

1. Introduction

The Bible is not only the book of and for the Jews and Christians; it contains a message for all people on the whole earth. This is clear from God's promise to Abraham "in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." ¹ Besides this general promise and others, God gave His prophets specific messages concerning particular nations. These pertain the neighboring countries of Israel, such as Ammon, Moab and Philistia, and great kingdoms like Egypt, Assyria and Babylon.



Sometimes these were encouraging predictions, other times God warned them about coming judgment because of their sins.

2. Overview of the prophecies

The table on the last page contains the references to the different Bible passages, with the promises marked bold italics and the judgments in regular font. This list is the result of an extensive study of all the prophecies in the Old Testament. Possibly there are more in the Bible, but this overview gives a clear picture of which peoples God spoke about and whether His messages were positive or negative.

The books of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel contain a long section with prophecies about other nations. The part in Jeremiah encompasses some six chapters (46:1 – 51:58) and begins with “The word of the LORD that came to Jeremiah the prophet concerning the nations.”² The book of Isaiah contains nine chapters (Ch. 13-21) and Ezekiel eight (Ch. 25-32).

Besides prophecies about particular nations, God sometimes spoke to all the nations in the world. For instance, Isaiah received the message "Draw near, O nations, to hear, and give attention, O peoples! Let the earth hear, and all that fills it; the world, and all that comes from it. For the LORD is enraged against all the nations." ³

3. Lessons

From the table at the end, the following observations can be made regarding God's ways with different nations.

a. Judgments

i. Amalek

The Amalekites were only prophesied about at the time of Moses. The message was that it would be destroyed, because they had attacked the people of Israel in the desert for no reason. In fact, they had approached the Israelites from the back, where the most vulnerable people were walking: the elderly, the sick and children (Exodus 17:8, Deuteronomy 25:17-19). The prophecy was largely fulfilled in the days of Saul, who wiped out most of the Amalekites.

ii. Edom

Edom was judged more often than any other nation. The Book of Obadiah is even mostly about them. Apparently, the descendants of Esau made problems early on, because in the 15th century BC, the pagan Balaam already prophesied about them (Numbers 24:20). They distinguish themselves from other nations as one of the greatest enemies of the Israelites.

iii. Other descendants of Abraham

There are remarkably few judgments about Kedar and Nebaioth, descendants of Ishmael and Midian, especially in relation to the promises.

In addition, the judgment about Kedar seems to focus mainly on her pride. He is neither accused of attacking Israel or other nations, nor of worshiping idols. When Nebuchadnezzar went all the way to Egypt from Babylon, subjecting all the nations to him, Kedar thought he was safe in the wilderness. However, God told him not to think that the aggression of Babylon would go past him.

iv. Philistia

The Philistines were the recipients of many judgments. They were told they would lose their land and cease to exist as a unique nation (Zephaniah 2:5-7). This was fulfilled during the time of the Maccabees, when they lost their land to the Israelites.⁴ This means that the Palestinians today have no Biblical claim to the coastal area of Gaza.

v. Other nations

Many other nations are specifically mentioned in the Bible as having come under God's judgment. Egypt, Cush, Elam, Assyria, Aram, Tyre, Sidon, Babylon and Magog were all judged for their sins. Some of them also received promises, as can be seen below.

Eventually the whole world will be judged, but even then there is the promise of blessing afterwards, in response to repentance (Isaiah 2:2-4; Zachariah 8:20-23; 14:16-19).

b. Promises

i. The descendants of Abraham

Isaiah prophesied that the descendants of Kedar, Nebaioth, Midian and Ephah would worship the Lord in Jerusalem with their riches and that the villages of Kedar would rejoice in the wilderness. Until today that hasn't happened at a large scale, leading to the conclusion that it is yet to happen. One day many on the Arabian Peninsula are going to turn to the God of Israel and serve Him. The visit of the wise men from the east is seen by many as a first fulfillment of Isaiah 60:6-7.⁵

ii. Neighbors of Israel

At the time of Jeremiah God gave a powerful message to the neighbors of Israel, who wanted to possess the land that Judah had received as her inheritance (Jeremiah 12:15-16). It is known from history that the Philistines, Edomites, Moabites, Ammonites and Arameans have tried to do that several times.⁶ First these nations were judged (12:14; 25:9-11), but God promised to bring them back to their inheritance and bless them in the midst of His people. The condition was that they would honor Him, instead of Baal. If they didn't accept God's invitation, He would root them up completely (12:17).

