

The African Coalition, Humbled to be Blessed

Isaiah 18:1 – 20:6

Halifax: 20 September 2009

Introduction:

Today, we take up yet another of Isaiah's prophecies that describe what God is going to do with the nations that lived near to Judah had dealings with them.

- It is to the African nations that are just the South of Judah that we turn today,
 - but before we do, we might do well to once again consider the significance of Judah when they were but one of the petty Palestinian states among many others.
 - Is the interest in Judah simply that this is where Isaiah was from?
 - No, there is much more...
- Judah was the place where God had chosen to reveal Himself to His covenant people, and through them to the whole world.
 - It was too these people that God had sent His Word, beginning with Abraham, then with Moses, and more recently with David.
 - Abraham had been called to this land,
 - God promising to Him that He would be His God and would bless Him,
 - and that through His seed all the nations (who at Babel had tried to bless themselves) would be blessed.
 - God showed that blessing was to be found in knowing Him,
 - not in united human effort that is independent of Him.
 - Then, about 500 years later,
 - Moses had delivered the covenant people out of bondage in Egypt to bring them into this land,
 - God claiming them as His people that He would bless (who could not bless themselves),
 - and giving them His commandments so that they would know how to live,
 - and His warnings that salvation was only to be found in Him,
 - and giving them His way of worship,
 - showing them that He was holy and could not be approached apart from the shedding of blood.
 - And then David had come forth,
 - raised up by God to bring them into submission to God's way and to subdue their enemies,
 - promising to them a son to David that would unite them and the whole world under the blessing of God and destroy all their enemies so that they could serve God.

- God's dealing with Israel was constantly where God showed His people what He first showed to Abraham...
 - That salvation comes from God's blessing, not from man's efforts to make His own name great.
 - The folly of the nations attempting to find blessing apart from God is constantly exposed,
 - and the message is constantly repeated that salvation is only to be found with God.
 - Oh that the world might come to know this soon!
 - Oh that we might see that we cannot provide our own salvation or make our own way in this fallen world,
 - for we have sinned against our Maker and cannot ignore our need to be reconciled with Him.
 - Nor can we, by our own efforts, provide salvation or secure ourselves in it.
 - God has sent His Son, Jesus Christ, and only He can atone for sin by the cross—you can't do it!
 - And God and His Son send the Holy Spirit to change our stubborn hearts so that we will come to Him...
 - You cannot change your own heart—it is God's work!
 - If any one wishes to be saved,
 - You must come to the end of your rope and realise that you just do not have the resources to deal with your fallen estate.
 - You must see that salvation is only found in the LORD.

And my friends, that is the message that is brought to us in Isaiah's description of God's dealings with Africa!

- In chapters 18, 19, and 20,
 - Isaiah speaks about how the LORD will humble Africa in order to bring them to an end of self-trust that they might be prepared to trust in Christ when He comes.
 - He tells of how they will become God's covenant people!
 - And I say, it is a remarkable thing to see how the gospel did indeed break forth with power into Egypt and on down into Cush (present day Ethiopia) in the early days of the Church.
 - Athanasius, who lived in North Africa from 293-373 declared these words concerning these remarkable chapters in Isaiah that are before us today:
 - "The thing is happening before our very eyes, here in Egypt; and thereby another prophecy is fulfilled, for at no other time have the Egyptians ceased from their false worship save when the LORD of all, riding as on a

- Isaiah's prophecies tell us of this turning of Africa to the Lord hundreds of years before it happened,
 - and he explains how the very things that were about to happen to them in his day would contribute that future conversion, preparing them to receive the gospel.
 - God's work is not a frantic work, but a patient work of humbling the nations until at last He causes them bow to Christ as their only hope.
 - In this way the gospel makes its way around the whole world so that people from every tribe and tongue come to confess Him.
 - Let us look at how Isaiah demonstrates the breaking of Egypt's pride to prepare them for salvation...
 - And as we do, let us be assured that if we would be ultimately blessed,
 - it will only be through ceasing to trust in ourselves and find our rest in Jesus Christ who was crucified to take away our sins...and who gives us the Holy Spirit to change us...
 - And let us come gladly to Him and rejoice in Him with thanksgiving that we and our descendants might continue in His blessing and grace.

