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Isaiah 18

(2019)

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Although I believe my aim is pure and God's will perfect this document is still the product of a human man, as to such I neither claim perfect knowledge or perfect understanding.

Isaiah 18.

Topics.

- A land of whirring wings beyond the rivers of Cush.
- You, who dwell on earth, when a signal is raised on mountains, look.
- Like clear heat in sunshine and a cloud of dew in the heat of harvest.
- Before the harvest, he cuts off the branches and clears away.
- Tribute will be brought to mount Zion from nations that people feared.

FOR INFORMATION: concerning people, places and the meaning of words see the title: "Map Locations and People of the Bible," and the title: "Bible Dictionary" on Website Menu.

INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF ISAIAH

Isaiah is the exciting story of the Old Testament and the New Testament compacted into one book. It covers the wonder and splendour of Bible prophecy and echoes of the Lord Jesus Christ resound throughout Isaiah's visions and his messages. It teaches history as it affects God's people and constantly points to a future age when righteousness, justice, joy and peace will be established on earth. Isaiah prophesied about 740–700 B.C. He lived during the decline of Israel in the shadow of the powerful Assyrian Empire. He spoke the word of God to a people who were "deaf and blind" (Isaiah 6:10) who refused to listen to his warnings of looming disaster. Isaiah warned the people of Judah's that their sin would bring God's judgment (i.e., seventy-years captivity) and declared that God is sovereign and would use Cyrus the Persian to return the people from exile. He spoke also of a servant and man of sorrows who would be wounded for our transgressions faithfully accomplishing God's purposes of salvation (Isaiah 52:13 to 53:12). The final chapters give a beautiful description of a new creation in which Christ will rule as King, judging the wicked and establishing God's Kingdom on earth. Following are four points that will help the reader understand the book of Isaiah as they travel through it:

1. The history of Israel and Judah. At this time in the story Assyria has taken the ten tribes of Israel in the land of Samaria into captivity and marched up to Jerusalem (the two tribes of Judah) to destroy it, but failed. Later in the story Babylon attacks Jerusalem and conquers the city and takes the people of Judah into captivity. After this victory Babylon conquers Assyria which resulted in Israel and Judah being brought under the submission of Babylonian rule and the tribes being brought together during the seventy-year Babylonian captivity.
2. Many of Isaiah's visions are written as though they have already taken place, but a majority of these visions are predicting future events that are about to happen during Isaiah's generation while others will come to pass in a future age. Though these visions are of future events Isaiah speaks them in the present tense, because he spoke them as they came to his mind and as he saw the events unfolding before him. They are often spoken in this manner because of the certainty of it and because God had ordained them and revealed them to his prophets who spoke them to His people so they must come to pass, because God cannot lie.(Titus 1:2).
3. Though Isaiah is primarily speaking to Judah (the two tribes at Jerusalem) much of what he says applies to Israel (the ten tribes in Samaria) because both Judah and Israel are in the same corrupt spiritual condition.

4. All the promises to Israel are now in Christ. God's promises to Israel now include the Jews and the Gentiles. This is because under the New Covenant God is building an entirely new nation made up of Jews and Gentiles of which Christ is the head. In this new nation that God is creating in the Lord Jesus Christ Jews have no advantage over Gentiles since all are one in Christ Jesus.

The apostle Paul wrote: Gentiles were separated from Christ, alienated from the Commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus they have been brought to God by the blood of Christ. Jesus has made Jews and Gentiles both one by abolishing the law of commandments and ordinances so that Jesus might create in himself one new man (i.e., one nation) in place of the two (Jews and Gentiles). In Jesus both Jews and Gentiles are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. (Eph. 2:1-22).

The practical application: of what this means, is that all the future and eternal promises God made to Israel through Isaiah also apply to Gentiles who by faith belong to Christ.

ISAIAH 18:1-2

A Land of Whirring Wings beyond the Rivers of Cush.