History teaches us that these neighbors didn't repent. Several decades later the prophet Ezekiel foretold that Ammon, Moab and Edom would be destroyed,⁷ and that God would give their territory as inheritance to the men of the east (Ezekiel 25:4, 10).⁸ This was fulfilled when the Nabataeans, descendants of Ishmael's son Nebaioth, established their kingdom there in the 3rd Century B.C.

Still, God promised Ammon and Moab, descendants of the righteous Lot, a turn in their captivity (Jeremiah 48:47; 49:6). Possibly this was fulfilled for a short period, after the fall of the Babylonian empire, when they had the opportunity to turn back to God. It is more likely, however, that this promise concerns the people who later lived in their territory.⁹ As predicted in the judgments, the Ammonites and Moabites ceased to exist as unique peoples.¹⁰ The remaining Ammonites and Moabites assimilated into the Arabs, the descendants of Ishmael.¹¹ In Jeremiah 48:47 the promise can be seen that the Moabite Arabs will one day come to spiritual freedom.¹²

The Philistines and Arameans didn't repent either, so they were judged in the same way. Among others, the prophet Zechariah spoke about this about a century later (Zechariah 9:1-8). The Aramean capital Damascus fell into the hands of the Greek Alexander the Great.¹³

Several centuries later the Nabataeans ruled over Damascus, until the time of the Roman Empire.

Philistia was probably destroyed by Alexander the Great, though some sources mention that this took place during the rule of Jonathan the Maccabee.¹⁴ According to the Jewish historian Josephus, many of the remaining Philistines converted to Judaism.¹⁵

iii. Other nations

It is remarkable that God made specific promises to Egypt, Assyria, Sheba, Elam and Cush, as these peoples had no blood relationship with the descendants of Abraham. Of the first three, some positive connections with Israel may be observed.

Egypt played an important role in the history of Israel. At the time of Joseph, Pharaoh welcomed Jacob and his family into the country and saved them from death through famine. In later times Egypt was often an ally of Israel in her battles against other nations. Solomon even married a daughter of Pharaoh. Finally, Joseph and Mary sheltered in Egypt from the wrath of King Herod.

Assyria was in the area where the descendants of Abraham's brothers Nahor and Haran went to live. Possibly this is why God promised to bless this people.

Then there is the people of Sheba, whose queen once tested the wisdom of Solomon,¹⁶ and of whom Jesus said that she, together with the other believers, will judge the unbelievers on the day of judgment.¹⁷ These people will one day be blessed by God and worship Him wholeheartedly.

The Elamites were promised that God would reverse their captivity (Jeremiah 49:39). Does this apply to the days of the prophets or does it point to a deeper future fulfillment? Current developments among the Elamites, today's Iranians, suggest that God promised a spiritual liberation as well. Many are being delivered from the yoke of religious slavery and are changing from 'slave of God' into 'sons and daughters of God.'

As for Cush, it was prophesied that they would submit themselves to God (Psalm 68:31), and bring their commerce to Israel (Isaiah 45:14). In the Bible Cush usually refers to the area south of Egypt,¹⁸ corresponding with modern Sudan.¹⁹

According to this prediction many of them will come to faith in Christ.²⁰ Some see an initial fulfillment in the baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:27-39).²¹

iv. Daniel

In Daniel 11:41 a promise is given that Ammon, Moab and Edom would escape a major invasion of Israel. In light of the judgments over these people, as described above, this doesn't seem to make sense.

Some see the fulfillment of this prophecy in the victory of Antiochus against the Jews, when the population east of the Jordan was left alone,²² while others see it in the Turks who could not overcome the Arabs east of the Jordan River.²³ Since the Nabataeans were living there at the time of Antiochus, the prophecy was probably not about the three nations, but about the areas

that bore their names at the time of Daniel. At the time of fulfillment the area may still have carried the same names,²⁴ but by then the descendants of Ishmael lived there.

v. Psalm 72

This Psalm is a prophetic song of King David in which he describes how all peoples will submit themselves to his son Solomon. This was fulfilled during the reign of Solomon, who was at peace with all the nations around him. At that time the queen of Sheba brought him great gifts of gold and spices.

At another level the Psalm points to Jesus, who also is a descendant from David. One day all nations will serve Him (72:11), and be blessed in Him and bless Him (72:17). The desert dwellers – Abraham's descendants through Ishmael and Keturah's sons – will bow before Him. The fact that the desert dwellers are mentioned together with the enemies doesn't necessarily imply that they were those enemies. The context of the verse shows a pattern of expansion, from the desert dwellers to the enemies around Israel, to coastal lands further away and to Sheba, which is called "the ends of the earth"²⁵ elsewhere.

