

ISAIAH^a 18
Babylon's Silent Night^b
(Isaiah 21)

Isaiah 21 Revised Standard Version (RSV)

Oracles concerning Babylon, Edom, and Arabia

21 The oracle concerning the wilderness of the sea.^c

As whirlwinds in the Negeb^d sweep on,
it comes from the desert,
from a terrible land.^e

² A stern vision is told to me;
the plunderer plunders,
and the destroyer destroys.

Go up, O Elam,
lay siege, O Media;
all the sighing she has caused
I bring to an end.^f

³ Therefore my loins are filled with anguish;
pangs have seized me,
like the pangs of a woman in travail;

I am bowed down so that I cannot hear,
I am dismayed so that I cannot see.^g

⁴ My mind reels, horror has appalled me;
the twilight I longed for
has been turned for me into trembling.^h

⁵ They prepare the table,
they spread the rugs,
they eat, they drink.

Arise, O princes,
oil the shield!ⁱ

⁶ For thus the Lord said to me:

“Go, set a watchman,
let him announce what he sees.^j

⁷ When he sees riders, horsemen in pairs,
riders on asses, riders on camels,
let him listen diligently,
very diligently.”^k

⁸ Then he who saw cried:

“Upon a watchtower I stand, O Lord,
continually by day,
and at my post I am stationed
whole nights.^l

⁹ And behold, here come riders,
horsemen in pairs!”

And he answered,

“Fallen, fallen is Babylon;
 and all the images of her gods
 he has shattered to the ground.”^m
¹⁰ O my threshed and winnowed oneⁿ,
 what I have heard from the LORD of hosts,
 the God of Israel, I announce to you.^o
¹¹ The oracle concerning Dumah.^p
 One is calling to me from Se’ir^q,
 “Watchman, what of the night?
 Watchman, what of the night?”
¹² The watchman says:
 “Morning comes, and also the night.
 If you will inquire, inquire;
 come back again.”^r
¹³ The oracle concerning Arabia.
 In the thickets in Arabia you will lodge,
 O caravans of De’danites.^s
¹⁴ To the thirsty bring water,
 meet the fugitive with bread,
 O inhabitants of the land of Tema.^t
¹⁵ For they have fled from the swords,
 from the drawn sword,
 from the bent bow,
 and from the press of battle.^u
¹⁶ For thus the Lord said to me, “Within a year, according to the years of a hireling, all the glory of Kedar will come
 to an end;^v ¹⁷ and the remainder of the archers of the mighty men of the sons of Kedar will be few; for the LORD, the
 God of Israel, has spoken.”^w

Revised Standard Version (RSV)

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1. Of the two proposed interpretations of verses 1-10 outlined in the footnote to verse 2, which do you think is the better one? In your answer, address the context within Chapter 21, and with the chapters which precede it.

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^a The Titles of the lessons in this study are borrowed from those given by **Jhan Moskowitz** of Jews for Jesus to the chapter titles in his recorded study of Isaiah upon which much of this study is based. I owe a great debt to Jhan, my late friend and brother in

the Lord, who was called Home before his time, not only for much of the work in this study, but also for giving me a whole new perspective on the Scriptures and the Jewish Messiah. Jhan's original recordings may be downloaded from the Jews for Jesus web site. <http://jewsforjesus.org/jhan-moskowitz>

