

ISAIAH — LESSON ELEVEN

ISAIAH 12-21

CHAPTER TWELVE

Rejoicing and Thanksgiving of the Remnant

Chapter 12 begins by connecting with the end of chapter 11, specifically with the redemption of the remnant which identifies what is meant by “in that day.” The deliverance of God’s people, the remnant, will evoke thanks to Jehovah that his anger has turned away and he now seeks to comfort (v. 1). How different this language is from that with which prior refrains were concluded – his hand is stretched out still. God is praised as the source of salvation; he is trusted for security; he is looked to for strength (v. 2). Those forgiven and redeemed are satisfied for they draw waters out of the wells of salvation (3). This language is similar to the song of Moses on deliverance from Egypt (Ex. 15:2). Joy should always be characteristic of the redeemed. How can it be otherwise, for we too drink the water of life from the wells of salvation (Rev. 21:6; 22:1, 17; John 4:14).

One of the Psalmists wrote, “Let the redeemed of the Lord say so” (Psa. 107:2). Isaiah urges the same: say it in thanks to Jehovah; say it calling upon his name; say it by declaring his doings among the peoples; say it by exalting his name and making it known; say it by declaring his excellent deeds; say it by making all these things known throughout the whole earth. Cry it aloud and shout it for “in the midst of thee is the Holy One of Israel” (vv. 4-6).

One of the beautiful characteristics of Paul’s writings is the frequency with which he breaks forth in a doxology praising the God of Heaven for his new creation and the salvation that it brings. Clearly he did not take for granted the spiritual blessings bestowed upon him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Eph. 1:3), and neither

should we. How can we not faithfully worship him in spirit and in truth and proclaim his name and salvation among men?

SECTION TWO

Oracle of Judgment Against Individual Nations (13-23)

Introductory Comments on Section Two

Section Two of Isaiah's prophecy declares the future of ten nations. One of the prophecies relates to Judah, and two relate to Babylon (13:1 -14:27; 21:1-10). Isaiah has already dealt with the fall of Assyria (ch. 10) and the coming of God's kingdom from the Sprout of David (chs. 7-11). Now he addresses the future of the heathen nations whose actions relate to the people of God. God will use the heathen nations to accomplish his purpose, and then they will be destroyed before God's kingdom is established.

There are at least two issues related to these chapters. 1) when were they written, and 2) was Isaiah the author, especially insofar as these chapters relate to Babylon. While there are some time indicators in these chapters,¹ for the most part no time is stated nor are there time indicators from which the time can be determined.

It is the absence of time indicators that leads liberal theologians to conclude that Isaiah could not have written the chapters that pertain to Babylon. After all, they assert, Assyria was the dominant world power at this time and, to the extent Babylon existed, it was subject to Assyria. What could possibly have indicated at the time Isaiah wrote that Babylon would ever replace Assyria and the ruler of the world? This being the case, they conclude, Isaiah could not have written chs. 13:1-14:27. That in turn means that these chapters were not written by Isaiah during his lifetime, but must

1. 14:38 identifies the year of the death of Ahaz (715 B.C.) as the time at which Isaiah received the prophecy related to Philistia. The date of Tartan's coming to Ashdod (713 B.C.) was the time at which Isaiah was commanded to give a symbolic message to Judah (ch. 20).

have been written by someone else at a much later date when Assyria was gone and Babylon had become dominant.²

Chapter Thirteen

The Oracle Against Babylon

Vv. 1-5 – The Call to Arms

The heading of chapter 13, “Oracle concerning Babel, which Isaiah the son of Amoz did see,” indicates that a second major section of the work has been reached. The Hebrew word *Massâh* may be translate either “oracle” or “burden.” It really makes no difference. The “oracle” is God’s judgment for sin; the “burden” is that which is borne because of sin, a burden that is determined by the judgment of God.

Jehovah issues a call to arms – set up an ensign on the mountain where it can be seen and call and hand signal for the army to gather through the gates of the nobles, either

2. These specious arguments are dealt with here and have already been dealt with in the introduction. This information should be remembered when studying chs 21 and 29 (dealing with Babylon), and chs. 44:28-45:7 where hundreds of years before the birth of Cyrus he was named as the deliverer from Assyria. There are other references throughout the book that raise the same issue. There are two basic positions: 1) the prophecy of Isaiah is a patchwork of writings from multiple sources written at various and sundry times when the events were occurring without divine guidance or supernatural intervention; or 2), they were written by Isaiah during his lifetime with the intervention of divine guidance and supernatural inspiration from one who could proclaim the future and who had the power to bring to pass the events that he had said would occur in the future. God surely knew that there would be such unbelievers. Could this have been one of the reasons that In chapters 41-48 he challenged the gods of wood, clay, and metal to a contest reminiscent of the one between Elijah and the prophets of Baal (2 Kings 18:20-40). He risked his glory upon his ability to declare the end from the beginning and the inability of the idols to do the same. For believers the issue was settled long ago. It was settled when Isaiah declared his prophecy to be “the vision of Isaiah, the son of Amoz.” Inspiration confirmed that statement with an “Amen” when Peter declared that “no prophecy ever came by the will of man; but men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Pet. 1:21). It makes all of the difference in the world, not to mention the world to come, when your God begins with a capital “G”!

into Babylon or into cities ruled by nobles or princes (2). The urgency of the summons is demonstrated by the three-fold signal. God has called for his consecrated and mighty men to execute his wrath (3). Jehovah's command is quickly executed and the multitudes assemble from the mountain with great noise; the nations gather together. There is no doubt about who is in charge; it is Jehovah's army and it gathers from the uttermost part of heaven and Jehovah will use them as weapons of his indignation to destroy the land (4, 5).

Vv. 6-16 – The Terror of the Day of Jehovah

The command issues to wail and cry because the day of Jehovah is at hand and it will come as destruction from the almighty (6). But how can the destruction of the land occur when the land has not even been established in Jeremiah's day? There was no Nebuchadnezzar, must less one who could say, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honor of my majesty (Dan. 4:30)?" Once again Isaiah uses the prophetic perfect, *i.e.*, he speaks of a future event as if it had already happened. When God has said that it will happen its occurrence cannot fail. It is so absolutely certain that it is described in a manner that declares its certainty. Those who see it will be utterly amazed and stand helplessly by with melting heart and severe pain. Their faces will be flushed and red like fire from having observed mighty Babylon burn to the ground (7-8).

Again the Lord declares the day of Jehovah and describes its fierceness. It will come with cruelty, wrath, and fierce anger to make the land desolate and to destroy the sinners out of it. The stars and the sun will withhold their light and the moon will not shine (9-10). It is a day of judgment and God declares that he will punish the world for its evil, the wicked for their iniquity, the proud for their arrogance, and the terrible for their conceitedness. Man will become so rare that he will be as precious as gold, even the pure gold of Ophir (11-12).³ This language may also refer to the remnant that

3. Place to which Solomon sent a fleet of merchant ships to bring back gold and all sorts of precious and exotic products. The location of Ophir is not certain; most place it in southwest Arabia. There may be a relationship between the place and the man named Ophir, who appears in the table

cannot be redeemed with silver and gold but only by the blood of the Lamb (1 Pet. 1:18-20).

Continuing to describe the day of Jehovah and the fall of Babylon, Isaiah declares that it will involve the trembling of the heavens and the shaking of the earth out of its place. Isaiah wrote this at a time when man did not know that God had created the earth with a “place” and that just the slightest displacement would render the earth uninhabitable by man. Man will flee like the roe flees from the hunter and wander like sheep without a shepherd. Both are objects of pity. Is not man the same without God? He thinks that he is self-sufficient, but in the day of God’s visitation he is as helpless and the roe and the sheep. There is nothing left to do but flee, each man for himself (13-14).

Fleeing does not accomplish safety because every person found will be “thrust through” and all captives will fall by the sword. Their infants will be dashed to death before their eyes, their houses plundered, and their wives raped (15-16). God will use the Mede’s to accomplish his purpose. They are interested only in revenge and power. But Babylon is a wealthy nation. Can it not buy them off? Can Babylon not pay tribute and save itself? The Mede’s have not interest in such. Offer them silver they not even stop to look at it. Offer them gold and they will show no desire to possess it. They will only unleash their bows and show no mercy to man, pregnant women, or children (17-18).

Isaiah now reaches the heart of his message. The final destruction of Babylon is described (19-21). Was this prophecy fulfilled? Not immediately. Cyrus left the walls and the city of Babylon still standing. In 518 B.C. the walls were destroyed. Then

of nations as a son of Joktan (Gn 10:29; cf. 1 Chr 1:23), a descendant of Shem. The names of Joktan and his sons are connected with the southern and western parts of Arabia. *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*.