The parallel promises regarding the desert dwellers and Sheba in Isaiah 42 and 60 point to voluntary actions and don't give reason to see them as enemies here. Most likely the enemies referred to the Philistines, Ammonites, Moabites, Edomites and Arameans, nations that had disappeared at the time of Jesus or were considered Arabs.

The Psalm seems to indicate that there will be several phases in the fulfillment of the prophecy: first many Arabs will turn to Christ and finally all people will serve Him.

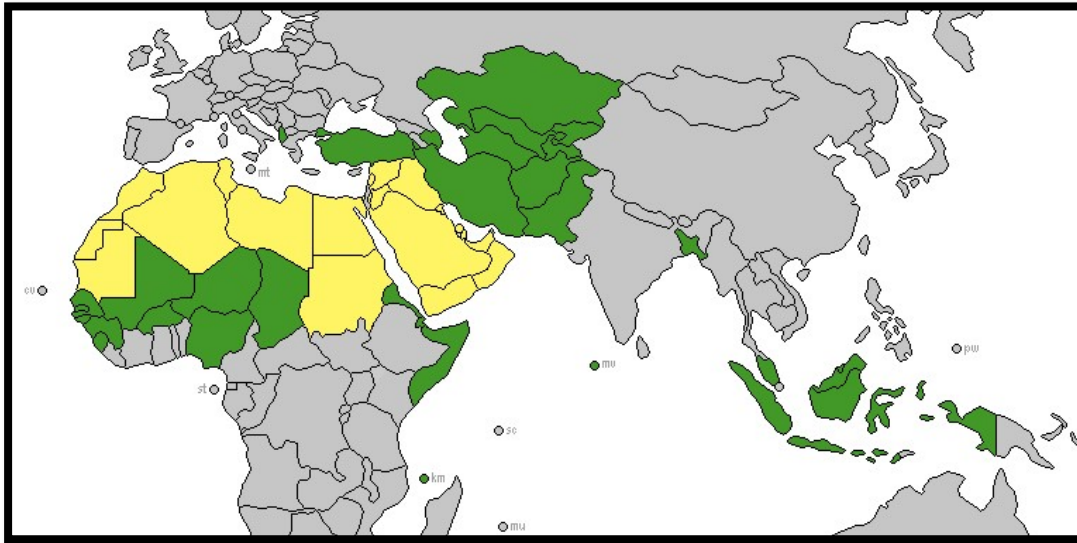
4. The Middle East today

Most of the nations and peoples mentioned in the Biblical prophecies have other names at present. The following table shows the relationship between them.

Biblical name	Current name	Bible reference
Ammon	Northwest-Jordan	Daniel 11:41
Assyria	Eastern-Syria, Western-Iraq	Isaiah 19:18-25; Micah 7:12
Cush	Sudan, North-Ethiopia	Psalm 68:31; Isaiah 45:14
Edom	South-Jordan	Daniel 11:41
Egypt	Egypt	Isaiah 19:18-25; 29:8-16; Micah 7:12
Elam	Iran	Jeremiah 49:39
Kedar	Southwest-Iraq, North-Saudi-Arabia	Psalm 72:9; Isaiah 42:11; 60:6-7
Midian, Ephah	Central-Saudi-Arabia	Psalm 72:9; Isaiah 60:6-7
Moab	West-Jordan	Daniel 11:41
Nebaioth	South-Jordan, North-Saudi-Arabia	Psalm 72:9; Isaiah 42:11; 60:6-7
Sheba	Yemen	Psalm 72:10; Isaiah 60:6

It should be noted that the promise in Daniel 11:41 probably doesn't refer to the people of Ammon, Moab and Edom, but to their territories, in which the Nabataeans settled, thus fulfilling Ezekiel 25:4 and 10. See also above at 3.b.iv.

The following illustration shows the countries in which more than half of the population adheres to the Islamic faith. The yellow countries make up the Arab world, while the other Islamic countries are colored green.



As can be seen in the schedule, of several of these peoples the Bible predicts that they will truly worship God. The following illustration gives an overall impression of their habitat in relation to the current borders. Remarkably, the Arabian Peninsula, the cradle of Islam, and a considerable part of the Arab world are included.



