

By Joseph F. Dumond

This week's Triennial Torah reading can be found at:

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Ex 19	Isaiah 15-19	Ps 129-131	John 7
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## Exodus 19

Shavuot was also the first day on which individuals could bring the Bikkurim (first fruits) to the Temple in Jerusalem (Mishnah Bikkurim 1:3). The Bikkurim were brought from the Seven Species for which the Land of Israel is praised: wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives, and dates (Deut. 8:8). In the largely agrarian society of ancient Israel, Jewish farmers would tie a reed around the first ripening fruits from each of these species in their fields. At the time of harvest, the fruits identified by the reed would be cut and placed in baskets woven of gold and silver. The baskets would then be loaded on oxen whose horns were gilded and laced with garlands of flowers, and who were led in a grand procession to Jerusalem. As the farmer and his entourage passed through cities and towns, they would be accompanied by music and parades.

At the Temple, each farmer would present his Bikkurim to a kohen in a ceremony that followed the text of Deut. 26:1-10. This text begins by stating, " 'My father was a perishing Aramean, and he went down to Mitsrayim and sojourned there with few men. And there he became a nation, great, mighty, and numerous. 6 'But the Mitsrites did evil to us, and afflicted us, and imposed hard labour on us. 7 'Then we cried out to Yehovah Elohim of our fathers, and Yehovah heard our voice and saw our affliction and our toil and our oppression. 8 'And Yehovah brought us out of Mitsrayim with a strong hand and with an outstretched arm, with great fear and with signs and wonders. 9 'And He brought us to this place and has given us this land, "a land flowing with milk and honey." 10 'And now, see, I have brought the first-fruits of the land which You, O Yehovah, have given me.' Then you shall place it before Yehovah your Elohim, and bow down before Yehovah your Elohim, 11 and shall rejoice in all the good which Yehovah your Elohim has given to you and your house, you and the Lewite and the stranger who is among you.

The text proceeds to retell the history of the Israelite people as they went into exile in Egypt and were enslaved and oppressed; following which God redeemed them and brought them to

the land of Israel. The ceremony of Bikkurim conveys the Israelite's gratitude to God both for the first fruits of the field and for His guidance throughout history (Scherman, p. 1068).

So here we are again at this special time of the year and the Torah study is about the giving of the law on the day of Pentecost.

On this very day Yehovah spoke with His own voice to all of the Israelites and gave them the Ten Commandments which all the people with one voice agreed to do; Exo 19:8 And all the people answered together and said, "All that Yehovah has spoken we shall do." So Mosheh brought back the words of the people to Yehovah.

Exo 19:9 And Yehovah said to Mosheh, "See, I am coming to you in the thick cloud, so that the people hear when I speak with you, and believe you forever." And Mosheh reported the words of the people to Yehovah. 10 And Yehovah said to Mosheh, "Go to the people and set them apart today and tomorrow. And they shall wash their garments, 11 and shall be prepared by the third day. For on the third day Yehovah shall come down upon Mount Sinai before the eyes of all the people.

The people got ready on the preparation day Friday and the 49th day was Shabbat and the third day was Pentecost. How terrifyingly awesome that would have been to be there and to witness this most magnificent event. Moses was told to "set them apart today and tomorrow". These set apart days were the weekly Sabbath which was the 49th day and Sunday which was the 50th day.

Exo 19:16 And it came to be, on the third day in the morning, that there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud on the mountain. And the sound of the ram's horn was very loud, and all the people who were in the camp trembled. 17 And Mosheh brought the people out of the camp to meet with Elohim, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. 18 And Mount Sinai was in smoke, all of it, because Yehovah descended upon it in fire. And its smoke went up like the smoke of a furnace, and all the mountain trembled exceedingly. 19 And when the blast of the ram's horn sounded long and became louder and louder, Mosheh spoke, and Elohim answered him by voice. 20 And Yehovah came down upon Mount Sinai, on the top of the mountain. And Yehovah called Mosheh to the top of the mountain, and Mosheh went up.

A question I ask Christians is that on this day of Pentecost this huge and awesome event took place and Yehovah gave us the 4th commandment. He made a big deal about all of the commandments. Where is the big deal about it being changed to Sunday? In the entire bible there is none because it never happened. But they still try to justify it by not keeping the Sabbath and changing it to Sunday.

## **Isaiah 15-19**

### **Chapter 15**

"The burden of Moab ." (v 1). In this chapter and the next, Isaiah continues his series of prophecies about the fate of the main biblical nations with a prophecy over the coming exile of the Moabites that is almost a lament.

“My heart cries out for Moab .: (v 5): Rashi (ad loc. comments): “The prophets of Israel are not like the prophets of the nations of the world. Bila’am sought to uproot Israel for no reason, while the prophets of Israel mourn over the punishments of the nations.”

The Moabites were descended from the incestuous relations between Abraham’s nephew Lot and his oldest daughter after the destruction of Sodom (Gen. 19:33-38). The mountainous strip of land east of the Dead Sea above Sodom to which Lot had fled became the inheritance of the children of Moab , while the children of Ammon, born from his relations with his second daughter, inherited the territories further north, east of the River Jordan, around the present-day Jordanian city of Amman .

The territories of the Moabites, lying largely on a plateau 4,300 feet above the level of the Dead Sea , consisted of steep but fertile hills that provided excellent pasture for their many sheep and cattle as well as abundant grain and wine. Thus although this region of the south of the modern kingdom of Jordan is not particularly famous or noteworthy today, in ancient times it was the center of a thriving kingdom with its own idolatrous religion and culture and a mighty army.

