

Isaiah Chapters 15-18 - John Karmelich

Title: Why God wants us to care about nonbelievers!

I wanted to take on all these chapters together as they discuss the "neighborhood" around Israel. What I noticed is just how much God cares for non-believers. This section of Isaiah focuses on several nations near Israel and their short and long-term fate based on what they knew about God. The big picture idea is God cares for all people and wants them look to Him for salvation. All these nations had interactions with Israel. God desires to make it obvious He's God and here's what's will happen to you for ignoring Him or here's your reward for accepting God is God!

The point for you and me is not to become an expert on ancient and modern Middle East History. God wants us to care about non-believers just as He does. Yes, I believe God knows all things. That means He knows who will reject Him and why. The sorrow Isaiah points out over the demise of these people is a testament to how much God cares about all people, and obviously He wants believers to care about them as well! Yes, the text discusses their fate, and we get also get some references to the land of Israel in this text. The text begins with the land directly east of Israel (Jordan today), then goes northeast, the land of Syria today, then all places Southern Egypt (or Ethiopia). Isaiah has a lot to say about Egypt, so it'll be the focus of the next lesson. As we go through these chapters don't think of them in terms of the Israel "neighborhood" but consider the non-believers around us. This text reminds us God cares for the fate of all people and wants us believers to be a witness to them! With that said, Chapter 15 opens with Isaiah saying here's the fate of those in "Jordan" (at the time of Isaiah 7th Century BC!)

The first focus is on a nation called Moab. They along with two other nations are Jordan today. Moab gets wiped out by the growing Assyrian Empire and then the Babylonian Empire which means those in Jordan today are not the same as "Moab" then. So why should we care about a long dead nation? What God wants us to grasp is that all people are accountable to Him and He's aware of all things. The text's even commenting on the people of Moab worshipping their false god. John, we know all of that. What we must keep in mind is if God's aware of "all that", He is also aware of all we're doing in life, and that is another reminder of how God designed us to use our lives for His glory! An illustration is a glove is designed based on the shape of a hand. God designed us for Him to be inside us. Still, He gave us free will as He doesn't want "robots" to honor Him. Therefore, we choose let God be in our lives, so we can use our lives for His glory! We can only make a difference for God when we let the Spirit work within us (the glove illustration)! Anyway, this lesson is examples of people rejecting the free gift of His love and the consequences of that action!

With that said, back to the Moabites! A "30-second history" first: We first read about them in Genesis when Lot was fleeing the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah with his two unmarried daughters. The girls thought no one was left alive so they got their father drunk had sex with him and produced a child each. One of those children started the Moabites. Centuries later when the Israelites left Egypt on their way to Israel they traveled through that territory. A prophet told the Moabite king not to attack them as one day they'd rule over them! Centuries later at Isaiah's time, the Israelites ruled over them in a sense, they paid Israel a "lamb tax". It is referenced in this section! Also, at Isaiah's time the "big dog on the block" was the Assyrian Empire based out of what is Iraq today. Isaiah states Moab will be conquered, but the Moabites prayed to their false gods despite those facts. The Moabites knew of God given a long history with Israel. The fact the Israelites got out of Egypt and conquered the land of Israel should have been proof of who the real God is! Since they ignored those facts, down they went! These chapters do

describe cities in Moab and the false god they worshipped. It shows Isaiah knew the geography and it's a historical fact they turned from God despite the evidence of His existence and suffered for it. For us, it is a simple reminder we're all accountable to God based on what we do or should know about Him!

From there Isaiah turns his focus on Syria. As I assume most of you know, that country still exists and like then Damascus is the capital. That city was conquered by the Assyrians soon after Isaiah wrote all this. It is simply another proof that God knows all things before it happens. It is also significant in the fact Syria made an alliance with the Northern Israel Kingdom. Isaiah lived in the Southern Kingdom as they were more loyal to God when the "North" was falling. In effect God was saying, "All of you want to turn your back on Me, despite your knowledge that I'm God and in charge, then you'll suffer for that decision!" The city of Damascus was conquered, and the residents were killed. The city obviously still exists (probably on a different spot nearby). The bottom line's God knew of that alliance, and He wants the Middle East to know He's God, "deal with it or suffer the consequences". Later in Isaiah we'll read of God saving the Southern Kingdom literally by wiping out a huge multitude of Assyrian soldiers! So, does that mean I should ignore my problems and wait for God to act? God will do what He wants when He wants! I've always held the view I should pray for wisdom, make the best decisions I can and if He desires to step in a situation, that's His business. The mistake here in Isaiah is those in Syria and in that Northern Israel Kingdom knew of His existence but turned from Him and suffered the consequences.

Again, as this text discusses the nations near Israel, the issue is not to become an expert on Middle East history, but to realize God knows all things, watches all things and expects us to act on what we do and should know about God. In effect, the issue is accountability based on that knowledge we should or do have about Him! If you get that, you get the underlying point about what was happening in the Middle East at that time and the fact God knows all things and He holds us accountable for that knowledge.

Then Chapter 18 switches from the land adjacent to Israel to roughly Ethiopia. What's significant about this section is Isaiah doesn't have the same "doom and gloom" of the other nations! It still has negative things to say about this area, but there's some positive aspects to this text as well. Obviously, the word Ethiopia didn't exist then, and the text refers to birds and insects that were known there. When we think about the Nile River, we rarely think about where the water comes from. The short version is the lower parts (think southern) parts of Egypt was hillside where streams flow and it eventually forms in what is the Nile River. Today that area is partially Egypt and partially Ethiopia. The negative aspect is Egypt's going to lose big time to the rise of the Babylonian Empire and Ethiopia will suffer as well. Still, God's saying He will still flourish in that region one day. The queen of Ethiopia is famous in the Bible as she visited Solomon centuries earlier, so my point is they had knowledge of God. In the Book of Acts, we get a meeting of a Christian disciple witnessing to an Ethiopian official. (Acts 8:26-40). Knowledge of that fact lead many to Jesus there! Isaiah's saying because Ethiopia knew of God and they continued to worship God, they got spared judgment. Judaism and Christianity flourished for a time there. In effect that saved Ethiopia from the horrid fate of other places in the Middle East conquered soon after Isaiah's time!

OK John, I now know more about 7th Century BC Middle East history than I ever care to know! What I'm trying to pound home is the issue is not local politics back then. It is the awareness that God knows all things and cares about all people. Christianity was NEVER designed to be an exclusive club with an "I'm in, you're not and that's your problem!" He gave us free will, that He wants us to use that free will to be a witness to Him and lead others to Him. Of course, only God is capable of saving people. We're called to be a witness for Him! Reading about other nations in the neighborhood to Israel is a reminder that He cares about all people and wants us to be witness to nonbelievers! Jesus calls us to be a witness to all nations (Matthew 28:19) and that is what we are seeing here in this text!

With that said, hope you like this study. I wrote a more detailed one some years back. If you want to read that, click on one of the links below. It is still a joy to study this stuff and again I'm grateful for you reading this. The rest of this email is links to questions you may have. If you're new here, you're always welcome to e-mail me. Thanks again for reading this!

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That's it. Hope you enjoy it. Don't forget to fire up a prayer prior to your reading.