

## **FOUR FALSE HOPES**

**20** In the year that the supreme commander, sent by Sargon king of Assyria, came to Ashdod (and he attacked [Ashdod] and [eventually] captured it)—<sup>2</sup>at that time Jehovah spoke through Isaiah the son of Amoz, saying, “Take off the sackcloth from your body and the sandals from your feet.” And he did so, walking around naked and barefoot. <sup>3</sup>Then Jehovah said, “Just as my servant Isaiah has walked around naked and barefoot for three years as a sign and portent against Egypt and Ethiopia, <sup>4</sup>so shall the king of Assyria lead away naked and barefoot the Egyptian captives and the Ethiopian exiles, young and old, with bare buttocks—to Egypt’s shame. <sup>5</sup>Then my people will be dismayed and will despair because of Ethiopia, who was their hope, and because of Egypt who was their confidence.” <sup>6</sup>On that day the people who live along the coast will say, “Look, if this is our source of hope—those to whom we fled for help and deliverance from the king of Assyria—how shall we escape?”

**21** The oracle concerning the Wilderness by the Sea. Like whirlwinds sweeping through the southland, peril comes from the wilderness, from a land of terror. <sup>2</sup>A grievous vision has been shown to me. The treacherous man deals treacherously, and the destroyer destroys. Attack, O Elam! Lay siege, O Media! I will bring to an end all the groaning she caused. <sup>3</sup>Because of this my body is full of anguish; sharp pains seize me, like those of a woman in childbirth. I am so bewildered I cannot hear; I am so terrified I cannot see. <sup>4</sup>My heart falters, fright overwhelms me. The twilight I longed for has become a horror to me. <sup>5</sup>They set the table [for feasting], they spread out the rugs [to lie upon]; they eat, they drink. Get up, you officers, oil the [battle] shields!—<sup>6</sup>for this is what the Lord has said to me, “Go, station a lookout, and have him report what he sees. <sup>7</sup>When he sees riders, horsemen in pairs, a train of donkeys, a train of camels, let him be alert, fully alert.” <sup>8</sup>Then the lookout cried out like a lion, “O Lord, day after day I am stationed on the watchtower; and every night I am at my post. <sup>9</sup>Look! Here comes a troop of riders, horsemen in pairs!” And he reported, “Babylon has fallen! [It has] fallen! And all the images of her gods lie shattered on the ground!” <sup>10</sup>O my [people] who have been threshed, you who are the grain of my threshing floor, I have reported to you what I have heard from Jehovah of hosts, the God of Israel.

<sup>11</sup>The oracle concerning Dumah. Some one calls to me from Seir, “Watchman, how far spent is the night? Watchman, how far spent is the night?” <sup>12</sup>The watchman replies, “Morning is coming—but also the night. If you want to inquire, do so. Turn, and come.”

<sup>13</sup>The oracle concerning Arabia. O you caravans of Dedanites, you must camp in the forests of Arabia. <sup>14</sup>They brought water to him who was thirsty; the inhabitants of the land of Tema shared their bread with the fugitives—<sup>15</sup>because they have fled from the sword, from the drawn sword and the bent bow, from the heat of the battle. <sup>16</sup>This is what the Lord has said to me, “Within a year, as it is reckoned when making a contract with a hired laborer, all the glory of Kedar will come to an end. <sup>17</sup>The number of archers that are left, the mighty men of the people of Kedar, will be few; because Jehovah, the God of Israel, has declared it. (Isa. 20:1-21:17)

## Introduction

Where do you place your hope? Hope is essential—without hope you cannot survive.

By way of example, there once was a lady who died because she no longer had any hope. She had been separated from her husband, but the hope of reconciliation had sustained her over the years. She had her children, and as long as they were young she entertained the hope that they would always be with her. But as the years passed, the children grew up and left home; and it became more and more evident that her husband would not be coming home. Consequently, this poor woman lost hope, and died.

Hope is essential, without hope you cannot survive. But it is not only important to have hope; it is also important to have a true and worthy object of hope.

