

Isaiah 18:1-7

A Prophecy regarding Cush

"To us, this brief chapter is the most difficult one of all the sixty-six chapters of Isaiah." (Bultema) "Although the prophecy is a short one, it probably ranks as the most obscure chapter in this entire section." (Wolf) "This is one of the most obscure prophecies in the whole Book of Isaiah." (Clarke) ~ from **David Guzik's Study Guide for Isaiah 18**

Welcome to **Monday Night Bible Study** at its best! Where do you start when the “commentators” admit to being stumped? Judah was being threatened by the advancing Assyrians. It looked like they were doomed, desperate for a military solution. Should they reach out to their neighbors, create an alliance and hope for the best?

Creating a military alliance with the Cushites (modern-day Ethiopia), “a people who were tall, fearsome, and aggressive,” were a major world power who ruled over Egypt and a chief rival to Assyria may be just the answer. As you can probably imagine, Yahweh may have something to say about their “plan.”

English Standard (ESV)	Passion Notes	Passion Translation (TPT)
<p>Isaiah 18:1 Ah, land of whirring wings that is beyond the rivers of Cush, ² which sends ambassadors by the sea, in vessels of papyrus on the waters! Go, you swift messengers, to a nation tall and smooth, to a people feared near and far, a nation mighty and conquering, whose land the rivers divide.</p> <p>³ All you inhabitants of the world, you who dwell on the earth, when a signal is raised on the mountains, look! When a trumpet is blown, hear! ⁴ For thus the LORD said to me: “I will quietly look from my dwelling like clear heat in sunshine, like a cloud of dew in the heat of harvest.”</p>	<p>a 18:1 Or “locusts.”</p> <p>b 18:1 The Hebrew word <i>kuwsh</i> (Ethiopia, or modern-day Sudan) means “burned” or “darkened.”</p> <p>c 18:2 The meaning of this Hebrew clause is uncertain.</p> <p>d 18:2 That is, the Upper Nile region. The land is divided by the White Nile and the Blue Nile rivers.</p> <p>e 18:4 See Isa. 57:20; 62:1; Heb. 3–4.</p> <p>f 14:4 The body of Christ is now his dwelling place (Eph. 2:19–22).</p> <p>g 18:4 The meaning of this Hebrew clause is uncertain.</p> <p>h 18:4 See Isa. 19:1; 25:5; 44:22; 60:8.</p>	<p>Isaiah 18:1 Ah, the land of whirring wings, a that is beyond the rivers of Cush, b ² sending their messengers by the way of the Nile in papyrus vessels gliding on the water! Go, you swift messengers, to a tall, smooth-skinned people c feared far and wide, to a mighty conquering nation whose land the rivers divide. d</p> <p>³ Everyone everywhere, all who dwell on the earth, when a signal flag is raised on the mountain, take notice! When the shofar is blown, listen! ⁴ Here is what the Lord Yahweh said to me: “I will rest calm and confident e as I look from my dwelling place, f serene as on a pleasant summer day g or a cool, refreshing cloud h in the heat of harvest.</p>

English Standard (ESV)	Passion Translation (TPT)	Passion Translation (TPT)
<p>⁵ For before the harvest, when the blossom is over, and the flower becomes a ripening grape, he cuts off the shoots with pruning hooks, and the spreading branches he lops off and clears away. ⁶ They shall all of them be left to the birds of prey of the mountains and to the beasts of the earth. And the birds of prey will summer on them, and all the beasts of the earth will winter on them.</p> <p>⁷ At that time tribute will be brought to the LORD of hosts from a people tall and smooth, from a people feared near and far, a nation mighty and conquering, whose land the rivers divide, to Mount Zion, the place of the name of the LORD of hosts.</p>	<p>i 18:6 Scripture often mention birds of prey and wild animals as symbols of demonic powers.</p> <p>j 18:7 See Ps. 68:28–29; 76:11; Matt. 2:11.</p>	<p>⁵ Before the harvest, when the bud is ripening and the flower finishes, he will take his pruning hooks and cut off the shoots and remove them. ⁶ They will all be left for the birds of prey on the mountains and for the wild animals to devour. Birds will eat them throughout the summer, and the animals will gnaw on the bones of the fallen all winter. i</p> <p>⁷ At that time, a tall, smooth-skinned people will bring gifts of tribute j to the Lord Yahweh, Commander of Angel Armies. They are a people feared far and wide, a mighty conquering nation whose land the rivers divide. They will bring their gifts to Mount Zion, the place of the name of the Lord Yahweh, Commander of Angel Armies.</p>

“Remember the things I have done in the past. For I alone am God! I am God, and there is none like me. Only I can tell you the future before it even happens. Everything I plan will come to pass, for I do whatever I wish. I will call a swift bird of prey from the east— a leader from a distant land to come and do my bidding. I have said what I would do, and I will do it.”
 Is. 46:9–11 NLT-SE

