

ISAIAH 18

“THE LAND SHADOWING WITH WINGS”

This chapter is a little more difficult to understand than some other portions of Isaiah’s writings which we have encountered thus far. Scholarly men of God have differed much over its meaning, particularly concerning the question of what nation is being addressed in verse 1. The famous Bible commentator Matthew Henry leaned toward the understanding that this chapter is a prophecy against Assyria; and as such, it would be a continuation of the prophecy in the last three verses of the foregoing chapter.

There seems to be very little doubt concerning the identity of the nation described in verse 2 – a nation that was wonderful from the beginning of their history, and yet was “scattered and peeled,” and “meted out and trodden down, whose land the rivers have spoiled.” This refers to the nation of the Israelites. This nation had indeed been wonderful from their beginnings; for they were chosen by God with signs and miracles from among the heathen, and they were guided and governed by the Lord in a peculiar way for many hundreds of years. They were preserved in the most wonderful manner, as a distinct people, although they were trodden down by the heathen. And the Jews are no less a wonderful nation today, although they are scattered and afflicted. God’s judgments have come upon them for a sign and a wonder, as Moses prophesied (Deut. 28:46). The Jews stand before us now, in their humiliation, as a sign of the truth of God’s threatenings. And in the distinctness with which they remain separate from all other nations among whom they are scattered, we also see a sign of the Lord’s faithfulness; for He preserves them so that they may one day be brought into a saving relationship with the Messiah Whom they once rejected.

Taking advantage of Israel’s humblings (verse 2), the enemy in verse 1 planned to come and attack them. Let the reader spiritualize this passage to himself and his own circumstances, and he will find it profitable indeed. The world and the great enemy of souls often come to distress the souls of God’s people, when the Lord is chastening them. But the Lord sees this, and He will avenge their quarrel. Although He brings His children down, He will also bring them up – and their enemies shall not hinder this!

In light of this, the Lord sounds an alarm to all the enemies of His Church (verse 3); and they are admonished to listen to the sound of the trumpet, for then the Lord goes forth for the salvation of His people! Every eye shall see, and all faces shall gather blackness, when the Lord reverses the captivity of His children. All the heathen will be obliged to confess (Ps. 126) that the Lord has in-

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ All the inhabitants of the world are called to behold the Lord’s woes upon the nation that threatens His people – verses 1-3
- ❖ The Lord will stand up against His people’s enemies and remarkably cut them off, which will be very much for His own glory – verses 4-7

deed done great things for His sons and daughters! Well might the enemies of God and His people be afraid when He stands up to save them! (verses 5-6)

Under the understanding that the nation of Assyria is the subject of this chapter, we may remember that just when their army promised itself a plentiful harvest in the taking of Jerusalem and the plundering of that rich city – then they were cut off, in one single night! When the bud of their plans against King Hezekiah and his people was ripening in the flower, and their evil intentions were just ready to be put into execution – then the Lord God destroyed their army just as easily as the farmer cuts off the sprigs of the vine with pruning-hooks, and takes away the branches which are bearing grapes that are sour and good for nothing. This seems to point very well to the overthrow of the Assyrian army by the Lord's destroying Angel, when the dead bodies of the soldiers were scattered like the branches and sprigs of a wild vine which the farmer has cut to pieces.

Let us take a moment to look more closely at the expression in verse 4. The Lord says there, "I will take my rest!" That means that He will withdraw for a time from His people, and leave them to themselves. There is a somewhat similar expression in Hosea 5:15: "I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face." The Lord sometimes seems as if He took no notice of what is going on in this lower world – as if He were taking His rest, and letting sin and misery pursue their course unhindered. For example, the Savior slept in the stern of the boat, when the disciples were toiling and trembling in the storm (Mark 4:37-38). But in truth, the Lord is not weary of governing the world; nor is He unmindful of His own people! If He seems to take His rest for a time, it is so that His people may be stirred up to seek His face. And let us further remember that He invites us to enter into His rest by believing in Him! (Heb. 4:1, 3). Jesus is the rest in which the Father Himself rests and is well-pleased; and therefore, in Him and His great salvation, the de-



liverance and security of His people is found. By trusting in Christ for pardon and everlasting salvation, and by trusting in Him also for present daily help and guidance, His children have found rest for time and eternity! And amidst all the changes of life, being thus stayed upon God, they have perfect peace (chapter 26:3). May each of us enjoy the blessedness of this peace!

Lord, we pray for grace to be stirred up to cry out to You in earnest prayer, when it seems that You have hidden Your face from us. And all praises be to You for being the rest of Your people, giving refreshment to our weary souls! Amen.