

Isaiah Chapters 18, 19, and 20 – a Prophetic Trilogy

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Formation of the book of Isaiah:

- This is based on inferences from the book's contents – there is no accurate historic record of how the book was formed
- Most prophetic oracles were presented orally – the original 'life situation'
- The prophet (Isaiah) may have written down some oracles in 'note' form
- Oral presentations may have been recorded by disciples (Is8:16)
- The collection of recorded oracles grew over the career of the prophet (Is34:16)
- Finally, with the help of disciples, the material was organized into an official 'book' – anciently a scroll, which was circulated
- For much of the material in Isaiah, the original 'life situation' is NOT explicit; for a few oracles it is and for a few, specific chronological information is given – these provide 'sign posts' to organize the material
- The 'life situation' of some material can be inferred from allusions or context
- The original 'life situation' may NOT be relevant to the final organization of the material
- In his final book, Isaiah has arranged his material according to broad time periods and circumstances of his career – placement in the book does NOT imply similar 'life situation'
- The collection grouping is outlined at the bottom of 'Life and Times of Isaiah' diagram

Purpose of Prophecies about Nations:

- The purpose of these prophecies is to demonstrate that YHWH is the God of history – he is in control of everything that happens; his plan is unfolding exactly as he intends
- The prophecies are NOT generally FOR, or to be presented TO, the nations in question
- They are specifically FOR Israel; and, because God has recorded them, they are for US – the Church, especially the end-time Church
- God inhabits eternity (Is57:15); we exist in a four-dimensional universe, which is simply an 'object' to God (Is40:12); our existence is linear, sequential, and temporal – these are all irrelevant to God: he declares the end from the beginning (Is46:10, Rv22:13)
- We speak of 'duality' of prophecy, which is accurate from our perspective; but from God's perspective, the 'time' element is irrelevant: what we see as two similar events separated by a large temporal gap, God sees as two parts of the same event – this is how Isaiah reports the visions and revelations given to him by God

Historical Setting of Isaiah 18:, 19:, and 20:

- Please refer to the 'Life and Times of Isaiah' diagram
- The general setting of Isaiah 13: through 23: is the beginning of Hezekiah's sole reign – Hezekiah has commenced his reform; there are 'parties' in the court promoting alliance with both Egypt and Babylon in rebellion against Assyria
- It is the middle of the reign of Sargon – he is heavily involved in military activities in the east and the north; the west is of less concern to him
- By 715, Piankhi and Shabaqo swept away Dynasties 22, 23, and 24 and gained united control over all of Egypt – one of Shabaqo's first activities is to foment rebellion in western Asia against Assyria
- In 714, an alliance led by Ashdod and including Moab, Edom, and Israel considers rebellion
- In 711, Sargon sends a force to crush the rebellion: Ashdod is taken, the alliance falls apart
- Isaiah has been preaching trust in YHWH – Hezekiah fortunately listens and does not commit to the rebellion and is NOT attacked by Sargon

Isaiah 18: 'Cush' – the End of the Earth

18:1 Cush is Nubia (KJV has 'Ethiopia', an anachronism), south of upper Egypt, home of Dynasty 25, source of the Nile; 'whirring wings' may refer to insects, but more likely 'wings' are boat sails – all communication from Nubia with the civilized world (Egypt) was north down the Nile by boat; Isaiah had almost certainly never been to Nubia – it was like the 'end of the earth' to him
18:2a 'ambassadors:' representatives of Dynasty 25 attempting to foment rebellion against Assyria

182b who are the 'messengers'? they are NOT the ambassadors – they come from Nubia, the messengers go to Nubia; 'a nation' and 'a people' are the Nubians, so the messengers have a message for them; what is the message?