Xerxes destroyed the temple of Belus.⁴ As Seleucia⁵ rose Babylon declined, and in Strabo's time⁶ Babylon was a desert that he described as "a great desert is the great city." Jerusalem will continue because God has declared that it will be the birthplace of the kingdom that cannot be destroyed (2:2-4) but Babylon will be utterly destroyed and fade into history and be forever uninhabited.

Isaiah is trying to teach us that even if it seems like an uneven fight to tackle "Babylon" (the powerful countries and the magnificent cities), it is not. Isaiah knows something about the Holy One of Israel that "Babylon" does not know. He knows that the battle is indeed an uneven fight, but not in the direction that the world thinks. Years later when Isaiah was dead and Babylon was at its height, the God of the captive Jews humbled Nebuchadnezzar, the mightiest of the Babylonian kings, by making him eat grass like an ox (Dan. 4:24-25). The words that Nebuchadnezzar spoke at the end of that experience were true then and are true now:

Dan. 4:34 And at the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the Most High, and I

4. As the chief temple in the land after Babylon became the capital, and the type of many similar erections, E-sagila, was the temple of **Belus**. According to Herodotus, it was a massive tower within an enclosure measuring 400 yards each way, and provided with gates of brass, or rather bronze. The tower within consisted of a kind of step-pyramid, the stages being seven in number (omitting the lowest, which was the platform forming the foundation of the structure). A winding ascent gave access to the top, where was a chapel or shrine, containing no statue, but regarded by the Babylonians as the abode of the god. Lower down was another shrine, in which was placed a great statue of Zeus (Bel-Merodach) sitting, with a large table before it. Both statue and table are said to have been of gold, as were also the throne and the steps. Outside the sanctuary (on the ramp, apparently) were two altars, one small and made of gold, whereon only unweaned lambs were sacrificed, and the other larger, for full-grown victims.

5. **SELEUCIA** Syrian city on Mediterranean coast, five miles north of the Orontes River and 15 miles from Antioch. Paul stopped there on his first missionary journey (Acts 13:4). It was founded by Seleucus Nicator, the first Seleucid king, in 301 B.C.

6. Strabo was a Greek historian who lived from 64 B.C. to c 23 A.D.

praised and honored him that liveth for ever; for his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom from generation to generation.

Dan. 4:35 And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?

Dan. 4:36 At the same time mine understanding returned unto me; and for the glory of my kingdom, my majesty and brightness returned unto me; and my counsellors and my lords sought unto me; and I was established in my kingdom, and excellent greatness was added unto me.

Dan. 4:37 Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven; for all his works are truth, and his ways justice; and those that walk in pride he is able to abase.

How sad that we, like the ancient Hebrews persist in trusting everything but God. We give our allegiance to physical things and to flesh and blood as if they could give us significance and worth. In reality those things pass faster than we can imagine and faster than we want to believe. Reality is that that in which we trust will soon be gone.

What then will survive? It is not the work of humans amassed by cleverness or oppression. It is not our finest works of art and culture. In the end, while they may survive their creators, they are as fragile as we are. One day the finest cathedrals will fall, as did Solomon's temple and the Mona Lisa will crumble into dust. If we trust our power, someone more powerful than we will emerge; If we trust our intelligence someone smarter than we will emerge; if we trust our creativity, someone more creative than we will emerge; if we trust our allies, they will one day run away before an enemy mightier than we, and they may even become the enemy themselves.

All of this supersedence comes from the fact that we are neither self-originating nor self-authenticating. It is foolish to trust in humanity that has breath in its nostrils (2:22). Rather we should be looking to the eternal that shall not pass away. We may love our country and sorrow over the unmistakable signs of its demise that are all about us. But if we put our hope in its eventual recovery and success, that is vain hope. Yes, God may give us a revival accompanied by more years to come. But the end will

come. How foolish it is to trust the veil when we can trust the one behind the veil and who will one day most certainly rend that veil in two.

Chapter Fourteen

A Taunting Song over the Fall of the Tyrant (vv. 1-27);

The Burden of Philistia (vv. 28-32)

Vv. 1-2 – Compassion on Jacob

These verses are generally considered to be part of chapter 13. Babylon's destruction is precedent to Judah's restoration. Jehovah will bring them again to their land. Isaiah speaks here not of the theocracy but of a new people chosen of God to be established in their homeland. It will include both Jews and Gentiles because "the sojourner shall join himself with them and they shall cleave to the house of Jacob." The peoples (plural) will bring the Jews back to their place. Cyrus issued the decree that released them from captivity and returned them to their land. Darius and Artaxerxes assisted in building the temple (Ezra 6). Artaxerxes allowed Nehemiah to return and build the walls of Jerusalem (Neh. 2). The prophecy that the house of Israel would rule over its oppressors was not to be taken literally, but spiritually or figuratively. It was fulfilled as the oppressors were conquered by the Spirit of God. Paul stated it well in 2 Cor. 10:5 when he spoke of "bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ."

Vv. 3-11 – The Taunting Song Against Babylon

The setting for the taunting song begins with an assurance to Israel that for the Israel of the future there will be a day of rest from sorrow and troubles and from the hard service of captivity. It is then that they are to take up a parable in song against the King of Babylon. It is not a song rejoicing at the misfortune of another, but a song of rejoicing in the work of God. Isaiah is taken beyond his own day to the day that Babylon has fallen, the oppressor and the golden city ceased. There will be no more tribute paid to Babylon. The staff of oppression and the scepter of power are broken. As a result the earth is at rest and breaks forth into song. Sheol is agitated at the

prospect of the Babylonian tyrant coming to its realm. Perhaps it is even surprised that one so great should ever fall: "Art thou also become weak as we? Art thou become like unto us?" In the place where it goes its music is silenced and worms replace its kingly garb. How the mighty have fallen!

Vv. 12-20 – The Fall of the Mighty

The opening verse of this subject has been a source of controversy over the years. Connecting this verse with Luke 10:18, v. 12 was interpreted by some early church fathers as referring to Satan's fall from heaven. The Hebrew word translated "day-star" (Lucifer⁷, KJV), derived from a word meaning "to shine," refers to the morning star. Some suggest that the event recorded in Isaiah 14:12 may be an example of a story quite commonly known in the time of Isaiah. This old Canaanite story concerned the morning star, who had attempted to rise high above the clouds and establish himself on the mountain where the gods assembled, in the uttermost part of the north. He had desired to take the place of the highest god, becoming ruler of the world. His attempts were thwarted, and he was cast into the underworld. This story of the minor star deity aspiring to ascend above the throne of the most high god served, in the purposes of Isaiah, as an excellent analogy to the pride and aspirations of the king of Babylon, the person with whom chapters 13 and 14 are concerned. Isaiah states (14:3, 4) that Yahweh, the God of Israel, would give the people relief from the tyranny of their oppressors, and they would take up a taunt song against the king. Although he had sought to be great, he would be brought low; he who sought to be a god would, with his descendants, cease to exist on the earth. Though the Hebrews had no myths, illustrations from familiar gentile mythology often were used to express spiritual truth.

7. The Hebrew expression was probably never meant to be a name, but has come to be used thus because the verse in which it occurs is applied to Satan. This apparently was done first by two of the church fathers, Tertullian and Origen. However, the popularity of Lucifer as a name for Satan may be attributed to its use in John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*.

There are many who believe the expression (and surrounding context) refers to Satan. They believe the similarities between Isaiah 14:12, Luke 10:18, and Revelation 12:7–10 warrant this conclusion. However, although the NT passages do speak of Satan's fall, the context of the Isaiah passage describes the defeated king of Babylon. The Babylonian king had desired to be above God, and so fell from heaven. His doom is pictured as already accomplished. Though defeat is certain for Satan, he yet continues his evil acts against God's people. Isaiah, then, is not speaking of Satan in 14:12 but of the proud, and soon to be humiliated, king of Babylon. Some think that the last half of the verse changes his figure of speech from the morning star to a tree. That may be, in which case he is saying that the one who had felled nations would himself be felled in their midst like a great tree. On the other hand, Isaiah may be continuing his figure of speech by saying that Babylon is a brilliant star whose glory is cut down by a fall from the height of heaven.

Vv. 13ff. seem to confirm the reference to Babylon. The boast attributed to him is clearly an assertion that he is greater than God. While there is no record of these exact words coming from the mouth of a Babylonian king, Isaiah is proclaiming that which he "said in his heart" (v. 13). His heart can be determined from his words and his actions (vv. 14-20). The result is that described in verse 12 – he will be brought down, even to Sheol, the uttermost parts of the pit (15).