Theme: Chapter 18 (which will look at today) gives us a general, more poetical, description of how God humbles Africa to prepare them for the gospel.

Chapter 19 shows more specifically the ways that the Lord will humble them and then convert them

And chapter 20 warns God's people against the folly of trusting in Egypt and Cush when God is about to humble them.

I had thought about trying to cover all three of these chapters today, but decided against it.

- So today, we will consider on chapter 18 where we are given a more general poetical description of how God is about to humble northern Africa with a view to bringing them to Christ.
- But I need to mention that because this chapter is poetical, it has some difficult imagery and language that is quite difficult to interpret.
 - I do not claim to be right about my interpretation of every point...
 - But as always in dealing with such a passage, I have been careful to make sure that what I say is true to the analogy of faith—to what is taught elsewhere.
 - In other words,
 - even if I am wrong about some of the details of my exegesis,
 - I am confident that the things I say are true to what scripture teaches elsewhere.

I. First of all, I want you see how Africa is here presented as buzzing with activity to find security through united human effort.

A. At the time of this prophecy (about 715 BC), there were two superpowers.

1. The first is Assyria.

- As you well know if you have been with us in this series, the nations were all afraid of Assyria...
- Assyria had grown very powerful,
 - and with their power, they had become cruel and ruthless and greatly feared...
 - They took pleasure in doing things such as skinning kings alive, and piling up the heads of those they conquered at the city gates.

TRANS> But at this time there was also another superpower in this region...

2. The land of Africa!

a. The Nubian Shabako had risen to power and had taken lower Egypt under his dominion in 715 BC.

- He was from the land that is called “Ethiopia” or (in the Hebrew) “Cush” in verse 1 of chapter 18.
- This territory included what is today southern Egypt, Ethiopia, Sudan, and Somalia.

b. Humanly speaking, if anyone would have been able to handle Assyria at this time,

- it was this great African dynasty!
- In verse 2, Isaiah shows that these were a people to be feared...
 - Among them were those tall and clean shaven Africans, a people somewhat mysterious to the Palestinian and Mesopotamian nations.
 - Many of us are familiar with their ancestors, the Dinkas among whom our dear friends Vince and Julie Ward labour to establish the gospel.
 - From Isaiah’s description, you can picture them going up and down the river in the papyrus boats.
- Isaiah goes on to describe their fearful aspect with these words:
 - “a people terrible from their beginning onward, A nation powerful and treading down, Whose land the rivers divide.”
 - They are mighty conquerors, capable at war...

B. And what you have here in the opening verses of Isaiah 18 is the description of this great people preparing themselves to meet an almost certain Assyrian attack.

1. Being a land of many insects, Isaiah depicts the restless activity of this land, calling it “the land shadowed with buzzing wings”...
 - There is incessant activity as messengers go up and down the Nile river to call forces together in consideration of the Assyrian threat.
 - We know from history, both inscriptured as well as outside scripture,
 - that appeals were also made to some of the Palestinian states that Assyria would pass through on their way into Egypt.
 - A coalition was being formed in the hope that Assyria could be stopped.
2. If we were there, we probably would have cheered for Africa.
 - They were not so cruel and hungry for dominion as Assyria was.
 - They were mostly concerned with defending their own borders.
 - And as far as it goes there was nothing wrong with them endeavouring to raise up an army to do so!

TRANS> I say, “as far as goes!” because...