As Christians, we should not be like those who place their hope in the things of this present world, only to be bitterly disappointed. With this in mind, let us consider Four False Hopes as they are presented in Isaiah 20 and 21; and having done so, let us all the more focus upon the one true alternative to these false hopes, the Lord Jesus Christ, remembering *“that the one who trusts in Him shall never be disappointed”* (Rom. 9:33b.)

### I. Do Not Place Your Hope In Men (Isa. 20:1-6)

The Philistine city of Ashdod was the center of opposition against the Assyrian conquest of Palestine. The people of Ashdod had crowned a Philistine patriot as king—they did so with the encouragement of Egypt and the pledge of Egyptian support against Assyria. But the Assyrians sent their commander in chief—the Tartan—to overthrow this Philistine patriot and take possession of the city. This patriot king now fled to Ethiopia for refuge, only to have the Ethiopians hand him over to the Assyrians, while the Egyptians stood by, failing to come to his defense.

Thus, in verses 5-6 there is recorded the dismay and the confusion of those who had put their hope in Egypt; that nation proved to be both unreliable and unable to fulfill the expectations of those who had trusted in her:

*Then my people will be dismayed and will despair because of Ethiopia, who was their hope, and because of Egypt who was their confidence. ‘On that day the people who live along the coast will say, “Look, if this is our source of hope—those to whom we fled for help and deliverance from the king of Assyria—how shall we escape?”* (Isa. 20:5-6)

But the LORD had already foretold this outcome:

*... at that time Jehovah spoke through Isaiah the son of Amoz, saying, "Take off the sackcloth from your body and the sandals from your feet." And he did so, walking around naked and barefoot. <sup>3</sup>Then Jehovah said, "Just as my servant Isaiah has walked around naked and barefoot for three years as a sign and portent against Egypt and Ethiopia, <sup>4</sup>so shall the king of Assyria lead away naked and barefoot the Egyptian captives and the Ethiopian exiles, young and old, with bare buttocks—to Egypt's shame." (Isa. 20:2-4)*

According to verse 3, at the time the Assyrians laid siege to Ashdod, (which in three years time would result in its conquest,) the LORD commanded Isaiah to remove his sackcloth garment and his shoes; thus, for the space of three years Isaiah would present himself before the people as being practically naked and barefoot. Verses 3-4 supply the interpretation of Isaiah's appearance. Isaiah's naked (humiliated) appearance is a testimony of what will happen to Egypt and Ethiopia; the king of Assyria will lead away the captives of Egypt—young and old—naked and barefoot. Egypt, who encouraged Ashdod's revolt against Assyrian control, appeared to be a strong nation to whom much of Judah looked for security and deliverance. Actually, Egypt was living off of her past reputation of glory and power; when the Assyrians invaded her they were surprised to find how weak she was. Note: The deliverance of Egypt by the Egyptian leader, Psamtik, (referred to in the previous lesson on Isaiah 19:1-25,) occurred around the year 652 B.C., some time after the Assyrian invasion and subjugation that reached its height around 661 B.C. (*The Ancient World*, Vincent M. Scramuzza and Paul L. MacKendrick, p. 97.)

Let us not place our hope in men, or we will be bitterly disappointed. Some people place their hope in political leaders, only to find that they either break their promises or prove to be powerless to bring about any true change. Some people place their hope in the guy or girl of their dreams, only to find that even that special someone is unable to fulfill their dreams, to meet their deepest needs, and sometimes they even find that special person lets them down or even takes advantage of them. Some people place unrealistic hope in their children, expecting those children to render constant service to them, never expecting them to grow up and live a life of their own. Some people place unrealistic hope in their parents, expecting their parents to always provide for them, to always come to their rescue under any and all circumstances, and to always shield them from the harshness of this life.

On the contrary, let us place our hope in the Lord Jesus Christ. Proverbs 18:24b speaks of *"a friend who sticks closer than a brother;"* that friend is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. From personal experience the Apostle Paul can testify to the faithfulness of the Lord Jesus Christ, he writes to young Timothy: *"I know the one in whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day"* (2 Tim. 1:12b.)