Vv. 21-27 – It Is the Vengeance of Jehovah

The time has come. The order is given to prepare slaughter for his children because of their fathers' sins so that there are no descendants to rise up and behave as their fathers. Jehovah will rise up against them and destroy name and remnant (not God's remnant), and all generations. It will be a habitation for porcupines and pools of water, having been swept with the besom ("broom" ESV) of destruction (21-23). When a nation reaches the point of such corruption and wickedness that it is unfit to continue, God brings it to an end. It was as true of John's Babylon (Rev. 19:20) as it was of ancient Babylon, and so shall it ever be.

Much has been said about Babylon, but Assyria is the dominant world power when Isaiah was writing. For Babylon to arise Assyria had to be taken down. Jehovah here announces that that shall indeed happen. Indeed, Jehovah has sworn that he will bring to pass his purpose and that it shall stand. To accomplish that purpose he will break the Assyrian in his land and upon his mountains and tread him under foot. The result will be that the burden of the Assyrian yoke will depart from Israel's shoulder (24-25). As at the beginning of these verses God assured its certainty, so he does again at its conclusion. Assyria may feel that it is the master of its own fate, but God reminds that what is happening is happening according to his purpose and no power can annul it. His hand was stretched out and no one could turn it back (26-27). As Omar Khayyâm wrote in *Rubáiyát*:

The Moving Finger writes: and, having writ,
Moves on: nor all thy Piety nor Wit
Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line,
Nor all thy Tears wash out a Word of it.

Man would do well to learn the truth of Proverbs 19:21: "There are many devices in a man's heart; But the counsel of Jehovah, that shall stand."

Vv. 28-32 – The Oracle Against Philistia

The Philistians were around long before Israel came to the Promised Land. They were there when Abraham arrived (Gen. 21:32, 34), and remained with Isaac (Gen. 26) and Moses (Ex. 13:17). They were there when Joshua led Israel into the Promised Land, and Israel constantly fought with the Philistines during its existence. David finally subdued them. With Arabian allies they later came up against Jehoram and carried off much plunder. Uzziah conquered several Philistine cities and destroyed their walls (2 Chron. 26:6-7). It was Edomite and Philistine victories that led Ahaz to seek security from Tiglath-pileser (Assyria) (2 Chron. 28:16-21). Hezekiah rebelled against Assyria. Having favor with Jehovah, Hezekiah defeated the Philistines. The philistines were still under the judgment of God in the days of Jeremiah (Jer. 25:15-17, 20). Jeremiah declared that the end result would be Philistia's complete destruction (Jer.

47). Zephaniah declared that there would be no inhabitant (Zeph. 2:5). As late as Zechariah God said that he would cut off the pride of the Philistines (Zech. 9:6).

This oracle of God was declared in the year that Ahaz died (715 B.C.).⁸ The Philistines had rejoiced because the rod that had subdued them had been broken. God told them that their rejoicing was premature because “out of the serpent’s root shall come forth an adder, and his fruit shall be a fiery flying serpent.” What this means is not clear. Delitsch argues that it refers to the house of David, that David and Solomon ruled over Philistia, that when, following Solomon, Israel was divided, Philistia rejoiced. He concludes that the rejoicing was premature because out of the root of David would come a serpent whom he identifies as Hezekiah. Following Hezekiah would come the Messiah who would pronounce final judgment upon Philistia. This position seems to be no more than trying to connect a series of historical facts in a manner to fulfill prophecy. The approach is similar to the historical interpretation of the Book of Revelation, and, like the historical approach to Revelation, is not persuasive.

Rawlinson⁹ has a more reasonable understanding supported by Assyrian texts: “The Philistines had suffered grievously at the hands of Judah in the reign of Uzziah (2 Chron. 26:6), and had retaliated in the reign of Ahaz (2 Chron. 28:18). It would seem that after this they were invaded by Tiglath-Pileser, who penetrated as far as Gaza, which he took (‘Records of the Past,’ vol. v. p. 51), as he also did Ascalon (‘Ancient Monarchies,’ vol. ii. p. 399). Tiglath-Pileser died shortly before Ahaz, and the present “burden” seems to have been uttered in connection with his death. Isaiah warns Philistia (equivalent to “Palestina”) that her rejoicing is premature; Tiglath-Pileser will have successors as powerful and as cruel as himself, and these successors will carry destruction and ravage over the whole land.” However, this explanation is not without difficulty. As noted above, as late as Jeremiah God, referring to Babylon, said that Philistia would drink of the cup of Jehovah’s wrath. Still later, after the return from Babylonian captivity, Zechariah said that the pride of Philistia was still to be cut off.

8. There is no indication of whether it was declared before or after Ahaz’s death.

9. Rawlinson, George, *Isaiah, Pulpit Commentary*.

So what does it mean? Based on the above, Hailey concludes that the Assyrians were the rod that was broken, the Babylonians were the adder, and a third unnamed power is the flying serpent that will deliver the final blow. Were I an original commentator I might be forced to confess, "I don't know."

The poor and needy will be spared (the attack will come while they are being fed and sleeping safely), the root and remnant of the Philistines will be destroyed. Every city is to howl and cry; not one shall be spared. They are melted away. The smoke out of the north is understood to be the smoke of the invaders campfires or the smoke from burning cities and the invaders approach or just a symbol of fiery destruction. Whatever the meaning, it does not declare the utter destruction of Philistia. That will be left for the fiery serpent.

Comments on God's Swearing

God's nature is such that he cannot lie (Titus 1:2; Heb. 2:18) so what does his swearing add to either his promise or his prophecy? As the Psalmist wrote, "He keepeth his promise forever (Psa. 146:6). Perhaps God is simply accommodating his creature because he knows that we have a propensity to distrust one another. After all, who is there among men who has not failed to fulfill a promise or who has not been disappointed by a promise's not being kept? Could it be that God sometimes, but not often, confirms his promise with an oath to give us greater certainty and to provide us greater comfort? A survey of his oaths seems to support that conclusion. After the flood God covenanted with Noah as the representative of all future mankind that he would never again destroy the earth by flood (Gen. 9:11) and Isaiah tells us that he did so with an oath (Isa. 54:9). He swore to Abraham that he would give him the land of Canaan (Gen. 24:7). He promised David in a covenant confirmed with an oath that he would establish his seed forever and build up his throne to all generations (Psa. 89:3-4). He swore to his own son that would be a High Priest forever after the order of Melchizedek (Psa. 110:4).¹⁰ In v. 24 God swore that the yoke of the Assyrians would be

10. Does this not argue against our hypothesis that God's oaths are for the certainty and comfort of his creatures? Christ does not fall into that category because he is not created save in his being

broken and removed. It is a beautiful thought that God's eye is on the sparrow, but how much greater is the thought that God never takes his eye off of his remnant. How comforting it is that he knows our frame and remembers that we are dust (Psa. 103:14). Is it not true that we often condescend (in the right sense of the word) to speak with our little children to encourage and comfort them? Surely God by his oaths is doing the same. "Like as a father pitieth his children, So Jehovah pitieth them that fear him (Psa. 103:13). 17 Wherein God, being minded to show more abundantly unto the heirs of the promise the immutability of his counsel, interposed with an oath; 18 that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we may have a strong encouragement, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us: 19 which we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and stedfast and entering into that which is within the veil. . . . (Heb. 6:16-19)"

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

The Burden of Moab (1)

Vv. 1-4 – Crying, Weeping, and Trembling over Desolation

made in the likeness of man and being found in fashion as a man (Phil. 2:6-8). His eternal nature is that he exists in the form of God. Not only does scripture not tell us why God made this oath to Christ, it does not tell us when. It does tell us that on the Mount of Transfiguration God sent Moses and Elijah to speak with Christ about his decease that he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Could it be that this was the occasion that God made such an oath to comfort Jesus' earthly nature as he was prepared for the moment that he would be forsaken by both man and God; to assure him that "thy will be done" was the right path to walk (Matt. 26:42); to confirm to him as a man that his flesh would not see corruption (Psa. 16:10; Acts 2:31). It is difficult to deny that the human side of Jesus needed comfort and assurance in light of his plaintive cry, My God! My God! Why hast thou forsaken me Matt. 27:46?" Of course, it could be that the oath was not for Christ at all, but was for us. When we read his inspired record of these events his oath assures us Christ was indeed only the first fruits of them that sleep and that there shall be a resurrection for us (1 Cor. 15:2-24).

The Moabites were descendants of Lot by his first-born daughter (Gen. 19:37). The handout for this lesson shows where Moab was located in relation to Judah and Israel. Chapters 15 and 16 name 23 locations; only some 10 can be identified today. Only Babylon and Egypt receive more attention from Isaiah than that which he gives to Moab. Through Terah Moab and Israel had a common ancestor. Despite that kinship Moab and Israel were bitter enemies. David had great contempt for Moab, describing it as his “washpot” (Psa. 60:8). The language that Isaiah uses to describe the judgment against Moab is striking. The Moabites will weep, wail, grieve, they will cry out. Even their armed men will cry out with his soul trembling within him. It is so stark that Isaiah’s heart cries out for Moab while her nobles flee (1-5). This map locates Moab after the Northern Kingdom’s fall.



