

The Book of the Prophet ISAIAH

Chapter 18

Theme: Egypt and Ethiopia join and fall to God's scourge of Assyria that He killed for Ethiopia's praise.

Outline:

- 1-2 Egypt and Ethiopia Join Forces
- 3-4 The World Saw God's Works
- 5-6 God Defeated Both Armies
- 7 Ethiopia Would Bring Gifts

Preparatory Reading: Isaiah Chapters 10,36-38 (Sennacherib)... 20 (Egypt and Ethiopia) ... 30-31 (Egypt).

Related Links:

- A. *Exposition of Isaiah 20 ...*
- B. *Virgin Daughter of Zion (slides) ...* <http://www.letgodbettrue.com/pdf/virgin-daughter-of-zion.pdf>
- C. *Hezekiah – His Life and Lessons ...* <http://www.letgodbettrue.com/pdf/hezekiah-lessons.pdf>
- D. *Chronological Table and Notes for Prophets ...* <http://www.letgodbettrue.com/pdf/prophets-table-with-notes.pdf>
- E. *Interpreting Bible Prophecies (slides) ...* <http://www.letgodbettrue.com/pdf/prophecy-interpretation.pdf>

Introduction:

- A. Many if not all commentators and students of Isaiah declare this the most obscure chapter in Isaiah.
 - 1. For a quick demonstration of obscure passages ... compare the two verses only of Isaiah 21:11-12.
 - 2. If the sender (Is 18:1) and recipient (Is 18:2) could be identified, elimination could find the truth.
 - 3. But with great confusion about the sender and the recipient, the rest of the chapter is enigmatic.
 - 4. Since they are confused ... and all disagree ... maybe Great Britain, United States, Gog and Magog?
 - 5. We do not care what confuses others, if God will open them to us His children (Ps 119:18,98-100).
- B. Keep in mind a few of many factors that hinder specific application of obscure prophecies to events.
 - 1. We would like to take each chapter and each verse and apply a specific historical event to each.
 - 2. We would love a timeline with every event in its proper place with names, outcome, details, etc.
 - 3. We would love the Bible, extra-biblical texts, archeology, and iconography all reconciled for us.
 - 4. Some prophecies are so obscure we cannot date or name them with certainty (Is 18:1-6; 21:11-12).
 - 5. Some events and parties to them are so distant with only Bible hints that they are obscure to us.
 - 6. The prophets used similitudes, so there is also the constant translation of dark sayings (Hos 12:10).
 - 7. Large periods of time are covered so that many different events could be considered as solutions.
 - 8. Until men unearth hidden facts, there has been silence e.g. Hittites, Sargon, Darius the Mede, etc.
 - 9. The historical record may have errors that contradict the Bible record e.g. Ptolemy's 82-year error.
 - 10. Different names are used in the Bible e.g. Tirhakah of Ethiopia is Pharaoh of Egypt (25th dynasty).
 - 11. Different names are used in the historical record of nations with some kings having many names.
 - 12. Bible chronologers and historians have given many years and their lives without certain solutions.
 - 13. Time limits and audience limits force us to abbreviate explanations and simply supply sources.
 - 14. Some historical details are lost – ten and three horns of Daniel 7 – but we know the certain lesson.
 - 15. Moab, Ammon, Philistines, and such nations are unknown today, so we are limited to the Bible.
- C. We have distinct advantages over others when we study to discover the true sense of obscure passages.
 - 1. They change the text, like textual critics, but their effort destroys truth and faith (Clarke, Barnes).
 - 2. They research the use of a Hebrew/Greek word elsewhere, rejecting others' translations (Barnes).

