

God's wrath. The Hebrew word literally means "something lifted or carried." A natural conclusion would be that the word denotes a burden of coming misery to be laid upon an enemy of God. Yet this interpretation must not be adopted unless it fits all cases, and some of the burdens prove on examination to contain promises of blessing as well as threats of punishment. Thus the burden of Egypt (ch. 19) ends with a prediction of a wonderful time of blessing when a regenerated Egypt will stand among the people of God as a companion to Israel. It is necessary to conclude that in most of its occurrences in this section the word "burden" does not mean a weight of punishment laid upon a nation, but a message or revelation carried by the prophet. It is used to introduce special prophetic declarations, generally (but not always) about foreign nations. A burden may be as long as two chapters, as in 15-16, or as short as two verses, as in 21:11-12.

Seven of these burdens have names that are well known to all Bible readers: Babylon, Moab, Damascus, Egypt, Dumah (Edom), Arabia, and Tyre. Two of them bear picturesque titles which do not indicate a particular place. These two are "the burden of the desert of the sea," and "the burden of the valley of vision."

Sometimes our section is called "prophecies against foreign nations." Such a title is not strictly accurate. One of the burdens (ch. 22) is not concerned with a foreign nation, but with Judah itself. This is called "the burden of the valley of vision." It describes the wrath of God against the human pride of the people of Jerusalem, and shows His dealing with individuals in the time of Isaiah. These individuals, Eliakim the son of Hilkiyah, and Shebna, are mentioned in the historical sections, in 2 Kings 18-19 and in Isaiah 36-37.

Survey of the "Burdens"

The first and longest of the burdens, that against Babylon, occupies nearly two chapters. In Isaiah's day Assyria, rather than Babylon, was the great enemy. Babylon was of comparatively little importance at that time. Yet Assyria has no burden (though it is mentioned several times in chapter 20), and Babylon has the longest and most prominent one. Isaiah