

Isaiah Chapter 18

Verses 18:1-7

God's care for his people; and the increase of the church.

This chapter is one of the most obscure in Scripture, though more of it probably was understood by those for whose use it was first intended, than by us now.

Here the prophet now pronounces Woe (doom), on the land of Ethiopia (Cush), which rose to such power that it overran all of Egypt (in 715 B.C.).

The Ethiopian dynasty of this period (Egypt's twenty fifth), was headed by Pharaoh Shabaku (716-701 B.C.), and Shebitko (701-690 B.C.).

Sennacherib of Assyria finally crushed the Ethiopian-Egyptian forces at Eltekeh (in 701 B.C.).

Swift messengers are sent by water to a nation marked by Providence, and measured out, trodden under foot.

God's people are trampled on; but whoever thinks to swallow them up, finds they are cast down, yet not deserted, not destroyed.

All the dwellers on earth must watch the motions of the Divine Providence, and wait upon the directions of the Divine will.

God gives assurance to his prophet, and by him to be given to his people.

Zion is His rest for ever, and he will look after it.

He will suit to their case the comforts and refreshments he provides for them; they will be acceptable, because seasonable.

He will reckon with His and their enemies; and as God's people are protected at all seasons of the year, so their enemies are exposed at all seasons.

A tribute of praise should be brought to God from all this.

What is offered to God must be offered in the way He has appointed; and we may expect Him to meet us where He records his name.

Thus, shall the nations of the earth be convinced that Jehovah is the God, and Israel is His people, and shall unite in presenting spiritual sacrifices to His glory.

Happy are those who take warning by His judgment on others, and hasten to join Him and His people.

Whatever land or people may be intended, we are here taught not to think that God takes no care of His church, and has no respect to the affairs of men, because He permits the wicked to triumph for a season.

He has wise reasons for so doing, which we cannot now understand, but which will appear at the great day of His coming, when He will bring every work into judgment, and reward every man according to His works.

Isaiah 18:1 "Woe to the land shadowing with wings, which [is] beyond the rivers of Ethiopia:"

Wings:

These may speak of Ethiopia's strong armada of ships.

Cush is the Hebrew word for Ethiopia.

The country was south of Egypt, including territory belonging to modern Ethiopia.

The more generally received sense is, that either Egypt or Ethiopia themselves are pointed at, described as "shadowing with wings".

Not with the wings of birds, as Jarchi interprets it, which flocked thither in great numbers, the country being hot, and so shaded it with their wings.

But rather with mountains, with which Ethiopia, at least some part of it, was encompassed and shaded.

Or else with ships, whose sails are like wings, and which resorting hither, in numerous fleets of them, and hovering about their coasts and ports.

And seemed to shadow them; to which agrees the Septuagint version,

"Woe to the land, the wings of ships!" and so the Targum.

"Woe to the land to which they come in ships from a far country, whose sails are stretched out, as an eagle that flies with its wings.

Isaiah 18:2 "That sendeth ambassadors by the sea, even in vessels of bulrushes upon the waters, [saying], Go, ye swift messengers, to a nation scattered and peeled, to a people terrible from their beginning hitherto; a nation meted out and trodden down, whose land the rivers have spoiled!"

“Sea ... water ... rivers”:

These all apparently refer to the Nile River and its tributaries.

Ambassadors, messengers sent to Jerusalem at the time that negotiations passed between Tirhakah and Hezekiah against the expected attack of Sennacherib (Isa 37:9).

Ezekiel 30:9 "On that day messengers will go out from me in ships to frighten Cush out of her complacency. Anguish will take hold of them on the day of Egypt's doom, for it is sure to come."

“By the sea”:

What "sea" is here meant cannot be accurately determined.

The word 'sea' (yam), is applied to various collections of water, and may be used in reference to a sea, a lake, a pond, and even a large river.

“By the sea”, on the Nile (Isa. 19:5): As what follows proves, vessels of bulrushes-light canoes, formed of papyrus, daubed over with pitch: so, the "ark" in which Moses was exposed.

It does not elsewhere occur.

That the ancients were in the practice of making light boats or vessels from the papyrus is well known.

Exodus 2:3 where the little ark is described in which Moses was laid near the Nile.

The “rush” (in Job 8:11); and “rushes,” (in Isaiah 35:7).

Both the Egyptians and Ethiopians, used boats of rushes or reeds, which were more convenient for them than those of wood, because they were both cheaper and swifter, and lighter for carriage from place to place.

“Go”:

Isaiah tells them to take back the tidings of what God is about to do (Isa 18:4), against the common enemy of both Judah and Ethiopia.