3. They compare single word usage for sound rather than compare information for sense (I Cor 2:13).
 4. They value context, which is important, but they limit it to that next door, ignoring the same street.
 5. They prefer the literal, whether a single word or passage, rather than the contextual or spiritual.
 6. We trust our English Bible (KJV) to study by its internal rules, exalting its small and large contexts.
- D. Ethiopia is favored due to its mention in verse 1 (for a nation other than Ethiopia), but it has problems.
1. Those that emphasize sight or sound of words leap at Ethiopia, but the sender is likely not Ethiopia.
 2. If the sender is Ethiopia and has a *burden* (woe), why not name it as the other *burden* chapters do?
 3. Why, how, and when did the Ethiopians, if not the sending nation of verse 1, give gifts to Jehovah?
 4. History and the Bible have three Ethiopias from Genesis 2:13 (Mesopotamia) to Arabia to Africa.
 5. Any consideration of African Ethiopia should include some study of Nubia, Cush, and Kushites.
 6. Keep Isaiah chapter 20 in mind when reading and studying this chapter – they must be reconciled.
- E. Assyria is favored as the unspoken enemy for mustering this western helper by large and small context.
1. The previous context is Assyria destroying Ephraim and then death in a night (Is 17:1-11,12-14).
 2. The following context is Egypt (Is 19:1) and Assyria (Is 19:18-25), the two main antagonists here.
 3. The following context is Egypt and Ethiopia (Is 20:1-6) at this time, Sargon and Tartan in Judah.
 4. Due to Isaiah's ministry under Hezekiah, the emphasis through chapter 40 is Assyria as enemy.
- F. Israel and Judah often foolishly looked to Egypt (Ethiopia) for help against their enemies (II Kings 17:4; 18:21; Isaiah 30:1-7; 31:1-3; Jeremiah 37:5-10; Ezekiel 17:14; 29:6-7; etc.).
1. This fundamental lack of faith is seen over and over in these people e.g. Ahaz looking to Assyria.
 2. This basic lack of faith greatly angered Jehovah for their trust in mortal man but not eternal Him.
 3. They would trust anything they could – like Solomon's mere temple building (Jeremiah 7:1-15).
 4. Sennacherib knew or presumed that Hezekiah or Judah was looking to Egypt/Ethiopia (Is 36:6).
 5. See Isaiah 20:1-6 for timing and for identification of Egypt and Ethiopians as succourers to Judah.
- G. Egypt and Ethiopia were often connected by location, race, and culture, but especially the 25th dynasty under Ethiopia (Ps 68:31; Isaiah 20:3-5; 43:3; 45:14; Ezek 29:6-7,16; 30:4-5; Nah 3:9; Zeph 3:10).
1. The nations will be alternated at times, for Egypt usually ruled Ethiopia, but here it was opposite.
 2. The 25th dynasty had the king of Ethiopia also Pharaoh and king of Egypt; Tirhakah = Pharaoh.
- H. Isaiah 18 shows God protecting His church without help; Isaiah 20 shows God humiliating the helpers!
- I. Without identification ... God pronounced woe on a nation that sent a message to a downtrodden nation that by God's deliverance brought a present to God in Mt. Zion. God told Isaiah He would sit back and watch while prospering the conflict but then cut off the branches and leave the enemy for beasts.

***** *Egypt and Ethiopia Join Forces – Verses 1-2* *****

1 Woe to the land shadowing with wings, which is beyond the rivers of Ethiopia:

- A. Read the introduction above before proceeding into this difficult and obscure chapter.
- B. Though there is little to go on, we should try to identify the sender of the ambassadors.
1. There are two nations here, not one, as many think. Both nations must be identified.
 2. Barnes is an example of many that reject *saying* to limit the prophecy to one nation.
 3. There is a nation sending ambassadors and a nation receiving the messengers sent.
- C. The chapter starts with *woe*. The land is not named (Is 17:1; 19:1); it must be discovered.
1. Though burdens are stated quite clearly around this chapter, this one is very obscure.
 2. Whatever nation it is, it was to receive God's judgment for its leadership role here.