Most current translations of Isaiah into English are based on the Masoretic (Hebrew) text which was primarily copied, edited and distributed by Jew known as the Masoretes, mostly from the ben Asher family. These Jews lived in the Middle East, especially Jerusalem, Tiberias and Mesopotamia, between the 7th and 10th centuries A.D., a high point of Jewish civilization in the that region. The earliest Masoretic extant texts are from the 9th century. The Masoretic text is similar to other Hebrew texts from Qumran (mostly from the first three Centuries before the Messiah) and others from the 2nd Century. However, there are other Hebrew textual traditions in circulation prior to the standardization of the Masoretic text. The Great Isaiah Scroll (1QIsa) is a virtually complete copy of Isaiah from Qumran which has been carbon dated between 325 B.C. and 100 B.C. This history indicates that the accepted Hebrew text of Isaiah was substantially settled well before the coming of the Messiah. The Masoretic text of Isaiah has numerous differences of both greater and lesser significance when compared to the manuscripts of the Septuagint, a Koine Greek version of the Scriptures in common use in the Middle East, where this version of Greek was the *lingua franca* at the time of the Messiah. Indeed, where the Gospels and Paul's letters quote Scripture, it is mostly quoted from the Septuagint. The Septuagint was created among diaspora Jews in Egypt beginning during the reign of Ptolemy Philadelphus (283-246 B.C.) and was completed by 132 B.C., likely from Hebrew texts which differed from the tradition that would later give rise to the Masoretic text. There are extant manuscripts of portions of the Septuagint from the 2nd Century B.C. and citations to the Septuagint from other sources from the early part of that Century. The Septuagint was the basis of the Old Latin and Vulgate (the authoritative Roman Catholic Latin translation) translations of the Bible and for all Catholic translations until the middle of the last Century. It remains the authoritative version for Greek Orthodox Christians. In the endnotes for these outlines I frequently quote an English translation of the Septuagint version of Isaiah where it differs significantly from the Masoretic text. The Septuagint is particularly useful for Biblical scholars seeking to interpret the Greek of the Messianic Writings (New Testament) because it is likely that the meanings attributable to words used by the Apostolic writers, who were all most familiar with the Septuagint, would be the same as the meaning of those words as used in the Septuagint.

We must approach our study of Isaiah from the standpoint of humility, and recognize that we study from faith and not knowing all the answers. While there are parts that seem fairly clear, there are other parts that are debated. This study will attempt to identify where the scholarship is essentially in agreement, and where there are debated passages and meanings.

There are a number of recurring images or "motifs" in Isaiah, including (1) the Holiness of God, (2) David's City, Jerusalem, Zion or God's Holy Mountain, (3) a restoration to the conditions of the Garden that will reverse the curse of Original Sin (Gn 3), (4) the "seed" or descendant of Abraham and David, and judgment upon the nations, and (5) faith in God. Isaiah's overall theme appears to be that God will judge sin, but at the end of the day, He will use His Messiah to bring reconciliation and healing and establish the Messianic Kingdom.

While there is some debate among scholars regarding the date and authorship of the Book, this study will assume that Isaiah is the primary author, and that it is relatively contemporaneous with the times it describes. Even if others had a hand in authoring some parts of the Book, or in editing, arranging and copying the Book, the inspiration of the Holy Spirit need not be limited to those men and women who actually wrote the text of Scripture. It can extend also to those who may have edited or copied the original text, those who compiled it, and those who decided which texts were to be included within the Scriptural Canon. There is good reason to believe that Isaiah may be a sort of "greatest hits", with various writings of Isaiah throughout his ministry arranged in the final form to make a point about Judah, Jerusalem, the coming Jewish Messiah and the plan of salvation. It is also likely that much of Isaiah was first spoken, or recited, in the form of sermons or prophetic statements, and then written down and collected into the form we have today.

We cannot know whether we have, in the compiled book, the complete original sermons or poems. Nor do we know the context in which they were preached or recited, though in some cases we can make a good guess about that context. It is possible, even likely, that at least some of them were created in a specific context of time and place, endowing them with a specific contemporary meaning, but that when recombined into the final product we have today, the individual pieces take on a new meaning in this new context. Thus we may find multiple meanings for the same passage, including, e.g. a meaning in the original context in which it was spoken (if that can be determined), a meaning in the context of the short term history of the Judah, Assyria and Babylon, and a Messianic or eschatological meaning.

