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The Oracle Concerning Ethiopia

18: 1-7

DIG: How would you sum up ADONAI's answer in 18:3-6, which they are to bring to the aggressive nation? What do the images of the summer heat, morning dew, and the farmer pruning His garden say about the way God will work with Assyria? How do the events of 37:36-38 illustrate the lesson of 18:5-6? Beyond the Assyrian crisis, what ultimately will result from God's work among the nations (see 2:2-4, 9:5-7, 11:10-12, 14:1-2, 16:4-5; also Psalm 68:31)?

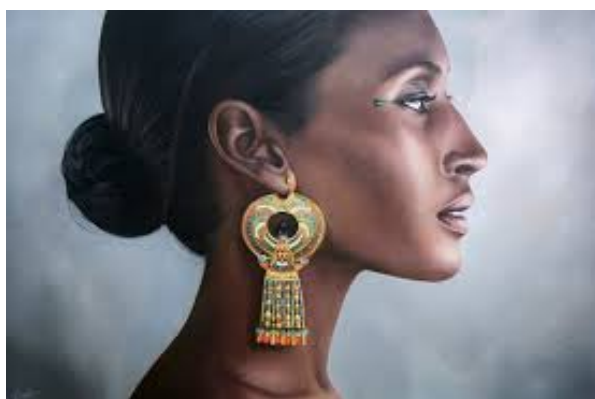
REFLECT: If God's purpose for the nations is unchanged, how does this affect the way you pray for peoples that seem most fearsome to you? How has Christ, the banner who is raised for all to see, transformed someone who is feared far and wide into someone close to Him? The Ethiopian eunuch is one example. Can you think of anyone else you know of? Who has been God's heat and dew in your life? How might you be like that to someone in your circles who is feared far and wide? What would that take for you to do so?

The **woe** to **Ethiopia** (or **Cush**) is a specific example of the oracle to Damascus and **Syria**. It puts the message to them in a particular context. *The word **woe** points to distress, or a threat voiced in the face of present or coming disaster.* It is not directed to **the Ethiopians**, and no word of judgment is pronounced on **them**. Rather, **they** are to be the bearers of a message that no alliance against **Assyria** would succeed. As **Isaiah** had prophesied all along, the alliance of **Syria** and **Isra'el** would fail to conquer the southern kingdom of **Judah**. ADONAI was using **the Assyrians** to discipline **His people**.⁵⁵

When we think of this prophecy, that **the Ethiopians** will come to Jerusalem bearing **gifts to the LORD**, we remember **the Ethiopian** eunuch who received the divinely guided interpretation of **Isaiah 53** and became a believer (see the commentary on **Acts**, to see **link click Bb - An Ethiopian Asks about Isaiah 53**). **He** represents all those other nations who have brought their gifts to **God** in Jerusalem, both before the birth of **the Messiah** and even more since. **Isaiah** has the long view that sees the reality behind what the other people of his day cannot see.⁵⁶ This segment provides a transition to the oracles against **Egypt**, but the poem is not a part of **Chapters 19** and **20**. It is the closing of the

segment that began in **17:1**.

Woe to the land of whirring wings along the rivers of Cush, which sends envoys by sea in papyrus boats over the water (18:1-2a). The **woe** was directed against **the land of whirring wings**, or the nation of **Cush**. The term **whirring wings** refers to *swarms of insects*, and to **Ethiopia** in particular. **Cush** included modern-day southern **Egypt**, Sudan, and northern **Ethiopia**.



Go, swift messengers, to a people tall and smooth-skinned, to a people feared far and wide, an aggressive nation of strange speech, whose land is divided by rivers (18:2b). **Ethiopia** has three **rivers** (two key **rivers**, and serves as a source for a third one). The first key river is the Atbara River. The second river is the Blue Nile, and the third river is the Nile itself. **The Nile, like the Euphrates, is sometimes designated as the sea.** **Ethiopia** is the source for the Nile. From **Ethiopia** the Nile flows *northward* into **Egypt**, and becomes **Egypt's** key river. From the Israeli point of view, the land beyond these **rivers** was the city of Napata, which was the capital of **Ethiopia** at that time.