- **Isaiah 18:1-2:** Ah, land of whirring wings that is beyond the rivers of Cush (Ethiopia in KJV). ²which sends ambassadors by the sea, in vessels of papyrus on the waters! Go, you swift messengers, to a nation, tall and smooth, to a people feared near and far, a nation mighty and conquering, whose land the rivers divide.

The King James Bible says:

- **Isaiah 18:1-2:** Woe to the land shadowing with wings, which *is* beyond the rivers of Ethiopia: ²That sendeth ambassadors by the sea, even in vessels of bulrushes upon the waters, *saying*, Go, ye swift messengers, to a nation scattered and peeled, to a people terrible from their beginning hitherto; a nation meted out and trodden down, whose land the rivers have spoiled!

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This brief chapter and short prophecy is the most difficult one of all the sixty-six chapters of Isaiah." It is commonly spoken of as being one of the most obscure chapters and prophecies in the whole Book of Isaiah, because of the many metaphors and symbolisms used. The ultimate and fullest focus of the prophecy is to the restoration of Israel in the Holy Land since it ends with gifts being brought to the LORD at Mount Zion from nations mighty and strong that were once greatly feared, by Israel and others. However, concerning the substance of the prophecy, the people to whom it is addressed, the history to which it belongs, the person who sends the messengers, and the nation to whom the messengers are sent, are all obscure and doubtful. This has resulted in various interpretations of what is meant and because of this I do not claim any special revelation or that the following interpretation expresses in exact detail everything Isaiah saw in this vision and prophecy, however I do believe it best harmonises with the chapters before it and after it.

Ah (woe in KJV): the word "woe" starting this chapter comes from the Hebrew word (*howy*) it literally means, oh! ah, alas, and O, woe. It carries the idea of crying out in lamentation.

Cush: (Ethiopia in KJV). Ethiopia comes from the Hebrew word (*Kuwsh*) and can refer to Cush or Ethiopia. It is also the name of the oldest son of Ham and his territory. Nimrod is said to be a descendant of Cush. The country was south of Egypt but north of Ethiopia near the Nile River. On occasion it seems to be associated with Saudia Arabia and possibly with Mesopotamia. It is the name of the territory through which the Gihon River (believed to be the Nile River) flowed through the whole land of Ethiopia.

Woe to the land whirring/shadowing with wings: (v1) the word shadowing comes from the two Hebrew words (*ts^elatsal*) (*tsalal*) the first literally means repetition (of sound) and can refer to a clatter or whirring (of wings) to a cricket, locust or some similar creature or to a cymbal (as clanging), or a spear as casting a shadow. The second (*tsalal*) carries the idea of vibration (i.e. rattle together) as ears reddening with shame or the teeth chattering with fear. Summing it all up it can refer to anything that makes a repetitive clattering and noisy sound. Since the focus of the following verse (v3) speaks of vessels of papyrus being sent on the waters of the sea the expression, "the whirring wings" most likely refers to the constant and repetitive sound of the sails of the many ships hovering about the River Nile and moored on the coasts of the sea and the ports,, while the expression, "the land shadowing with wings," would carry the following two ideas:

1. Sails casting large shadows upon the ships and poetically speaking it could be said that it is the sails that cause the ships to appear to fly across the oceans.
2. The Nile Valley was famous for its many whirring insects.

The land that is beyond the rivers of Cush: (v1) since it is difficult to determine what land is exactly meant there are many varying ideas, but the most common and most logical is that it refers to Egypt and the nations that lie toward the sea that were aligned to them since they had an innumerable fleets of ships because of the vastness of the river Nile and its' many branches and the Red Sea and the Midland Sea. Added to this, in the days of Isaiah Ethiopia was a major world power, ruling Egypt so it is most likely that the expression, "the land that is beyond the rivers of Cush," signifies a much larger area than Egypt and present-day Ethiopia it may also include Saudi Arabia and possibly Mesopotamia.