“It is the same with my word. I send it out, and it always produces fruit. It will accomplish all I want it to, and it will prosper everywhere I send it.”
 Is. 55:11 NLT-SE

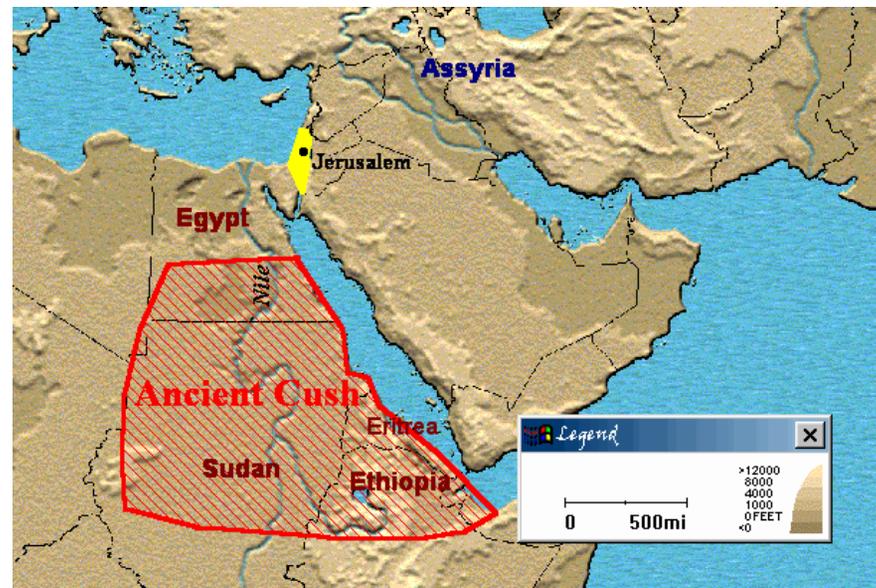
STUDY GUIDE FOR ISAIAH 18 ~ David Guzic

- CONCERNING ETHIOPIA/CUSH (18:1-7)

"To us, this brief chapter is the most difficult one of all the sixty-six chapters of Isaiah." (Bultema) "Although the prophecy is a short one, it probably ranks as the most obscure chapter in this entire section." (Wolf) "This is one of the most obscure prophecies in the whole Book of Isaiah." (Clarke)

- **No need to make an alliance with Ethiopia.**
- **(Isa 18:1-2) A word directed to Ethiopia.**

Woe to the land shadowed with buzzing wings, which is beyond the rivers of Ethiopia, which sends ambassadors by sea, even in vessels of reed on the



waters, saying, "Go, swift messengers, to a nation tall and smooth of skin, to a people terrible from their beginning onward, a nation powerful and treading down, whose land the rivers divide."

- **Which is beyond the rivers of Ethiopia:** In the days of Isaiah, Ethiopia was a major world power, ruling Egypt and a chief rival to Assyria. Since Judah was caught in the middle between this conflict, it might make sense for Judah to align herself with Ethiopia against Assyria.
 - "In 715 B.C. an Ethiopian named Shabako gained control of Egypt as founder of the twenty-fifth dynasty. Ethiopian domination continued until 633 B.C. when a native Egyptian regained the throne." (Wolf)
 - "The term designates a much larger area than present-day Ethiopia - an area including the Sudan and Somalia." (Grogan)
 - **Shadowed with buzzing wings:** The Nile Valley is famous for its many whirring insects.
 - **Which sends ambassadors by sea:** The scene pictures Ethiopian ambassadors who come to make an alliance with Judah and the other nations of the region against Assyria.
 - **Go, swift messengers, to a nation tall and smooth of skin:** As the Ethiopian ambassadors invite Judah to rebel against the Assyrians, they ask Judah to send swift messengers back to Ethiopia (to a nation tall and smooth of skin ... a nation powerful), and the Ethiopians would hope to hear that Judah has rebelled against Assyria and aligned itself with Ethiopia and Egypt.
- **(Isa 18:3-6) The LORD rejects the offer of help from the Ethiopians.**
- **All inhabitants of the world and dwellers on the earth:** When he lifts up a banner on the mountains, you see it; and when he blows a trumpet, you hear it. For so the LORD said to me, "I will take My rest, and I will look from My dwelling place like clear heat in sunshine, like a cloud of dew in the heat of harvest." For before the harvest, when the bud is perfect and the sour grape is ripening in the flower, He will both cut off the sprigs with pruning hooks and take away and cut down the branches. They will be left together for the mountain birds of prey and for the beasts of the earth; the birds of prey will summer on them, and all the beasts of the earth will winter on them.
 - **The LORD said to me, "I will take My rest":** The LORD God rejects the alliance with Ethiopia, because He is more than able to deal with the Assyrians Himself. He can take His rest without the help of the Ethiopians. If God wanted to muster an army against Assyria, He would have raised a banner or sounded a trumpet. He is fully able to do it, and would do it when the time is right.
 - Significantly, there is no rebuke or judgment against Ethiopia announced in this chapter. It wasn't as if God was going to judge Ethiopia for their offer of an alliance. Perhaps the idea is that it is a well intentioned but unnecessary offer. Instead, Judah was to trust in the LORD!
 - **He will both cut off the sprigs with pruning hooks and take away and cut the branches:** God can "prune" Assyria all by Himself. He will destroy the Assyrian army so completely that they will be left together for the mountain birds of prey.