## II. Do Not Place Your Hope in National Security (Isa. 21:1-10)

The next prophecy with its mysterious title, *“The oracle concerning the Wilderness by the Sea,”* is dealing with the great nation of Babylon.

In the future, from Isaiah’s perspective, Babylon would rise up under king Nebuchadnezzar to become the great superpower of the ancient world. But what this prophecy focuses upon is how transitory that great empire really was: Babylon is identified as *“the wilderness (or, desert) by the sea.”* In verse 1 Isaiah is referring to the fierce wind and dust storms that originate in the southeast desert and sweep through the south of Palestine with violent force. Like those violent and destructive storms in the Negev, so shall the conquerors storm across Babylon. Verse one is referring to the initial conquest of Babylon by the Medes and the Persians (also known as Elam) under Cyrus in 539 B.C.; a conquest that set in motion the process that finally reduced Babylon to a perpetual desert. Prophetically, the fall of ancient Babylon becomes a vision of the final destruction of the kingdom of man by the LORD Himself on the last great Day of Judgment. In the course of time once great Babylon literally did become a howling wilderness; the Roman historian, Strabo (born in 60 B.C.), wrote, “the great city has become a desert.”

Furthermore, this prophecy focuses upon how vulnerable that great society became; they lived in a state of careless, self-confident ease, and were swept away in a night (vs. 5.) Babylon is pictured as eating and drinking in revelry when suddenly the reveling is disrupted by the call to arms: *“Get up, you officers, oil the [battle] shields,”* for the enemy is at the door! Such was the actual state of affairs on the night Babylon was conquered. Cyrus, the Persian general, diverted the protecting waters of the Euphrates River to allow his troops to enter the city while the Babylonians feasted, confident of their security, oblivious to their imminent danger and doom. The Book of Daniel records the fall of the great empire of Babylon at the hands of the Medes and Persians: *“King Belshazzar gave a great banquet for a thousand of his nobles and drank wine with them ... <sup>30</sup>That very night Belshazzar, king of the Babylonians, was slain, <sup>31</sup>and Darius the Mede took over the kingdom”* (Dan. 5:1,30-31)

Let us not place our hope in national security, or we will be bitterly disappointed. Some people place their hope in the strength of their nation’s military might, viewing the nation as though it were invincible—but no nation can withstand the sovereign will of Almighty God: *“Surely the nations are like a drop from a bucket; they are regarded as dust on the scales”* (Isa. 40:15a.) Some people place their hope in the fact that the military power of a former superpower has apparently been broken; but the LORD can easily revive that power if He sees fit to do so, or He can raise up another such power to threaten the peace and stability of the world. Some people place their hope in the democratic system of government, but history has shown that such a government is fragile and relatively short lived.

On the contrary, let us place our hope in the Lord Jesus Christ, heeding the example of the Psalmist: *“Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of Jehovah our God. <sup>8</sup>They are brought to their knees and fall, but we rise up and stand firm. <sup>9</sup>O Jehovah, save the king! Answer us when we call!”* (Psl. 20:7-9.) Let us also bear in mind the example of our forefather Abraham, of whom it is written:

*By faith [Abraham] made his home in the Promised Land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. <sup>10</sup>He willingly did so because he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.* (Heb. 11:9-10;) in imitation of Abraham, our father in the faith, we are exhorted to *“seek first the kingdom of God”* (Matt. 6:33)

### III. Do Not Place Your Hope in “A Bright Tomorrow” (Isa. 21:11-12)

From out of Mt. Seir (the nation of Edom) comes the agonizing cry, *“Watchman, how far spent is the night? Watchman, how far spent is the night?”* The question is being asked, “When will the long night of oppression be over? How long before there will dawn a bright new tomorrow?” Note: *“Dumah”* (דִּוְמָה), meaning “silence,” “stillness,” “the place of the dead,” is a play on words, being closely related to the Hebrew word for Edom (אֱדוֹם), the capital of which was Seir. The Edomites are anxiously inquiring, When will this period of Assyrian oppression come to an end, and better times be introduced?