Ambassadors and messengers: (v2) comes from the Hebrew word (*tsiyr*) it carries the idea of pressure and of one who runs an errand

Vessels of papyrus and bulrushes: (v2) comes from the Hebrew word (*gome'*) it literally means absorbent, (i.e. the bulrush from its porosity). It carries the idea of absorbing, swallowing and drinking. When Moses mother gave birth to Moses, she made a basket of bulrushes and daubed it with bitumen and pitch and then placed it among the reeds by the river bank. (Exod. 2:1-3). Many historians state that it was a common practice of the Egyptians to use light ships and boats, made of the papyrus reed to sail on the River Nile. It is most likely these ships were made with bulrushes (papyrus), because of its lightness which was then covered in bitumen and pitch since this type of construction agrees perfectly well with shipbuilding in ancient Egypt.

A nation tall and smooth: (v2) the English Standard Bible says, "to a nation, tall and smooth," the King James Bible says, "to a nation scattered and peeled." This is a vision of things yet to come. Here Isaiah by the inspiration of God sees a nation that is powerful, mighty, strong, has conquered many nations and is beyond the rivers of Cush, this primarily refers to Egypt and Ethiopia, who Isaiah prophesies in the following chapters that the armies of Assyria will invade their land and overthrow them. (i.e., scattered and peeled them in the sense of laying them bare) (v2 KJV).

Isaiah is saying woe to the land that is beyond the rivers of Cush (Ethiopia in KJV) so the lamentation is not for Cush, but for the land beyond it which is Egypt and Ethiopia. In the previous chapters the focus of Isaiah's visions has been upon the many Assyria invasions upon the land of Samaria (the ten tribes of Israel) and upon the land of Judah (the two tribes). Now in this vision he sees the Assyrian armies marching toward with the intention of invading their land and taking Egypt and the surrounding region for itself. The nation who from their very beginning have been known to be a terrible and strong nation refers to Egypt, but they will become a nation trodden down (by the armies of Assyria) whose land (referring to the land

of Egypt) the rivers have spoiled (referring to the armies of Assyria). This scenario would then be in perfect harmony with the following chapter since its entire focus is Egypt and the ones following it speak of the mighty Assyrian armies invading the land of Egypt and Ethiopia.

Go, you swift messengers (v2) the use of the word ambassadors (swift messengers in KJV) does not necessarily apply to any particular men especially appointed to this office, but any of the usual conveyers of news whatsoever such as, chief men, travellers and merchants etc. Isaiah foreseeing in this vision that the armies of Assyria are intending to overthrow the land of Egypt calls messengers to quickly go throughout all the land of Egypt and Ethiopia to publish this declaration made by the prophet Isaiah throughout Egypt and the surrounding nations and to all the world to draw their attention to the fact that this is not a random act, but the judgment of God so that when they visibly see these things come to pass they will know that it was brought about by the hand of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and not the gods of Assyria.

ISAIAH 18:3

All who dwell on Earth, look when a Signal is Raised on Mountains.

- **Isaiah 18:3:** All you inhabitants of the world, you who dwell on the earth, when a signal is raised (when he lifteth up an ensign in the KJV) on the mountains, look! When a trumpet is blown, hear!

The signal raised and the trumpet sounds on the mountains refers to the armies of Assyria marching over the mountains to invade the land of Egypt and Ethiopia. When this happens, the whole earth is called, "to look, see and hear and be witnesses of what God is about to do. God (He) will call the Assyrian hosts together on the mountains surrounding the land of Egypt and Ethiopia and bring them down upon the cities, towns, villages and land of Egypt, Ethiopia and those aligned with them to bring their royal city and their gods to ruin. The LORD will be as the burning heat of the sun and a heavy rain cloud that destroys the harvest, meaning that God will destroy the armies of Egypt before their crops are ripe for harvest. As the farmer prunes off the shoots and the branches of a vine to clear it for new growth the LORD will bring to ruin Egypt and the nations aligned to them.

ISAIAH 18:4

Like clear Heat in Sunshine and Cloud of Dew in the Harvest.

- **Isaiah 18:4:** For thus the LORD said to me, "I, will quietly look from my dwelling like clear heat in sunshine (like a clear heat upon herbs in KJV) like a cloud of dew in the heat of harvest."

