

CHAPTER 18

Whatever country it is that is meant here by “the land shadowing with wings,” here is a woe denounced against it, for God has, upon his people's account, a quarrel with it.

- I. They threaten God's people (v. 1, 2).
- II. All the neighbours are hereupon called to take notice what will be the issue (v. 3).
- III. Though God seem unconcerned in the distress of his people for a time, he will at length appear against their enemies and will remarkable cut them off (v. 4-6).
- IV. This shall redound very much to the glory of God (v. 7).

ISAIAH 18:1-7

JUDGMENTS DENOUNCED

Interpreters are very much at a loss where to find this land that lies beyond the rivers of Cush. Some take it to be Egypt, a maritime country, and full of rivers, and which courted Israel to depend upon them, but proved broken reeds; but against this it is strongly objected that the next chapter is distinguished from this by the title of *the burden of Egypt*. Others take it to be Ethiopia, and read it, *which lies near, or about, the rivers of Ethiopia*, not that in Africa, which lay south of Egypt, but that which we call *Arabia*, which lay east of Canaan, which Tirhakah was now king of. He thought to protect the Jews, as it were, under *the shadow of his wings*, by giving a powerful diversion to the king of Assyria, when he made a descent upon his country, at the time that he was attacking Jerusalem, ^{2 Kings 19:9}. But though by his ambassadors he bade defiance to the king of Assyria, and encouraged the Jews to depend upon him, God by the prophet slights him, and will not go forth with him; he may take his own course, but God will take another course to protect Jerusalem, while he suffers the attempt of Tirhakah to miscarry and his Arabian army to be ruined; for the Assyrian army shall become a present or sacrifice to the Lord of hosts, and to the place of his name, by the hand of an angel, not by the hand of

Tirhakah king of Ethiopia, v. 7. This is a very probable exposition of this chapter. But from a hint of Dr. Lightfoot's, in his Harmony of the Old Testament, I incline to understand this chapter as a prophecy against Assyria, and so a continuation of the prophecy in the last three verses of the foregoing chapter, with which therefore this should be joined. That was against the army of the Assyrians which rushed in upon Judah; this is against the land of Assyria itself, which lay beyond the rivers of Arabia, that is, the rivers Euphrates and Tigris, which bordered on *Arabia Deserta*. And in calling it *the land shadowing with wings* he seems to refer to what he himself had said of it (^{<218>}Isaiah 8:8), that *the stretching out of his wings shall fill the breadth of thy land, O Immanuel!* The prophet might perhaps describe the Assyrians by such dark expressions, not naming them, for the same reason that St. Paul, in his prophecy, speaks of the Roman empire by a periphrasis: *He who now letteth*, ^{<517>}2 Thessalonians 2:7. Here is,

I. The attempt made by this land (whatever it is) upon *a nation scattered and peeled*, v. 2. Swift messengers are sent by water to proclaim war against them, as a nation marked by Providence, and *meted out*, to be trodden under foot. Whether this refer to the Ethiopians waging war with the Assyrians, or the Assyrians with Judah, it teaches us,

1. That a people which have been terrible from their beginning, have made a figure and borne a mighty sway, may yet become scattered and peeled, and may be spoiled even by their own rivers, that should enrich both the husbandman and the merchant. Nations which have been formidable, and have kept all in awe about them, may by a concurrence of accidents become despicable and an easy prey to their insulting neighbours.

2. Princes and states that are ambitious of enlarging their territories will always have some pretence or other to quarrel with those whose countries they have a mind to. "It is a nation that has been terrible, and therefore we must be revenged on it; it is now a nation scattered and peeled, meted out and trodden down, and therefore it will be an easy prey for us." Perhaps it was not brought so low as they represented it. God's people are trampled on as a nation scattered and peeled; but whoever think to swallow them up may find them still as terrible as they have been from their beginning; they are cast down, but not deserted, not destroyed.

II. The alarm sounded to the nations about, by which they are summoned to take notice of what God is about to do, v. 3. The Ethiopians and

Assyrians have their counsels and designs, which they have laid deep, and promise themselves much from, and, in prosecution of them, send their ambassadors and messengers from place to place; but let us now enquire what the great God says to all this.

1. *He lifts up an ensign upon the mountains, and blows a trumpet, by which he proclaims war against the enemies of his church, and calls in all her friends and well-wishers into her service, v. 3. He gives notice that he is about to do some great work, as Lord of hosts.*

2. All the world is bidden to take notice of it; all the dwellers on earth must see the ensign and hear the trumpet, must observe the motions of the divine providence and attend the directions of the divine will. Let all enlist under God's banner, and be on his side, and hearken to the trumpet of his word, which gives not an uncertain sound.

