

# The Millennium Forecast

The Book of Isaiah

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Text

21:1 - 22:25

Topic

Jerusalem acted just like Babylon, mocking God and reveling when they ought to be repenting

Title

*"They Wanna Mock the LORD All Night and Party Everyday"*

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## Pop culture pop-quiz:

### Which of these is NOT the title of a James Bond film?

*No Time to Die... Die Another Day... For Tomorrow We Die... Live & Let Die... Tomorrow Never Dies...*

"For tomorrow we die" is *not* a Bond movie. It is a partial phrase found in Isaiah 22:13. "Let us eat and drink, **for tomorrow we die!**"

We expect unbelievers to mouth these words. Ricky Gervais said, "It's a strange myth that atheists have nothing to live for. It's the opposite. *We have nothing to die for.* We have everything to live for."

### **Believers in Jesus have everything to live for, and everything to die for.**

The apostle Paul put it this way: "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21).

It is troubling, therefore, that it was God's people in Jerusalem who were saying, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!"

I'll organize my comments around two points: **#1 You Expect Unbelievers To Live As If There Is No Heaven Tomorrow**, and **#2 You Expect Believers To Live As If They Will Be In Heaven Today**.

### **#1 - You Expect Unbelievers To Live As If There Is No Heaven Tomorrow (21:1-17)**

Many ancient cities believed their wall to be impregnable to assault. Clever conquerors always found a way. Can you say, "Trojan horse?"

Babylon found out just how 'pregnable' their mighty wall was one prophesied night.

We pick-up Isaiah in the middle of a long stretch of chapters in which God reveals His dealings with certain nations. Chapter twenty-one highlights Babylon, Edom, and Arabia.

**Bear in mind that Isaiah wrote 150 years before Babylon was a world power.**

Isa 21:1 The burden against the Wilderness of the Sea. As whirlwinds in the South pass through, So it comes from the desert, from a terrible land.

Babylon is identified in verse nine. "Wilderness of the Sea" is a descriptive nickname. There are differences of opinion as to what it refers.

Babylon's conqueror is compared to a "whirlwind," "terrible" in power and destruction.

Isa 21:2 A distressing vision is declared to me; The treacherous dealer deals treacherously, And the plunderer plunders. Go up, O Elam! Besiege, O Media! All its sighing I have made to cease.

Treachery and plundering were the political atmosphere of those centuries. It's like in *Pirates of the Caribbean*, when someone betrays someone else, and simply explains it by saying, "Pirate!" In this case, maybe they said, "Pagan!"

"Elam" is an ancient name for Persia (modern Iran). The Medes (Media) and Persians (the Medo-Persians), would conquer Babylon.

Isa 21:3 Therefore my loins are filled with pain; Pangs have taken hold of me, like the pangs of a woman in labor. I was distressed when I heard *it*; I was dismayed when I saw *it*.

Isa 21:4 My heart wavered, fearfulness frightened me; The night for which I longed He turned into fear for me.

Future Babylon would deserve conquering, but Isaiah was nonetheless overcome with emotion by it. He would not live to see Babylon rise and fall, but prophecy was so true to him that he reacted as if he was there.

I had a weird thought. *What if the visions the prophets had were like virtual reality?*

Being heavenly minded helps you to see everyone, your enemies, the wicked, in need of God's gracious salvation. It becomes much harder to be offended by someone when I realize that they have no power from God the Holy Spirit to do otherwise.

Isa 21:5 Prepare the table, Set a watchman in the tower, Eat and drink. Arise, you princes, Anoint the shield!

Isa 21:6 For thus has the Lord said to me: "Go, set a watchman, Let him declare what he sees."

Over a century before it happened, Isaiah saw what is recorded in the fifth chapter of the OT Book of Daniel. The Medes and Persians were encamped outside. Trusting in their wall, the Babylonians were hosting a drunken feast during which they mocked the God of Israel. The Medes and Persians altered the course of the River Euphrates that ran under the wall. It was too late to "anoint [their] shields" for a battle.

The sober Medo-Persian army rushed in and overcame what little resistance there was. Ta, ta for now, Babylon.