Nations about which promises are found in the Bible are colored beige

The apostle Paul wrote, "a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And in this way all Israel will be saved." ²⁶ So, part of Israel hardened against the good news that Jesus Christ died for their sins. This resistance would continue until the fullness of the number of converted Gentiles would be achieved. Today about half of the Jews consider themselves secular; a clear picture of the hardening of their hearts. However, this is going to change. Paul already predicted how this will happen, when he wrote, "I will make you jealous of those who are not a nation; with a foolish nation I will make you angry." ²⁷

Throughout the centuries the Christians worldwide have not been able to make the Jews jealous of them. On the contrary, history teaches us that the Jews were often treated badly in the Christian West. The attitude of many Christians changed only after the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948.

Who would be better able to arouse the Jews to jealousy than the descendants of their half-brother Ishmael and the other surrounding nations who are counted among the Arabs?

5. Conclusion

The Old Testament contains many prophecies concerning nations in the Middle East; judgments as well as promises.

The judgments over Philistia and Edom are the most severe. Both nations eventually disappeared, because of their disobedience to God and their hatred toward God's people Israel.

On the other hand, the judgments of the Ishmaelites were few, consistent with their behavior. They sought no problems with other nations, and were left alone by the others.²⁸ Kedar was judged for his pride, just like Israel was often judged for being proud. This means the descendants of Ishmael were closer to Israel than any other people.

The unfulfilled promises of God show His great plan with the peoples of the Middle East, in accordance with His mercy that extends "to a thousand generations of those who love Him."²⁹ God promised Abraham that He would bless Ishmael, and he has done that ... and will continue to do so! One day the promises of Psalm 72 and Isaiah 42 and 60 will be a reality.

In addition, the Egyptians and Assyrians, the Elamites, the remaining descendants of Moab and Ammon, and the inhabitants of Cush will also be recipients of God's blessing. Today, most of these nations are counted among the Arabs, of whom many live under the yoke of all kinds of religious commandments and prohibitions. God wants to give them the blessing of full assurance of forgiveness of sins.³⁰

Finally, this is God's desire for all the spiritual descendants of Ishmael worldwide, who suffer under the same yoke; all of whom have taken up the yoke of praying five times a day, of a month of fasting every year and of other obligations. God the heavenly Father is waiting on them, in order to share with them all that He has.³¹

¹ Genesis 12:3, *The Holy Bible*, English Standard Version, Copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles. Unless marked otherwise, all other verses are also from the English Standard Version

² Jeremiah 46:1

³ Isaiah 34:1-2a

⁴ 1 Maccabees 11:61-62

⁵ See Study Wise Men

⁶ See Study Conflicts with nations

⁷ Ezekiel 25:1-14, especially the verses 7, 11 and 13

⁸ Ezekiel 25:4,10 The men of the east were descendants of Ishmael. See Study Origin of Arabs & Land for the Arabs

⁹ Bible Commentator Gill on Jeremiah 48:47, 'though that people [the Moabites] are no more, yet there are a people which inhabit their country, who will, at least many of them, be converted, when the fullness of the Gentiles is brought in; and it is no unusual thing in Scripture for the present inhabitants of many countries to be called after those who formerly inhabited them, as the Turks are often called Assyrians.' *e-Sword* version 10.1.0, Rick Myers

¹⁰ Bible Commentator Clarke on Jeremiah 48:47, 'neither the Ammonites, Moabites, Philistines, nor even the Jews themselves were ever restored to their national consequence. Perhaps the restoration spoken of here which was to take place in the latter days, may mean the conversion of these people, in their existing remnants, to the faith of the Gospel. Several judicious interpreters are of this opinion. The Moabites were partially restored; but never, as far as I have been able to learn, to their national 'consequence.'

¹¹ Bible Commentator Gill on Jeremiah 49:6, 'Justin Martyr {f} says, that in his time there was a large multitude of Ammonites; but Origen {g}, who was later than he, observes, that not only the Idumeans, but the Ammonites and Moabites, were then called by the common name of Arabians; and these are now the present inhabitants of their country.'

¹² Bible Commentator Clarke on Jeremiah 48:47, 'Their conversion to the Christian faith must be the main end designed by this prophecy.'

¹³ Bible Commentators Barnes and Gill on Zechariah 9:1

¹⁴ Bible Commentators Barnes and Gill on Zechariah 9:6

¹⁵ The Antiquities of Josephus: book 13, chapter 15, section 4

¹⁶ 1 Kings 10:1-13

¹⁷ Matthew 12:42

¹⁸ Other areas that possibly were called Cush are: Southeast Syria and an area along the Persian Gulf, as far as the Tigris. See Jamieson, Fausset en Brown Commentary on Jesaja 18:1, *e-Sword*

¹⁹ http://myslave.tv/customers/107122013001368/filemanager/Land_of_Cush.pdf and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_Kush

²⁰ 'a prophecy of the conversion of many in these nations, who should join themselves to the churches of Christ, formed among them, and make use of their riches, got by merchandise, labour, and industry, for the support of the interest of religion.' John Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible on Isaiah 45:14, *e-Sword*

²¹ For instance, Gill on Psalm 68:31.