“Go, ye swift messengers”:

To this nation before mentioned, who, by the Nile, and by their numerous canals, have the means of spreading the report in the most expeditious manner through the whole country: “go, ye swift messengers”, and carry this notice of God's designs in regard to them.

These are ordered to publish this declaration made by the prophet throughout Egypt, and to all the world; and to excite their attention to the promised visible interposition of God.

Peeled "Smoothed":

Either relating to the practice of the Egyptian priests, who made their bodies smooth by shaving off their hair, or rather to their country's being made smooth, perfectly plain and level, by the overflowing of the Nile.

As Herodotus characterizes the Ethiopians as "the tallest and fairest of men," G. V. Smith translates, "tall and comely"; literally, "extended" (Isa 45:14, "men of stature"), and polished (the Ethiopians had "smooth, glossy skins").

To a nation scattered; that dwelt in towns, villages, and houses, scattered about here and there; or who would be scattered and dissipated by their enemies.

Or, "drawn out", and spread over a large tract of ground, as Ethiopia was.

And peeled; of their hair, as the word signifies; the Ethiopians, living in a hot country, had very little hair upon their bodies.

"Trodden down", true of the Jews.

But Maurer translates it actively, a people "treading under foot" all its enemies.

That is, victorious (Isa 14:25), namely, the Ethiopians.

Isaiah 18:3 "All ye inhabitants of the world, and dwellers on the earth, see ye, when he lifteth up an ensign on the mountains; and when he bloweth a trumpet, hear ye."

"All ye inhabitants ... dwellers":

This prophet calls upon the whole human race to be alert for the signals that God is at work in the world.

Isaiah 26:11 "LORD, [when] Thy hand is lifted up, they will not see: [but] they shall see, and be ashamed for [their] envy at the people; yea, the fire of thine enemies shall devour them".

"All ye inhabitants of the world, and dwellers on the earth".

All the men of the world are here called upon, either by the LORD, or rather by the prophet, to be eye and ear witnesses of the judgment that should be inflicted upon the above nation, and of the salvation of His own people; which should be so manifest, that all should see it as easily as an ensign set up on a mountain.

And the news of it should ring through the earth, and be as plainly heard as when a trumpet is blown.

Unless it should be thought that these are the words of the messengers sent to the above nation, addressing them in such terms, assuring them, that, however stupid and secure they were now, they should quickly see the sign and hear the alarm of war.

It being usual to call any large kingdom the world, and the earth.

Isaiah 31:9 "Their stronghold will fall because of terror; at sight of the battle standard their commanders will panic," declares the LORD, whose fire is in Zion, whose furnace is in Jerusalem."

This is when God shall gather together the nations, as it were, by the lifting up of an ensign, or by the sound of a trumpet, to execute His judgments upon this people.

Jeremiah 51:27 "Lift up a banner in the land!

Blow the trumpet among the nations!

Prepare the nations for battle against her; summon against her these kingdoms: Ararat, Minni and Ashkenaz.

Appoint a commander against her; send up horses like a swarm of locusts."

This (the eighteenth chapter), declares the coming overthrow of those armies whose presence is announced (in Isaiah 17:12-13).

The same motive, which led Hezekiah to seek aid from Egypt, led him to accept gladly the Ethiopian Tirhakah's aid (Isa 36:6; 37:9).

This is what the Sovereign LORD says:

Isaiah 49:22 "Thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles, and set up my standard to the people: and they shall bring thy sons in [their] arms, and thy daughters shall be carried upon [their] shoulders".

Isaiah 18:4 "For so the LORD said unto me, I will take my rest, and I will consider in my dwelling place like a clear heat upon herbs, [and] like a cloud of dew in the heat of harvest."

Yahweh has revealed His purpose, that is, to execute punishment on the people who have been described in the previous verses.

Their state as there described is that of a fierce people making ready for war, and probably designing an alliance with the enemies of Judea, and marshalling their armies for that purpose.

Yahweh here reveals to the prophet that they shall be discomfited, and shows the manner in which it will be done.

He says He will sit calm while these preparations are going on, as the sun shines serenely on the earth while the harvest is growing, and the dew falls gently on the herb; but that "before" their plans are completed, He will interpose and destroy them, as if one should appear suddenly before the harvest is ripe and cut it down.

The "design" therefore, of this part of the prophecy is to comfort the Jews, and to assure them that there is no danger to them from the preparations which were made against them, for Yahweh calmly beholds the proud rage of the enemy.

Proverbs 19:12 "A king's rage is like the roar of a lion, but his favor is like dew on the grass".

The subject of the remaining part of this chapter is, that God would comfort and support His own people, though threatened with immediate destruction by the Assyrians; that Sennacherib's great designs and mighty efforts against them should be frustrated; and that His vast expectations should be rendered abortive, when he thought them mature, and just ready to be crowned with success.