The watchman replies, *“Morning is coming—but also the night.”* In other words, the Assyrian oppression will eventually come to an end, but it shall be succeeded by future oppressive powers—such as the Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks, and the Romans. The world always hopes that it is on the brink of a Golden Age of everlasting peace and prosperity; but the hopes and dreams of the world always prove to be vain. Our Lord Jesus Christ declared, *“In this world you will have tribulation. But take heart! I have conquered the world”* (Jn. 16:33b.)

The watchman goes on to say, *“If you want to inquire, do so. Turn, and come.”* The watchman invites Edom to inquire further, to look to the prophet of God and the Word of God for true and lasting answers. Edom is exhorted to *“turn, and come;”* i.e., to repent and come to the LORD, and through the Savior to gain a place in the new creation, of which the Apostle Peter speaks: *“in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the place where righteousness dwells”* (2 Pet. 3:13.)

Let us not place our hope in “a bright tomorrow,” or we will be bitterly disappointed. As Christians, let us not be so foolish as to share in the perpetual hope of the world that there will be “a bright new tomorrow” of lasting peace

and prosperity in this present world. World War I was hailed as the “war to end all wars,” but within about twenty years there followed World War II, which in turn was followed by the Cold War and countless small-scale wars that threaten the peace and stability of the modern world. The most recent threat to peace and stability is terrorism.

On the contrary, let us place our hope in the Lord Jesus Christ, and His sure promise:

*Peace I leave with you; I give my peace to you. I do not give it to you as the world gives. Do not let your heart be troubled; neither let it be fearful ...<sup>1</sup>Do not let your heart be troubled; trust in God, trust in me also. <sup>2</sup>In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I am going to prepare a place for you. <sup>3</sup>And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me; so that where I am, you may be also. (Jn. 14:27,1-3)*

#### **IV. Do Not Place Your Hope in Finding “A Safe Place” (Isa. 21:13-17)**

The trading caravans of the Dedanites are instructed to seek shelter in the Arabian wilderness: *“O you caravans of Dedanites, you must camp in the forests of Arabia”* (vs. 13.) Even the caravan routes through the Arabian Peninsula have become unsafe, because the Assyrian armies have even penetrated into this region and threaten to ravage all traders who would venture along the usual routes of travel.

The inhabitants of Tema are described as having provided bread and water for these harried caravans—they have provided a ministry of mercy and have offered a place of refuge (vs. 14-15.) But, as verses 16-17 indicate, even such refuge shall prove to be temporary and insecure, for within a year all of Kedar (i.e.; Arabia) will be conquered by the invading Assyrians—and this has been determined by God.

Let us not place our hope in finding “a safe place,” or we will be bitterly disappointed. After the Persian Gulf War in 1991, a bright yellow ribbon on the porch of a Detroit home promised a hero's welcome for a young soldier. But within a few hours of his homecoming, he had been shot to death in the street in front of his own house. (*Our Daily Bread*, 4/29/92) In this present world we cannot escape the presence of sin, as Galatians 5:19 reminds us, *“the works of the sinful nature are evident;”* i.e.; they are in evidence wherever you go. Neither can we escape the hallmark of this sinful world, as our Lord informs us, *“In the world you have tribulation”* (Jn. 16:33a.)

On the contrary, let us place our hope in the Lord Jesus Christ:

*God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. <sup>2</sup>Therefore we will not fear, even though the earth gives way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea. <sup>3</sup>Even though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging ... <sup>7</sup>Jehovah of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. (Psl. 46:1-3,7)*

*These are the ones who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white by the blood of the Lamb. <sup>15</sup>Therefore, they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tabernacle over them. <sup>16</sup>Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat; <sup>17</sup>for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. (Rev. 7:14-17)*

## **Conclusion**

Hope is essential. Without hope we cannot survive. But it is not only important to have hope; it is also important to have a true and worthy object of our hope. As Christians, let us not be like those who place their hopes in this present world, only to be bitterly disappointed.

In contrast to the world, and as a witness to the world, let us place our hope in the Lord Jesus Christ and His faithful promises. Let us remember the divine assurance recorded for us in Romans 9:33; those who place their hope in the LORD shall never be disappointed.