We were introduced to a "watchman" in verse six. He was appointed by the Lord. In Isaiah's vision he was an observer who reported to the Lord.

We are watchmen in the sense that we 'see' future history as it will unfold in the unfulfilled prophecies of the Bible.

Isa 21:7 And he [the watchman] saw a chariot *with* a pair of horsemen, A chariot of donkeys, *and* a chariot of camels, And he listened earnestly with great care.

Isa 21:8 Then he cried, "A lion, my Lord! I stand continually on the watchtower in the daytime; I have sat at my post every night.

Isa 21:9 And look, here comes a chariot of men *with* a pair of horsemen!" Then he answered and said, "Babylon is fallen, is fallen! And all the carved images of her gods He has broken to the ground."

His shout was like a lion's roar. A good watchman needed a strong voice that could be heard and understood. We should always speak clearly and plainly when we talk about Jesus to others. I don't think I've ever used this, but Chuck Smith would often say, "Simply teach the Word simply." We can trust that God the Holy Spirit will empower our sharing of God's Word.

A watchman is faithful, always alert at his post. You can be faithful. There are many encouragements to be awake and alert, to stay sober and serve the Lord.

The watchman saw soldiers, horses, donkeys, and camels. Archaeologists have discovered the animals were were led by Francis, the talking mule. (Didn't Festus ride a mule? Ruth, I think, was her name).

A future Babylon occupies two entire chapters in the Revelation (17&18). She will be rebuilt on the ancient site and serve as the religious and commercial capital of the world ruled by Satan through his antichrist during The Time of Jacob's Trouble. As a watchman, you see, "Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and has become a dwelling place of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird!" (18:2).

Isa 21:10 Oh, my threshing and the grain of my floor! That which I have heard from the LORD of hosts, The God of Israel, I have declared to you.

Jeremiah, describing the destruction of Babylon, wrote, "The daughter of Babylon is like a threshing floor; it is time to thresh her" (51:33).

"I have declared to you." God trusted them to know His future plans.

**We know a great deal more about God's future plans than any previous generation.**

You know a great deal about *your* future, too. Maybe not the minutiae (as Rocket Raccoon would say), but the broad strokes are enough to reduce you to tears of joy.

The last few verses of chapter twenty-one describe two other nations, Dumah and Arabia. They were geographically between Judah and Babylon.

Isa 21:11 The burden against Dumah. He calls to me out of Seir, "Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night?"

Harold Bultema wrote, "*This brief burden has always been a great burden to expositors!*" These nations are somewhat obscure and their history not well known. They were well known to God. So are you.

"Seir" is an alternate name for Edom because the mountains of Seir were given as a possession to Esau and his descendants.

Isa 21:12 The watchman said, "The morning comes, and also the night. If you will inquire, inquire; Return! Come back!"

An enemy has caused Edomites to flee. They are encouraged to "inquire," of God. His answer will be to "return" and "come back."

Isa 21:13 The burden against Arabia. In the forest in Arabia you will lodge, O you traveling companies of Dedanites.

Isa 21:14 O inhabitants of the land of Tema, Bring water to him who is thirsty; With their bread they met him who fled.

Isa 21:15 For they fled from the swords, from the drawn sword, From the bent bow, and from the distress of war.

Isa 21:16 For thus the LORD has said to me: "Within a year, according to the year of a hired man, all the glory of Kedar will fail;

Isa 21:17 and the remainder of the number of archers, the mighty men of the people of Kedar, will be diminished; for the LORD God of Israel has spoken *it*."

In one year Arabia would be attacked. Refugees would flee seeking provisions and protection. I wonder if they prepared? And how?

I've noticed God prepares His people for what is coming. You don't know you're being prepared until afterwards, but then it brings oceans of comfort

**T**he Babylonians felt secure behind the walls they had built. So secure that they could revel while a determined enemy pressed upon them.

Determined enemies press upon us. The world... The flesh... The devil. Feeling secure in Jesus, do I party like there's no tomorrow? Am I succumbing to the devil using the world to incite me to indulge my flesh?

## #2 - You Expect Believers To Live As If They Will Be In Heaven Today (22:1-25)

It should not surprise you when unbelievers act like unbelievers. It should surprise you when believers act like unbelievers.

