

There can be no question that Merodach-baladan's real purpose in sending an embassy to Jerusalem was to get Hezekiah to join with him in making plans for common action against Assyria. For a period of nearly a century Babylon was a thorn in the flesh to the Assyrians. The Assyrian kings were constantly having trouble with the Babylonians, who, though frequently conquered, often revolted. During a considerable portion of this time, Merodach-baladan was the leader of the opposition to Assyria. The Elamites, who were themselves afraid of the tremendous power of the Assyrians, joined with him and for a number of years they succeeded in holding back the forces of King Sargon. Eventually Merodach-baladan was driven out of Babylon, but he was able to take refuge in the marshy land near the shores of the Persian Gulf and thus to escape capture by the Assyrians. Eventually he returned and again established himself as king of Babylon. Again the city was attacked and he was compelled to flee for refuge to the wild country at the edge of the Persian Gulf.

This fact provides a clue to the title of the vision -- the Burden of the Desert of the Sea. It is a play on the fact that Merodach-baladan had to flee for refuge to a region which could well be described as the wilderness of the sea.

Babylon is Fallen

A number of statements in this passage show the prophet to be tremendously upset by the fate of Babylon. It is an attitude altogether different from any which he displays in chapters 13 and 14. It is by no means the typical attitude of the prophet of God when dealing with the great forces which oppose God's will in the world. The reason is that the prophet is not here considering Babylon as an enemy. He thinks of it rather as a great power to which the people are tempted to look for help. "A grievous vision" -- "the treacherous dealer deals treacherously" -- "my loins are filled with pain" -- "pangs have taken hold upon me" -- "I was dismayed at the seeing of it" -- phrase after phrase piles up to show the intense emotion of the prophet. It is representative of the feeling of the Israelites, as they look for help from Egypt,