The expression, "For thus the LORD said to me," (v4) means that God by a vision has revealed His plans and purpose to Isaiah which is, to execute punishment on Egypt and Ethiopia by the Assyrian armies.

I will quietly look from my dwelling: (v4) (i.e., from heaven), these words paint with marvellous vividness the calmness and deliberation of God's workings and His judgments. It is an expression that shows God is never in panic or a rush to bring judgment upon any nation. While nations go about their business and corrupt and wicked ways God remains at rest and calm, He does not panic, intervene or oppose them, but remains calm and still as if He seemed to favour their evil plans. These verses shine a spotlight upon the truth that God not only remains calm as He sees the plans of the wicked, but also allows them to mature and develop without attempting to hinder them. Nevertheless, whoever acts wickedly and against God's people are deceived if they think, because of their success

they are secure because God has not hindered their plans while they were forming them. Those who think this way should know that at this present time God's judgment is delayed until the appointed time.

Like clear heat in sunshine: (v4) carries the idea that the burning heat of the sun destroys plants, herbs and flowers before they ripen for harvest.

Like a cloud of dew in the heat of harvest: (v4) carries the idea that the heavy moisture of dew and dark cloudy rain destroys plants, herbs and flowers before they are ripe for harvest.

The destruction of Egypt: the following verses speak of the destruction of Egypt and the nations in league with them. This destruction is symbolised by the scorching heat of the sun on plants, herbs and flowers killing them and by a thick cloud of dew that brings heavy rain that destroys the harvest. These are both symbols of God's judgment and punishment. It carries the idea that nations may make their plans, but before they are completed God will intervene and destroy them, as if He should appear suddenly before the harvest is ripe and cut it down.

God will appear to favour the wicked and corrupt nations and at times even the enemies of His people and give them a time for planning their evil plots. Here He is pictured as calmly beholding the proud boast and rage of Egypt and the nations aligned with them until the proper time for Him to cut them off and bring them to ruin. God's long silence and His delay in taking vengeance, is mistaken by the ungodly for consent, but this is not so, but rather means that we are living in the, "long day of death and the long day of grace."

In Ecclesiastes it is written:

- Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the heart of the children of man is fully set to do evil. ¹²Though a sinner does evil a hundred times and prolongs his life, yet I know that it will be well with those who fear God, because they fear before him. (Eccles. 8:11-12).

God wishes that no one should perish:

- Have I (the LORD) any pleasure in the death of the wicked, declares the Lord GOD, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live? (Ezek. 18:23).
- I (the LORD) have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord GOD; so turn, and live. (Ezek. 18:32).
- Say to them, As I live, declares the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel? (Ezek. 33:11).

This is the reason why it is so offensive to God when people, especially His people mock and scorn their enemies when they are defeated or harm has come to them. Justice must be done, but mocking and taunting those who have been punished, defeated and humbled and gloating over them when they are suffering comes from a heart full of pride, hatred and revenge none of which are of the Spirit of the LORD. Though the LORD for a while may seem to be taking no notice of what is happening on earth, He is in heaven beholding all that is done and looks with wrath upon the wicked and the enemies of His people as the sun looks with its scorching heat upon the herbs and dries them up; and as a dark cloud thick with dew brings with it, destruction in harvest time.

This sense is in harmony with the context of the following verses.

ISAIAH 18:5-6

Before the Harvest, He cuts off the Branches and Clears Away.

- **Isaiah 18:5-6:** For before the harvest, when the blossom is over, and the flower becomes a ripening grape, he, cuts off the shoots with pruning hooks, and the spreading, branches he, lops off and clears away. ⁶They, shall all of them be left to the birds of prey of the mountains and to the beasts of the earth. And the birds of prey will summer on them, and all the beasts of the earth will winter on them.

The shoots and the spreading, branches: (v5) refer to the nations aligned with Egypt and the Ethiopians.

He lops off and clears away with pruning hooks: (v5) refers to God cutting down the mighty armies of the Egyptians and the Ethiopians as a farmer prunes a vine in its due season at the right time.

