

a summary in beautiful poetic form of a section of Isaiah's teaching which is elaborated in various other parts of the book. It forms a distinct unit by itself, separate from what precedes and what follows. It has an appropriate place here in the midst of these "burdens of the nations."

Isaiah 18-20

These three chapters form a unit. The first speaks of Ethiopia, the second of Egypt, and the third of Egypt and Ethiopia together. The two nations are treated in this way because in Isaiah's time Ethiopia was dominant over a large portion of Egypt. For a time an Ethiopian reigned as Pharaoh and the policies of the two nations were united. This situation is reflected in Isaiah 37:9, where Sennacherib's plan to conquer Jerusalem is affected by the report that Tirhakah, king of Ethiopia, is coming to make war with him. Such an event would be utterly impossible if Tirhakah were not ruler of Egypt, since Egypt would then be an impassable barrier between Ethiopia and Palestine.

In ancient times Ethiopia was the land south of Egypt, including what we now call Sudan and also what we now call Ethiopia, to the east of Sudan. In ancient times the emphasis was on the western half, since this was in close proximity to Egypt, and was greatly affected by Egyptian culture. Eventually the Ethiopian leaders even established themselves for a time as supreme in Egypt.

Some commentators have been misled in their interpretation of chapter 18 by the word "beyond" in verse 1 -- "Woe to the land shadowing with wings which is beyond the rivers of Ethiopia." This translation has caused them to think that the chapter is not about Ethiopia at all, but about a nation beyond it. Immediately they run into serious difficulty, since there is no country on the other side of Ethiopia which plays a vital part in the history of the time of Isaiah. An examination of the Hebrew quickly shows that such a difficulty is unnecessary. The word which is here translated "beyond," actually means "at the side of." It is frequently used in connection with the Jordan river, since people in Canaan usually referred to the land across the Jordan as "the side of Jordan." Thus the term came often to be almost a synonym