Vv. 5-9 – The Prophet’s Lament

Isaiah’s lament for Moab arises from the destruction that he sees coming. More of the effects of that judgment are outlined. Nimrim, which flows into the Jordan above the Dead Sea at the northern limit of Moab, will be desolate, the grass withered leaving no green thing (6). In desperation they will flee seeking to save their possessions by carrying them across the brook of the willows¹¹ (7). The Moabites will seek refuge in Edom to which their cry has reached, even unto Eglaim and Beer-elim.¹² Give the

11. A reference to the Zered River that marked the border between Moab and Edom.

12. The location of both these cities is uncertain. The best “guess” is on the eastern boundary

status of the River Dimon, its waters are full of blood, it is not surprising that the crying goes up. But there is more – God will bring further catastrophe (a lion) upon even the remnant of the land that escapes. The end will be total destruction.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

The Burden of Moab (2)

Vv. 1-5 – Moab's Hope

These verses are difficult.¹³ One commentator lists six possible interpretations. Who is speaking? To whom is he speaking? Perhaps it is not clear because it makes no big difference. Whoever is speaking to whom the message is that Moab, in its distressed condition, can find hope only in Judah. The tribute is to come from Selah (Semitic for Petra, “rock” or “cliff”), the capital of Edom, through the wilderness to the mount of the daughter of Zion (1). There is no explanation of why the Moabites would send tribute from the Edomite capital. Perhaps the Moabites with their flocks had taken refuge there. Perhaps it relates to a rocky section of Moab to which they had fled. Wherever the origin, the tribute was to flow through the Edomite wilderness to Jerusalem (2 Kings 3:4-8).

The daughter of Moab would be in a confused state, compared to birds that have been flushed from their nests. They flutter about at the fords of the Arnon which are near the land of Judah (2).

Verse 3 calls for the giving of counsel and the execution of justice, but does not designate by whom the counsel is to be given or by whom justice is to be administered. Some suggest it is an appeal by Moab begging Judah for asylum. Others think that it is Isaiah beseeching Moab to accept fugitives from Judah so that Moab may receive reciprocal treatment in the future. Still others think that Isaiah is advising Moab on how to bring and present its tribute to Judah. Moab is to ask for counsel and justice,

with Edom.

13. Much of the difficulty arises from the fact that the time of this prophecy is unknown.

for protection (shade) for refugees, provide complete cover, as night in the midst of noonday. Moab is to implore Judah to provide protection and accept the risk of hiding its former enemies.

Verse 4 presents similar difficulties. Is it Moab or Judah that is being addressed? If Judah is addresses the outcasts are Moabites. If Moab is being addressed, the outcasts are Israelites. You may take your pick and find a commentator that will support your conclusion. If we are correct on verse three, Isaiah is advising Moab to make a plea to Judah so that God would show them mercy. Judah would be in position to offer refuge because the extortioner is brought to naught, destruction has ceased, and the oppressors are consumed out of the land.

Refuge is offered. It is offered in the form of a Messianic prophecy that provides that refuge from all enemies will be provided in Zion under the Messianic David (see Amos 9:11-12) who will establish a throne in loving-kindness, judging, and seeking justice, and swift to do righteousness (5).

Vv. 6-12 – Moab’s Rejection of This Hope

Why did Moab not seek and accept Jehovah’s offer of refuge? Could it be “the pride of Moab” (6)? Moab is a braggart but its braggadocio will be brought to naught. What Moab can and will do is wail and mourn for the raisin-cakes¹⁴ of Kir-hareseth.¹⁵ (See Jeremiah’s comments on Moab’s arrogance, Jer. 48:7, 11, 14, 42). How many of our

14. “As this was the principal fortress of Moab, and according to Isa. 15:1 it had already been destroyed... . But in every other passage in which the word occurs it signifies a kind of cake; and as the devastation of the vines of Moab is made the subject of mourning afterwards, it has the same meaning here as in Hos. 3:1, namely *raisin-cakes*, or raisins pressed into the form of cakes. Such cakes as these may have been a special article of the export trade of Kir.” Keil & Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*

15. **Kir-Hareseth; Kir-Heres:** Modern scholars unanimously identify this city with Kir of Moab. In Jehoram’s invasion of Moab it alone withstood his attack; and on the city wall the king of Moab sacrificed his son (2 Ki 3:25 ff). It was obviously the capital, i.e. Kir Moab. The name is generally taken to mean “city of the sun.” *The International Standard Encyclopedia*.

politicians today invoke God's name and ask for his blessing while arrogantly ignoring his will and wisdom?

Vv. 8-10 describe the price that Moab will pay for its pride. It is so devastating that it leads Isaiah to weep for Moab (9). "Wherefore" (11) introduces the conclusion of the devastation. Isaiah's weeping continues; his heart sounds like a harp and his inward parts (sound) for Kir-heres. The Moabites will present themselves in the high places, the sanctuaries of their gods. They will pray until they are weary, but they will not prevail (12).

Vv. 13-14 – The Fixed Time of the Visitation

At least three suggestions have been expounded for when this prophecy was made. Some refer it to prophecies earlier made by Moses (Num. 21:27-30; 24:17) and by Amos (Amos 2:1-3). Others attribute the prior prophecy to an unidentified prophet and Isaiah now repeats that prophecy. It is more likely that the prophecy was made earlier in Isaiah's ministry and he now proceeds to proclaim that its fulfillment is nigh. The time is certain since the description of the time, within three years, is the normal time of the years of a hireling. The worker wants no more; the hirer wants no less. Some construe this to mean exactly three years. Some construe it to mean not over three years. No one construes it to be more than three years. Since the time of the prophecy is unknown it is not possible to tell whether it was fulfilled under Shalmaneser, Sargon, or Sennacherib. All that would be left is a remnant so small that it would be of no account. Jeremiah (48:45-47) writes that such a remnant did survive and remained until Nebuchadnezzar's invasion, after which Moab would be as Sodom (Zeph. 2:9).

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

The Burden of Damascus

Vv. 1-3 – The Judgment Against Damascus

Damascus is an ancient city, some say the oldest continuously inhabited city in the world. Its origin is unknown, but it existed in the days of Abraham (Gen. 14:15; 15:2). Damascus was about 135 miles northeast of Jerusalem near the Abana and Pharpar rivers (Remember Naaman, 2 Kings 5:12.). It was the Syria's capital until about 300 B.C. Conflict between Syria and Israel increased during the reign of Omri and Ahab. Conflict between Damascus and Assyria eventually led to Damascus' downfall. Isaiah's prophecy against Damascus includes Ephraim because of the Syriac-Ephraimitic uprising (ch. 7). Since Ephraim joined a heathen power against God's people it would share the same judgment. Additional prophecies against Damascus are found in Amos 1:3-5, Jer. 49:23-27, and Zech. 9:1.

Isaiah begins by announcing that Damascus will lose and never recover the importance that she had enjoyed. In contrast it would be a ruinous heap. This language does not refer to the destruction of all of its buildings, though some of them certainly were. Rather it refers to its glory that shall lie in waste. The cities of Aroer¹⁶ will be deserted by all and be fit only for sheep to graze. The sheep can lie down in peace because there will be no one to make them afraid.

Both Ephraim and Damascus will be destroyed; Ephraim will lose its fortress and Damascus will lose its kingdom. Their plot to ruin others led to their own ruin. It came to pass under Tigleth-pileser.

Vv. 4-11 – The Leanness of Jacob

Syria fell in 732 B.C. Israel followed in 722 B.C. With its fall the glory of Jacob wastes away and the fat of his flesh grows thin (1). Since Syria had not yet fallen at the time of this prophecy, it occurred prior to 732 B.C. Verse 2 illustrates the fall by comparing it to reaping heads of grain. The result is little grain is left. The valley of Rephaim is

16. Three cities bear this name in scripture ([1] 1 Sam. 30:28; [2] Josh. 13:25, Judg. 11:26; [3] mentioned often in scripture). Since Jeremiah mentions Aroer in his prophecy against Moab (Jer. 48:19), it is likely that this is the city that Isaiah had in mind in his prophecy. Syria took Aroer under King Hazael, and it became Syria's southwest extremity (2 Kings 10:32-33). Based on Jeremiah's prophecy it appears that Moab had regained it.

named as the place of gleaning. Thus it is likely a place where Isaiah's hearers had seen such harvesting on numerous occasions (5). Again, it will be like the harvesting of an olive tree leaving only a few olives in the top and hard to reach places of the tree (6).