Although “cousins” of the Israelites, the Moabites were traditionally hostile to Israel in the times of Moses, the Judges and Kings. In this they were seen as the epitome of ingratitude because Abraham had taken Lot from Haran and saved him from captivity by the four kings, and in Abraham’s merit Lot was saved from the destruction of Sodom . Yet not only did the Moabites not help Israel ; they sent Bilaam to curse them and made war against them in the time of the Judges and Kings. When Sennacherib took the tribes of Reuben and Gad through their territory into exile, the Moabites mocked them saying they were simply returning to the other side of the river ( Euphrates ) from which their ancestor Abraham had come (see Rashi on v 7 of our present chapter).

The Moabites’ final expression of ingratitude was when they came to assist Sennacherib when he laid siege to Shomron for three years (see Rashi on Isaiah 16:14). In retribution, many of the Moabites themselves were taken into exile by Sennacherib, and any that were left were later exiled by Nebuchadnezzar. According to rabbinic tradition, the Moabites became completely assimilated with the other nations and all trace of them was lost (Rambam, Hilchos Issurey Bi’ah 12:25), although Jeremiah prophesied that at the end of days God will return the captivity of Moab (Jeremiah 48:47).

Vv 1-4 depict the destruction of the cities of Moab when Sennacherib would take their inhabitants into exile, and the mourning that would ensue.

Vv 5-6: Isaiah laments their destruction. The nation that was like a fat, prosperous three-year old heifer would flee screaming over their own devastation. “For the waters of Nimrim shall be desolate, for the hay is withered away, the grass fails, there is no green thing” (v 6): From this verse we can understand how lush and prosperous were the pastures of the Moabites at the height of their greatness.

Vv 7-9 explain the cause of their destruction because of their historical failure to support Israel (see Rashi on v 7, of which a synopsis was given above) and how Nebuchadnezzar – the “lion” referred to in verse 9 – would complete their destruction.

## CHAPTER 16

Vv 1-4: The reason for Moab ‘s punishment is that they did not help and support Israel . This is alluded to in verse 1, “Send the lamb to the ruler of the land. to the mountain of the daughter of Zion “. Meisha king of Moab had been subject to King Ahab of Israel , to whom he used to send one hundred thousand sheep (II Kings 3:4), but after the death of Ahab, he rebelled. Isaiah is saying here that the Moabites should have sent lambs to the Temple in Jerusalem , and had they done so in the time of Hezekiah they would have been saved from exile, but because of their failure to do so they would be punished.

“Take counsel, execute judgment, make your shadow as the night in the midst of the noonday: hide the outcasts, betray not the wanderer. Let My outcasts, O Moab, dwell with you” (vv 3-4). Here Isaiah asks the Moabites to give succor to the Israelites when they would later try to escape from Nebuchadnezzar’s armies by taking refuge in their territory. If they would do so they would avoid exile, but since they would not, they would be exiled.

This same verse is speaking to us in the very near future. Nebuchadnezzar represents Babylon which will be coming for Israel in the last days. At the martyrdom of the Saints at Passover in 2030 the survivors will flee across the Jordan to Moab where we will be hidden as a shadow in the night.

Rev 12:12 “Because of this rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them! Woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, knowing that he has little time.” 13 And when the dragon saw that he had been thrown to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male child. 14 And the woman was given two wings of a great eagle, to fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent. 15 And out of his mouth the serpent spewed water like a river after the woman, to cause her to be swept away by the river. 16 And the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed up the river which the dragon had spewed out of his mouth. 17 And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to fight with the remnant of her seed, those guarding the commands of Elohim and possessing the witness of Yeshua Messiah.

To know what this water was, that Satan spewed out, we just have to go to;

Rev 17:15 And he said to me, “The waters which you saw, where the whore sits, are peoples, and crowds, and nations, and tongues.

When we go to Daniel we learn a number of things. First of all we learn about prophecy that is happening right now; Egypt Libya and Kush which could be either or both Ethiopia and Sudan. Right now the king of the north, Europe, is attacking Libya, not for moral reasons of peace

although this is what they say, but for oil which is also what Sudan has and which is also monitored by NATO forces as I write.

Dan 11:40 “At the time of the end the sovereign of the South shall push at him, and the sovereign of the North rush against him like a whirlwind, with chariots, and with horsemen, and with many ships. And he shall enter the lands, and shall overflow and pass over, 41 and shall enter the Splendid Land, and many shall stumble, but these escape from his hand: Edom, and Mo’ab, and the chief of the sons of Ammon. 42 “And he shall stretch out his hand against the lands, and the land of Mitsrayim shall not escape. 43 “And he shall rule over the treasures of gold and silver, and over all the riches of Mitsrayim, and Libyans and Kushites shall be at his steps. 44 “Then reports from the east and the north shall disturb him, and he shall go out with great wrath to destroy and put many under the ban, 45 and he shall pitch the tents of his palace between the seas and the splendid set-apart mountain, but shall come to his end with none to help him.

When you see Egypt and Libya and Kush fall to NATO forces you will also see these NATO forces take over the Holy Land at this same time. Again all in the name of peace.

It is after this time by a certain number of years that all of Israel will be gathered back to the Land for Passover and there will be two Passovers that year. Right after the first Passover many will flee to Moab and the rest will be martyred as we are told in Revelation 12.

And at some point during this time, tidings from the North and East trouble the beast power which will divert his attention from the refuges in Moab.

Rev 16:12 And the sixth messenger poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, in order to prepare the way of the sovereigns from the east. 13 And I saw coming out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits, as frogs, 14 for they are spirits of demons, doing signs, which go out to the sovereigns of the entire world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of Yehovah the Almighty.

V 5: “And in mercy a throne will be established and he shall sit upon it in truth.” Our commentators interpret this verse as an allusion to the throne of Hezekiah (see Rashi ad loc.). This was greatly strengthened after the overthrow of Sennacherib, which came after he had already exiled the Moabites. The House of David itself was descended from the Moabite princess Ruth, daughter of King Eglon, who was King David’s great grandmother. Ruth embodied the spark of holiness that came down from the line of Abraham’s nephew Lot . When she converted, the vital spark for whose sake Moab was kept alive left it, and thus the kelipah (husk) – the remaining people of Moab – fell away into exile, while the throne of David was simultaneously strengthened.