Much of the Book is in the form of Hebrew poetry. While the translation into English causes a loss of many of the poetic elements, some of those that remain will be identified as we go along. One thing that is apparent is that poetry, in Hebrew and English, allows the use of images which can paint a powerful picture of what is going on without being a literal description. Isaiah will make liberal use of these images. When God speaks in verse, it helps to elevate the dignity of what He says. Poetry also casts a much larger shadow than prose. If an historical event is described in prose, it would normally be just a description of that event. But by putting it in verse that single historical event can have a much bigger meeting in a larger context. In addition, verse, even unaccompanied by music, is easier to remember, and recite, than is prose. These two aspects of poetry may help explain why many of the Prophets, including Isaiah, wrote in verse. It is not clear that Isaiah's verse was ever set to music, though music was an aspect of at least some of the Prophets, 1Sm 10:5; 2Ki 3:15. If any of Isaiah's verse were set to music, none of the actual music has survived.

Isaiah himself does not appear in the Book until Chapter 6 when the beginning of his ministry is described. In verse 1:1 he tells us that his ministry began in the year King Uzziah (783-742 B.C.; 2Ki 15:1-7, 2Ch 26:1-23) died and continued through

the time of Kings Jotham (742-735 B.C.; 2Ki 15:32-38, 2Ch 27:1-9), Ahaz (735-715 B.C.; 2Ki 16:1-17:41, 2Ch 28:1-27) and Hezekiah (715-687 B.C.; 2Ki 18:1-20:21, 2Ch 29:1-32:33). In 721 B.C., the Assyrian army captured the Israelite capital at Samaria and carried away the citizens of the northern kingdom into captivity. The virtual destruction of Israel left the southern kingdom, Judah, to fend for itself among warring Near Eastern kingdoms. At the time of Samaria's fall, there existed two kings in Judah — Ahaz and his son Hezekiah — who ruled as co-regents. After the fall of the Northern Kingdom, the kings of Judah tried to extend their influence and protection to those inhabitants who had not been exiled. They also sought to extend their authority northward into areas previously controlled by the Kingdom of Israel. The latter part of the reign of Ahaz, and most of that of Hezekiah were periods of stability during which Judah was able to consolidate both politically and economically. Although Judah was a vassal of Assyria during this time and paid an annual tribute to the powerful empire, it was the most important state between Assyria and Egypt. In 715 B.C., following the death of Ahaz, Hezekiah became the sole regent of Judah and initiated widespread religious reforms, including the breaking of religious idols. During 2016 archaeological evidence of these reforms was discovered in Israel, <http://www.foxnews.com/science/2016/09/28/archaeologists-unearth-ancient-gate-shrine-in-israel.html>. Hezekiah built Hezekiah's tunnel, still in existence today, to insure that water was available during a siege, <http://www.biblicalarchaeologytruth.com/hezekiahs-tunnel.html>. He re-captured Philistine-occupied lands in the Negev desert, formed alliances with Ashkelon and Egypt, and made a stand against Assyria by refusing to pay tribute. In response, Sennacherib attacked Judah, laying siege to Jerusalem in 701 B.C. God destroyed Sennacherib's army outside Jerusalem and the siege was broken. The records of royal Assyria state that while Sennacherib captured many cities in Judah, Jerusalem was only besieged, not captured, thus agreeing with the Biblical account. Archaeologists have recently uncovered the ruins of Sennacherib's palace in Nineveh under the ruins of Jonah's Tomb, <http://www.foxnews.com/science/2017/03/06/biblical-kings-palace-uncovered-beneath-shrine-destroyed-by-isis.html>. Archaeologists have also discovered a royal seal of Hezekiah picturing a winged sun which may refer to the events of Is 38:8 in which the sun appeared to move backward in the sky, <http://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-sites-places/jerusalem/king-hezekiah-in-the-bible-royal-seal-of-hezekiah-comes-to-light/>. After being saved from the Assyrians, Judah survived until c. 600 B.C. when the Babylonians destroyed the City and carried the leaders into exile. The Exiles were first allowed to return to Jerusalem in 539 B.C. after Babylon fell to the Persians.