3. There was a great problem with what they were doing!
 - They were doing all this with confidence in what they could do by united human effort!
 - They were operating under the delusion that they could be great without bothering to be reconciled to the only true God who made heaven and earth!
 - I don’t mean to say that Assyria was any different!
 - They had the very same problem—they too trusted in the arm of the flesh and in what man can do without acknowledging God.
 - As far as human justice is concerned (if it were possible to isolate it from the Lord in a sense),
 - these Africans were in the right...
 - but as far as living under the delusion that they could bring about something good—
 - some blessing when they were not reconciled to God against whom all have sinned...
 - they were as guilty and as obnoxious to God as the nations were at Babel when they united together to build a city and a tower in the heavens.
 - Too many people in our society—yea—in every society—
 - do not see the seriousness wrong in this pride!
 - It is almost completely lost upon our society.

- For generations, the propaganda that as long as you try to be a nice person and try to do what is right,
 - everything is okay—it will go well for you!

- But I do not want you to leave this place today holding on to that delusion!
 - It is manifestly false!
 - The great wickedness of our society is not so much in what we do to each other
 - (though I could furnish plenty of ugly examples of what we do to each other and of how we can't even get along with the members of our own family);
 - but it is in the fact that we do not acknowledge God in our lives...
 - we do not thank Him for the blessings He daily lavishes on us...
 - we do not consult His commandments to learn of how He wants us to live...
 - and worst of all, we ignore the fact that we have sinned against Him and that He has sentenced us with death and everlasting punishment unless we are reconciled with Him...
 - And that wickedness is compounded ten times over when we suppose that we can bless ourselves without being restored to Him...

- What a mockery that is!
 - How dare that mere human flesh should go on as if it is of no consequence to having offended our Creator!
 - As if this is a matter that can be ignored and safely overlooked!

 - O my friends,
 - God has endowed each and every one of you with an innate sense of His eternal power and divine nature.
 - And He has clearly revealed His wrath against us for disregarding Him...
 - We only multiply our sin and guilt when we do not tremble before Him...
 - and go on as if we could go on without seeking to be reconciled to Him!

TRANS> This was Africa's problem at this time.

- It was not wrong of them to rally together to try to protect their borders from the Assyrian threat...
- but oh how wrong it was for them to do this as if Assyria was their greatest problem when they were not even reconciled to the living God!
 - You can see how much it dishonours God when men who are yet at enmity with Him try to pretend that it is nothing!
 - That was the problem with these great African peoples as they formed their coalition.

II. But Isaiah shows us that God has plans to bring these Africans to *His* salvation!

A. Isaiah presents a contrast in verse 3.

1. The African ambassadors have been busy calling an army together under their banner...
 - but here the Lord is seen calling the inhabitants of the world to come under His banner!
 - Verse 3 says:
 - Isa 18:3: 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.
 - Even while the Africans are calling people together, the God of heaven and earth is also making His plans to call people together under His banner.
 - We have run into the language of God raising up a banner and blowing a trumpet to assemble people before...
 - In ancient warfare when the battle was engaged,
 - the army would sometimes become scattered and would need to regroup.
 - A standard (such as a banner) could be raised as a rallying point.
 - A trumpet might also be sounded.
 - Each soldier would recognise his commander's trumpet and banner and come.
 - There was both a visual and an auditory rallying point.
2. Perhaps you will remember what God's banner is!
 - We looked at it in Isaiah 11...
 - I believe Isaiah is speaking of the same banner here in Isaiah 18:3.