That is the Talmud’s take on this verse. I believe this to be the Messiah.

Vv 6-11: The arrogance of Moab . Their destruction is compared to that of a fruitful vine.

“Therefore my heart shall moan like a lyre for Moab ” (v 11). Again the Israelite prophet shows his great compassion for the suffering of the nations with this metaphor evoking the plaintive melody of the lyre.

V 12: The Moabites’ prayers to their gods will not help them.

Vv 13-14: Prophecy on the looming calamity that would strike Moab after their three years in the service of Sennacherib besieging Shomron like wage laborers: its glory would be cast down and the tiny remnant would be left with no power.

Jeremiah also speaks of Moab.

Jer 48:1 Concerning Mo’ab. This is what Yehovah of hosts, the Elohim of Yisra’el said, “Woe to Neb’o! For it is ravaged, Qiryathayim is put to shame, captured. The high stronghold is put to shame and broken down. 2 “There is praise for Mo’ab no longer. In Heshbon they have devised evil against her, ‘Come and let us cut it off as a nation.’ O Madman, you are also cut off, a sword goes after you. 3 “Listen! An outcry from Horonayim, ravaging and great destruction! 4 “Mo’ab shall be destroyed, her little ones shall cry out. 5 “For on the ascent to Luhith they go up weeping bitterly. For in the descent of Horonayim the enemies shall hear a cry of destruction. 6 “Flee, deliver your own lives! And be like a bush in the wilderness. 7 “For because you have trusted in your works and your treasures, you shall be captured. And Kemosh shall go forth into exile, his priests and his heads together. 8 “And a ravager shall come into every city, no one escapes. And the valley shall perish, and the plain be destroyed, as Yehovah has spoken. 9 “Give wings to Mo’ab, for she has to flee away, and her cities become a ruin, with no one to dwell in them. 10 (Cursed is he who is slack in doing the work of Yehovah, and cursed is he who withholds his sword from blood). 11 “Mo’ab has been at ease from his youth, and he has settled on his dregs, and has not been emptied from vessel to vessel, nor has he gone into exile. Therefore his flavor has stayed in him, and his fragrance is unchanged. 12 “Therefore see, the days are coming,” declares Yehovah, “when I shall send him tilters, who shall tilt him over and empty his vessels and break the bottles. 13 “And Mo’ab shall be ashamed because of Kemosh, as the house of Yisra’el was ashamed of Byth El, their refuge. 14 “How do you say, ‘We are mighty and strong men for battle’? 15 “Mo’ab is ravaged and her cities have been entered. And her chosen young men have gone down to the slaughter,” declares the Sovereign, whose Name is Yehovah of hosts. 16 “The calamity of Mo’ab is near to come and his affliction hurries fast. 17 “Lament for him, all you who are around him. And all you who know his name, say, ‘How the strong sceptre has been broken, the staff of splendour!’ 18 “Come down from your esteem, and sit in thirst, O inhabitant, daughter of Dib on. For the ravager of Mo’ab shall come against you, he shall destroy your strongholds. 19 “Stand by the way and watch, O inhabitant of Aroer. Ask him who flees and her who escapes; say, ‘What has been done?’ 20 “Mo’ab has been put to shame, for it has been broken down. Howl and cry! Let it be heard in Amrnon that Mo’ab is ravaged. 21 “And judgment has come on the plain country, on Holon and on Yahtsah and on Mophaath, 22 and on Dibon and Neb o and on Byth Diblathayim, 23 and on Qiryathayim and on Byth Gamul and on Byth Me on, 24 and on Qeriyoth and on Botsrah, and on all the cities of the land of Mo’ab,

far or near. 25 “The horn of Mo’ab has been cut off, and his arm has been broken,” declares Yehovah. 26 “Make him drunk, because he has made himself great against Yehovah. Mo’ab shall splash in his vomit, and he shall also be in mockery. 27 “And was not Yisra’el a mockery to you? Was he found among thieves? For whenever you speak of him, you shake your head. 28 “O inhabitants of Mo’ab, leave the cities and dwell in the rock, and be like the dove making a nest in the sides of the cave’s mouth. 29 “We have heard of the pride of Mo’ab (he is very proud!), of his loftiness and arrogance and pride, and of the haughtiness of his heart.” 30 “I know his wrath,” declares Yehovah, “and his boastings are untrue, and his deeds are false. 31 “Therefore I wail for Mo’ab, and I cry out for all Mo’ab. I mourn for the men of Qir Heres. 32 “O vine of Sibmah! I weep for you with the weeping of Yazr. Your branches have passed over the sea, they have come to the sea of Yazr. The ravager has fallen on your summer fruit and your grape harvest. 33 “Joy and gladness have been taken away from the orchard and from the land of Mo’ab. And I have made wine to cease from the winepresses. No one treads with shouting – the shouting is no shouting! 34 “From the outcry of Heshbon unto El alh, unto Yahats, they shall raise their voice, from Tsoar to Horonayim, like a three-year-old heifer, for even the waters of Nimrim are dried up. 35 “And I shall make an end in Mo’ab to him who offers in the high places and burns incense to his mighty ones,” declares Yehovah. 36 “So My heart sounds for Mo’ab like flutes, and My heart sounds for the men of Qir Heres like flutes. Therefore the wealth they made shall be gone. 37 “For every head is bald, and every beard clipped – cuts on all the hands, and sackcloth on the loins. 38 “On all the house-tops of Mo’ab and in its streets it is all lamentation, for I have broken Mo’ab like a vessel in which no one delights,” declares Yehovah. 39 “How has she been broken down! They shall wail! How has Mo’ab turned her back with shame! So Mo’ab shall be a mockery and a horror to all those about her.” 40 For thus said Yehovah, “See, he soars like an eagle, and shall spread his wings over Mo’ab. 41 “Qeriyoth shall be captured, and the strongholds seized. And the heart of the mighty men in Mo’ab on that day shall be like the heart of a woman in labour. 42 “And Mo’ab shall be destroyed as a people, because he has made himself great against Yehovah. 43 “Fear and the pit and the snare are upon you, O inhabitant of Mo’ab,” declares Yehovah. 44 “He who flees from the fear falls into the pit, and he who gets out of the pit is caught in the snare. For I am bringing upon Mo’ab the year of their punishment,” declares Yehovah. 45 “Those who fled stood powerless under the shadow of Heshbon. But a fire shall come out of Heshbon, and a flame from the midst of Sihon, and consume the brow of Mo’ab and the crown of the head of the sons of uproar. 46 “Woe to you, O Mo’ab! The people of Kemosh have perished, for your sons have been taken into exile, and your daughters into exile. 47 “But I shall turn back the captivity of Mo’ab in the latter days,” declares Yehovah. Thus far is the judgment of Mo’ab.