3. The obscurity may be to focus attention on Ethiopia rather than a better known land.
 4. Recall how Paul was quite obscure in II Thessalonians 2 to avoid identifying Rome.
 5. Egypt was most shamed by their defeat by Assyria by careful reading (Isaiah 20:4).
 6. Since Egypt will be dealt with at length next (Is 19:1), it might be left obscure here.
- D. The land or nation implied is not shadowed by wings but rather shadows by their wings.
1. Shadow of wings = protection (Ruth 2:12; Psalm 17:8; 36:7; 57:1; 61:4; 63:7; 91:4).
 2. Therefore, the unknown sending nation must be greater than the recipient nation.
 3. Furthermore, the nation must be significant of reputation to be known as a protector.
 4. It would of necessity be a large and powerful nation that could succor other nations.
 5. From Abram to Ezekiel, the Israelites often looked foolishly or not to Egypt for help.
 6. Commentator guesses are folly ... ship sails, a musical instrument of Egypt, etc., etc.
 7. The wings of Assyria did not involve a shadow, so they may be ignored (Isaiah 8:8).
 8. Eagle wings are not shadows but to devour (Isaiah 8:8; Jer 48:40; 49:22; Ezek 17:3).
- E. The land or nation implied is beyond the rivers of Ethiopia, a geographical identifier.
1. What are the rivers of Ethiopia? The Blue Nile, White Nile, and many, many others.
 2. The Blue and White Niles combine in modern Sudan for the Nile known in Egypt.
 3. The Blue Nile, contributing 75% of Egypt's Nile, starts in Lake Tana in Ethiopia.
 4. Lake Tana covers 1300 square miles, draining 4500 square miles by 60 tributaries.
 5. Lake Tana is 6000 feet above sea level. Egypt is flat and near sea level for the flow.
 6. The White Nile is seen as the headwaters and originates in Burundi, central Africa.
 7. Lake Victoria and tributaries are the headwaters of the White Nile below the equator.
 8. The length of the Nile from Lake Victoria is 4200 miles, from Lake Tana is 3000.
 9. It takes three months for the water in Lake Victoria to reach the Mediterranean Sea.
 10. Egypt and the Nile are in plural for canals and delta rivers (Is 7:18; 11:15; Eze 29:3).
- F. *Beyond the river* can mean around and beyond a river, for it does with Assyria (Is 7:20).
1. Major cities of Egypt were located between the seven rivers into the Mediterranean.
 2. Alexandria (by some Rhakotis before Alexander) was west of all seven branches of the Nile, and some believe that the populous Bible No is Alexandria (Nahum 3:9).
 3. Zephaniah 3:10 has the same ... *beyond the rivers of Ethiopia* ... for scattered Jews found by the gospel e.g. Libya, Cyrene (Matt 27:32; Acts 2:10; 11:20; 13:1; 18:24).
 4. Libya and Cyrene farther west would join with Egypt (II Chron 12:3; 16:8; Nah 3:9).
 5. Lubims = Liberians; Phut or Put = Cyrenians; Lud = Liberians ... or North Africans.
- G. There is a slight problem here, for there are about three Ethiopias to be reckoned with.
1. There is an Ethiopia written in the creation account near Mesopotamia (Gen 2:13).
 2. There is another Ethiopia stretching across the Arabian peninsula (Arabia Chusea).
 3. There is Ethiopia south of Egypt (including Sudan) and making a major nation then.
 4. Since we know about the 25th dynasty of Egypt, we know it is the African Ethiopia.
- H. We choose Egypt for the sending nation for its reputation of helper, especially to Judah.
1. A land shadowing with wings, protective like the wings of a bird, fits its reputation.
 2. It also used vessels of bulrushes extensively, which are identified in the next verse.
 3. A woe is declared against it, fitting Egypt (Is 19-20,30-31; Jer 25,43,46; Eze 29-32).
 4. We choose to make its identity of *beyond the rivers of Ethiopia* fit for these reasons.

5. Note another obscurity, *the desert of the sea*, forced by context to Babylon (Is 21:1).
6. See the notes for verse two below for the objections against other possible solutions.

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!