The entire Book of Isaiah is identified in 1:1 as a "vision" meaning, in a broad sense, divine revelation, 2Ch 32:32, Ob 1, Nah 1:1, Am 1:1, Mi 1:1, Hab 1:1. The visions in Isaiah are not arranged chronologically. In order to understand Isaiah, we always need to ask how the text relates to the rest of the text of the section in which it appears, how the sections of the Book are connected, and why they are arranged the way they are. The central theme of Chapters 1-39 is the "King." Chapters 40-55 have to do with the "Suffering Servant." And Chapters 56-66 have to do with a restored Jerusalem, with the key theme in those chapters being the "Conqueror."

The initial section on the "King" may also be divided into separate sections. Chapters 1-5 describe the overall background of a sinful time in Judah of greed, hypocrisy, and judgment. Even in these chapters, there were hints of a restoration. Isaiah 6 is Isaiah's call. Chapters 7-12 (the Book of Emmanuel) are all about the birth of a son, explicitly in 7-9 and 11 and implicitly in 6 and 10, who will be Emmanuel. Chapter 12 is a hymn of thanksgiving for what God has done, and has promised to do. The other sub-sections are Chapters 13-23 and 24-37.

The **first 5 chapters** could have taken place during any, or all, of the time of Isaiah's ministry and are perhaps best understood as setting the scene, or painting a picture, of the spiritual condition of Judah during Isaiah's ministry. In **Chapter 6**, Isaiah is given his ministry by God, a ministry to preach to a people who will not hear, and who will continue to be estranged from God and His law, that is, an unsuccessful ministry. Indeed, in some way, the failure to respond to Isaiah's preaching will be used to help convict the people of Judah, Rm 10:14-21. Yet even here, there is a hope of redemption for the remnant. The context for **Chapters 7 and 8** are a rebellion by Syria and Israel against their overlord Assyria. Syria and Israel wish to attack Judah, remove Ahaz of the line of David, and replace him with a King who will join them in an alliance against Assyria. Isaiah warns Ahaz against doing so, but Ahaz chooses to protect himself against Syria and Israel by making an alliance with Assyria thus becoming a vassal of Assyria. Thereafter except for brief periods, Judah will have lost its existence as an independent state. In Chapter 7, Emmanuel is referred to, but remains a mystery. We learn a little more about in in **Chapter 8**, and in **Chapters 9** and 11 we get a much fuller picture. **Chapter 11** ends with images from the Exodus which is the touchstone of the salvation history in the Hebrew Scriptures. By using that image, Isaiah calls up the story of God as redeemer of Israel, and all of its implication for salvation history.

Chapter 12 is a Psalm of thanksgiving for God's help and rescue and the conclusion of, or coda for, the Book of Emmanuel, which was introduced in Chapter 6. In some way, not clearly defined because this is poetry, the song expresses that the wrath of God is turned away and the relationship with God restored in joy and thanksgiving. This Psalm should be compared to Chapter 6, in which Isaiah himself confesses his sin to God (a man of unclean lips living among a people of unclean lips), and God brings forgiveness for Isaiah through the touch of a hot coal to his lips. Now, in Chapter 12, for the remnant, something of the same sort has happened, the sin of the remnant has been forgiven so that the relationship with God can be restored. Similar to the Passover itself, where God saw the blood on the doorposts and stayed His hand, God will recognize His people and leave a remnant. Although the details are not clear, we know from the intervening chapters that this child, Emmanuel, will be instrumental in this restoration.

Chapter 13 begins a new subsection of the "King" section of the Book which will run through Chapter 24. The theme of this section is the goyim, or the Nations, including Judah, and contains prophecies of destruction for the various nations

