

EXPOSITORY NOTES ON THE PROPHET ISAIAH

by

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ISAIAH CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

THE LAND SHADOWING WITH WINGS

WE ARE NOW TO CONSIDER a chapter which has given ground for many differences of opinion among Christian scholars, and particularly prophetic interpreters. Many have taken it for granted that the land shadowing with wings is Egypt, because of the winged solar disk which appears upon so many of its monuments and was really a symbol of its power and greatness. But it could hardly be said of Egypt that it lay beyond the rivers of Ethiopia when the Nile descended from Ethiopia, passed through the midst of Egypt, and emptied itself into the Mediterranean Sea in the north. Since the revival of interest in prophetic study during the last century and a half, some have thought that the symbol refers to the United States, because of the fact that on our Great Seal an eagle is represented with outstretched wings. Other nations have used the eagle upon their ensigns and coats-of-arms, but not with overshadowing wings, as it is officially used in America. Many others have assumed that, inasmuch as the reference is undoubtedly to some great maritime power, it was a prophecy of Great Britain who of old gloried in ruling the waves, but it does not seem possible to identify it as referring either to Britain or America with certainty. Perhaps, indeed, it might include both, and with them other nations linked together in the last great confederacy.

F. C. Jennings, in his monumental work on Isaiah, points out that there were two districts known as Cush, the Hebrew word translated "Ethiopia" in this passage; one on the banks of the Euphrates, and the other in what we have known as Abyssinia until recently its ancient name has been restored to it.

The great stretch of country between these two lands was included in that promised to Abraham, and was ruled by both David and Solomon for a time. It seems evident from many prophetic scriptures that Israel will possess all of this land in the millennial day. According to this view, the powers referred to here would be outside and beyond these two rivers and therefore might well include western European lands and others of the western hemisphere unknown to the prophets of old.

We know that ten kingdoms, rising out of the ancient Roman Empire, are to come to the front in the last days, bound together by an offensive and defensive alliance over which that sinister character designated "**the Beast**" in Revelation 13 will bear rule.

This last confederation of the Gentile nations of the west will for a time act as the friend and ally of Israel, as a nation, restored to their own land. It is, therefore, reasonable to conclude that it is these that are referred to in the opening part of this chapter.

“Woe to the land shadowing with wings, which is beyond the rivers of Ethiopia: that 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!” (verses 1, 2).

The word here translated “**woe**” is the same as that rendered “**Ho**” in Isaiah 55:1. It is a call to attention. The Lord is summoning this great power lying beyond the rivers of Ethiopia to come to the aid of His people. Undoubtedly it is the people of Israel who are in view for they, indeed, have been through the centuries, “**a nation scattered and peeled.**” What other people have suffered as they have done and yet maintained their unity and national existence in spite of every effort made to destroy them. They have been “**terrible,**” or “*dreadful,*” from their very beginning, for when they went forth as directed by the Lord, the fear of them fell upon all nations that confronted them and their power seemed unlimited, but when they became disobedient, then disaster followed.

“All ye inhabitants of the world, and dwellers on the earth, see ye, when he lifteth up an ensign on the mountains; and when he bloweth a trumpet, hear ye. For so the Lord said unto me, I will take my rest, and I will consider in my dwelling place like a clear heat upon herbs, and like a cloud of dew in the heat of harvest. For afore the harvest, when the bud is perfect, and the sour grape is ripening in the flower, he shall both cut off the sprigs with pruning hooks, and take away and cut down the branches. They shall be loft together unto the fowls of the mountains, and to the beasts of the earth; and the fowls shall summer upon them, and all the beasts of the earth shall winter upon them” (verses 3-6).

The return depicted here is evidently not that which is spoken of elsewhere in the prophets and is based upon the repentance of the nation and their recognition of Jesus as the Messiah. The ships of the Gentiles will bring them back to the land while the Lord, as it were, looks on but does not interfere in any special sense. An ensign lifted up in the land will be the signal for the returning to Palestine of those who through the centuries have wandered among the Gentiles.

We may see this being fulfilled already. They are now in the land and recognized by other nations as an independent republic. One could well hope that their sufferings were over, did we not know that even greater distress awaits them in the future when the horrors of the great tribulation will burst upon them in all their fury. Then a remnant will be distinguished from the mass and with this remnant the Lord will be identified.

“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” (verse 7).

This coincides with the actual return of the Lord when He will arise to deal in judgment with the enemies of Israel and will recognize the remnant as His people. The great trumpet will be blown, and the outcasts of Israel summoned to return from every land of earth to their ancient patrimony. Surely we may see in all that is going on at the present time in connection with Palestine and the new nation Israel now established there, how readily all these things will have their complete fulfillment as soon as the Church of God has been taken out of this scene and caught up to be with the Lord.

God's heart is ever towards Israel and while He has permitted them to pass through such terrible sufferings throughout the long centuries of their dispersion because they knew not the time of their visitation, the day will surely come when, their transgressions forgiven and their hearts renewed, they will be restored to Himself and planted again in their own land - that land which so often the rivers have spoiled!

This refers to a well-known symbol in the prophetic Scriptures. Invading armies are often pictured as overflowing, destructive rivers. Such "**rivers**" have passed and repassed over the land of Palestine throughout the nearly two millennia since the rejection of Christ and the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple which followed some forty years later. In all these stresses, Palestine has been an almost continual battleground. Assyria, Babylonia, Persia, Greece, Egypt, Rome, and later the Turks and other powers have fought over this land, and whoever has won, the Jew has always been the loser until when, in God's due time, General (later Lord) Allenby entered Jerusalem without firing a shot and the Turkish army fled beyond the borders of the land. God has been working providentially toward the fulfillment of His purpose for Israel. Their reliance has been, however, upon their own wisdom and might, assisted at times by the Gentiles, rather than upon God Himself, and so there have been many disappointments, and there will be more in the future before the promises of God have their complete fulfillment.

~ end of chapter 18 ~

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