## Chapter 17

As we saw in the prophecies of Isaiah to Ahaz (Isaiah 7), Syria and Israel were allies. Chapter 17 starts out as a prophecy against Damascus, the capital of Syria, but by verse 3 the subject is Ephraim and the rest of Israel more than it is Syria.

The dating of this prophecy is not certain. The Assyrians had, at the time of Israel’s first deportation in 732 B.C., also destroyed Damascus and taken its citizens captive north to Kir, thereby fulfilling, at least in part, a prophecy of Amos (2 Kings 16:9; Amos 1:3-5). Yet we know

that the Assyrians later came against Damascus again, around 720 B.C., and retook it. For this reason, since the prophecy mentions the “remnant of Syria” (Isaiah 17:3), many date the prophecy to the early reign of Hezekiah—to between 729 and 722 B.C.—following the early deportations of Israel and Syria and yet prior to their later fall.

However, Isaiah 17:12-18:7, which contains a message to Ethiopia (Hebrew Cush), seems to be part of the same prophecy or “burden” as the early part of Isaiah 17. And there is reason for dating this section to around 715 B.C. At that time, around the death of Ahaz, “a Cushite dynasty took over Egypt...and probably sent ambassadors to Jerusalem” (Nelson Study Bible, note on 18:1). This is a reference to “Shabako, the Nubian successor to Osorkon [IV],” the latter, apparently known also as King So (2 Kings 17:4), having been defeated by Sargon II of Assyria in 716 (Eugene Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel*, 1987, pp. 412-413). Thus, as our previous few readings have borne some relation at least to 715 B.C.—and our next reading will refer to an event dated to 713-712 B.C.—this dating seems likely. And the first part of Isaiah 17 seems to date from the same time since, as mentioned, Isaiah 17-18 appears to be a single prophecy.

If that is so, here we have a prophecy of Israel and Syria’s fall given after Israel has already fallen. This makes it most likely an end-time prophecy. Supporting this conclusion is the repeated phrase “in that day” (17:4, 7, 9), which often refers to events surrounding the coming of the Messiah to reign over the nations (compare 2:11, 17, 20; 4:1-2; 11:10-11; 12:1, 4). Following Israel’s ancient captivity, its people journeyed, over the centuries, to northwest Europe—and are now represented, in large part, by the American and British peoples. (For more on this, request or download our free booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*).

An end-time prophecy of Damascus and Syria could apply to those living in the nation of Syria today. Or it could also refer to Aramaean peoples who were, in ancient days, deported by the Assyrians to Kir, just south of the Caucasus Mountains. Some of these people became the Armenians. And others probably migrated through the Caucasus and into Europe along with the Israelites. Besides Amos 1:3-5, additional prophecies against Damascus can be found in Jeremiah 49:23-27 and Zechariah 9:1.

The Israelites, we are told in Isaiah 17:7-8, will finally turn to God in the midst of the destruction that comes upon them. Then, following more details of that destruction in verses 9-11, the prophecy changes focus. We are told of a massive invasion force that God will punish. “The connection of this fragment with what precedes is: notwithstanding the calamities coming upon Israel, the people of God shall not be utterly destroyed...[and] the Assyrian spoilers shall perish” (Jamieson, Fausset & Brown’s Commentary, note on 17:12-18:7). Some have connected Isaiah 17:14 to the overnight destruction of the Assyrian army of Sennacherib that would occur in the days of Hezekiah (see Isaiah 37:36). While a likely forerunner, this is still predominantly an end-time prophecy.



Notice what the JFB Commentary says regarding the next section addressed to Ethiopia: “Isaiah announces the overthrow of Sennacherib’s hosts and desires the Ethiopian ambassadors, now in Jerusalem, to bring word of it to their own nation; and he calls the whole world to witness the event (vs. 3). As ch. 17:12-14 announced the presence of the foe, so ch. 18 foretells his overthrow. The heading in [the] English Version, ‘God will destroy the Ethiopians,’ is a mistake arising from the wrong rendering ‘Woe,’ whereas the Hebrew does not express a threat, but is an appeal calling attention (ch. 55:1; Zech. 2:6): ‘Ho.’ He is not speaking against but to the Ethiopians, calling on them to hear his prophetic announcement as to the destruction of their enemies” (note on Isaiah 18).

Indeed, in the end time too, the ruler of Assyria—the “king of the North”—will be an enemy of Ethiopia, as we elsewhere see him bringing the Ethiopians as well as the Egyptians under his subjection (see Daniel 11:42-43). This is another reason we may view the defeat of the enemy force in Isaiah 18 in an end-time context. Also, compare verse 6 with Revelation 19:17-18.