surrounding Judah. Isaiah uses these stories of judgment against these nations as illustrations of what God will do in the Eschaton. In this subsection judgment upon individual nations are linked with scenes of universal and cosmic Doom and assurances of better times for God's people. The link with 8th Century Judah is not broken altogether, but the historical horizon is extended far into the future. The first nation, in **Chapters 13 and 14**, is Babylon. Isaiah in Chapter 13 prophesies the conquest and eventual destruction and abandonment of Babylon, an event, over a century in the future, in 539 BC, with several specific details about that event including that the destruction will be at the hands of the Medes. During Isaiah's time, the Medes were allied with Babylon against Assyria. The Chapter consists of two poems, vs. 2-16, which do not mention Babylon, and vs. 17-22 which makes specific reference to conquest by the Medes. There is debate about whether the first poem is about Babylon specifically, or has a more general application. Both poems share, however, the fact that they describe the coming Day of the Lord. The end of Chapter 14 (vs. 24-32) and **Chapters 15 and 16** are, on their face, prophecies against Assyria, Philistia and Moab, ancient neighbors and adversaries of Israel. In **Chapter 16**, the exiles of Moab will seek shelter in Judah but be denied because of their arrogance, in this case the refusal to reject Moab's own gods and submit to the God of Abraham. As a result of that refusal, they are destroyed. **Chapters 17 & 18** contain oracles ostensibly about Damascus (Syria) and Cush (Ethiopia), respectively. The first three verses of **Chapter 17** are about Damascus, but verses 4-11 are a poem about the fall of Israel due to the failure of Israel's alliance with Syria. Verses 12-14 are about the Assyrian attack on Jerusalem that failed suddenly. Taken together they are yet another lesson about trusting God rather than trusting in the devices of men.

In **Chapter 18-20**, Cush/Egypt is ostensibly the target. The historical setting is Cush/Egypt seeking an alliance with Judah which is rejected in part because of Isaiah's advice. Unlike Damascus, however, Cush will be preserved and even serve as an ambassador for God to the gentiles. Egypt serve here as an archetype of the gentiles generally who will suffer and be chastened by the Lord, but to whom God will send a savior. At least some of them will come to the Lord and worship with the Jewish people. These passages contain much Messianic and eschatological language.

Jhan reminds us that the meaning of most stories is found in its end. We know the end of the story is Jesus, which allows us to interpret Isaiah in light of that ending. The central theme of Isaiah, and indeed all of Scripture, is that, after the Fall, God still desired to live with mankind, but could not do so because of Sin. Scripture discloses that Jesus the Messiah is that plan by which God will bring us back from corruption and sin, and His anger will turn to comfort.

^b **Chapter 21** contains three prophecies, a longer one about Babylon, and two shorter poems about Edom and Arabia. The interpretation of the first oracle, about Babylon, is particularly difficult. In the standard interpretation it is about the Fall of Babylon to the Medes and Persians which will result in freedom for the exiled Jews and the ultimate return to Jerusalem. In the alternate interpretation, the lesson of this oracle is similar to that of Chapters 18-20, don't trust in foreign alliances for salvation, trust only in the Lord.

^c The **Wilderness of the Sea** is lower Mesopotamia near the Sea on part of which Babylon is built. Thus this oracle is addressed to Babylon, see v. 9, but the identification here, as in the other two oracles in this chapter, is somewhat cryptic, requiring some knowledge of the context. This lends support to the view that these oracles are about more than the specific places mentioned. Rather, they should be interpreted, together with the other oracles about the nations in the region, as speaking to mankind and her fate more generally. Babylon, here and elsewhere, generally represents the earthly system in opposition to God's Kingdom.

^d The **Negeb** (Negev) is the desert south of Jerusalem in Judah.

^e (1) Is 13:1, 13:20-22, 14:23, 47:1-15; Jr 4:19, 51:36-42; Zec 9:14; Hab 3:16; Jr 51:1; Rv 17-18. It is not clear what the historical context of this oracle was, though it was perhaps the period immediately before the fall of Babylon to Persia in 539 B.C. (Is 13:17-19, 47; Jr 50:2, 51:8-11, 51:28, 51:50-51). As noted below, it may also represent the then contemporary attempts of Babylon to create an alliance against Assyria which would include Judah. The poem may also be a re-working of a poem foretelling the fall of Nineveh in 612 B.C. to the Medes and Babylonians. The use of the first person singular pronoun is also ambiguous. In parts, it seems to express Isaiah's own emotional reaction to the horrors of the destruction of Babylon (v. 3-4) while in other parts appears to refer to God who will bring the destruction (v. 2).