18:3 Isaiah broadens his scope – he now addresses the inhabitants of the whole earth: telling them to watch for a signal and listen for a trumpet – the final trumpet signifies Christ's return

18:4 Now YHWH speaks personally to Isaiah; he says that he is waiting patiently for the right time

18:5a the right time is when the harvest is ripe (Mt24:32-33)

18:5b-6 then God will act – the immediate action will be the destruction of Assyria (Ez31:3-7), which is a type of the destruction of 'world city' (Rv19:17-18); Assyria is the current representative of the system of this world, 'world city', which will pass to the Babylonian empire and ultimately to the last 'resurrection' of 'Roman Empire' to be destroyed at Christ's return

18:7 Isaiah now goes to the World Tomorrow – there is no temporal distinction, all these events are at the core of God's plan, time is irrelevant: the Nubian people will be among those bringing 'tribute' to the King of Kings in Mount Zion (Is2:2-4, Mc4:1-3)

Who are the messengers? The prophets carried God's message anciently; their message to the world is that God is in charge; his plan is inexorable; he is proceeding with it. The Church has inherited that responsibility. We have the same message – 'the gospel of the kingdom of God'.

Isaiah 19:1-15 The Burden of Egypt

Isaiah reverts to the current situation: Hezekiah is under pressure to comply with the alliance and side with Egypt in rebellion against Assyria. Isaiah points out the folly in trusting Egypt.

19:1a 'swift cloud:' metaphor indicating 'sovereignty' and 'power' (Dt33:26, Ps18:10, 68:33, 104:3)

19:1b the general affect of God's power on Egypt (Ex12:12)

19:2 civil war and internal strife were very common under the competing Pharaohs of Dynasties 22, 23, and 24, culminating in military unification of the country under Dynasty 25

19:3-4 God's plan for Egypt: their glory was gone; the arrogance based on the past cannot be justified; Egypt will suffer under Assyria and Babylon, and finally be ruled by Persians, Greeks, and Romans

19:5-10 the Nile is the economic life blood of Egypt – failure of the annual inundation causes immeasurable suffering

19:11-13 Zoan and Memphis were two of the most important delta cities; God renders the much-heralded wisdom of Egypt to be worthless

19:14-15 Egypt's glory is gone only decline remains; 'palm branch and reed' see Is9:14 for explanation of the metaphor

Isaiah 19:16-25 New Israel and the 'World'

This is one of the most frequently quoted sections of scripture related to the World Tomorrow; but, it is usually read out of context. Isaiah has just related God's judgement on Assyria (18:5b-6) and Egypt (19:1-15); now without any temporal distinction, he rolls into how Assyria, Egypt, and Israel will form a triumvirate of peace, cooperation, and prosperity. From God's perspective, the judgements on the nations of this world are simply the prelude to the establishment of the World Tomorrow. Clearly, the ancient nations are now gone, but in revelation to Isaiah, God uses the ancient nations as symbolic of the world as it will exist in the World Tomorrow.

19:16-17 the 'fear' expressed here at the start of the millennium may be symbolic, or it may be actual – the world has just experienced the holocaust and the Day of YHWH; when God establishes the New Israel, there may well be fear among those people remaining in the nations; on the other hand, the fear may be symbolic of finally eradicating the old ways according to "the purpose that the LORD of hosts has purposed against them"; in any case, the survivors will come to know God as his purpose unfolds

19:18 'five cities' are symbolic of a slow start in the conversion of the nations; 'City of Destruction' should be 'City of Sun' (Heliopolis) – one letter different in Hebrew

19:19-20a further signs of progress in converting nations

19:20b 'saviour and defender' resurrected saints – US: this will be our job

19:21-22 conversion of Egypt is symbolic of conversion of people of all nations

19:23-25 'highway' is a symbol of travel, communication, commerce, and interaction; Egypt and Assyria were the classical enemies of Israel – all are gone now, but God will create a New Israel, and it will become the center of an integrated, peaceful, and abundant worldwide society

Isaiah 20:1-6 Back to the Present

Under God's inspiration, Isaiah comes back to the actual historic situation of 711BC.

20:1 Sargon takes steps to quash the rebellion fomented by Ashdod

20:2-3 Isaiah has performed a symbolic action for three years to emphasize God's purpose

20:4 God has decreed that Egypt cannot stand against Assyria – trust in Egypt is futile

20:5 'they' is all the participants of the rebellion – especially Israel; Egypt is unable to support the rebellion

20:6 'inhabitants of this coastland' pejorative epithet lumping Israel with the other nations as nothing special, just one of the participants in the rebellion; trust in Egypt is as futile as trust in Assyria, or any 'human' power; 'and we, how shall we escape?' – the realization God wants to emphasize, the purpose of the whole section: trust in any human power is futile; only God can provide deliverance/salvation