- A. This obscure nation to join with Egypt may be identified with Ethiopia/Sudan of Africa.
 1. The Bible and history use other names e.g. Nubia, Cush, Kush, Meroe, Milukka, etc.
 2. Egypt and Ethiopia often joined as documented already, thus the ambassadors sent.
 3. The timing is the 25th dynasty, during which Egypt was under Ethiopia leadership.
 4. Two nations were clearly connected by water, whether the Nile River or Red Sea.
 5. They both are known historically for using light boats of bulrushes (Exodus 2:3).
 6. Ethiopia and Sudan (modern names) were known for scattered people over the land.
 7. These same inhabitants were known for short hair and naked torso (Cp Ezek 29:18).
 8. These Cushites (Ethiopia or Nubia) were terrible from the beginning (Genesis 10:8).
 9. Meted out and trodden down can refer to Nile flood measurements and planting seed.
 10. The phrase can also refer to defeat (II Sam 8:2; II Kgs 21:13; Psalm 60:6; Is 34:11).
 11. The spoiling of a land by rivers is true of Ethiopia, stripped by the Nile for Egypt.
 12. The spoiling of a land by rivers occurred by Assyria (Is 8:7-8; 59:19; Jer 46:7-8).
 13. Egypt greatly benefitted by the Nile spoiling Ethiopia, as in context (Isaiah 19:1-10).
- B. Egypt and Ethiopia were often connected, but especially the 25th dynasty under Ethiopia (Ps 68:31; Isaiah 20:3-5; 43:3; 45:14; Ezek 29:6-7,16; 30:4-5; Nahum 3:9; Zeph 3:10).
 1. The lands are alternated at times; Egypt usually ruled Ethiopia, but here the opposite.
 2. The 25th dynasty's king of Ethiopia was Pharaoh, king of Egypt; Tirhakah = Pharaoh.
- C. There are other options for both nations – see the commentaries – we reject a few here.
 1. God sent messengers to the Ethiopians, but that was Nebuchadnezzar (Ezekiel 30:9).
 2. We reject Nebuchadnezzar, for Mt. Zion was destroyed for receiving gifts (Is 18:7).
 3. We reject Judah as object people, for how/when did they bring a present (Is 18:7)?
 4. We reject Judah as the object people, why or how could Egypt send boats to them?
 5. We reject Babylon as giver of present (Is 39:1), for what fearful nation sent to them?
 6. We reject Ethiopia as the sender, for it is Egypt named most always as Judah's wings.
 7. The Lord did cut down the Assyrians, and their inspired loss outweighed Ethiopia's.
 8. We reject Chad and Congo (DRC), Uganda, Kenya, Somalia for no Bible mention.
 9. We reject Great Britain, the European Union, and America as having no connection.
- D. Why would Egypt, if soliciting assistance against Assyria, speak critically of Ethiopia?
 1. Because of usual pride over Ethiopia, the present submission by Egypt was painful.
 2. The words were to the messengers only; they had to beg for help in fear of Assyria.
- E. An alternative would be an Egyptian-Ethiopian-Beyond association sending to Judah.
 1. Egypt did combine with Libya, Lydia, Ethiopia, Chub, etc. (Ezek 30:3-10; Nah 3:9).

2. Those west feared the Judean buffer falling; Judea did want help from those west.
3. The sender would exalt Tirhakah; the receiver spoiled by Assyrian figurative rivers.
4. There are difficulties, but those difficulties are not much worse than for our solution.

***** *The World Saw God's Works – Verses 3-4* *****

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.

