

Watchman, What Of The Night?

Isaiah has already been a bearer of many burdens and three more are laid upon him in this chapter 21. The first seems to be a return to the destruction of mighty Babylon, here called 'the desert of the sea'. Perhaps this burden is repeated to reassure the Lord's remnant of what must have appeared highly improbable in their day. Then comes a short reference to Dumah. This is Edom or Idumea, a region south of Judah, largely in modern day Jordan. The final burden concerning Arabia likely points to military activity on the Arabian peninsula.

The Object of our faith

The Lord's people are divinely foretold of future national calamities in part to prepare them, in part to reassure them, as they patiently await the coming Messiah. Christ would come at the appointed time and until then nations must rise and fall, when their iniquity is full, according to the will of God. John says, 'these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name'.

Babylon is fallen!

Babylon would fall quickly and unexpectedly at the hand of Cyrus and an army of Medes and Persians. It is likely Cyrus, an Elamite, and Darius the Mede are intended by the two riders in chariots, one a chariot of asses, the other of camels, mentioned by the watchman. These kings besieged Babylon and destroyed the empire as we read in Daniel 5.

The writing on the wall

Cyrus ravaged Babylon like a lion but it was a divine reckoning. The lament of Belshazzar is related in Isaiah's powerful description of the treacherous dealer dealing treacherously, and the spoiler spoiling. Those who live by the sword die by the same. The watchman is a picture of God's prophet. The Lord's servant was called to declare God's purpose just as Christ's preachers are sent to declare His gospel. As Belshazzar feasted, his judgment drew near. Equally, a day of reckoning is fast approaching for all those outside of Christ.

Thy will be done on earth

The burden of Arabia pictures the desert nomads fleeing as refugees before their enemies, hiding in forests and abandoning their tents. They are assisted with food and water by local inhabitants. These burdens are not recorded in time order. Over several hundred years the Lord's elect would see the hand of God bring judgment on His enemies while chastening His beloved people. During that time Isaiah's prophecy reassured the remnant people that despite the darkness of the moment, God was on His throne and the coming of the Messiah would be in no way hindered.

What of the night?

In our service tomorrow we shall give particular attention to the two verses concerning Dumah. Little is said of this burden except to record a two-fold and somewhat desperate request for news, 'Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night?' The cry receives the reply, 'The morning cometh, and also the night: if ye will enquire, enquire ye: return, come'. Despite the lack of information it seems clear this is a gospel message for all ages. The whole purpose of the prophet is to help God's people wait patiently for the Lord, and so here.

Darkness in our souls

The time of waiting under the Mosaic law was a time of darkness for God's elect until the day of the Lord should come; 'the dayspring from on high ... to give light to them that sit in darkness'. Yet, too, in these gospel times there are periods when as believers we wait in darkness under a sense of need for the light of God's countenance to rise and a sense of His peace to be felt. There are times of discipline, straitening and trial when darkness hides the Saviour from our view and causes us to long for His return visit.

Christ the Light of the world

Such periods of darkness require gospel ministers, God's watchmen, to speak words of gentle encouragement to the remnant people who in their gloom lose sight of their Saviour. Words of peace, joy, hope and promise must be preached to the weary and heavy laden. Such periods also require words of wise instruction to those burdened with sin who

continue to inhabit the darkness, yet long for the morning to bring peace of conscience and a sense of forgiveness by the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ.

The shining light, that shineth more and more

No matter who we are, the Lord's people are always seeking greater light as we await the consummation of all things and persevere in faith 'until the day break, and the shadows flee away'. It is the privilege of gospel preachers to bring into view the love and wisdom of Jesus Christ, 'the shining light, that shineth more and more'. Our blessed Saviour is 'the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds'.

Amen

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