In that day, the day of waste and the leaving of little, the remnant, small though it may be, will look to God rather than to the made by their hands (7-8). Also in that day their strong cities will be forsaken and desolate (9).

The reason for the desolation is that they forgot the God of their salvation and had not been mindful of the rock of their strength. They had planted pleasant vines (their idols) and tended them well, but they had turned out to be "strange slips" (10-11, "vine slips of a strange god," margin, ASV).

Vv. 12-14 – The Destruction of the Invader

Isaiah now turns attention to the nation that God used for punishing Syria and Ephraim – Assyria. Assyria has already been described as a river overflowing Judah (8:5-8) and as the rod of God's anger against Israel and Judah (10:5-27). His present description is just as vivid. Assyria will come like the roaring of the seas. It seems to be more than just a tidal wave. It will be a tsunami. But the destroyer shall itself be destroyed. Jehovah will rebuke them and cause them to flee like chaff blown by a mountain wind and like dust before the storm. Assyria will come as a terror but the next day it will not exist. This is a vivid description of the destruction of Sennacherib's army outside the gates of Jerusalem. This chapter closes with great assurance, "This is the portion of them that despoil us, and the lot of them that rob us." God cares for and takes care of his people to accomplish his purpose. What shall we say of those who, today, seek to overthrow the work of God. Need we worry about God's being defeated by humanism, Communism, secularism, Zionism or any or all of the other "Gogs" and "Magogs" that seek to overthrow him? Not at all. Our only worry should be whether he will have brave soldiers who will march onward.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN¹⁷

Ethiopia

Vv. 1-3 – The Ambassadors and the Prophet’s Word to Them

Ancient Ethiopia (the land of Cush), lay south of Egypt. It had a large desert; its lifeline was a strip along the Nile River. It is often associated with Egypt (see, *e.g.*, Ch. 20 and 2 Chron. 14:9-15. Isaiah mentions Tirhaka, king of Ethiopia, and his attempt to check Sennacherib in Judah (37:9). The probable date of the events of this chapter is the period of the Assyrian threat to Judah (720-702 B.C.) Chapter 18 is the most difficult chapter thus far. From whence came the ambassadors and to whom were they

17. The following comment concerns chapters 18-20. It is from Keil & Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*. It gives a good basis to understand these chapters. “The three prophecies in Isa. 18, 19 and 20 really form a trilogy. The first (Isa. 18), which, like Isa. 1, the introduction to the whole, is without any special heading, treats in language of the sublimest pathos of *Ethiopia*. The second (Isa. 19) treats in a calmer and more descriptive tone of *Egypt*. The third (Isa. 20) treats of both *Egypt* and *Ethiopia* in the style of historic prose. The kingdom to which all three prophecies refer is one and the same, viz., the Egypto-Ethiopian kingdom; but whilst Isa. 18 refers to the ruling nation, Isa. 19 treats of the conquered one, and Isa. 20 embraces both together. The reason why such particular attention is given to Egypt in the prophecy, is that no nation on earth was so mixed up with the history of the kingdom of God, from the patriarchal times downwards, as Egypt was. And because Israel, as the law plainly enjoined upon it, was never to forget that it had been sheltered for a long time in Egypt, and there had grown into a great nation, and had received many benefits; whenever prophecy has to speak concerning Egypt, it is quite as earnest in its promises as it is in its threats. And thus the *massa* of Isaiah falls into two distinct halves, viz., a threatening one (vv. 1–15), and a promising one (vv. 18–25); whilst between the judgment and the salvation (in vv. 16 and 17) there stands the alarm, forming as it were a connecting bridge between the two. And just in proportion as the coil of punishments is unfolded on the one hand by the prophet, the promise is also unfolded in just as many stages on the other; and moving on in ever new grooves, rises at length to such a height, that it breaks not only through the limits of contemporaneous history, but even through those of the Old Testament itself, and speaks in the spiritual language of the world-embracing love of the New Testament.

sent. What is the significance of their being tall and smooth, and of their sending or bringing a present to Jehovah? Commentators give numerous answers to these questions.

Isaiah's introductory word, "Ah," is either an expression of anguish or it may be describing the great distance of the country of which he is about to speak. In either case, the land in question is a land of rustling wings or, the marginal reading, or "shadowing of wings" (ASV). The Hebrew word is translated "locust" in Deut. 28:42. In effect, it is a land of insects, though it is not stated whether they were flies, locusts, or any of other numerous possibilities. Young suggests that it may have been the tsetse fly that was associated with Ethiopia. His purpose, however, does not seem to be so much to assert that the land was filled with some insect as it was to speak of the land as one of swarming hoards of people. This land has armies equipped for foraging and conquering. They move like insects with wings over lands that they would destroy. Hailey identifies the rivers as the White and Blue Niles with their tributaries.¹⁸ Isaiah does not name the nation that sends the ambassadors or to whom they are sent. The ambassadors travel in vessels of papyrus, which indicates that the "sea" is likely a river since papyrus vessels, which were in fact used, were fit only for rivers or lakes, but were not seaworthy. The ambassadors were sent from Ethiopia to "a nation tall and smooth, to a people terrible from their beginning onward, a nation

18. **Nile** — dark; blue, not found in Scripture, but frequently referred to in the Old Testament under the name of Sihor, i.e., "the black stream" (Isa. 23:3; Jer. 2:18) or simply "the river" (Gen. 41:1; Ex. 1:22, etc.) and the "flood of Egypt" (Amos 8:8). It consists of two rivers, the White Nile, which takes its rise in the Victoria Nyanza, and the Blue Nile, which rises in the Abyssinian Mountains. These unite at the town of Khartoum, whence it pursues its course for 1,800 miles, and falls into the Mediterranean through its two branches, into which it is divided a few miles north of Cairo, the Rosetta and the Damietta branch.

that meteth out and treadeth down, whose land the rivers divide.” Their destination has been surmised to be Judah¹⁹ or Ethiopian villages.²⁰

Note that “saying” in verse 2 is an interpolation without which it is not clear who is speaking. Its presence says that the ambassadors are speaking. But could it be that Isaiah is speaking to the ambassadors instructing them to return to their home and be quiet because God will take care of things. 2 Kings 19:9 lends some credence to this position. Ethiopia certainly was a tall and smooth people. They had success in war with Egypt from 1000 B.C. to 663 B.C.. Ethiopia’s history has certainly included times of “meting out and treading down” as well as periods of being meted out and trodden down. It was the former state in Ethiopia’s history when Isaiah was prophesying. It was also a country whose land was divided by the rivers (margin, ASV, “have despoiled”).

In v. 3 Isaiah calls for the world to note a coming event. In metaphorical language he describes a banner being lifted upon the hills of Zion accompanied by the sound of a trumpet announcing judgment. This introduces the word of Jehovah that follows.

vv. 4-6 – Jehovah is in Control

On his throne from whence he controls the universe God will behold that which transpires. His time of beholding may seem as indifference, but before the Assyrians have garnered their harvest Jehovah will destroy the threatening enemy. The destruction will be so complete that the birds and beasts will feast upon the dead summer and winter. The Assyrian had boasted of his greatness (10:8-11), but not even

19. The supposed purpose of visiting Judah would supposedly have been to incite resistance and revolt against Assyria or to stir up Judah in some way against a common enemy. Barnes supposes just the opposite – the ambassadors were “to the people of Nubia or Ethiopia forming an alliance with the Assyrians for the purpose of invading Judea.”

20. The purpose of sending ambassadors from the king of Ethiopia to Ethiopian villages would have been to stir up his people against an invasion by the Assyrians.

the greatest power on earth is a match for Jehovah. It is Jehovah and not Assyria who will determine the outcome.

V. 7 – Ethiopia’s Homage to the Lord

The ambassadors return and report the great victory (37:36-37; see Zeph. 3:10), as a result of which the “people tall and smooth” send a present to the place of the name of Jehovah of hosts, Mount Zion. There is no record of Tirhakah’s sending a present to Mount Zion, but that is not to say that it did not happen. When the Lord had destroyed and scattered David’s enemies, David wrote, “Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall haste to stretch out her hands unto God” (Psa. 68:31).

CHAPTER NINETEEN

An Oracle Concerning Egypt

Vv. 1-17 – Threats

Egypt has a long and storied history. The Bible student is interested in only a part of that history, some 2,000 years from Abraham’s sojourn in that land (Gen. 12:10-13:1) to the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26-40). During that period God’s people were greatly influenced by Egypt’s religion, culture, and economy. Chapter 19 falls into two distinct divisions: threats (vv. 1-17) and promises (vv. 18-25). Through most of its history Egypt had been an oppressor of God’s people. However, the chapter closes with a promise of blessing and hope for both Egypt and Assyria (v. 25). For additional prophecies concerning Egypt see Jer. 46; Ezek. 29-32; Joel 3:19.

