

"And the Lord will strike Egypt, striking and healing, and they will return to the Lord, and He will listen to their pleas for mercy and heal them! (Isaiah 19:22)

Last week, through the oracles concerning Moab and Damascus (Syria), in Isaiah 15-17, we saw how God would continue to judge the nations of the world which "surrounded" the kingdom of Judah. Beginning with Moab, which had a long history of threats and abuses to the children of Israel and who, when seeking refuge from the Assyrians, and finding their prayers to their pagan god, Chemosh, to no avail, appealed to the king of Judah for protection, but with "great pride, arrogance, and self-exaltation" refusing to submit to the Holy One of Israel! Thus experiencing "certain ruin" and devastation for the grieving people of Moab! (Interesting that the heart of Isaiah, and the Lord Himself, would still "cry out" in sympathy for Moab--with Constable noting how "the grief of the Judge of all the earth expressed over the judgment of the nations is one of the most striking truths of these oracles"!)

Isaiah 17 then prophesies about the coming judgment against Damascus, but quickly focuses on the northern kingdom of Israel as well, since they had made an alliance with Syria for protection, rather than trusting in God! And so, while Damascus would soon fall, so "in that day" would the glory of Jacob fade, for "forgetting the God of their salvation and not remembering the rock of their refuge"!

But, interestingly, in both cases (concerning Moab and Damascus) Isaiah prophesies that there would be a "remnant" as "man would have regard for His Maker, with his eyes looking to the Holy One of Israel, with no regard for his pagan altars or the work of his hands"!

And so, along with the judgment of the nations, Isaiah provides a "theme of hope" as he sees people from all the nations "one day" seeking and worshiping the God of Israel! Removing any impression that the promises of God's covenants are "exclusionary"!

And with that we move on to Isaiah 18 and 19, concerning the oracles of the nations of Cush (or Ethiopia) and Egypt--with the scene actually picking up from Isaiah 17:12-14 where "nations are rumbling like the rumbling of many waters" (indicating ongoing wars and turmoil among the nations, in which both Ethiopia and Egypt are caught up)!

So what do we know about Cush?

Cush was the son of Ham, who was one of the sons of Noah who survived the flood! And the father of Nimrod who founded Babel and built Nineveh, whose brother Canaan was "cursed" by Noah (along with his father Ham, as recorded in Genesis 9)--and, unfortunately, would occupy the land promised to the descendants of Abraham (the children of Israel, who were descendants of Shem)! Thus establishing the legitimacy of Israel's later conquest of the Canaanites! Meanwhile Cush settled in North Africa (which Wiersbe describes as an area southeast of Egypt, land now occupied by the Sudan, Somalia, and parts of Ethiopia)! Wow!

The nation of Cush is described (in Isaiah 18:1) as "a land of whirring wings" (speaking perhaps of ships with sails that looked like the whirring wings of insects over the waters of the Nile river, when viewed from a distance)--with people described as "smooth and tall," and "envoys" apparently engaged in frantic diplomatic efforts, to gain help from other nations (including Judah) against the advancing Assyrians!

Meanwhile, Isaiah notes (in verse 4) how God is "quietly watching from His dwelling place" over what's happening in this troubled world, as the "nations rumble like the rumbling of many waters"--and is totally aware and in control of world affairs, but waiting for the right moment to intervene!

Wiersbe says Isaiah (in verse 2) is telling the "envoys" to "go back home" to their people, for God will deal in His own timing with the Assyrians, "apart from the help of any army"!

Then (in verses 3-6), Isaiah describes how, when the time comes, "all the inhabitants of the world will see the standard on the mountains raised and hear the trumpet call," when God will "prune the sprigs and cut away the spreading branches (described as ripening vines before the harvest, that will never survive), and feeding them to the birds"--picturing His judgment of the nations!

And so (verse 7 says), the Cushites will (one day!) "bring homage (worship)...to the place of the name of the Lord of hosts, even Mount Zion"!

And how can we not cite too the Acts 8 account of how an angel of the Lord would compel Philip, the evangelist, to share the gospel with an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of Queen Candace of Ethiopia, who just happened to be "sitting in his chariot reading the prophet Isaiah" and received Christ, and was baptized, and apparently became a great influence for Christ in his native land! (And interesting too how the current nation of Ethiopia, although not totally equivalent to the Ethiopia of the Bible, is filled with true Christian believers, including its prime minister, Abiy Ahmed, and other high officials with whom my own son Andrew works extensively, hearing them remark how "the biggest answer to their country's needs is Jesus"!)

On to Isaiah 19 and the oracle concerning Egypt--where it begins with Isaiah "beholding the Lord, riding on a swift cloud and about to come to Egypt, with the idols trembling...and the hearts of the Egyptians melting..." as they're "delivered into the hands of a cruel master," and the waters of the Nile "dry up," and "the advice of Pharaoh's wisest advisers has become stupid"! Wow! All so they might understand (verse 11 says) "what the Lord of hosts has purposed against Egypt"!

Kind of deja vu (all over again)! A repeat performance of God's (and Moses') "battle with the gods" at the time of the children of Israel's escape from bondage in Egypt, back in Exodus 1-12!

As Motyer wrote: "The problems of society, economics, and politics are the outworking of divine purposes and are directly traceable to the hand of God!" (Do you think that's what going on today in our country? And in the world?)

Isaiah says (in verse 16) that "in that day...the land of Judah will become a terror to Egypt... (again) because of the purpose of the Lord of hosts"!

And (yet!) in verses 18-20--"In that day, five cities in the land of Egypt will be speaking the language of Canaan (Hebrew?) and swearing allegiance to the Lord of hosts...and (would you believe) building an altar to the Lord in the middle of the land...! And the Lord would send a Savior, and a Champion, and deliver them!"

Verse 21 says it all (it would seem)! "Thus the Lord will make Himself known to Egypt, and the Egyptians will know the Lord in that day! Note "in that day" (speaking, it would seem clearly, of the millennial reign of Christ)!

But there's more! Verses 23-24 say, "In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrians would come into Egypt and the Egyptians into Assyria, and the Egyptians will worship with the Assyrians. And in that day Israel will be a third party with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, whom the Lord of hosts has blessed, saying, 'Blessed is Egypt My people, and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel My inheritance!'" Wow!

F. B. Meyer sums it up this way! "We have the foreshadowing of an age, yet to be revealed, when the long discipline of God's dealing with men shall be consummated in their conversion to God! What a radiant prospect is thus suggested to us, when the most inveterate enemies of God's church shall be received into her borders and regarded with favor that God shows His people! Who could have thought, recalling the terror of the plagues of Egyptian captivity, that Egypt would one day be addressed as 'My people'? That Assyria, the tyrant persecutor, would one day be called 'the work of My hands'? That the Egyptians and Assyrians would be united with children walking together down the King's Highway to worship the God of Israel in peace and harmony? Yet this is exactly what Isaiah prophesies, as 'trophies of God's divine grace"! That will be realized "in that day"!

What more could we add? Except that recognizing this reality (as Constable noted) should motivate us more than ever before to want to share the message of the prophecy of the Bible, and of the "gospel" of Jesus Christ, with others!

And the song: "Behold He comes, riding on the clouds! Shining like the sun! At the trumpet call! Lift your voice! It's the year of Jubilee! Out of Zion's hill salvation comes! There's no God like Jehovah! There's no God like Jehovah! There's no God like Jehovah! Behold He comes...!"

Sing it, men!

Lowell