

# SUDAN IN THE SCRIPTURES

*“Cush will submit herself to God.”* Psalm 68: 31

In the Bible, Sudan is referred to as Cush, Nubia and Ethiopia. Often when the Bible mentions a place at the end of the world it would refer to Sudan (e.g.: Psalm 87:4).

2 Kings 19:1-9 and Isaiah 37:1-10 relate how one of the Cushite pharaohs, Tirhakah, intervened to assist King Hezekiah when Israel was attacked by Sennacherib, the emperor of Assyria.

Jeremiah 38:7-13 describes how a Sudanese official, Eben-Malech, helped save Jeremiah from certain death when he had been thrown into a cistern. It was Eben-Malech, the Cushite, that pulled Jeremiah the Prophet from the pit.

Nahum 3:9 describes how the Assyrians treated the Egyptian city of Thebes when the Cushites were defeated.

## Confusion About Cush

It is regrettable that so much confusion has been created by some Bible translators rendering the Hebrew word *Kush* with the Greek word *Aithiopia*. Cush is identified in Ezekiel 29:9-10 as the land south of Aswan, the southernmost border of Egypt, on the Nile.

Ezekiel 29:9-10 prophesies against Egypt: *“Egypt will become a desolate wasteland. Then they will know that I am the Lord. Because He said ‘the Nile is mine; I made it’, therefore I am against you and against your streams and will make the land of Egypt a ruin and a desolate waste from Migdol to Aswan, as far as the border of Cush.”* Ezekiel 29:9-10

Migdol is in the North of Egypt, Aswan is the southernmost town, beyond which lies the land of Cush. Similarly, in Psalm 68:31 Egypt and Cush are referred to as immediate neighbours: *“Envoys will come from Egypt; Cush will submit herself to God.”*

While Cush is a very specific term, for the people descended from Cush, the grandson of Noah, and refers to the country immediately south of Egypt along the Nile, the Greek word *Aithiopia* was a very vague term that the ancient Greeks used for any country to the south of their known world. *Aithiopia* (which comes from the word *Aithiops* - meaning a black face) was such a general term that the Greeks used it not only for anywhere in Africa, but even India!

So, when the Greek translators in Alexandria, three centuries before Christ, were translating the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek, their using the vague term *Ethiopia* for the specific Hebrew word *Cush*, sowed seeds of confusion.

This confusion has been compounded even more now that there is today a country called Ethiopia. But modern day Ethiopia was known as Abyssynia (or *Abessinia*) until the Second World War, and in the time of the Bible was referred to as *Axum*.

## Envoys from Cush

The great prophesy on Cush in Isaiah 18 plainly refers to what we today know as Sudan. ***“Woe to the land of warring wings along the rivers of Cush, which sends envoys by sea in papyrus boats over the water.”*** Isaiah 18:1-2

Sudan has been the land of Biblical plagues, where the locusts came down upon Egypt. And Sudan has sent envoys on boats by water (down the Nile River or down the Red Sea) to Jerusalem. This included Eben-Malech, who saved Jeremiah, (Jeremiah 38:7-13) and the treasurer of Queen Candice (Acts 8:26-40).

The Ethiopian eunuch, the treasurer of Queen Candice who ruled Meroe (present day Northern Sudan), had gone to Jerusalem to worship and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the Book of Isaiah. The Spirit of the Lord led the deacon Phillip away from the Revival in Samaria to this remote desert road to Gaza. Phillip ran up to the chariot and heard the Cushite reading Isaiah the Prophet.

***“Do you understand what you are reading?”*** he asked. ***“How can I, unless someone guides me?”*** The Cushite asked Philip to come up and sit with him. The place in the Scripture which he was reading was: ***“He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so He opened not His mouth. In His humiliation His justice was taken away, and who will declare His generation? For His life is taken from the earth.”*** Acts 8:32-33

The eunuch asked Phillip ***“of whom does the Prophet say this, of himself or some other man?”*** Then Phillip began at this Scripture to proclaim the Lord Jesus Christ to him. And so, the Ethiopian eunuch came back to the kingdom of Meroe, in Northern Sudan, not only with the Book of Isaiah in his hands, but with Jesus Christ in his heart - a newly baptized Christian convert. So the history of the church in Sudan begins in AD 37, in Acts chapter 8, with a portion of Scripture, the Book of Isaiah itself. (Axum, or what became Abyssinia, received the Gospel from the Apostle Matthew, who was martyred there.)

The church in Sudan grew steadily, and in the third century many Egyptian Christians fled to Sudan to escape the persecutions of the Roman emperors, Decius and Diocletian. Strong Christian communities were flourishing in Philae from the early centuries. Crosses and other Christian objects have been found in the royal tombs of Nubia dating back to the 5th century. Following the collapse of the kingdom of Meroe (in about AD 350) three smaller kingdoms were established – Nubia, Makuria and Alwa. By the 6th century, Christianity had become the official religion of these Sudanese kingdoms. Archaeologists have unearthed over a hundred churches dating back to this period in Nubia alone. Many of these churches have elaborate Christian paintings on the walls.

## A War Like People

***“Go swift messengers, to a people tall and smooth skinned, to a people feared far and wide, an aggressive nation of strange speech whose land is divided by rivers.”*** Isaiah 18:2

The Sudanese are a tall people, a smooth skinned people, with a violent history. There was a time when the Cushites conquered Egypt – which had been the superpower of its day. To the Egyptians, Sudan was known as the land of Cush – the source of ivory, incense, ebony, gold and slaves. Sudan was subjected to numerous Egyptian trading and raiding forays until the 8th century BC. Then Cush grew to be a great power and, under their king Piankhi, the Cushites conquered Egypt in 712 BC. The Assyrians later invaded and seized Egypt from Cushite control in 671 BC. The Romans invaded Northern Sudan in 23 BC. With 800 cavalry and 10,000 infantry, the Romans attacked the capital of Napata, but the Romans were forced to withdraw in AD 297.