Second Kings 19:9 states that **Tirhakah, the Cushite king of Egypt** had responded to Hezekiah, who was seeking an alliance against **Assyria**, by **marching out to fight the Assyrian king** while Sennacherib was threatening Jerusalem (see [Gp - The Timeline of Sennacherib's Invasion of Judah](#)). Apparently, **Ethiopia** sent messengers to **Judah**. When **they** arrived, **Isaiah** was the one who spoke to **them**, and sent **them** back with a word of judgment. **All you people of the world, you who live on the earth, when a banner is raised on the mountains, you will see it (18:3a).**

The LORD would defeat the enemy at the proper time. While **the people of Cush** represented **all the people of the world** who wanted to see **Assyria** defeated, **Assyria** is not the point here. **Isaiah** helps us see beyond a mere nation to the fact that **ADONAI** is

LORD over *all* the earth. **The** entire **world** is called to witness **His Lordship**. **When** the banner of **Messiah** is raised on the mountains, the world will see it. **And when** the *shofar*, or last trumpet, sounds (**First Corinthians 15:51-52**), the world will hear it (**18:3b**). So, when the signals are given, **all** the **people of the world** must be prepared to accept the evidence that **God** has given us that **He** is at work in **the world**. Many times, we do not see **His** hand in events because we do not expect to see it. But having been altered, we will, through faith, see **the Hand** that controls the universe.

On the surface of it, it seems strange that **God** would judge **Cush** so harshly because **she** was sincerely trying to help **Judah**. But **her** actions, however well intentioned, went directly against **God's** Word through **His** prophet **Isaiah**. Is this still not true today? Anytime we go against the Word of **ADONAI**, however well intentioned we might be, our desires, like **Cush**, will not succeed.

This is what the LORD says to me: **I will remain quiet and will look on from my dwelling place like shimmering heat in the sunshine, like a cloud of dew in the heat of harvest (18:4)**. These verses contain the content of what **Isaiah** said to these messengers from **Ethiopia**. **He** said that **God's** plans would linger much **like** the summer **heat** and harvest **dew**. **ADONAI** told **Isaiah** that **He** would wait until the proper time to **cut off** the enemy. The prophet had already been given the reasons for this (**10:12, 25 and 32**). But **the Assyrian** army first had to complete the task **God** gave them. That was to punish the people of **Isra'el** by taking them captive. No **Ethiopian** alliance against **Assyria** would succeed. **The near historical prophecy** for **Cush** would be that they were sentenced to destruction by **Assyria**.

For, before the harvest, when the blossom is gone and the flower becomes a ripening grape, he will cut off the shoots with pruning knives, and cut down and take away the spreading branches (18:5). **The LORD** carefully watched the state of affairs developing on the earth and then, like a farmer who prunes back his vines, **ADONAI** will cut off the excess leaves that were not bearing fruit and leave it. **God** has perfect timing and, like the farmer, will not act too soon or too late. Once the fruit is matured, **God's pruning** knife will go into action. The near historical context is **the Assyrian king** Sennacherib's attack on Hezekiah and Jerusalem. At the last possible moment, when it seemed all was lost for **Judah**, **the LORD** quietly pruned and cut off 180,000 **Assyrian** soldiers and left them on the ground like so many leaves (see [Gw - Then the Angel of the LORD Put To Death a Hundred and Eighty Thousand Men in the Assyrian Camp](#)).

They will be left to the mountain birds of prey and to the wild animals; the birds

will feed on them all summer, the wild animals all winter (18:6). However, once **God's** purposes had been accomplished, **He** would intervene and **cut** them **off** just when **the Assyrians**. Like grapes beginning to ripen (or beginning to expand their empire), just as they were poised to attack Judah, **they** would be killed and **left** on the mountains as food for wild **birds** in the **summer** and **wild animals** in the **winter (37:36-38).**

But it has a happy ending of sorts because **Ethiopia** submitted herself, and offered herself to **the LORD**. It is ironic that **the Ethiopians**, who did not have the Torah, submitted to **ADONAI**, but in the final analysis, **Judah**, who had the Torah and the prophets, would not. But **God** would honor the submission of **the Ethiopians**.

At that time gifts will be brought to the LORD of heaven's armies from a people tall and smooth-skinned, from a people feared far and wide, an aggressive nation of strange speech, whose land is divided by rivers - the gifts will be brought to Mount Zion, to the place where the LORD of heaven's angelic armies lives (CJB), Mount Zion (18:7). After **the Assyrian** defeat, **the LORD** would cause the people of **Cush** to bring **gifts** to **the LORD of heaven's armies** at **Mount Zion**, where **His name** dwelt. **He** says that no alliance that **Ethiopia** will try to gain against **Assyria** will succeed. **The Assyrians** sentence **Ethiopia** to destruction. It is no accident that **Isaiah** uses the same phrase, **the LORD of heaven's angelic armies (CJB)**, which **Zechariah** uses when describing the nations of the world bringing **gifts** to **Him** at **Mount Zion** during the Millennial Kingdom. Therefore, **the far eschatological prophecy** for **Ethiopia** would be that in the Millennial Kingdom, **they**, along with **people** and **nations** from all over **the world**, would **go up year after year to worship the King, the LORD of heaven's angelic armies (CJB), and to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles (Zechariah 14:16-19).**