Jerusalem acted like Babylon by trusting in their own preparations, including fortifying the wall.

Isa 22:1 The burden against the Valley of Vision. What ails you now, that you have all gone up to the housetops,

“Valley of Vision” is a reference to Jerusalem, though I do not know why.

I remember one time in the Philippines when we had lunch on a flat rooftop patio. The Jews weren't having a picnic. They were watching for danger.

Isa 22:2 You who are full of noise, A tumultuous city, a joyous city? Your slain *men are* not slain with the sword, Nor dead in battle.

Is this good or bad? It seems to be describing a bustling city whose armies have not been slain.

God had many times supernaturally protected His chosen, and against impossible odds.

Isa 22:3 All your rulers have fled together; They are captured by the archers. All who are found in you are bound together; They have fled from afar.

This jumps to a different occasion, one in which the “rulers fled together,” but would be *found* and *bound*.

Isa 22:4 Therefore I said, “Look away from me, I will weep bitterly; Do not labor to comfort me Because of the plundering of the daughter of my people.”

Jeremiah is called The Weeping Prophet, but Isaiah gives him a run for his money. I can't tell you to weep more, and bitterly at that. All of us should be challenged to measure our compassion for the lost. It may be undeserved, but evangelical Christians have a reputation of lacking true compassion.

Isa 22:5 For *it is* a day of trouble and treading down and perplexity By the Lord GOD of hosts In the Valley of Vision - Breaking down the walls And of crying to the mountain.

Isa 22:6 Elam bore the quiver With chariots of men *and* horsemen, And Kir uncovered the shield.

Isa 22:7 It shall come to pass *that* your choicest valleys Shall be full of chariots, And the horsemen shall set themselves in array at the gate.

Little is written about Elam and Kir. It seems an attack comes out of nowhere.

Have you ever been ambushed by the devil? He employs people, both unbelievers and (sadly) believers, to blindside you on the narrow road and push you into the ditch. He's playing a long-game.

Isa 22:8 He removed the protection of Judah. You looked in that day to the armor of the House of the Forest [an armory];

Isa 22:9 You also saw the damage to the city of David, That it was great; And you gathered together the waters of the lower pool.

Isa 22:10 You numbered the houses of Jerusalem, And the houses you broke down To fortify the wall.

Isa 22:11 You also made a reservoir between the two walls For the water of the old pool...

There must have been a meeting to adopt strategies to combat the siege that was occurring outside the wall. These were the silly physical things that the Jews would do in order to be protected.

The sad truth is that they were already fully protected by the LORD. They did not turn to Him. These people were willfully ignorant of God.

"The houses you broke down To fortify the wall." They tore-up their homes to pile debris against the wall.

If we look at this devotionally, we might say that Christians sometimes break down their homes, their families, their lives, in pursuit of worldly things that they believe will fortify them. I can't tell you all the ways you can do that. Some of you immediately recognize what I'm saying because you've experienced the destruction of your family because of spiritual neglect while in the selfish pursuit of material things. Christians regularly blow-up their lives.

Isa 22:11 ... But you did not look to its Maker, Nor did you have respect for Him who fashioned it long ago.

Let's stay in devotional mode. Looking back on my life, I can see times I looked to the Lord, respecting Him. It can also see times I thought I was looking to Him, but was pressing upon Him my own agenda.

In a more general sense that touches all of us, we frequently remind ourselves of the warning in the NT Book of Galatians, to the effect that having begun in the Spirit, we *will* try to continue the Christian life in our own flesh, applying our own wisdom.

Isa 22:12 And in that day the Lord GOD of hosts Called for weeping and for mourning, For baldness and for girding with sackcloth.

Isa 22:13 But instead, joy and gladness, Slaying oxen and killing sheep, Eating meat and drinking wine: "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!"

I don't think Isaiah was saying that the Jews partied like there was no tomorrow while they were besieged. They ate and drank when God called upon them to repent, to weep and mourn, shaving their heads and wear rough clothing. They blew it off. They ate and drank like there was no tomorrow. So God disciplined them, allowing other nations to conquer them.