Vv. 1-4 – Internal discord: The failure of idolatry

The use of Oracle” and “burden” has already been discussed (Chapter 13). God comes to judge Egypt striking fear into the hearts of the Egyptians and their false gods. Egypt shall be divided by internal strife from neighbor to neighbor to kingdom to kingdom. Its spirit will fail; its counsel destroyed; their only recourse will be to the necromancers. Egypt will be defeated and given over to a cruel lord and fierce king. It is not clear whether Isaiah is here speaking of one king or using the term to include all

kings who defeated Egypt during this period. The Assyrians defeated Egypt several times and then, under Ashurbanipal, sacked Thebes (the Noamun of Nahum 3:8) in 663 B.C. Later, as Jeremiah prophesied (Jer. 43:10-13; 46:13-26), Nebuchadnezzar brought down the land of Egypt. Cambyses led a Persian army against Egypt and brought it under his rule. When Egypt revolted against Persia the wrath of Xerxes 1 fell on them. Alexander the Great was looked upon as a deliverer when he freed Egypt from Medo-Persian tyranny. By New Testament times Egypt was under the rule of Rome.

Vv. 5-10 – Natural and economic disaster

Nothing was more important to the Egyptian economy than the Nile and its tributaries, here referred to as the “sea.” It will fail and the river will become dry (5). All drivers will be foul, diminished, and dried up. The wetlands and the grassy fields, necessary to the production of food, will wither away (6-7). The fishers of the Nile cannot save the economy. They can only lament and languish because they have no catch by either angle (hook) or net (8). Egypt was noted for its garments of flax and cotton but they are no more (9). All classes from the highest (the foundations thereof) to the lowest (all that work for hire) will be grieved in soul.

Vv. 11-15 – Foolish counsel

Isaiah returns to the discussion of v. 3 – foolish counsel. Zoan was located in the northeast section of the Delta near the border. Between 1080 and 715 B.C. it was a capital of the pharaohs. During the period of 715 – 644 B.C., it was used occasionally by the Nubian rulers as a royal residence. Egypt, once known for its wisdom (Acts 7:22), had princes of Zoan who were foolish; the wisest counselors were brutish.²¹ They cannot claim to be wise or the sons of wise men because their counsel will betray them. The “wise men” are challenged to come forward and to hear that which Jehovah has purposed concerning Egypt. But that will not happen because the princes of Zoan have become fools and the princes of Memphis are deceived. In their foolish and

21. They were without reason, irrational, stupid.

duped condition they have led Egypt astray. The cornerstone of the people have led their people to destruction (11-13).

The God who is in control has determined this sad condition in which the people go astray in every work much like one who is vomiting drunk. The result is that no work will be accomplished by the leaders or the workers. They shall all tremble with fear because Jehovah is shaking his hand over them. Even Judah, a small part of the people who were once Egypt's slaves, shall make them afraid. It shall not be accomplished their own. It is because of what Jehovah of hosts purposes against Egypt. It is Judah's God who makes them tremble.

Vv. 18-25 – Promises

v. 18 – The transition from threats to promises

“In that day” ties the time to the day when the prophecies of judgment will be fulfilled. Days of blessing follow days of judgment. Some hold that the “five cities” are literal cities; however, they cannot agree either on the identity of the five cities or the time that is in view. It seems to be better to understand “five” to represent a small number. The meaning of “speak the language of Canaan, and swear to Jehovah of hosts” is a major difficulty. Most commentators think the language is Hebrew. They then look for Jewish leaders who, after the time of Isaiah, could have introduced the worship of Jehovah to Egyptian cities. Others see the phrase as a reference to the time of spiritual unity under the Messiah. However, there is no Biblical support for the proposition that “the language of Canaan” ever was used to signify the language of national or spiritual Israel.

It is more reasonable that the phrase is a reference to “the merchant people” (see, Isa. 23:11, margin, ASV).²² These traffickers were laden with silver and were to be cut off (Zephaniah 1:11, see margin). Zechariah 14:21 may give the reason when, in the day of

22. See also, Hosea 12:7, “He is a trafficker”; Ezek. 7:4, “a land of traffic,” margin, ASV, “the land of Canaan”.

Jehovah's reign under the Messiah "there shall be no more a Canaanite in the house of Jehovah of hosts.

The next phrase that describes one of the five cities and "the city of destruction" is just as difficult. Some commentators just surrender and conclude that there is no satisfactory explanation. If that is in fact the case it is worth looking at the text closely to determine if there is a possible variant that makes sense. One possibility is that by a slight change of one consonant the word could be translated "City of the Sun." This could refer to Heliopolis, the center of the worship of the sun god, Ra, and the passage then would be predicting its destruction. Jeremiah 43:13 offers some support for this understanding. Speaking of the invasion of Egypt by Nebuchadnezzar, whom God calls "my servant" (v. 10), Jeremiah writes: "He shall also break the pillars of Bethshemesh (margin ASV, "the house of the sun Probably Heliopolis, that is, On"), that is in the land of Egypt; and the houses of the gods of Egypt shall he burn with fire." If this is correct, then Isaiah seems to be saying in v. 18 that amid idolatry and confusion there will be some who swear to Jehovah while they continue to speak the mixed language of error and truth – the language of Canaan – until the pure spiritual language of Jehovah comes. As they do so, the center of Egyptian idolatry will be destroyed.

Vv. 19-22 – Jehovah to be known to Egypt

As in v. 18, "in that day" refers to the period being discussed in this chapter. The worship of Jehovah will be established in the midst of Egyptian idolatry. "Altar" obviously includes sacrifices; however, the term may be used either literally or figuratively (Heb. 13:10). The first recorded altar erected in scripture was that of Noah (Gen. 8:20).²³ The patriarchs erected various altars. Moses erected altars outside of Palestine. Once the promised land was entered, the Israelites were to offer sacrifices only in the place where Jehovah recorded his name. Only there were altars to be erected (Exod. 20:24; Deut. 12:5, 11, 14). Those who offered sacrifices elsewhere were

23. This is not to say that Noah's altar was the first altar ever erected. Abel's offering may well have been upon an altar, but there is no Biblical record of his having erected an altar.

to be cut off (Lev. 17:8-9). Given these facts, it does not seem possible that a literal altar is under consideration in this passage.

To what then does the passage refer? If the passage refers to a literal conversion of Egypt and Assyria (vv. 22-25) when was it fulfilled? Some seek to find fulfillment in early centers such as Alexandria and the Coptic Church that has continued through the centuries. New Testament Christianity certainly existed in Egypt.²⁴ It probably began

24. Although no mention is made of the beginnings of **Egyptian Christianity** in the NT, other material and literary evidence suggests that Christianity started there early and became well established. The most important city for the rise of Christianity in Egypt was Alexandria.

Egyptian Jews who heard the gospel on the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem (Acts 2:10) were probably the first to introduce Christianity to Alexandria. Eusebius passes on a tradition, obtained by hearsay, purporting that Mark was the first to found churches in Alexandria and that he remained and functioned in a leadership capacity until the eighth year of Nero (Eusebius *Hist. Eccl.* 2.16; 2.24.1). Most scholars discount the viability of this tradition because of the better attested accounts of Mark accompanying Peter as his interpreter and composing his Gospel in Rome (Papias *Frag.* 3.15; Eusebius *Hist. Eccl.* 3.39; Metzger, 100; see DJG, Mark).

Alexandria was a natural place for the spread of the gospel to the rest of Egypt and to the (north) African continent. The city was a key commercial center, possessing the busiest port in the empire. Strabo, who spent five years in the city working on his *Geography*, remarked that Alexandria is “the greatest emporium of the inhabited world” (Strabo *Geog.* 17.1.13). With a population of up to a half-million people, Alexandria was the second largest city of the Roman world. Among this population was the largest Jewish settlement in the diaspora.

It is doubtful that Apollos provides us with insight into the early Christian community in Alexandria (Acts 18:24–28) in spite of the testimony of the Western text that he had been instructed in the way of the Lord “in his native place [*en teæ patriði*].” Apollos was only familiar with the OT and the baptism of John, not the gospel of Jesus Christ. We can only speculate as to where he came into contact with the John-the-Baptist tradition.

