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The Oracle Concerning Arabia

21: 13-17

The oracle concerning Arabia DIG: What are the Arabian cities of Dedan and Tema told to do? Which fugitives (or refugees) are they to care for? What does the future hold for Arabia or Kedar? How do you think these three prophecies against Babylon, Edom, and Arabia affect Judah's sense of hope as they consider the Assyrian threat? Why do you think God had Isaiah reveal these things to Judah?

REFLECT: Do you sometimes feel like collateral damage in this life? Dedan got caught in the crossfire of something beyond her control? Where did Dedan go for help? What happened to those who lived in Tema? Why? What happens when you take control of the steering wheel of your life? What is the alternative?

The Assyrian threat is the background of this **oracle**. The **Dedanites** were a tribe from southern **Arabia**. **Tema (Jeremiah 25:23)** was a well-known oasis in northwestern **Arabia**, and **Kedar (42:11)** was in northern **Arabia**. This **oracle** discusses the difficult times the people of **Arabia** would soon experience at the hands of the Assyrians. **Isaiah** uses play on words here. The meaning of the root letters for **Arabia** and *evening* are the same three Hebrew letters. Only the vowel patterns change. The night that **Edom** is to suffer, that *night of Edom*, will creep into **Arabia** as well. Only in **Arabia** it will be more in the sense of *evening* rather than the night.

An oracle concerning Arabia (21:13a). The **NKJ**, which is a word for word translation, reads: **The burden against Arabia**. The **NIV**, which is a thought for thought translation, reads: **An oracle concerning Arabia**. Muslims translate the Bible to read *the burden upon Arabia*. They teach that those who believe in **the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob** (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ, to see link click Ja - Whose Wife Will She Be at the Resurrection**) are trying to destroy them; thus, it is the responsibility of all Muslims to spread their belief that Allah is the only god and his messenger is

Muhammad, throughout the world (see my comments on **21:7**).

Isaiah focuses on two key cities. In the Dispensation of Torah, **Arabia** was never a unified kingdom as it is today in Saudi **Arabia**. Rather, until recently, **Arabia** was comprised of various tribes. Here **Isaiah** focuses on two key tribes. The first one is the tribe of **Dedan**, or the **Dedanites**. **Dedan** is probably identified with the modern al-Ula, which is about ninety miles southeast of the second tribe of **Tema**.

This **near historical prophecy for Arabia** came true. In 715 Sargon II wrote that he had defeated a number of **Arabian** tribes and had deported them to Samaria. In 703 Arabs joined **Merodach-Baladan (39:1)** in rebellion against Assyria and were crushed by Sennacherib. The tribe of **Dedan** had settled just east of **Edom**. **Their** origin is mentioned in **Genesis 10:7** and **25:3**. Because of **their** proximity to **Edom** they are often referred to together in the Prophets (**Jeremiah 49:8** and **Ezeki'el 25:23**). But here, the **Dedanites** are viewed as fleeing from war and having to hide. Although **their** main economy was based upon the caravan routes, **they** suddenly found **they** needed to camp **in the thickets of Arabia** off the beaten path (**21:13b**).

Bring water for the thirsty, you who live in Tema, bring food for the fugitives (21:14). **Tema** is about two hundred miles southeast of Dumah on the incense trade route. The word for **fugitives** occurs in **16:2-3** of the Moabites fleeing from danger. The **Dedanites** could not even go into the city to buy **food**. The tribe of **Tema** needed to feed them. Suddenly, this highly independent, self-sufficient **Dedan** tribe needed to depend upon other tribes for food and **water**. **Tema** was in northwest **Arabia (Job 6:19** and **Jeremiah 25:23)**. **They** could have **fled** to Jerusalem but **the Arabian** tribes sought to be self-sufficient.



They flee from the sword, literally *from before swords, from the drawn sword, swords, from the bent bow and from the heat of battle (21:15)*. The reason why the **Dedanites** must hide is because **they** were caught up in the reality of war. The word *swords* suggests being caught between two opposing forces. They were collateral damage. So inner **Arabia** became a haven for those fleeing from the warfare that would engulf the more fertile lands around the edges of the desert. Where could **they** find help?

Then **Isaiah** turned his attention to a second **Arabian** tribe, that of **Kedar (Genesis 25:13)**. The glory of **Kedar** was **her** merchant trade and control over certain caravan routes is mentioned elsewhere in **Isaiah 42:11, 60:7** and **Ezeki'el 27:21**. **Kedar** was a very wealthy, strong tribe. **They** lived in tents, but **they** were quite elaborate tents. They looked ugly from the outside, but they were quite beautiful on the inside. The tribe of **Kedar** was known for its tents (**Psalms 120:5**).

The mode of traveling in a caravan is peculiar. They travel four camels abreast, which are all tied one after another, like in teams. The whole body is called a caravan, which is divided into several companies, each of which has its own name and could include thousands of camels. The camels have bells about their necks, which, with the singing of the camel drivers, who travel on foot, make pleasant music. Though there is great confusion at the setting out of a caravan, its different companies and divisions soon settle down into a condition of order.⁶⁹

Then **Isaiah** prophesies. **This is what the LORD** says to me: **Within one year, as a servant bound by contract would count it, all the pomp of Kedar will**

come to an end (21:16). In other words, **Kedar** will fall **within one year**. This was assured because **ADONAI, the God of Isra'el** had **spoken**. The boldness of this statement is lost on us today. What does **ADONAI** have to do with **Babylon** or **Edom** or **Arabia**? **They** had **their** own gods. But **Isaiah** dares to say it is *his God* alone who holds the nations in **His** hand. Do you believe that today? Is it true that the Word of **God** alone shapes the destiny of the nations? Apart from the sovereignty of **God** is there any hope for mankind that seems intent on destroying itself?

The survivors of the bowmen, the warriors of Kedar will be few, because they would experience a great defeat (**21:17a**). When judgment hits, **her** population will decrease (**Jeremiah 49: 28-33**). **The survivors** will become fugitives, running for **their** lives from the sword. For **Arabia**, this will be **evening**. Notice the contrast with **the Edomites**. For **Edom** it is night, total destruction. No one was left. But for **Arabia**, it is **evening**, because a remnant will survive into the Millennial Kingdom. This was **the far eschatological prophecy for Arabia**. The **oracle** would be fulfilled, for **ADONAI, the God of Isra'el**, had **spoken (21:17b)**.

The suffering **Dedanites**, and their helpers of **Tema**, tried to control **their** plight with **their** own resources, and the results speak for **themselves**. Like **Edom** and **Egypt**, **Arabia** teaches us what happens when we cut **the LORD** out of the picture and take the steering wheel of our lives into our own hands. The bottom line is this: **Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight (Proverbs 3:5-6).**