²² See for instance Barnes, EBC, Matthew Henry Commentary and Jamieson, Fausset and Brown Commentary about Daniel 11:41

²³ For instance Gill, Clarke and Poole

²⁴ The following citation shows that this was true even centuries later. 'Their region, however, continued to be known by its biblical name for some time. For example, when the [Crusaders](#) occupied the area, the castle they built to defend the eastern part of the [Kingdom of Jerusalem](#) was called [Krak des Moabites](#)' <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moab>

²⁵ Matthew 12:42, Luke 11:31

²⁶ Romans 11:25b-26a

²⁷ Romans 10:19

²⁸ This was in fulfillment of the word of the Angel of the Lord to Hagar concerning Ishmael: "his hand against all and the hand of all against him," which means he wouldn't rule over others and others wouldn't over him. See Study Genesis 16:12 on www.godlovesishmael.com

²⁹ Exodus 20:6 and 34:7. God's love for Abraham flows to his descendants through the prophecies

³⁰ John 20:30,31; 1 John 5:13; Romans 8:15-17

³¹ See the story of the Merciful Father, better known as the Parable of the Lost Son, in Luke 15:11-32.

Prophecies over the nations

Period B.C.	1420	1420	975	850	760-750	750-725	750-715	750-686	740-700	640-630	630-610	610-600	620-580	593-585	590-570	605-530	520	520-500	450-425	aantal oordelen (regular font)	aantal beloften (italic, bold)	
	Numbers	Deuter- onomy	Psalms	Joel	Amos	Jonah	Hoseah	Micah	Isaiah	Zephania	Nahum	Habakkuk	Jeremiah	Ezekiel	Obadiah	Daniel	Haggai	Zechariah	Malachi			
Amalek	24:20																			1		
Ammon		23:2-6			1:13-15				11:14	2:8-10			9:25-26 25:21 27:3-11 49:1-6 49:6	21:28-32 25:1-7		11:41				10	2	
Moab	24:17	23:2-6			2:1-3				11:14 Ch 15-16 25:10-12	2:8-10			9:25-26 27:3-11 Ch48 48:47	25:8-11		11:41				11	2	
Edom	24:18			3:19	1:11-12 9:12				11:14 21:11-12 34:5-15				9:25-26 27:3-11 49:7-22	25:12-14 Ch 35 36:5	1:1-21	11:41			1:4	15	1	
Philistia				3:4-8	1:6-8				11:14 14:28-32	2:4-7			25:20 Ch 47	25:15-17	1:19			9:5-8		9		
Tyre				3:4-8	1:9-10				23:8-9 23:15-16 23:17-18				27:3-11	Ch 26-28				9:2-4		7	1	
Sidon				3:4-8					23:11-12				27:3-11	Ch 28				9:2-4		5		
Egypt			68:32	3:19				7:12	Ch 19-20 19:18-25 45:14				9:25-26 25:19 Ch 46	Ch 29-32 29:8-16				10:11		6	5	
Assyria	24:24							5:4-5 7:12	10:5-19 14:24-27 30:31-33 31:8-9 Ch 33 19:18-25	2:13-15	Ch 1-3							10:11		10	2	
Babylon									13-14:23 21:1-10 47:1-15			2:2-20	25:12-14 Ch 50-51							6		
Aram					1:3-5	1:1-2			7:16 Ch 17				49:23-27					9:1		6		
Arabia Kedar			72:9						21:13-17 42:11 60:7				25:24 49:28-33							3	3	
Arabia Nebaioth			72:9						60:7				25:24							1	2	
Arabia Midian	25:17 31:2		72:9						60:6				25:24							3	2	
Elam													25:25 49:34-38 49:39							2	1	
Sheba Magog			72:10						60:6													2
Cush			68:32						18:7 45:14	2:12 3:10				38-39:13						1		
enemies	24:8												30:16							2		
neighbors of Israel													25:9-11 12:14-17							1	1	
All nations			72:11	3:1-3 3:9-16				4:11-14 5:8 7:13 7:16-17 4:1-3	24:1-23 30:27-28 33:3 34:1-4 2:2-4	2:11 3:6-8 3:9			25:15-33 27:7 30:11				2:23 2:8	12:1-9 14:12-15 8:20-23 14:16		18	6	

Ch = Chapter