III. The assurance God gives to his prophet, by him to be given to his people, that, though he might seem for a time to sit by as an unconcerned spectator, yet he would certainly and seasonably appear for the comfort of his people and the confusion of his and their enemies (v. 4): *So the Lord said unto me.* Men will have their saying, but God also will have his; and, as we may be sure his word shall stand, so he often whispers it in the ears of his servants the prophets. When he says, *I will take my rest*, it is not as if he were weary of governing the world, of as if he either needed or desired to retire from it and repose himself; but it intimates that the great God has a perfect, undisturbed, enjoyment of himself, in the midst of all the agitations and changes of this world (the Lord sits even upon the floods unshaken; the Eternal Mind is always easy), and, though he may sometimes seem to his people as if he took not wanted notice of what is done in this lower world (they are tempted to think he is *as one asleep*, or *as one astonished*, ^{<2423>}Psalm 44:23; ^{<2449>}Jeremiah 14:9), yet even then he knows very well what men are doing and what he himself will do.

1. He will take care of his people, and be a shelter to them. He will regard his *dwelling-place*; his eye and his heart are, and shall be, upon it for good continually. Zion is his rest for ever, where he will dwell; and he will *look after it* (so some read it); he will lift up the light of his countenance upon it, will consider over it what is to be done, and will be sure to do all for the best. He will adapt the comforts and refreshments he provides for his

people to the exigencies of their case; and they will *therefore* be acceptable, because seasonable.

(1.) Like a clear heat after rain (so the margin), which is very reviving and pleasant, and makes the herbs to flourish.

(2.) Like a dew and *a cloud in the heat of harvest*, which are very welcome, the dew to the ground and the cloud to the labourers. Note, There is that in God which is a shelter and refreshment to his people in all weathers and arms them against the inconveniences of every change. Is the weather cool? There is that in his favour which will warm them. Is it hot? There is that in his favour which will cool them. Great men have their winter-house and their summer-house (^{<3085>}Amos 3:15); but those that are at home with God have both in him.

2. He will reckon with his and their enemies, v. 5, 6. When the Assyrian army promises itself a plentiful harvest in the taking of Jerusalem and the plundering of that rich city, when the bud of that project is perfect, before the harvest is gathered in, while the sour grape of their enmity to Hezekiah and his people is ripening in the flower and the design is just ready to be put in execution, God shall destroy that army as easily as the husbandman cuts off the sprigs of the vine with pruning hooks, or because the grape is sour and good for nothing, and will not be cured, *takes away and cuts down the branches*. This seems to point at the overthrow of the Assyrian army by a destroying angel, when the dead bodies of the soldiers were scattered like the branches and sprigs of a wild vine, which the husbandman has cut to pieces. *And they shall be left to the fowls of the mountains, and the beasts of the earth*, to prey upon, both winter and summer; for as God's people are protected all seasons of the year, both in cold and heat (v. 4), so their enemies are at all seasons exposed; birds and beasts of prey shall both summer and winter upon them, till they are quite ruined.

IV. The tribute of praise which should be brought to God from all this (v. 7): *In that time*, when this shall be accomplished, *shall the present be brought unto the Lord of hosts*.

1. Some understand this of the conversion of the Ethiopians to the faith of Christ in the latter days, of which we have the specimen and beginning in Philip's baptizing the Ethiopian eunuch, ^{<4427>}Acts 8:27, etc. Those that were *a people scattered and peeled, meted out, and trodden down* (v. 2), shall

be a present to the Lord: and, though they seem useless and worthless, they shall be an acceptable present to him who judges of men by the sincerity of their faith and love, not by the pomp and prosperity of their outward condition. *Therefore* the gospel was ministered to the Gentiles that *the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable*, ^{<6516>}Romans 15:16. It is prophesied (^{<4981>}Psalm 68:31) that *Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God*.

2. Others understand it of the spoil of Sennacherib's army, out of which, as usual, presents were brought to *the Lord of hosts*, ^{<4959>}Numbers 31:50. It was the present of a people scattered and peeled.

(1.) It was won from the Assyrians, who were now themselves reduced to such a condition as they scornfully described Judah to be in, v. 1. Those that unjustly trample upon others shall themselves be justly trampled upon.

(2.) It was offered by the people of God, who were, in disdain, called *a people scattered and peeled*. God will put honour upon his people, though men put contempt upon them. *Lastly*, Observe, The present that is brought to the Lord of hosts must be brought *to the place of the name of the Lord of hosts*; what is offered to God must be offered in the way that he has appointed; we must be sure to attend him, and expect him to meet us, where he records his name.