^f (2) Ps 60:3; Is 24:16, 33:1, 11:11, 13:7, 22:6; Jr 49:34; Ezk 9:4; Rv 17:3. The prevailing interpretation of verses 1-9 is that it describes the fall of Babylon to the Medes and Persians in 539 B.C. as described in Dn 5 (see note on verse 1). Much of the description would fit that event. **Elam** is a nation east of Babylon (Jr 49:34-39) from the same region as the Medes and Persians. God was stirring up the nations surrounding Babylon to attack. Isaiah looks on with horror, and indeed becomes physically ill, as his oracles come true to a far greater degree than he had anticipated. Verse 2 has the Babylonian destroyers continuing to destroy, but an end put to that by the Medes and Persians. The arrogance of the Babylonians, v. 5, is so great that they do not expect the disaster that will befall them. Instead they eat and drink, they maintain their weapons of war, but they expect no one to disturb their power. In verse 6 God tells Isaiah to set a watchman to look for the signs of the coming fulfillment of this prophecy of events more than 150 years into the future. So the watchman will become tired of waiting. But finally, the prophecy is fulfilled and Israel is left on the threshing floor. In the other, minority, interpretation, this describes contemporary events when Hezekiah is being urged to make an alliance with Babylon against Assyria, just as Judah had been urged to make an alliance with Egypt against Assyria in Chapters 18-20. The Biblical evidence for this contemplated alliance is thin though Hezekiah did receive a

friendly embassy from Babylon immediately after the defeat of Assyria before the gates of Jerusalem in 701 B.C. (Is 39:1-2). In this interpretation, the lesson of Chapter 21 is the same as that of Chapters 18-20, a warning against trusting in foreign alliances instead of the Lord. Babylon revolted several times against Assyria and suffered defeat and destruction when the revolt failed. The Medes and Persians were subject to Assyria at the time and helped put down the revolt. At one point, the Assyrians diverted the rivers to flood Babylon which had been constructed primarily of mud bricks. So as with the Egyptians, the message of Isaiah would be that, just like the Egyptians, Babylon will be defeated, so do not trust in them. Under this interpretation, the destroyer in verse 2 is Assyria who will continue to destroy even after Babylon rebels. Verses 3-4 represent Judah's reaction to the defeat of Babylon. Judah had hoped Babylon would protect them from Assyria, so the reaction to Babylon's defeat would be that that protection (twilight) would not come to pass and of horror with the thought that Judah might be next. In this interpretation, the feast, v 5, represents Babylon and Judah making an alliance which would not turn out well. The Septuagint reads, ". . . [so] a fearful and a grievous vision was declared to me: he that is treacherous deals treacherously, the transgressor transgresses. The Elamites are upon me, and the ambassadors of the Persians come against me: now will I groan and comfort myself."

^g (3) Is 13:8, 16:11; Ps 48:6; Is 26:17; 1Th 5:3; 2Th 1:6-10; Rm 8:19-24. Even though the Day of the Lord will bring justice and righteousness, it will be terrible to behold. The Septuagint reads, "Therefore are my loins filled with feebleness, and pangs have seized me as a travailing woman: I dealt wrongfully that I might not hear; I hastened that I might not see."

^h (4) Dt 28:67. The twilight is, in a desert country, the time of respite from the heat of the day and before the terrors of the night. In the standard interpretation, the longed for twilight, the diminishing of Babylon, still engenders fear in Isaiah. The Septuagint reads, "My heart wanders, and transgression overwhelms me; my soul is occupied with fear."

ⁱ (5) Jr 51:39, 31:57. **Leather shields** were oiled to keep the oil supple (2Sm 1:21). In the standard interpretation, the Babylonians perform normal activities, though activities which include watchfulness and readiness, not knowing of the impending disaster. This sudden coming of the Lord's vengeance is a repeating motif in Scripture, see, e.g., Sodom and Gomorrah (Gn 19:14), Belshazzar (possibly the same event in 539 B.C., Dn 5) and the Eschaton (Mk 13:35-36).

