

DAILY BIBLE ILLUSTRATIONS

by

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Forty-Fourth Week - Friday

THE CUSHITE INVASION

"And Asa had an army of three hundred thousand from Judah who carried shields and spears, and from Benjamin two hundred and eighty thousand men who carried shields and drew bows; all these were mighty men of valor. Then Zerah the Ethiopian came out against them with an army of a million men and three hundred chariots, and he came to Mareshah" (2 Chronicles 14:8,9).

The first ten years of Asa's reign were happily passed in promoting the temporal welfare of his people, strengthening his kingdom by fortresses, organizing a large force fitted for military service, and in repairing the shorn magnificence of the Lord's temple and his own palace (so far as his means allowed)

Then the clouds of an impending storm appeared in the south from an unexpected quarter. "Zerah the Ethiopian" appeared with a countless army in which a large proportion of Lubim, or Lybians, was included. To the less instructed reader of Scripture, this suggests the idea of an army from the region south of Egypt, to which the name of Ethiopia properly belongs. But the better informed reader will see that the possibility of such an army marching from Ethiopia through the length of Egypt in order to reach Palestine is just not possible.

The passage of an army through any country is a great calamity and not likely to be allowed for purposes in which that king takes no part or has no interest. Now Osorkon, who succeeded Shishak, was fully aware of the invasion made by his predecessor. If Osorkon were willing that Judah should be invaded again, would he not be apt to consider such an invasion his own affair and not that of a near neighbor such as Ethiopia? And if he were not willing, it is scarcely credible that he would have consented to such a passage through his territories.

All the difficulty involving this episode seems to have been created by one of the most common accidents of translation--that of rendering a large term by another of more limited significance in the language into which the translation is made. In the original, Zerah "the Ethiopian" is Zerah "the Cushite," a name applicable to all the descendants of Cush, the son of Ham, and even to the inhabitants of the regions originally settled but afterward abandoned by them. Now the name Cush is very rarely in Scripture applicable to the African Cush (or Ethiopia proper), but almost always refers to the Asiatic Cush in Arabia.

The original settlements of the great Cushite family can be traced at the head of the Persian Gulf, where the name Khusistan, or "land of Cush," still denotes an important district, anciently renowned by the classically softened name of Susiana. From there, all along the coast of Arabia, down the eastern coast and up the western, the course of the great settling migration of the Cushites may be traced. Hence Arabia, or certain important parts of it, would be properly called Cush; and this not only as originally settled by Cushites, but as still the abode of many Cushite tribes, the distinct origin of some of which can be recognized even at this day.

That this war originated in Arabia is evinced in our text by the fact that the invaders were a mixture of pastoral and settled tribes. They had tents and cattle in great numbers. They also had chariots and towns. The pastoral herds inevitably tie them to Arabia, if only as confirming the improbability of their having passed through Egypt. Besides this, one of their towns to which they fled and attempted to make a stand was Gerar in the southern wilderness, which ties them to Arabia Petres and the parts about and between Egypt and Palestine. Many no doubt came from more distant parts of Arabia, seeing that this huge host seems to have been a great gathering of Cushite and other tribes. The prime movers were in all likelihood those that lay the nearest to Palestine, who urged on the more remote tribes to join them.

These, we doubt not, were the Lybians, descendants of those who had been among Shishak's conscripted troops some twenty-five years before. Finding kindred tribes and a country and mode of life congenial to their own habits, they chose to be left behind at that time with the glad consent of Shishak, who thus got rid of them when their work was done without the expense and trouble of restoring them to their own land. And it is indeed likely that the idea of the present expedition originated with this people. They remembered the ease with which Judah had been subdued in the time of Rehoboam, of the golden glories of Jerusalem and of the rich pillage obtained there. We may imagine these rough fellows conversing among themselves and murmuring over how the king of Egypt at that time refused to give up the rich city of Jerusalem to be sacked by his troops, for depriving the soldiers of the just reward of the treasures of the temple.

But so much the better. What was not taken then was still there now, and no doubt even more.