- a. In Isaiah 11, we saw that this banner that the LORD lifts up is a person!
 - In Isaiah 11:10, he said:
 - Isa 11:10: And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse, Who shall stand as a banner to the people; For the Gentiles shall seek Him, And His resting place shall be glorious.
 - You see how it refers to this banner as **Him**.
 - It says that the Gentiles—the nations—will seek **Him!**
 - not **it**, but **Him**, showing that this is a person.
 - And not only that, but you see that this banner is called a “Root of Jesse.”
 - Jesse was King David’s father, but Jesse was just an ordinary man—
 - God took Jesse’s son from being a lowly shepherd in his father’s house, the youngest of Jesse’s sons, and made him a great king in Israel!
 - But this One who is to be God’s banner would not be lifted up as the Son of a king...on a throne...
 - but as a cursed sacrifice on a cross!
 - Jesus as crucified is God’s banner!
 - It is to Jesus crucified that God calls sinners.
 - Even as the serpent was lifted up in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up!
 - And He, when He is lifted up, will draw all nations to Himself!
 - Again, Isaiah 11:10 says:
 - “For the Gentiles (or the nations) shall seek Him!”
 - The nations of the world are going to rally around this banner that God is going to set up.
- b. And so we should not be surprised here in our text today that the summons is universal...
 - In Isaiah 18:3, Isaiah addresses:
 - “all the inhabitants of the world and the dwellers on the earth...”
 - The Africans were busy going all about the surrounding nations to gather them together against Assyria...
 - but Isaiah shows us that God’s banner will be for everyone in the entire world—without exception!
 - Isaiah says that they will all see God’s banner and hear His trumpet...

- or the language may be understood as a summons for them to see it:
 - “When he lifts up a banner, O do see it... and when He blows a trumpet, O do hear it.”
 - Either way, it is clear that the Lord’s banner is raised up and His trumpet is sounded for the whole world!
 - The call of the gospel is universal, and we should never exclude anyone from it.
 - We must not be ashamed that the solution for the world—the most important thing for the world—the only answer for the world to have peace and blessing...
 - Is Jesus, lifted up, crucified for our sins.
- c. This is what every person needs if they would be saved...
- This is what **you** need if you would saved!
- 1) The world has many things they call us to rally around...
- Sometimes they are things that are intrinsically rebellious and wicked...
 - We are summoned to join the world in promiscuity—sexual perversion and uncleanness rather than pure and holy sex.
 - We are summoned to join the world in their political hopes—that if we get the right person in office, all our problems will be solved...
 - And the advertisers summon us to join the world in the notion that happiness will come to us through having lots of things.
 - The spirit of the age calls us to join the world in their attitude that there is no judgement, and that nothing is sinful...
 - But sometimes the world calls us to rally around causes that are not in themselves perverse,
 - but the rebellion is found, as we have seen, in supposing that you can be blessed without ever being reconciled to God.
- 2) That is why we need to come to the banner that God raised up and respond to His trumpet call.
- There is no other place to come for everlasting life and blessing!
 - No one but Jesus lifted up on the cross can reconcile you to God, and no one but Jesus can baptise you with the Spirit so that you can walk in God’s ways.
 - And oh what a marvellous salvation this is!

- Just imagine, to be made fit to live in paradise with God forever and ever, beholding His glory, delighting in Him, serving Him, living in a world of perfect love with no sin and no curse! to be completely forgiven!
 - This is what God calls you to!
 - See that you do not neglect this salvation!
- 3) I mentioned before that our wickedness is compounded ten times over if we suppose that we can bless ourselves even though we are not reconciled to God...
- But I tell you now that it compounds your wickedness a hundred times over if you are among those who know have seen God's banner and heard His trumpet call to come to Christ and you ignore that!
 - How could you disregard the Son of God sent to save the world!
 - How could you spit in the face of Jesus Christ, the suffering one, by saying you don't need Him...
 - Yes, that is to spit in His face and to defy Him as if His sacrifice is unworthy of your attention and affection!
 - Such impertinence!
 - Such audacity!
 - Such high-mindedness!
 - God will deal most severely with you for that!
- B. But verse 7 shows us that these Africans will indeed respond to God's call when Christ the banner is lifted up.
- It says:
 - Isa 18:7: 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.
1. This verse deliberately identifies these who come with their gifts as the same people who were spoken of in verse 2.
- The same description is used of them—
 - 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...
 - but they are engaged in an entirely new activity.
 - Jesus Christ crucified has been lifted up—the banner of the Lord—and now they have become His true worshippers.
 - They are still busy, but now they are busy for God instead of busy apart from God...