That the chief part of His army should be made a prey for the beasts of the field and the fowls of the air, (for this is the meaning of the allegory continued through verses 5-6); and that Egypt, being delivered from his oppression, and avenged by the hand of God of the wrongs which she had suffered, should return thanks for the wonderful deliverance, both of herself and of the Jews, from this most powerful adversary.

God would be still and quiet, and as one asleep and at rest, that took no notice of what was doing, nor interpose between parties preparing for war, and laying schemes for the ruin of each other; not help the one nor hinder the other, but let them go on a while with their designs.

Isaiah 26:19 "But your dead will live; their bodies will rise. You who dwell in the dust, wake up and shout for joy. Your dew is like the dew of the morning; the earth will give birth to her dead."

Isaiah 18:5 "For afore the harvest, when the bud is perfect, and the sour grape is ripening in the flower, he shall both cut off the sprigs with pruning hooks, and take away [and] cut down the branches."

"Cut off ... take away ... cut down":

As an all-wise farmer, God's pruning activity (i.e. His direct intervention) will be neither too early nor too late.

"For afore the harvest":

This verse is evidently figurative, and the image is drawn from that which is commenced in the previous verse.

There, God is represented as calmly regarding the plans of the people here referred to, as the sun shines serenely on the herb, or the dew falls on the grass.

That supposes that they had formed plans, and that they were advancing to maturity, like a growing harvest, while God surveyed them without interposition.

This verse continues and affirms "that those plans shall not be mature;" that God will interpose and defeat them "while" they are maturing, as if a man should enter the harvest field and cut it down after it had been sown.

Or go into the vineyard, and cut down the vines while the green grape was beginning to ripen.

Its meaning is, when their plans are maturing, and there is every human prospect that they will be successful.

It is, therefore, a most beautiful and expressive figure, intimating that all their plans would be foiled even when they had the prospect of a certain accomplishment.

Isaiah 27:11 "When its twigs are dry, they are broken off and women come and make fires with them. For this is a people without understanding; so their Maker has no compassion on them, and their Creator shows them no favor."

"He shall both cut off the sprigs".

The shoots; the small limbs on which the grape is hanging, as if a man should enter a vineyard, and, while the grape is ripening, should not only cut off the grape, but the small branches that bore it, thus preventing it from bearing again.

The idea is, not only that God would disconcert their "present" plans, but that He would prevent them from forming any in future.

Before their plans were matured, and they obtained the anticipated triumph, He would effectually prevent them from forming such plans again.

Isaiah 18:6 "They shall be left together unto the fowls of the mountains, and to the beasts of the earth: and the fowls shall summer upon them, and all the beasts of the earth shall winter upon them."

Dropping his metaphorical language, Isaiah describes in grotesque language the fallen carcasses of the victims of God's judgment.

The sense is that the army shall be slain and left unburied.

Perhaps the "branches and twigs" in the previous verse denoted military leaders, and the captains of the armies, which are now represented as becoming food for beasts of the field and for birds of prey.

"And all the beasts of the earth shall winter upon them":

They shall be unburied through the winter; probably indicating that they would furnish food for the fowls and the wild beasts for a long time.

On the multitude of carcasses these animals will find nourishment for a whole year, that is, they will spend the summer and the winter with them.

Jeremiah 7:33 Then the carcasses of this people will become food for the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, and there will be no one to frighten them away.

The following is the Biblical account of Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem:

It begins with the destruction of the Northern Kingdom of Israel (in 722 B.C.), and its capital Samaria.

This is how the ten northern tribes came to be known as the Ten Lost Tribes, because as recorded (in 2 Kings 17), they were carried off and settled with other peoples as was the Assyrian policy.

2 Kings 18-19 (and parallel passage 2 Chronicles 32:1-23), details Sennacherib's attack on Judah and capital Jerusalem.

Hezekiah had rebelled against the Assyrians, so they had captured all of the towns in Judah.

Hezekiah realized his error and sent great tribute to Sennacherib.

But the Assyrians nevertheless marched toward Jerusalem.

Sennacherib sent his supreme commander with an army to besiege Jerusalem while he himself went to fight with the Egyptians.

The supreme commander met with Hezekiah's officials and threatened them to surrender; while hailing insults so the people of the city could hear, blaspheming Judah and particularly Jehovah.

When the King Hezekiah heard of this, he tore his clothes (as was the custom of the day for displaying deep anguish), and prayed to Jehovah in the Temple.

Isaiah the prophet told the king that Jehovah would take care of the whole matter and that he would return to his own lands.