Finally, mention is made of a “present” being brought from Ethiopia to Jerusalem. This is stated in Zephaniah 3:10 as well: “From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia My worshipers, the daughter of My dispersed ones, shall bring My offering.”

These verses also appear related to Psalm 68, where David says to God: “Because of Your temple at Jerusalem, kings will bring presents to you... Envoys will come out of Egypt; Ethiopia will quickly stretch out her hands to God” (verses 29-31). Yet Isaiah and Zephaniah appear to indicate a particular present or offering—singular. As to what all of this might mean we can only speculate.

Interestingly, many Ethiopians practiced the Jewish religion before the days of Christ. (Note the eunuch of the Ethiopian royal court who was in Jerusalem to worship—see Acts 8:27.) In the Ethiopian national epic, the *Kebra Nagast* (“The Glory of Kings”), written down in the 13th century, it is claimed that this tradition goes back to the Queen of Sheba at the time of Solomon. Indeed, it states that Solomon fathered a son by her named Menelik, who then founded the dynasty of Ethiopian rulers.

Whether or not this is true is unconfirmed, as the Bible is silent on it. However, history does tell us of a number of later Jewish colonies in Egypt that eventually disappeared—and there is reason to believe that refugees from these colonies were forced south and resettled in Ethiopia. Surprisingly, Ethiopians are today actually permitted to settle in the state of Israel under the Jewish law of return. While these people are black, it is possible that many are indeed descendants of Jews who intermarried with the native population.

The *Kebra Nagast*, it should be mentioned in this context, prominently mentions the Ark of the Covenant, the gilded chest built in Moses’ day to hold the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments. This most sacred of Israelite relics was lost at some point between the days of Solomon and Ezra, though we don’t know when, where or how. According to the *Kebra Nagast*, Menelik, to safeguard it from Solomon’s growing apostasy, secretly took the ark with

him to Ethiopia, leaving behind a replica that he had asked the faithful priests to make. While this sounds rather unlikely, it is nevertheless widely believed among Ethiopians today that their nation is in actual possession of the Ark of the Covenant—that it sits guarded and unapproachable in an old church in the city of Aksum in northern Ethiopia. In fact, each local church in Ethiopia has its own Tabot, or representation of the ark, to memorialize that conviction.

British journalist Graham Hancock, in his book *The Sign and the Seal: The Quest for the Lost Ark of the Covenant*, 1992, actually gives a more plausible explanation, different from the Kebra Nagast, as to how the ark might actually have ended up in Ethiopia. He speculates that the ark was taken out of Judah by the Levites to protect it from the apostasy of Hezekiah's son Manasseh—that when Josiah later told the Levites to put the ark back into the temple (2 Chronicles 35:3) this was never done, as it had supposedly already been moved to a new temple at a Jewish colony in Aswan in southern Egypt. Historically, as mentioned above, these Jewish colonists were later forced to flee from the Egyptians, and Hancock provides some evidence that they migrated south into Ethiopia—with, he maintains, the Ark of the Covenant. This hypothesis is also explored in a 2002 book titled *In Search of the Lost Ark of the Covenant* by Robert Cornuke and David Halbrook. Author Grant Jeffrey, in *Armageddon: Appointment with Destiny*, 1990, while embracing the Kebra Nagast version of events, lends some support to the ark's residing in Ethiopia today (pp. 108-122, 229-233).

Still, there are other theories about the ark's whereabouts that also appear credible—including the possibility that Jeremiah hid it or took it with him at the time of the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem. The apocryphal book of 2 Maccabees (2:1-8) says he hid it in a cave on Mount Nebo. (Realize, however, that while the apocryphal books can be useful historical sources like many other secular writings, they are not inspired Scripture and often contain errors.) Many others believe the ark was hidden in a chamber under the Temple Mount. There is, of course, also a very strong possibility that God allowed it to be destroyed by the Babylonians along with its precious contents.

Nonetheless, given what we've seen, a number of people have suggested that the particular present the Ethiopians bring in the last days might be the actual Ark of the Covenant containing the Ten Commandments. Jeremiah says that some time into the peaceful reign of Jesus Christ, people will no longer talk about or think about the ark (Jeremiah 3:16-17)—but this would seem to imply that it will be an issue immediately before then. There is simply no way to be sure.

Finally, while such matters are certainly interesting, we should avoid getting caught up in them to the exclusion of more important spiritual study

## Chapter 19

In Isaiah 19, Isaiah delivers this "burden against Egypt." Set as it is between Isaiah 18 and 20, the prophecy would appear to have been written between 715 and 709 B.C. After a period of infighting and anarchy (19:2), Egypt is to come under the dominance of an oppressive foreign

power (verse 4). Historically, such oppression came a number of times—from Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Seleucid Syria, Rome and later conquerors.

(Alexander the Great was welcomed as Egypt's deliverer from Persia and some identify him with the savior of verse 20—and they see the peace between Israel, Egypt and Assyria at the end of the chapter as representative of the stability within Alexander's brief empire. But this is clearly not what is meant at all.)

The fact that Egypt is reconciled with Assyria at the end of the chapter shows that Assyria is most likely the “cruel master” mentioned earlier in the chapter (verse 4). The prophecy, therefore, might have had some fulfillment in what would begin around 45 years later—the conquest and assimilation of Egypt by the Assyrian Empire under Esarhaddon and then Ashurbanipal. These kings took over from Egypt's ruling Ethiopian dynasty.

However the entire chapter, particularly the way it ends, reveals that this prophecy mainly concerns the end time. As was mentioned in the highlights for our previous reading, the end time ruler of Assyria—the “king of the North” of Daniel and the Beast of Revelation—will invade and oppress Egypt and Ethiopia in the years just prior to Christ's return (Daniel 11:42-43). This means that the “Savior and Mighty One” to deliver the Egyptians (verse 20) is the returning Jesus Christ, who will crush their Assyrian oppressors. (It should also be considered that Assyria of the last days is apparently the dominant power within a resurrected Babylon and Rome—so Egypt's ancient conquests by these and related empires would also appear to serve as forerunners of the coming end-time oppression.)