^j (6) 2Ki 9:17-20; Ezk 3:16-21, 33:1-9; Hab 2:1-4. The lookout or seer may be preparing for a vision or divine revelation .

^k (7) Messengers bringing news from far away, see v. 9. Horses in pairs might signify that these are troops retreating from defeat with the survivors bringing the horses of the slain.

^l (8) Hab 2:1. No real watchman would take endless shifts. This must refer to a different sort of watchman, see note on verse 6 above. He must stay awake to be ready for the Day of the Lord, Mk 13:35-37. The Qumran Isaiah scroll and Syriac are as quoted above in the RSV, while the Masoretic text refers to a Lion at the beginning of verse 8. The presence of the word lion in the Masoretic left translators in a quandary. The Septuagint, created before vowel markings were common in Hebrew, let the Hebrew consonants for lion stand as a proper name, "Hearken with great attention, and call thou Urias to the watch-tower: the Lord has spoken. I stood continually during the day, and I stood in the camp all night. . ." The KJV, created before the Qumran text was discovered, translates this verse as, "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 . . ." Other translations have the watchman "crying out like a lion". However, after the discovery of the Qumran Isaiah scroll, it appears that the insertion of lion in the Masoretic text was a scribal error. The Hebrew for lion (aryeh, אַרְיֵה) is very close to the Hebrew for watchman (haroeh, הַרְאוֹה). Watchman would make the translation difficulties go away.

^m (9) Is 13:9, 47:5, 9:48; Hab 2:2; Jr 51:8; Rv 14:8, 18:2; Is 46:1; Jr 50:2, 51:44; Bel 1:1-22. The Fall of Babylon is announced in this vision which began in v. 6. Even its idols will be destroyed. The Babylonian Empire will fall to the Persians in 539 B.C. It would also be defeated c. 700 B.C. and several times thereafter, after ill-fated rebellions against Assyria. Babylon, as the symbol of those who oppose God, will not be finally defeated until the Eschaton.

ⁿ **Winnowed one**, literally "son of my threshing floor". Threshing and winnowing were the steps by which the newly harvested wheat was prepared for milling. The heads or ears of the wheat were first trampled down (threshed) to expose the seeds themselves. The resulting mixture was then thrown into the air (winnowed) so that the lighter chaff would be blown away leaving the usable grain to fall to the floor where it was gathered up. The Septuagint for v. 10 reads, "Hear, ye that are left, and ye that are in pain, hear what things I have heard of the Lord of hosts [which] the God of Israel has declared to us." This suggests that "winnowed one" refers to the remnant that will be left of the Jews. It carries with it both the implication that those left are the worthy ones after being winnowed, and that they were made to suffer through the threshing process, see also Rv 6:9-11.

^o (10) Jr 51:33; Am 1:3; Mi 4:13. The lookout or seer is speaking to his own people who had suffered at the hands of the Babylonians in the standard interpretation. In the alternate interpretation the lookout would look for the result of relying upon the alliance with Babylon.

^p (11) Is 13:1; Gn 25:14-16, 32:3; 1Ch 1:30-31; Dt 2:8; Ezk 35:2-3. This is a short (two verses) oracle against Dumah. Dumah is an oasis in northern Arabia and a region in the north of historical Edom. Thus is likely an oracle against Edom, named after one of Ishmael's sons. Dumah means "silence" or "stillness" and thus may be a play on words. The concept of "watchman" connects this poem with the previous one.

^q Se'ir is in Edom (probably called Dumah here).

^r (12) Jb 36:20; Am 5:8; Ps 37:36; Ob 1-9. Normally a watchman could, and would, answer this question directly since that was his job. But here he answers in riddles. In a similar way, though the signs of the Eschaton are visible, it will not be for us to know the time or the season in which the Messiah will return, Mk 13:28-37. The man from Se'ir probably represents the gentiles asking the watchman when the darkness, the nightmare would end. The watchman answers in effect, it does not matter because even when this nightmare will end, another will be along to take its place. Our time on earth will not be easy, and we must trust only in the Lord. "Come again" here is the same Hebrew word (shub, שׁוּב) as is sometimes translated as "turn around" or "repent" and thus may be an invitation to come to God as the only respite from the night.

