

OT751 Isaiah  
Dr. Russell Mack

***Essay 6: What is one new thing you learned or idea to which you were exposed?***

One new thing that I learned this week is the significance of Biblical geography. There are plenty of geographical references in this portion of Isaiah that accentuates the message of “trust in God”. For example, when the Lord rebukes Judah’s plan to ally with Egypt, He declares that “Egypt’s shade will bring you disgrace” (Isa30:3) This expression has to be understood in the context of the Near East. Oswalt explains that the direct sun in the Near East can harm a person seriously through dehydration, and that shade from the sun “is the difference between life and death”. (Oswalt, 351) Just as it is natural to look for shade from the sun, it is natural for Judah to seek protection in critical times of danger. However, Egypt cannot shade her, only God’s shade can bring real protection.

The oracle concerning the animals of the Negev (Isa 30: 6-7) and the mention of Topheth (30:33) also require some geographical knowledge. The Negev is a pathway to Egypt through the desert, but there is a more direct path along the coast through Philistia. It is likely that the Judean ambassadors wanted to avoid Assyrian detection, thus ended up taking this difficult path that their ancestors took to leave Egypt in the Exodus. (Constable, 202) Topheth is a “fireplace” south of Jerusalem where the Israelites had made child sacrifice to the Ammonite Idol (Constable, 208). However, Isaiah declared that this place has long been prepared for the Lord’s punishment of Assyria (Isa 30:33). Both the irony of the ambassadors’ route to Egypt and the fact that the Lord will punish Judah’s enemy at a place of idol worship further highlights the foolishness of relying on anything but the almighty God.

Chapters 34-35 contain two contrasting images of the land of Edom turning into a desert (34:8-15) and the desert turning into a garden (35:1-2). These images must be especially startling to those living in the Near East. Geography is in the hands of the Creator and He speaks to His creatures in the language of the natural environment that they are familiar with. I have gained geographical knowledge of the Biblical land that deepens my understanding of the text in this week’s portion of Isaiah.