When the Islamic armies attacked Nubia in AD 643, the Nubians steadfastly resisted and threw back the invaders. Again in AD 652 another Muslim offensive which sought to conquer Nubia was defeated by the Christians. The Muslims were thrown back into Egypt.

From the time when the Cushites invaded Israel under King Asa, and when the Cushites came to the support of King Hezekiah against the Assyrians, to the centuries of resistance against Islamic invasion from Egypt, to the uprising of the Mahdi in the 19th century, to the fifty year civil war just ended, the Sudanese have proved to be exactly as the Scriptures describe: ***“A people feared far and wide, an aggressive nation...”***

And Sudan is truly the ***“land divided by rivers.”*** The Nile, one of the greatest rivers in the world, stretches the full length of Sudan. From the source of the White Nile in Lake Victoria, it takes a drop of water four months to travel the over 4,000 kilometres to the Mediterranean Sea. While present day Ethiopia is a mountainous and desert land, Sudan is the land of Cush referred to in the Bible here in Isaiah 18. The Blue and White Nile and their tributaries provide tremendous logistical challenges for missionaries and other travelers to cross these phenomenal obstacles.

### **The Banner and Trumpet**

***“All you people of the world, you who live on the earth, when a banner is raised on the mountains, you will see it, and when a trumpet sounds, you will hear it.”***

Isaiah 18:3

The Scriptures declare that something of worldwide significance is going to happen in Sudan. That all people on earth must take note of. What could possibly be of such significance in this remote and vast country that Christians as far afield as Australia and America, South Africa and Switzerland should pay attention to?

Sudan is the largest country in Africa and it has just emerged from the grip of the longest war of the 20th century. Sudan contains the oldest community of Christians in Africa - who have suffered some of the worst persecutions in the world. Yet the Christian church in Sudan has been growing faster than anywhere else in Africa, with more Muslims coming to Christ in Sudan than almost anywhere else.

Sudan is in the *10-40 window*, the most neglected and needy mission field on earth (stretching from the 10th to the 40th degrees latitude in the Northern hemisphere.) In that 10-40 window

stretching from the Atlantic across the Middle East and South Central Asia to the Pacific, are over three billion non-Christians - the most needy and resistant mission fields in the world. The final mission frontier.

In the Book of Nehemiah, when Jerusalem was under attack, the trumpet would sound and rally the forces to concentrate on the threatened area.

***“Remember the prisoners as if chained with them – those who are mistreated – since you yourselves are in the Body also.”*** Hebrews 13:3

### **Africa’s Forgotten War**

***“This is what the Lord says to me: I will remain quiet and look on from My dwelling place, like shimmering heat in the sunshine, like a cloud of dew in the heat of harvest.”*** Isaiah 18:4

For a long time Christians in Sudan felt alone and abandoned. *“We are a hidden people fighting a forgotten war”*. It has been so important to let them know: You are not alone. You are not forgotten. There are many who are praying and who care enough to have sent us with these gifts for you.

### **A Harvest of Death**

***“For, before the harvest, when the blossom is gone and the flower becomes a ripening grape, He will cut off the shoots with pruning knives, and cut down and take away the spreading branches. They will all be left to the mountain birds of prey and to the wild animals; the birds will feed on them all summer, the wild animals all winter.”*** Isaiah 18:5-6

The relentless scorched earth campaign of the National Islamic Front government, which declared *Jihad* against the Christian South and the Nuba Mountains, brought tremendous suffering. Bibles were banned, villages were burned, churches destroyed, pastors crucified, livestock looted, crops burned, wells poisoned, children enslaved. At times the death toll has been so great that there were not enough people left to bury the dead. Vultures and scavengers did indeed feast on the slain in Sudan.

### **Revival Amidst Persecution**

***“At that time gifts would be brought to the Lord Almighty from a people tall and smooth skinned, from a people feared far and wide, an aggressive nation of strange speech, whose land is divided by rivers – the gifts would be brought to Mount Zion, the place of the Name of the Lord Almighty.”*** Isaiah 18:7

There has been Revival amidst persecution in Sudan. Tremendous sacrifices have been made. Like the Nuba Church in Kauda which, within a 12 month period, endured 18 aerial bombardments from the Sudan Air Force. Yet the people continued to gather, and overflow their

church, for Sunday worship. The cathedral in Lui, the birthplace of Christianity in Moruland, was bombed ten times. Three times the cathedral was destroyed, yet each time rebuilt and restored and filled with joyful Christians bringing a sacrifice of praise.

Despite having arms amputated and feet axed off at the ankles, Sudanese evangelists have continued to take the Gospel to their neighbours. The Lord Jesus declared: ***“Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends.”*** John 15:13

### **Surviving and Thriving**

The people of Cush have been submitting themselves to God. There has been tremendous church growth in Southern Sudan. Some pastors have reported adding over 8,000 people to their churches in just three years. Numerous pastors have multiple congregations to care for.

The resilient Christians of Sudan have stood steadfast against the onslaught of Islamic Jihad. They have been a bulwark holding up the southward expansion of Islam in Africa. Straddling the Nile, these Christian tribes had frustrated the ambitions of Islamic *Jihadists* in Khartoum. Not only has the church in Sudan survived the furious fires of persecution, but they have thrived, even winning some of their enemies to Christ.

***“From beyond the rivers of Cush My worshippers, My scattered people will bring Me offerings.”*** Zephaniah 3:10