^s (13) Gn 10:17-18, 25:3; Jr 25:23-24, 49:28, 49:8; Gn 10:7; Ezk 25:13-15, 27:15-20; Gn 37:25. This is an oracle against Arabia, probably the northwestern region referred to today as the Hijaz. But by changing the vowel markings, which did not exist in Isaiah's day, the word for Arabia becomes the word for night, thus connecting it with the preceding poem. This may be a play on words because the refugees will lodge in the thickets at night when they are not traveling. Arabs again probably stand for generic gentiles, one group of which is hiding and protecting other Arab groups. They must travel the back roads to stay away from the invaders. Dedanites are inhabitants of the oasis of Dedan, modern el-Ela, in the Hijaz on a major trade route. Kedar is a less specific name for the same region, Gn 25:13-15; Jr 49:28; Ezk 27:21. In 715 B.C., Sargon II led an army into northwestern Arabia after conquering Trans-Jordan, threatening Judah. Taken together, particularly if the minority interpretation of the first poem is accepted, the three poems leave a picture of a world under the judgment. We live in Babylon, representing the Kingdoms of this world, at the End of Days (though we don't know when that will come). Even if the End of Days does not come within our lifetimes, we will have to face God one way or another. The world offers solutions, but they do not save us. When we are in the agony of the night of our sin, when we suffer persecution or injustice, when misfortune dogs us, we will call the Watchman. When we do, the Watchman will have no answer but to call us to repent and turn to God, trusting in Him alone. And when we do, the night will end and a new dawn will come. The Septuagint reads, "Thou mayest lodge in the forest in the evening, or in the way of Daedan."

^t (14) Jb 6:19. This is a plea to the Arab tribes to take in refugees from Edom and other Arabian tribes escaping from the conflict between Assyria and Babylon which engulfed the area. Tema, modern Teima (Gn 25:15; Jr 25:23) is an oasis north of Dedan.

^u (15) Is 13:14-15, 17:13.

^v (16) Is 16:14, 60:7; Gn 25:13; Ps 120:5-6; Song 1:5; Is 60:7. **Kedar** is a northern Arabian tribe, and expert archers (Gn 21:20), which harassed Nehemiah during the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem (Neh 2:19, 6:1-9). The men of Kedar, Kedarites, were the main military power among the descendants of Ishmael. Isaiah speaks of Kedar's 'glory and her gifted archers' (Is 21:16-17). Ezk 27:21 suggests there was a union or alliance of Arab tribes under the leadership of the Kedarites, or perhaps that Kedar itself was the name by which the alliance was called. Historically Kedar fought the Assyrian Empire, and others who wanted to gain control of the trade routes in northern Arabia. We know from an Assyrian inscription found in present day Iran that they paid tribute to Assyria in 738 B.C. Nehemiah's opponent, Geshem the Arab, is identified in Arabic inscriptions in the area as one of the princes of Kedar during the mid-fifth century BC. Assyrian inscriptions tell us that Sennacherib captured several Arabian deities (idols) in the Kedarite city of Dumah. Their chief deity was Atarsamain, or the Morning Star of Heaven (counterpart of Ishtar) perhaps referred to in Is 14:12-15 and the origin of our name Lucifer (through the Greek Septuagint). The Kedarites are referred to as nomads in Ps 120:5. That Psalm is a cry of distress, as the writer has fled and lives in a place called Meshech in the tents of the Kedarites. See also, Is 42:11 (Kedar mentioned in a song of praise); Jr 2:10 (The children of Israel are advised to ask Kedar if it is an ordinary for a people to forsake their gods and turn to others); Jr 49:28 (A prophecy against Arabia); and Ezk 27:21 (Lament over Tyre).

^w (17) Jr 49:28; Is 10:19, 40:8, 55:10-11; Nu 23:19; Zec 1:6.