That night, the angel of Jehovah killed 185,000 Assyrian troops.

Jewish tradition maintains that the angel Gabriel (along with Michael in the Targum's version), was the angel sent to destroy the Assyrian troops, and that the destruction occurred on Passover night.

Sennacherib soon returned to Nineveh in disgrace.

Some years later, while Sennacherib was worshiping in the temple of his god Nisroch, two of his sons killed him and fled.

Some suggest that Psalm 46 was composed as a Song of Deliverance that was led by the Korahite Levitical singers and accompanied by the Alamoth (maidens with tambourines), and sung by the inhabitants of Jerusalem after their successful defense of the city from the siege.

Whenever it was fulfilled, it is quite evident that the design of the prophecy was to give comfort to the Jews, alarmed and agitated as they were at the prospect of the preparations which were made, by the assurance that those plans would fail, and all the efforts of their enemies be foiled and disconcerted.

Isaiah 18:7 "In that time shall the present be brought unto the LORD of hosts of a people scattered and peeled, and from a people terrible from their beginning hitherto; a nation meted out and trodden under foot, whose land the rivers have spoiled, to the place of the name of the LORD of hosts, the mount Zion."

“Place of the name of the LORD of hosts”:

Jerusalem was and remains the location on earth where the LORD has chosen to dwell (Deut. 12:5).

Isaiah’s prediction here extends to the future bringing of tribute to Jerusalem in the Messiah’s kingdom.

"Of a people scattered and peeled; this explains what the present is, that shall be brought to the LORD; it is a people, and therefore not the spoils of Sennacherib's army, as some interpret it; nor yet the people of the Jews, that shall be brought by the Gentiles out of all nations in the latter day, as an offering to the LORD.

Isaiah 11:11 “And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall set His hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people, which shall be left, from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea.”

But the Ethiopians or Egyptians (described Isaiah 18:2 as here), who, being converted, shall stretch out their hands to God, submit unto Him, and present themselves soul and body as an acceptable sacrifice unto Him.

When these prophecies (in Psalm 68:31), shall be fulfilled, and which began to be in the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:27).

And of which there were other instances in the times of the apostles, and in following ages.

And from a people terrible from their beginning hitherto.

That is, some of the people, not all of them; the same people are designed as before, only this Hebraism is used, to show a distinction among them.

A nation meted out, and trodden under foot, whose land the rivers have spoiled.

These descriptive characters, with those in the preceding clauses, are retained, to show that the same people are here meant as (in Isaiah 18:2), and to magnify the riches of God's grace, in the conversion of a people to whom such characters belonged.

Which show that it was not owing to themselves, or any deserts of theirs, but to the free favor and good will of God.

To the place of the name of the LORD of hosts, Mt Zion.

Here the present was to be brought, and here the persons to present themselves to the LORD, even in Mt. Zion, the church of God.

Where the name of the LORD is named and called upon, his word is preached, his ordinances are administered, and where He dwells, and grants his presence.

In that time shall the present be brought to the LORD of hosts of a people scattered and stripped, and from a people terrible from their beginning to this time.

A nation measured by line and trodden under foot, whose land the rivers have spoiled, to the place of the name of the LORD of hosts, Mt. Zion.

Meaning that God will pity his Church, and receive that little remnant as an offering to Himself.

Isaiah Chapter 18 Questions

1. What may the wings be speaking of?
2. What is the Hebrew word for Ethiopia?
3. Woe to the _____ land.
4. Who were the ambassadors?
5. What does the word “yam” mean?
6. Describe vessels of bulrushes.
7. In Exodus 2:3, who was found in a little arc of rushes or reeds?
8. Herodotus describes the Ethiopians as what?

9. Where was the ensign lifted up?
10. Their _____ because of terror.
11. A king's _____ is as the roar of a _____.
12. What happens to Sennacherib's vast army?
13. But you _____; their bodies will _____.
14. What is the meaning of the bud is perfect, the grape is ripening?
15. Will any of their plans mature in the future?
16. What indicates that?
17. What happens to Judah's enemies?
18. What happens to their bodies?
19. For how long does this go on?
20. Which was the first of Israel's kingdoms to be taken captivity?
21. What was the year?
22. Where were the people carried off to?
23. Did Hezekiah rebel against the Assyrians?
24. What was the purpose of Hezekiah tearing off his clothes?
25. What did Hezekiah do after that?
26. Did God answer Hezekiah?
27. How?
28. What happened that night?
29. Who was that angel?
30. Where did Sennacherib go after that?
31. What happened to him there?
32. Why was this prophecy given?
33. Where was "the place of the name of the LORD of hosts"?

34 . In what book did we find the Ethiopian eunuch?