The *Epistle of Barnabas* is the oldest Christian document from Alexandria that we possess. This document was written after some monumental events in the Alexandrian Jewish community: a horrific massacre of Jews under Tiberius Julius Alexander in A.D. 66, the reverberations from the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in A.D. 70 and the decimation of the Jewish community in Alexandria after they revolted during the reign of Trajan (A.D. 115–17; see Judaism, Post-A.D. 70). The content of *Barnabas* reflects some significant similarities to Stephen’s speech as recorded in Acts 7. In both, there is an emphasis on the demise of the temple cult, an appeal to the golden-calf episode

with the conversion of Alexandrian Jews. Thus, there are two possibilities: 1) there was a turning to God by the Egyptians and Assyrians in the days of Old Testament sacrifices; and 2) The Egyptians and Assyrians were included among the nations that would flow unto Zion. As for the first, there is no historical record of such turning. While it is true that nations heard of God's deliverance of his people from Egypt and trembled as a result (Josh. 2:8-11), there is no indication that such trembling led to conversion. The second possibility seems more reasonable if Isaiah himself is permitted to comment. Isaiah had already spoken of a time when all nations would flow unto God's mountain (2:2-4). He has said that the Root of Jesse would be an ensign to the peoples and the nations will seek him (11:10). Jehovah says that he "will give [the Servant] for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles," to bring

of the exodus, and a similar christology, including the use of the title, "the Righteous One." B. Pearson suggests that, "this type of Christianity was introduced to Alexandria soon after the death of Stephen and the scattering of the 'Hellenists' from Jerusalem" (Pearson 1986, 213). Since Alexandrian Jews already tended toward a spiritual interpretation of the temple and its observances, the ground was well prepared for the reception of Christianity along the lines expressed by Stephen (*see* Hellenists).

Perhaps some of the most significant discoveries illustrating the spread of Christianity into various parts of Egypt have been the fragments of NT and LXX biblical texts on papyri. The earliest of these, the John Rylands fragment of the Gospel of John (P52), dates to the first half of the second century. Another fragment of the Gospel of John dating to the second century was published in 1983 and has been designated (P90). Further analysis of P64 has recently led C. Thiede to suggest a late first-century date (in *ZPE* 105 [1994] 13-20), though this is debated. A fragment from an unknown Gospel (Egerton Pap. 2) dates to the middle of the second century. We could also add to this a number of early fragments of the Greek OT that have been found scattered throughout Egypt which show signs of being Christian copies. Metzger observes that for every papyrus fragment discovered in Egypt, scores have perished or still lie hidden in the sand (Metzger, 101-3). All this points to a thriving Christianity in Egypt that has radiated from its origin in Alexandria to various parts of the hinterland.

At a very early date, it appears that forms of Christianity began to emerge that deviated significantly from the apostolic brand of Christianity represented in the NT documents. From the second century on, Alexandria became a noted center for Gnosticism through a variety of famous teachers such as Basilides and Valentinus. The discovery of the Nag Hammadi documents in the late 1940s has given us a much better understanding of the varieties of Gnosis present in the city at a very early stage.

them out of the darkness (42:6), and that he would “also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation” (49:6). Of the redeemed nations Jehovah said, “Even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer: their burnt-offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon mine altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples” (56:7; cf. Mark 11:17). This fulfillment in the coming of the Messiah has further support in the remaining verses.

Vv. 23-25 – Universal worship of Jehovah

There will be a highway between Egypt and Assyria. It will no longer be used for war but to enable common worship. Isaiah has already used this metaphor to describe the return from Assyria (11:16). It is this highway that is the way of holiness for the redeemed (35:8). It reaches its climax in 62:10. God’s plan has triumphed and the nations will leave behind the rule of the flesh and will turn to walk after the rule of the spirit. These nations united with God’s remnant (v. 24) will bless the earth because Egypt has become God’s people, Assyria the work of his hands, and Israel his inheritance (25).

CHAPTER TWENTY

Egypt and Ethiopia

Vv. 1-6 – The Trust That Failed

Isaiah has already announced the destiny of Ethiopia (ch. 18) and God’s judgment on and promises to Egypt (ch. 19) In 715 B.C. Egypt was overcome by Shabako, ruler of Ethiopia, who united the two under the overlordship of Ethiopia, a subservience that continued until 664 B.C. This period is what Isaiah seems to be discussing in this chapter.

The year that Tartan²⁵ came to Ashdod was 713 B.C. Ashdod was a major city in Philistia under subjection to Assyria. It was probably the most fortified city of Philistia. While Sargon is famous in history, this is the only place his name is mentioned in scripture. He succeeded Shalmaneser V to the Assyrian throne in 722 or 721 B.C.²⁶ and played a significant role in the history of Judah and Israel. Ashdod miscalculated as weakness Sargon's not having conducted a major excursion into Palestine after 720. Based upon that miscalculation Ashdod rebelled in 713 B.C. While it drew others into the rebellion, Judah does not seem to have been one of them. Ashdod was taken. Sargon himself led a campaign against the rebels in 711 B.C. Promised help from Egypt and Ethiopia never came.

God assigned Isaiah a symbolical message. He was to remove his sackcloth from off his loins and his shoes off his feet. Isaiah did as he was commanded and walked naked²⁷ and barefoot among the people. The tenure of Isaiah's symbolic message was three years. The subject was the defeat of Egypt and Ethiopia by Assyria. For a period there was intermittent war between Assyria and Egypt. The decisive battle occurred in 663 B.C. when Ashurbanipal sacked Thebes (Noamon, Nahum 3:8), carrying away captives and much plunder (3).

Had they listened to Isaiah they would have known that Egypt and Ethiopia would not be around to help because Assyria would lead them away. Their not being either around or able to assist Judah would leave Judah dismayed and confounded. They expected help from Ethiopia and they expected Egypt to assist them in maintaining their glory. They had not yet learned that leaning on the arm of flesh will fail. It leaves

25. "Tartan" is not the name of a person. It is the title of the Assyrian-commander-in-chief.

26. Keil & Delitzsch place Sargon's reign from 721 – 702 B.C.

27. With the great importance attached to the clothing in the East, where the feelings upon this point are peculiarly sensitive and modest, a person was looked upon as stripped and naked if he had only taken off his upper garment. What Isaiah was directed to do, therefore, was simply opposed to common custom, and not to moral decency. He was to lay aside the dress of a mourner and preacher of repentance, and to have nothing on but his tunic (*cetoneth*); and in this, as well as barefooted, he was to show himself in public. This was the costume of a man who had been robbed and disgraced, or else of a beggar or prisoner of war.

the people of the coast-land²⁸ with a confession and one question. They confessed that they had looked to Ethiopia and Egypt for deliverance from Assyria. That having failed, they ask how they will escape (4-6).

Surely this message is for us today. How similar it is to the message in the Hebrew letter. "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great a salvation? which having at the first been spoken through the Lord, was confirmed unto us by them that heard" (Heb. 2:3). And again, "See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not when they refused him that warned them on earth, much more shall not we escape who turn away from him that warneth from heaven" (Heb. 12:25).

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Babylon, Dumah, and Arabia

Vv. 1-10 – Babylon, The Wilderness of the Sea

This chapter contains three burdens – Babylon, Edom, and Arabia. The dates of Isaiah's prophecy of these burdens is uncertain.

The historical background of this burden is helpful to its understanding. Shalmaneser V died around 722 or 721 B.C. Upon his death Merodach-baladan rebelled against Assyria and proclaimed Babylon's independence. In 710 B.C. Sargon II attacked Babylon and was welcomed as a deliverer. In 703 B.C. Merodach-baladan made another attempt at overcoming Assyria's rule. It may be that his sending ambassadors to visit Hezekiah upon Hezekiah's cure from a terminal illness was an attempt to get Hezekiah to join with him (2 Kings 20:12-18; Isa. 39). Sennacherib responded with a major campaign against Babylon in 700 B.C. followed by another in 695 B.C. that resulted in the sacking of Babylon. Sennacherib was murdered and his son, Esarhaddon, followed him to the Assyrian throne, ruling from 681-669 B.C. Esarhaddon rebuilt Babylon and brought it some stability for a while. Trouble again erupted and Ashurbanipal and his army marched on Babylon in 651 B.C., besieging it

28. This probably includes all of Palestine, including Phoenicia, Philistia, and Judah.

from some three years. The king of Babylon, despairing of victory, set fire to his palace and perished in the flames. In 626 B.C. Nabopolassar drove the Assyrians out of Babylon and was made king. In 612 Ninevah was destroyed, and upon Nabopolassar's death in 605 B.C. his son, Nebuchadnezzar became king. He was Babylon's last powerful king. During his 53 year reign (605-562 B.C.) he made Babylon one of the world's most beautiful cities, his Hanging Gardens becoming one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. In 539 Cyrus captured Babylon and brought the Babylonian Empire to an end. He did not destroy Babylon, but it began to slowly decline. With the invasion of Alexander the Great, the decline accelerated.