Verse 17 says that the land of Judah will initially be terrifying to the Egyptians. This did not happen in Isaiah's day. The reference is, again, to the last days. However, it is unclear whom the Egyptians fear. It could possibly be the resurgent Jews at Christ's return (see Zechariah 12:6; 14:14). Then again, perhaps it is the Egyptians' oppressor, the Assyro-Babylonian Beast power, that terrifies them. Its ruling dictator, the king of the North, will have set up his headquarters in Jerusalem (Daniel 11:45, KJV). But most likely it is the awesome power of the returning Christ that they fear. Perhaps they will not understand who He is. And for those who do, they may still be afraid—as they will have been enemies of the Jews and Christians before this. They might imagine terrible retribution. Yet Christ has come to rescue them as well.

Ultimately Egypt will come under His loving dominion (verses 18-22). Verse 19 points out that Egypt will one day have its own altar to God, providing us a glimpse into how God will be worshiped when more nations than Israel come under His rule. Historically, not all altars were built for the purpose of offering incense or sacrifices (compare Joshua 22). However, Isaiah 19:21 does mention sacrifice and offering (the Hebrew apparently denoting peace offering and grain offering respectively), which might be offered on that altar.

Malachi 1:11 confirms that other nations will be permitted to have centers of worship at which to offer incense to God as well as offerings (again probably grain offerings, as indicated by the

Hebrew here). There is evidently no mention of burnt or sin offerings in these verses, so whether or not these will also be offered at satellite places of worship is not clear.

Nevertheless, the nations—Egypt included—will still be expected to attend the feasts of God in Jerusalem or they will be disciplined by such divine measures as the removal of rainfall (Zechariah 14:16-19). God's striking of Egypt in Isaiah 19:22 may refer to these same disciplinary actions, although it could simply refer to the Assyrian oppression.

Eventually, Egypt will reconcile with God, with the people of Israel and with the Assyrians, and will become one of the leading nations in a world of peace (verses 23-25). The highway between Assyria and Egypt must necessarily run through Israel, which lies between them geographically. It is evidently the same route of return taken previously by the returning Israelite exiles from both lands (see Isaiah 11:11, 16). In this case, "the highway symbolizes good will and understanding, free and speedy access. The word, used as an image by Isaiah, indicates the close relationship between once hostile nations forged by a shared commitment to the God of the Jews. When God can say of Egypt and Assyria as well as of Israel, 'my people' (19:25), the world will have peace and blessing at last" (Lawrence Richards, *The Bible Reader's Companion*, 1991, note on 19:23).

Further prophecies concerning Egypt can be found in Jeremiah 46 and Ezekiel 29-32.

## **Ps 129-131**

### Psalm 129

As the first song of ascents in the fourth set of three (of the five sets of three), Psalm 129 is set in the context of distress, recalling those who have hated and abused God's people and pronouncing consequences on them.

The afflicted "me" in verses 1-2, as this is to be declared by all Israel-per the formula "Let Israel now say" (verse 1; compare 118:2; 124:1)-refers to the nation collectively and to all its citizens individually. As for their enemies here, the people of Israel throughout their history often suffered under the brutality of foreign oppressors-and even from other Israelites who were not classed with them here as part of Israel, these being disobedient to God's covenant. (Consider that faithful Israelites often suffered at the hands of their own countrymen.)

The striking imagery of plowers having plowed on Israel's back in long furrows in verse 3 probably combines different metaphors. The obvious meaning here is that of the lash cutting into the people's backs, creating bleeding furrows or stripes-as, for example, the Messiah was prophesied to experience (see Isaiah 50:6; 53:5). Yet it should be noted that God foretold Jerusalem's destruction by the Babylonians in terms of plowing: "Zion shall be plowed like a field, Jerusalem shall become heaps of ruin" (Jeremiah 26:18). The furrows in this case would be paths of destruction through the land. And this was on the back of the people in the sense of their bearing it as a burden.

Yet because the Lord is righteous, the enemies of Israel have never ultimately prevailed (Psalm 129:2). God has always at some point delivered His people, intervening to “cut in pieces the cords of the wicked” (verse 4)-that is, the figurative cords they have used to bind God’s people and to scourge them. God’s past deliverance is the basis of faith in His future intervention.

Verses 5-8, the second stanza of the psalm, then declare an imprecation or curse on the wicked oppressors, expressing God’s judgment. The psalmist asks that all who hate Zion and what it represents-God, His laws, His covenant nation, His Kingdom-“be turned back in shame” (verse 5, NIV). And “consistent with the agricultural language of the psalm, the people pray that the wicked may wither like ‘grass on the roof’ (v. 6 [NIV]; 2 Kings 19:26; Isa 37:27). Roofs were flat; and during periods of moisture or precipitation, grassy weeds might sprout and grow in the shallow dirt. However, the plants soon withered when deprived of moisture (cf. Matt 13:5-6). The grass may grow, but it is so useless that a reaper need not cut it down with a scythe nor bind it into sheaves ([Psalm 129] v. 7). It is a wasted growth. So it will be with the wicked” ( Expositor’s Bible Commentary, note on verses 5-8).

In verse 8, the righteous are reminded to not inadvertently pronounce a blessing on those who are cursed through a typical greeting or bidding of farewell using God’s name (compare 2 John 9-11).