- **Ethiopians come and worship God.**

- (Isa 18:7) A present will be brought to the LORD of hosts: Isaiah announces a day when Ethiopians will come and worship the LORD, and bring gifts to Him to the place of the name of the LORD of hosts, to Mount Zion.

In that time a present will be brought to the LORD of hosts from a people tall and smooth of skin, and from a people terrible from their beginning onward, a nation powerful and treading down, whose land the rivers divide; to the place of the name of the LORD of hosts, to Mount Zion.

- Instead of Israelite messengers bringing news to Ethiopia of an alliance against the Assyria, the day will come when Ethiopians will come and worship at Mount Zion.
- This may have been fulfilled in some way close to Isaiah's time. But we know it was fulfilled in Acts 8:26-40, when an Ethiopian came to worship the LORD at Jerusalem, and then trusted in Jesus at the preaching of Philip. It was also fulfilled in the strong Ethiopian church the first few centuries, and the enduring Ethiopian church today.

BIBLE KNOWLEDGE COMMENTARY ~ John A. Martin

- **18:1-2.** The message in chapter 18 is directed against the land of whirring wings, the nation of Cush. (On the word woe; see comments on “Oh” in 17:12 and comments on 3:9.) The whirring wings may refer to locusts. Cush included modern-day southern Egypt, Sudan, and northern Ethiopia. Apparently the Cushites sent envoys in swift-moving papyrus boats (cf. Job 9:26) to suggest that Israel form an alliance with them against the Assyrians. The Cushites, a people who were tall, fearsome, and aggressive, spoke a language that would have sounded strange to Hebrews because it was non-Semitic. Like Egypt, Cush is divided by rivers (cf. Isa. 18:7) that is, by branches of the Nile. Nothing is known elsewhere in the Bible or from extrabiblical sources about any contacts of this nation with Israel in a joint venture against Assyria.
- **18:3.** The prophet exhorted the Cushites to go back home and not try to form an alliance because the Lord would defeat the enemy at the proper time. The Cushites represented all the people of the world who desired to see the Assyrians fall. But the Lord promised through Isaiah that when the time would come to fight the Assyrians they would know it and would see the enemy fall.
- **18:4-6.** God's plans would linger much like the summer heat and harvest dew. The LORD told Isaiah that He would wait till the proper time to cut off the enemy. Isaiah had already been given the reason for this (10:12, 25, 32). But the Assyrian army first had to complete the task God gave them, to punish the people of Israel by taking them captive. However, once God's purposes had been accomplished He would intervene and cut them off (18:5) just when they, like grapes, were beginning to ripen, to extend their empire. They would be killed and would be left on the mountains as food for wild birds in the summer and wild animals in the winter.
- **18:7.** After the Assyrian defeat, the LORD would cause the people of Cush (cf. vv. 1-2) to take gifts to the Lord at Mount Zion, where His name dwelt (see comments on Deut. 12:5). Whether this occurred after the fall of Assyria is not known. Possibly Isaiah was speaking of the millennial kingdom when peoples from around the world will worship the LORD (cf. Zech. 14:16) because of His gracious acts.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Why were Yahweh's people so willing to create alliances with their surrounding neighbors/adversaries to solve their problems? Did they not realize what it would eventually cost them dearly? Were they somehow under the impression God would bless these efforts?
2. Trusting God is never more challenging than when the pressure is on. Unless you served in the active military during times of conflict, you have likely never experienced the threat of being overtaken by a foreign nation. Even then, America has not fought a war on her own soil since 1783. If a foreign enemy were to launch a missile attack on the US, do you think the Lord would come to our rescue? Why or why not?
3. Where do you turn when you feel "under attack?" We all know that it's easier to pick up the phone and call a friend or family member when someone is trying to hurt us. What do we hope to gain by reaching out to another person when we feel under attack?
4. When a friend of yours is under a personal attack from someone and they reach out to you for help, what advice do you typically give them? How would you pray for them?
5. Who does God fight for?