Isaiah is not given to using symbolic names, but he does use some.²⁹ Here he calls Babylon "the wilderness of the sea."³⁰ Isaiah has already spoken of Babylon's future destruction (13:20-22; 14:23) and will speak of it again (ch. 47). The burden that comes upon Babylon will sweep through Babylon as whirlwinds in the South from a terrible land. The grievous (hard) vision that God gave Isaiah was that Babylon, treacherous nation that dealt treacherously with men and a destroyer that destroyed men and nations, would itself be destroyed. It would come from Elam and Media which, depending upon the time in view, would be aligned with either Assyria or Cyrus. The defeat of Babylon would cause the sighing of oppressed people, including Judah, to cease. That which Isaiah saw in his "hard vision" was such that it led to his great anguishing.³¹ He saw the leaders of Babylon set a watchman and then go to the banquet tables to eat and drink. Instead of debauchery Babylon's leaders are called upon to arise and prepare for battle. The battle is not named. It could be Babylon's fall

29. Ethiopia is "the land of rustling wings" ((18:1); Edom is "Dumah" (21:11); Jerusalem is "Ariel" (29:1); Egypt is "Rahab" (30:7).

30. Jeremiah helps to understand the phrase when he speaks of Babylon saying, "O thou that dwellest upon many waters. . . thine end is come" (51:13; see, Jer. 50:38; 51:42-43). John helps even more in Rev. 17:15 when he says of Babylon, "The waters which thou sawest, where the harlot sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues."

31. It may seem strange that a prophet would anguish over God's judgment revealed in the vision. However, how could God's prophet rejoice at the perishing of Babylon when God himself is not willing that any should perish (2 Pet. 3:9).

at the hands of Cyrus or it could be used to summarize the many attacks that ultimately led to Babylon's fall.

Vv. 6-10 – The watchman and his mission

The Lord instructs Isaiah to set a watchman who is to declare that which he sees. When he sees the approaching troops he is to cry out their coming and announce that Babylon is fallen. The result will be the destruction of her gods and graven images that are broken unto the ground. Jehovah has carried out his will and the lifeless powerless gods of Babylon have utterly failed and been brought to naught. This declaration lays the groundwork for Chapters 40-66.

There is a difference of opinion on whether “my thrashing and the grain of my floor” refers to Babylon or Judah. Keil & Delitzsch argue for the latter: “Threshing is a figure used to represent *crushing oppression* in Isa. 41:15 and Mic. 4:12, 13; and *judicial visitation* in Jer. 51:33 (a parallel by which we must not allow ourselves to be misled, as Jeremiah has there given a different turn to Isaiah's figure, as he very frequently does); and again, as in the present instance, *chastising plagues*, in which wrath and good intention are mingled together. Israel, placed as it was under the tyrannical supremacy of the imperial power, is called the *medūsshâh* (i.e., the threshing) of Jehovah,—in other words, the corn threshed by Him; also His “child of the threshing-floor,” inasmuch as it was laid in the floor, in the bosom as it were of the threshing-place, to come out threshed (and then to become a thresher itself, Mic. 4:12, 13). This floor, in which Jehovah makes a judicial separation of grains and husks in Israel, was their captivity. Babylon is the instrument of the threshing wrath of God.”

Vv. 11-12 – The Burden of Edom

Edom is also known as Dumah. The name as used here is symbolical. It means deep, utter silence, and therefore the land of the dead (Psa. 94:17; 115:17). The name is turned into an emblem of the future fate of Edom. It becomes a land of deathlike sleep, deathlike darkness (11). The oracle consists of one question addressed to Isaiah from Seir and Isaiah's answer. The inquiry seeks to know how far the night is spent. Like a sleepless person wants the night to end, so also the Edomites want to know how much

remains of their night of tribulation. The watchman, Isaiah, responds. He tells them that a morning is coming, and at the same time a night, i.e., that even if the morning dawns, it will be swallowed up again directly by night. And the history was quite in accordance with such an answer. The Assyrian period of judgment was followed by the Chaldean, and the Chaldean by the Persian, and the Persian by the Grecian, and the Grecian by the Roman. Again and again there was a glimmer of morning dawn for Edom (and what a glimmer in the Herodian age!), but it was swallowed up directly by another night, until Edom became an utter “dumah,” and disappeared from the history of the nations. The prophet does not see to the utmost end of these Edomitish nights, but he has also no consolation for Edom. It is altogether different with Edom from what it is with Israel, the nocturnal portion of whose history has a morning dawn, according to promise, as its irrevocable close. The prophet therefore sends the inquirers home. Would they ask any further questions, they might do so, might turn and come. In “shubu” (turn back) there lies a significant though ambiguous hint. It is only in the case of their turning, coming, i.e., coming back converted, that the prophet has any consolatory answer for them. So long as they are not so, there is suspended over their future an interminable night, to the prophet as much as to themselves. The way to salvation for every other people is just the same as for Israel,—namely, the way of repentance.

Vv. 13-17 – The Burden upon Arabia

Arabia is the name given to the peninsula lying east of Palestine and the Red Sea.³² Its inhabitants were known as “the children of the east.”³³ The times were characterized

32. It is the largest peninsula in the world covering an area of almost one million square miles. Alaska and Texas combined have 925,026 square miles.

33. The term “children of the east” seems to have been applied to the inhabitants of any part of the country E. of Palestine. It is stated that Jacob, when he fled from Esau, “came to the land of the children of the east” (Gen 29:1), and the place to which he came was Haran in Mesopotamia. In Jer 49:28 the inhabitants of **Kedar** are called “the children of the east,” and in later Jewish literature, **Kedar** is identified with the Arabs (see **KEDAR**). Job was designated as “the greatest of all the children of the east” (Job 1:3), and the land of Uz was mentioned as his home (Job 1:1). While it is

by wars, and the Dedanites, who were traveling traders, had to leave their regular routes and seek safety in forests along the way.³⁴ Their normal sources of water and food were not available, so the people of Tema³⁵ surreptitiously brought them bread and water. The Dedanites' caution was necessitated by the fact that they were fleeing from the weapons and grievousness of war. The name *Kedar* is here the collective name of the Arabic tribes generally. In the stricter sense, Kedar, like Nebaioth, which is associated with it, as a nomadic tribe of Ishmaelites, which wandered as far as the Elanitic Gulf. Within the space of a year, measured as exactly as is generally the case where employers and laborers are concerned, Kedar's freedom, military strength, numbers, and wealth (all these together constituting its glory), would all have disappeared. Nothing but a small remnant would be left of the heroic sons of Kedar and their bows.

The period of the fulfilment of the prophecy keeps us still within the Assyrian era. In Herodotus (2, 141), Sennacherib is actually called "king of Arabians and Assyrians"

impossible absolutely to locate the land of Uz, it must have been on the edge of the desert which was E. of Palestine. The children of the E. seem to have been famous for their wisdom. It is said that "Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east" (1 Ki 4:30), and "Wise-men from the east" came to Jerusalem seeking the one that was born king of the Jews (Mt 2:1).

34. *Brown Driver Briggs* supplies this definition. That in which the Dedanites hid was probably more of a thicket given the locale. "1 **wood, forest, thicket** — a. *wood, forest, wooded height*, with trees to be felled; as producing trees; in designation of Solomon's palace; fig. of foes to be cut down and destroyed.

b. as hiding-place for fugitive; lurking-place of wild beasts.

c. devoured by fire (fig. of the people); so in metaph. or sim. of judgments (fig. of Assy.).

d. opp. *garden-land* but also *his garden woodland*, and secluded and fertile abode for flock, fig. of people.

e. = *thicket*, esp. as symbol of desolation; *thicket-covered heights* (overgrown with bushes and trees).

f. *trees of the forest* (in sim.)."

35. An oasis in the Arabian desert, situated at the intersection of several major caravan routes. Possibly named for one of Ishmael's sons (Genesis 25:15; 1 Chronicles 1:30), Tema is mentioned in several poetic and prophetic passages (Job 6:19; Isaiah 21:14; Jeremiah 25:23).

(compare Josephus, Ant. x. 1, 4); and both Sargon and Sennacherib, in their annalistic inscriptions, take credit to themselves for the subjugation of Arabian tribes. But in the Chaldean era Jeremiah predicted the same things against Kedar (Jer. 49) as against Edom; and Jer. 49:30, 31 was evidently written with a retrospective allusion to this oracle of Isaiah. When the period fixed by Isaiah for the fulfillment arrived, a second period grew out of it, and one still more remote, inasmuch as a second empire, viz., the Chaldean, grew out of the Assyrian, and inaugurated a second period of judgment for the nations. After a short glimmer of morning, the night set in a second time upon Edom, and a second time upon Arabia.