Isa 22:14 Then it was revealed in my hearing by the LORD of hosts, "Surely for this iniquity there will be no atonement for you, Even to your death," says the Lord GOD of hosts.

This isn't a forfeiting of salvation, an unforgivable sin. It is a strong reminder that sin, even when forgiven, carries this-life consequences. As our good friend Dennis Agajanian says, "*You can't unscramble eggs.*" Thank the LORD for grace without end.

Isa 22:15 Thus says the Lord GOD of hosts: "Go, proceed to this steward, To Shebna, who *is* over the house, *and say*:

Isa 22:16 'What have you here, and whom have you here, That you have hewn a sepulcher here, As he who hews himself a sepulcher on high, Who carves a tomb for himself in a rock?

Isa 22:17 Indeed, the LORD will throw you away violently, O mighty man, And will surely seize you.

Isa 22:18 He will surely turn violently and toss you like a ball Into a large country; There you shall die, and there your glorious chariots *Shall be* the shame of your master's house.



Isa 22:19 So I will drive you out of your office, And from your position he will pull you down.

Shebna was a servant of King Hezekiah, both a steward... over the house and a scribe.<sup>1</sup>

Shebna had built for himself a fancy and prestigious tomb. It was a display of significant power and wealth. There are believers who desire monuments, their name on things, so people can see that they built something great. Others are more subtle about wanting power and influence and position. Ask yourself, "Am I looking for recognition?"

Isa 22:20 'Then it shall be in that day, That I will call My servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiah;

Isa 22:21 I will clothe him with your robe And strengthen him with your belt; I will commit your responsibility into his hand. He shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem And to the house of Judah.

Remember, this was a prophecy. Made known to Hezekiah, it may have been the impetus to deal with Shebna.

God will get His work done. If a Shebna is unfaithful, the LORD will remove him from his office, strip him of his authority, and give it to another.

Isa 22:22 The key of the house of David I will lay on his shoulder; So he shall open, and no one shall shut; And he shall shut, and no one shall open.

The key was a picture and demonstration of the authority of the chief steward. Here, the LORD gives Eliakim the authority to open and shut as the LORD's representative, which no man can oppose.

Jesus applied this to Himself in the Revelation (3:7).

Isa 22:23 I will fasten him as a peg in a secure place, And he will become a glorious throne to his father's house.

Isa 22:24 'They will hang on him all the glory of his father's house, the offspring and the posterity, all vessels of small quantity, from the cups to all the pitchers.

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 37:2, Second Kings 18:18

Isa 22:25 'In that day,' says the LORD of hosts, 'the peg that is fastened in the secure place will be removed and be cut down and fall, and the burden that was on it will be cut off; for the LORD has spoken.' "

We sometimes use inanimate objects to describe people. "He's a rock" describes someone solid and dependable. Eliakim would be like a "peg," and a "throne," able to bear the burdens of his office as he represented his master. Shebna is the previous "peg" of verse twenty-five.

Next time I'm asked to fill-out a letter of recommendation, and they ask if there's anything I'd like to add, I'm going to say that he or she is "a peg."

"Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die." The apostle Paul quotes it in the great chapter of the NT where he explains that believers will be resurrected from the dead or raptured (First Corinthians 15). He uses it to argue that, if there is no resurrection or rapture, no eternal life in Heaven, you may as well abandon yourself to seeking physical pleasure in this life. There would certainly be no reason to sacrifice and suffer as a believer for a future that will not exist.

"Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!" The last half is fine as is - "For tomorrow we die." We are not afraid to die; it is "gain." Quote: "Death only frightens those who have their mind exclusively in this world."

We need to erase "Let us eat and drink," and replace it with things of the Lord:

- "Let me be transformed by the renewing of my mind, not conformed to the world - for tomorrow I die."
- "Let me serve the Lord as a steward in His household - for tomorrow I die."
- "Let me suffer with patient endurance - for tomorrow I die."

George Whitefield said, *"Take care of your life and the Lord will take care of your death."*

We know a glorious future *does* await the believer. Today or tomorrow we may die, but death is not the end. As *Chicago* sang, "It's only the beginning of what I want to feel forever."