- A. God calls the nations of the world to watch the events in Judah for two glorious lessons.
 1. Isaiah connected this verse with the next as to what God would do after the muster.
 2. It takes little to get the world's armies to fight, for greed and pride demand it of them.
- B. God Himself mustered combatants on both sides, but especially Assyria (Is 17:12-14).
 1. God does this very work, as He did to muster Medes and Persians (Isaiah 13:2-5).
 2. But this language is used for Assyria coming a long way (Is 5:26; 7:17-20; 8:7-8).
 3. Read carefully for a prophecy already given of Assyria and Egypt both (Is 7:17-20).
- C. God planned a clash of titans, which He wanted all the world to observe, even us now.
 1. God had a scourge for His people Israel and for His church Judah – the Assyrians.
 2. Though they would look for help elsewhere, He would use, then abuse, Sennacherib.
 3. Isaiah 20 proves Assyria defeated Egypt-Ethiopia before the death angel (Is 20:6).
 4. Since we know there was a death angel (Is 17:12-14; etc.), there were two defeats.
 5. The two defeats occurred within days, weeks, or months of each other by the timing.
 6. The Bible provides enough dates to know Sargon (Is 20:1) and Sennacherib together.
 7. By two defeats God taught Judah a lesson of trusting Him and rebuked Sennacherib.
- D. God's muster of Assyria got the attention of Egypt and Ethiopia for fear for their buffer.
 1. Egypt/Ethiopia could not afford to have Judah fall to leave them exposed to Assyria.
 2. At the same time, He had to teach Judah not to look for earthly help (Isaiah 20:1-6).
 3. His infinite wisdom and sovereign execution of this clash of titans is extraordinary.

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.

- A. God at times sits back and allows the nations to do what they will until He moves in.
 1. Instead of getting involved as in other cases, He would let the two armies have at it.
 2. His providence would be less active than other times. The two armies would march.
 3. This is opposite the known language ... *let us go down and see what they are doing.*
 4. When He rests and considers in His dwelling place, He is still in charge of events.
 5. We need to learn to rest ourselves in political upheaval and watch what He will do.

- 6. The Jews would hear about two armies marching toward them – a surrounded island.
- B. We understand the two weather clauses here as positive by the effect in the next verse.
 - 1. We take clear heat to be sunshine after rain – very delightful indeed (II Samuel 23:4).
 - 2. We take a cloud of dew to be dew or the latter rain – useful for harvest (Deut 11:14).
- C. His rest would last but a while, for He would act to shame Egypt and then also Assyria.
 - 1. He first used Tirhakah as the rumor to get Sennacherib to lift the siege of Jerusalem.
 - 2. He then defeated this Egypt-Ethiopia combine to shame the Jews for lack of faith.
 - 3. He then overthrew the Assyrian army in a night to send their king home ashamed.

***** *God Defeated Both Armies – Verses 5-6* *****

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.

- A. Glory! God would intervene before harvest and kill the vintage by pruning the vineyard.
- B. The harvest here is the international coalition’s plan to defeat the approaching coalition!
- C. Before they can fulfill their plans, which have been progressing well, they are defeated.
- D. Man’s best laid plans depend on God blowing with them and not rather against them.

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.

- A. Instead of a successful vintage for Egypt or Assyria, they would be destroyed for fodder.
- B. Do not forget the similitude – sprigs and branches being eaten by the birds and animals.
- C. Yes, the Assyrian 185,000 may have been so consumed, but this text does not prove it.
- D. There was a time of satiation as the vineyard did not return in this direction for 20 years.
- E. By combining all known verses, one titan lost to the other, the winner lost to the angel.

***** *Ethiopia Would Bring Gifts – Verse 7* *****

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.

- A. The nation of this prophecy – the Ethiopians of Africa – gave a present to Israel’s God.
- B. The event here – ruin of Sennacherib’s finest – moved many nations (II Chr 32:21-23).

1. The death of 185,000 Assyrian soldiers in a night sent Sennacherib back to Nineveh.
 2. The ruin of the Assyrians delivered Egypt and Ethiopia from immediate invasion.
 3. But God also moved the sun's shadow back ten degrees for Hezekiah (Is 38:4-8).
 4. Many brought gifts to Hezekiah for this astrological wonder and shocking victory.
 5. Prince of Babylon sent ambassadors for this wonder and his recovery (II Chr 32:31).
- C. Of course, a Messianic fulfillment of this prophecy can be made ... but does not fit well.
1. But we have seen insertions of gospel mercy comparable to this, so we consider it.
 2. Note gospel prophecies of Egypt/Ethiopia (Ps 68:31; 87:4; Zeph 3:10; Acts 8:27).