Isaiah in the vision: the LORD is giving him foresees that when the grandiose goals and plans of the prideful king of the Egyptians, the Ethiopians and all those aligned to them (perhaps to rule the world) are about to come together. God will bring all their ambitions to ruin as a farmer cuts off and prunes worthless shoots and branches from a vine.

They shall be left to the birds of prey: (v6) the carcasses of the warriors of the Egyptians, the Ethiopians and those aligned with them will be so numerous on the mountainside that the wild animals and the birds of prey will feast on them (the following chapters speak of this destruction of Egypt and Ethiopia).

ISAIAH 18:7

Tribute will be brought to Mount Zion from Nations People Fear.

- **Isaiah 18:7:** At that time tribute will be brought to the LORD of hosts from a people tall and smooth, from a people feared near and far, a nation mighty and conquering, whose land the rivers divide, to Mount Zion, the place of the name of the LORD of hosts.

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The King James says:

- In that time shall the present be brought unto the LORD of hosts of a people scattered and peeled, and from a people terrible from their beginning hitherto; a nation meted out and trodden under foot, whose land the rivers have spoiled, to the place of the name of the LORD of hosts, the mount Zion. (Isaiah 18:7).

Whose land the rivers have spoiled: refers to the river Nile and all the rivers that flow from it since it was the River Nile that spoiled the land of Egypt, meaning brought great prosperity to it.

A people scattered: refers to the long vale and fruitful parts of Egypt through which the River Nile runs bounded on each side from the east and west by a chain of mountains seven hundred and fifty miles in length and in breadth around two- or three-days' journey.

A people peeled: means they have been stripped bare and brought to ruin.

A people terrible from their beginning: refers to the Egyptians.

A people mighty in conquering: tall and smooth; feared near and far refers to the Egyptians, Ethiopians and all nations in league with them. The expression, "a people," (v7) refers to the people that Isaiah is speaking of which is the Egyptians. Isaiah here foretells of Egypt's return to the LORD, but not exactly at the time when this destruction comes upon them, but sometime after. We have no means of knowing with absolute certainty when or how this prophecy was fulfilled, but there is no doubt that there have been certain periods of time in past history when this prophecy may be regarded as having been in part fulfilled. It is certainly true that the Jewish religion spread into Upper Egypt, and that the Christian faith was later established there. This should not surprise us

since many of the prophecies of Isaiah contain a partial fulfilment to be fulfilled during the generations of that time and also contain a reference to a far more perfect fulfilment in the distant future. This prophecy should be regarded as one of those prophecies in that the offerings made from Egypt and other nations to the LORD at Jerusalem on Mount Zion were a prelude of the ultimate and more perfect fulfilment in a future period of greater light and truth than has yet existed and is destined to receive a more complete fulfilment when all lands and nations will be full of the knowledge of the LORD.

- In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and Assyria will come into Egypt, and Egypt into Assyria, and the Egyptians will worship with the Assyrians. ²⁴In that day Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, ²⁵whom the LORD of hosts has blessed, saying, “Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my inheritance.” (Isaiah 19:23-25).

SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

This chapter is one of the most obscure in Scripture, it is sure that much more of it was understood by those who it was first spoken to and intended than it is by us now. The message we should take from it is that though we may not understand God’s ways on earth He is in control of all things. We should never think that God has no awareness of the affairs of the nations, governments and rulers of the earth, but believe that He has wise reasons for allowing things to continue as they are, which we cannot at this present time understand, but which will appear clear on that Great Day of the Lord Jesus Christ’s return in glory to gather the faithful to himself and bring every work into judgment and reward each one accordingly.

- God has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end. (Ecclesiastes. 3:11).
- Man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun. However, much man may toil in seeking, he will not find it out. Even though a wise man claims to know, he cannot find it out. (Eccles. 8:17).

As the founder of Bible House of Grace, I would like to thank the many Christian scholars, commentators and theologians who have gone before me, and the many today, who have freely made available their works to enhance the knowledge of the Bible to all people worldwide. It is only with the help of these faithful writers that much of Bible House of Grace exists as it does today.
