

Isaiah 21:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

The burden of the desert of the sea. As whirlwinds in the south pass through; so it cometh from the desert, from a terrible land.

Analysis

The burden of the desert of the sea. As whirlwinds in the south pass through; so it cometh from the desert, from a terrible land. The enigmatic 'desert of the sea' likely refers to Babylon—surrounded by irrigated lands yet essentially in desert, with marshes in southern region. The imagery of whirlwinds from the south (Negev storms, violent and destructive) describes the coming invasion. 'From a terrible land'—Media/Persia, fearsome to Babylonians. This oracle is remarkable: predicting Babylon's fall while Assyria still dominated (Isaiah's time, 8th century BCE). Babylon wouldn't reach empire status until a century later, yet God reveals its future judgment. This demonstrates divine foreknowledge and sovereignty—God knows the end from the beginning, declaring outcomes before events unfold (Isaiah 46:10).

Historical Context

Babylon's fall to Cyrus the Persian (539 BCE) fulfilled this prophecy. Daniel 5 describes the event: Belshazzar's feast, handwriting on the wall, Babylon's conquest 'in that night.' The Persians diverted the Euphrates River, entering through river gates. Babylon fell without major battle—exactly like a sudden whirlwind. The prophecy's fulfillment came 150+ years after Isaiah spoke it, demonstrating genuine predictive prophecy. Archaeological evidence (Cyrus Cylinder, Nabonidus Chronicle) confirms the conquest. This validated Isaiah's prophetic authority and demonstrated that even mighty empires exist at God's

pleasure. Babylon, which would destroy Judah (586 BCE), was itself destined for destruction—divine justice operating across centuries.

Related Passages

John 15:13 – Greatest form of love

1 Corinthians 13:4 – Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. What does predicting Babylon's fall a century before its rise demonstrate about divine foreknowledge?
2. How does this prophecy demonstrate God's sovereignty over empires?
3. Why does God reveal future judgments long before they occur?

Interlinear Text

לְלֹלֶל	בְּ גַב	כָּסֹוף וְתַ	יְמִ	מִמְדָּבֶר	מִשְׁא
The burden	from the desert	of the sea	As whirlwinds	in the south	pass
H4853	H4057	H3220	H5492	H5045	H2498

נֹרַאָה:	מִאָּרֶץ	בְּ אָרֶץ	מִמְדָּבֶר	בְּ אָרֶץ	לְלֹלֶל
from the desert	through so it cometh	land	from a terrible		
H4057	H935	H776	H3372		

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 13:1 (Parallel theme): The burden of Babylon, which Isaiah the son of Amoz did see.

Jeremiah 51:42 (Parallel theme): The sea is come up upon Babylon: she is covered with the multitude of the waves thereof.

Isaiah 14:23 (Parallel theme): I will also make it a possession for the bittern, and pools of water: and I will sweep it with the besom of destruction, saith the LORD of hosts.

Zechariah 9:14 (Parallel theme): And the LORD shall be seen over them, and his arrow shall go forth as the lightning: and the Lord GOD shall blow the trumpet, and shall go with whirlwinds of the south.

Isaiah 17:1 (Parallel theme): The burden of Damascus. Behold, Damascus is taken away from being a city, and it shall be a ruinous heap.

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