In an ultimate sense, this song of ascents looks forward to the fulfillment of the fall festivals in the return of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, when Israel-meaning both God’s physical nation and His spiritual people, are delivered from their bondage in this world, their oppressors being both human and, primarily, demonic. The cords of Satan and sin will be broken, God’s people will at last be set free, and Satan and his followers will be brought to shame

### Psalm 130

Though Psalm 130 begins in the depths of despair, it rises, as the second song of ascents in the fourth set of three, to a primary focus of confident hope and trust in God-in His faithfulness to forgive and redeem. In its acknowledgment of sin and need for forgiveness, the song is classed as a penitential psalm. “It’s placement following a psalm of imprecation (Ps. 129) is fitting. After all, a person might take such joy [or comfort] in the destruction of the wicked that he or she no longer would consider his or her own heart before the Lord” ( Nelson Study Bible, note on Psalm 130). The pilgrims may have sung this psalm in the manner of a group confessional, seeking God’s forgiveness in preparation for keeping the Feast of Tabernacles. In this sense, it would seem related to the Day of Atonement, concerned with humbling oneself and seeking reconciliation with God just before the joyful celebration of Tabernacles.

The psalm opens with the picture of one who is drowning in sorrow over his sins, calling to God for help, referring to Him throughout as both “ Lord ” ( Yhwh , Eternal One) and “Lord” (Master). The psalmist knows that he, representative of all God’s people, has failed in obedience to the Master. Yet he also knows that God has made provision for this failure.

Verse 3 rhetorically asks who could stand if God were to mark iniquities-that is, if a running tally of our sins was His means of judging us. The answer is none of us-for all have sinned (Romans 3:23) and the ultimate penalty of sin is death (6:23). Ezra expressed wonder at God's people standing in His presence despite their sins: "O Lord God of Israel, you are righteous, for we are left as a remnant, as it is this day [though deserving of complete destruction]. Here we are before You, in our guilt, though no one can stand before you because of this!" (Ezra 9:15). This is possible because God, in His love for humanity, instituted an alternate means of satisfying justice, whereby mercy could be granted instead. This alternate means was the sacrifice of Jesus Christ-who bore the penalty of our sins in His suffering and crucifixion foreshadowed in the sacrificial system of ancient Israel.

The psalmist looks to God for forgiveness (Psalm 130:4), knowing that God is willing to forgive (see Exodus 34:7). It is instructive to note that God offers forgiveness that He "may be feared" (Psalm 130:4). This does not mean that God's forgiveness is something to be feared. Solomon similarly prayed in his prayer at the dedication of the temple for God to forgive His people when they repented "so they will fear you all the time they live in the land you gave our fathers" (1 Kings 8:40). The point is that God's willingness to forgive is what encourages people to enter into a relationship with Him-to committing their lives to obeying Him from then on in proper fear. We should especially consider that forgiveness is not intended to lead to careless abandon but to careful obedience. God does not offer a cheap grace where He continually forgives us without real repentance. He requires a change of life, though this too is possible only through Him.

Confident in God's forgiveness, the psalmist waits in assured hope of God's promises (Psalm 130:5)-hopes and watches even more than "watchmen wait for the morning" (verse 6, NIV). The psalmist may refer here to guards who watched over the city at night-who looked forward to their shift ending and getting some rest. Others suggest that the watchers were Levite priests observing the first signs of dawn to begin preparation for the morning sacrifices. Perhaps the figure concerns longing for the darkness of night to end with the dawning of day as representative of longing for some present trial brought on by sin to end or of Israel's national history of trials to end with the dawning of the coming day of God.

In verse 7 the psalm exhorts the nation to the same confident hope: "O Israel, hope in the Lord "-words also found in the conclusion of the next psalm (131:3), serving to link these songs. For with God, 130:7 continues, there is hesed -steadfast, loyal love and mercy. He had done so much to redeem them already-delivering them from Egypt, giving them a land, rescuing them from enemies time and again. God would redeem them in an ultimate sense in time to come from their sins and its consequences through the Messiah, who would die for their sins and rescue them from all foes, physical and spiritual (see verses 7-8). This redemption was on the minds of pilgrims as they made their way to God's feasts-just as it should be on our minds today

Psalm 131 is the third of four psalms of David among the songs of ascents. As the third song of ascents in the fourth set of three, we would expect its theme to be blessing and peace in Zion- and this does fit with the mention of David, the king in Jerusalem, having a calmed and quieted

soul and of Israel living in the hope of God forever (verses 2-3). The same exhortation for Israel to hope in God in Psalms 130:7 and 131:3 serves to link these two psalms thematically-as does proximity and the continued mood of humility before God.

In light of his accomplishments, David could have been proud. Yet he presents himself to the Lord as a humble man. At heart he is not arrogant or filled with self-importance, nor does he have aspirations for personal greatness (verse 1). He does not deem himself more capable than he is, recognizing his limitations (same verse).

He is at peace and content in God's presence, like a weaned child who no longer frets and cries for milk from his mother's breast (verse 2). A breastfeeding baby can be satisfied-but only temporarily. Note furthermore that this does not mean David views himself as independent of God and no longer in need of His provision. Indeed, a weaned child must still be taken care of and fed by his or her mother. Certainly God will continue to provide and care for all His people-and they should look to Him in confident hope for the present and for eternity to come (verse 3).

Thus, humility, maturity to a point of settled and ongoing contentment, and faith in God's promises are important focuses to maintain in observing God's festivals and in living godly lives generally in the lifelong march to His Kingdom

## **John 7**

At the Feast of Tabernacles. I can't help but wonder why Christians do not realize that Yeshua kept the Feast of tabernacles and taught during it. But they too do not keep the Torah just as Yeshua said of those in His day.

Joh 7:19 "Did not Mosheh give you the Torah? Yet not one of you does the Torah! Why do you seek to kill Me?"

Once again how appropriate that on this weekend of Pentecost we have this awesome teaching from Yeshua Himself.

