainly deliver us. Let us then put our trust in Him who is able to save (see Hebrews 7:25).

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