Joh 7:37 And on the last day, the great day of the festival, Yeshua stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me, and let him who believes in Me drink. 38 "As the Scripture said, out of His innermost shall flow rivers of living water." 39 And this He said concerning the Spirit, which those believing in Him were about to receive, for the Set-apart Spirit was not yet given, because Yeshua was not yet esteemed.

Isa 44:3 'For I pour water on the thirsty, and floods on the dry ground. I pour My Spirit on your seed, and My blessing on your offspring, 4 and they shall spring up among the grass like willows by streams of water.' 5 "One says, 'I belong to Yehovah; another calls himself by the name of Yaaqob; another writes with his hand, 'Unto Yehovah,' and names himself by the name of Yisra'el. 6 "Thus said Yehovah, Sovereign of Yisra'el, and his Redeemer, Yehovah of hosts, 'I am the First and I am the Last, besides Me there is no Elohim.

Jer 2:12 “Be amazed, O heavens, at this, and be frightened, be utterly dried up,” declares Yehovah.<sup>13</sup> “For My people have done two evils: they have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters<sup>1</sup>, to hew out for themselves cisterns, cracked cisterns, which do not hold water.

Jer 17:13 O Yehovah, the expectation of Yisra’el, all who forsake You are put to shame. “Those who depart from Me shall be written in the earth, because they have forsaken Yehovah, the fountain of living waters.”

Zec 14:8 And in that day it shall be that living waters flow from Yerushalayim<sup>1</sup>, half of them toward the eastern sea and half of them toward the western sea, in summer as well as in winter.

Rev 22:1 And he showed me a river of water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of Elohim and of the Lamb. <sup>2</sup> In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

Rev 22:17 And the Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And he who hears, let him say, “Come!” And he who thirsts, come! And he who desires it, take the water of life without paying!

Psa 36:8 They are filled from the fatness of Your house, And You give them drink from the river of Your pleasures.<sup>9</sup> For with You is the fountain of life; In Your light we see light

Pro 14:27 The fear of Yehovah is a fountain of life, To turn away from the snares of death.

Joh 4:10 Yeshua answered and said to her, “If you knew the gift of Elohim, and who it is who says to you, ‘Give Me to drink,’ you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water.” John 7:37-39. <sup>11</sup> The woman said to Him, “Master, You have no vessel, and the well is deep. From where, then, do You have living water? <sup>12</sup> “Are You greater than our father Yaaqob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, and his sons, and his cattle?” <sup>13</sup> Yeshua answered and said to her, “Everyone drinking of this water shall thirst again, <sup>14</sup> but whoever drinks of the water I give him shall certainly never thirst. And the water that I give him shall become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.” <sup>15</sup> The woman said to Him, “Master, give me this water, so that I do not thirst, nor come here to draw.”

Joh 6:63 “It is the Spirit that gives life, the flesh does not profit at all. The words that I speak to you are Spirit and are life.<sup>1</sup> Footnote: <sup>1</sup>See v. 68, and 1 Cor. 15:45. Word and Spirit are in unity.

1Co 10:1 For I do not wish you to be ignorant, brothers, that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, <sup>2</sup> and all were immersed into Mosheh in the cloud and in the sea, <sup>3</sup> and all ate the same spiritual food, <sup>4</sup> and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed, and the Rock was Messiah.



Rev 7:16 “They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun strike them, nor any heat, 17 because the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne shall shepherd them and lead them to fountains of waters of life. And Elohim shall wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

Rev 21:6 And He said to me, “It is done! I am the ‘Aleph’ and the ‘Taw’, the Beginning and the End. To the one who thirsts I shall give of the fountain of the water of life without payment. 7 “The one who overcomes shall inherit all this, and I shall be his Elohim and he shall be My son.

Eze 36:25 “And I shall sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean – from all your filthiness and from all your idols I cleanse you. 26 “And I shall give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you. And I shall take the heart of stone out of your flesh, and I shall give you a heart of flesh, 27 and put My Spirit within you<sup>1</sup>. And I shall cause you to walk in My laws and guard My right-rulings and shall do them. Footnote: <sup>1</sup>See 11:19-20, 37:6-14, 39:29.

Eze 11:19 “And I shall give them one heart, and put a new spirit within you. And I shall take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh, 20 so that they walk in My laws, and guard My right-rulings, and shall do them. And they shall be My people and I shall be their Elohim.

Eze 39:29 ‘And no longer do I hide My face from them, for I shall have poured out My Spirit on the house of Yisra’el,’ declares the Master Yehovah.”

Joe 2:29 “And also on the male servants and on the female servants I shall pour out My Spirit in those days.

Act 10:44 While Kepha was still speaking these words, the Set-apart Spirit fell upon all those hearing the word. 45 And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Kepha, because the gift of the Set-apart Spirit had been poured out on the gentiles also, 46 for they were hearing them speaking with tongues and extolling Elohim. Then Kepha answered, 47 “Is anyone able to forbid water, that these should not be immersed who have received the Set-apart Spirit – even as also we?” 48 And he commanded them to be immersed in the Name of Yeshua Messiah. Then they asked him to remain a few days.

Act 11:15 “And as I began to speak, the Set-apart Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning. 16 “And I remembered the word of the Master, how He said, ‘Yohanan indeed immersed in water, but you shall be immersed in the Set-apart Spirit.’ 17 “So if Elohim gave them the same gift as He gave us when we believed on the Master Yeshua Messiah, how was I able to withstand Elohim?”<sup>18</sup> And having heard this, they were silent, and praised Elohim, saying, “Then Elohim has indeed also given to the gentiles repentance to life.”

Eph 5:18 And do not be drunk with wine, in which is loose behaviour, but be filled with the Spirit, 19 speaking to each other in psalms and songs of praise and spiritual songs, singing and striking the strings in your heart to the Master, 20 giving thanks always for all to Elohim the Father, in the Name of our Master Yeshua Messiah, 21 subjecting yourselves to each other in the fear of Elohim.