- Now they are a new creation in Christ the banner...
- Now their labour is not in vain because their labour is in the Lord.
- Now they are not busy in a restless way, but as those who have entered into the Lord's rested-ness.

2. Isaiah's description of their new activity is very clear!

a. He says that they bring a present to the LORD of Hosts, to Yahweh Sabbaoth.

- They are now those who use their resources in service to Him.
 - They bring their tithes and their offerings to Him.
 - This is reflective of a whole life devoted to Him.
- That is how you will be if you have indeed received the Lord's salvation.
 - You will feel that you cannot do enough for Him!
 - You will be a new creation in Christ Jesus, created for good works that God has purposed beforehand!
 - Your life will be about serving Him and doing His will and bringing honour to Him and delighting in Him.

TRANS> And notice the place to which they bring their gifts!

b. They are said to bring their presents to the place of the LORD of hosts, to Mount Zion...

- This is very significant because this refers to the place where God revealed His glory and His salvation in the Old Testament through the service of the temple.
 - But as this speaks of what Egypt would do after Jesus Christ the banner was lifted up,
 - it is not meant to be understood as an earthly temple made with hands, but as the Zion that is above, where Jesus is!
- It is to Jesus, who is now exalted to the right hand of God as the one who has been crucified for sinners and whose sacrifice has been accepted of the Father.
 - They come to Him as the victorious Saviour who reconciles them to God through the blood of the New Covenant.
 - There is no pride in those who truly come to Mount Zion,
 - for they recognise that their salvation is of the Lord and not in themselves!
 - No longer do they suppose that eternal life can be obtained by building pyramids or by their burial rites...

- No longer to the serve a multiplicity of gods and dumb idols.
- No longer do they trust in their armies and their wisdom and their riches and their alliances.
- They come to the One true God at Mount Zion who is reconciled by the cross of Christ,
 - trusting in His work alone to obtain blessing.
- But do not suppose this to be an ethereal coming to Him!
 - A spiritual coming to Him does not mean we no longer offer the sacrifices of praise or confess His name in the assembly of His people...
 - It means we no longer worship at a temple, offering the blood of bulls and goats through a priest.
 - It means that we come with living faith in Jesus Christ, worshipping according to all that He has commanded us in the New Covenant worship—
 - primarily, remembering and rejoicing in His finished sacrifice and in the acceptance of that sacrifice.

TRANS> What a change for these Africans and all others who come to worship the true God through Jesus Christ!

- From a people buzzing about like hapless insects in a desperate effort to secure some kind of blessing for themselves,
 - to a people who come to Jesus Christ, resting in His finished work of salvation!

III. How does God get these proud Africans to come to Jesus Christ crucified?

A. We have already seen the main thing He does...

- He presents Christ openly before the world as the one whose self-sacrifice was accepted for sinners.
 - No one can come to God unless He has first heard the gospel.
 - The Africans, as other Gentiles, were all the Paul says they were until the gospel of Christ was preached to them.
 - Ephesians 2:17-22: And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father. Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

- If they nations are to have the blessing of God, they must have the gospel preached to them.
 - God is the one who sends forth His gospel through the ministry of the word,
 - and it is our duty as those who serve Him to pray for the ministry of the Word and to be an example as the Thessalonians were from whose example the gospel sounded forth into the all the world when they turned from idols to serve Jesus Christ.
 - No sinner really comes to a sufficient understanding of His need of salvation until He comes to understand that only Jesus, the Son of God, crucified, can save him.

TRANS> God calls the Gentiles by sending forth His gospel to them

- That is the first thing.
 - The gospel cannot be known from nature, but must heard.
 - But there is more here—
 - more that God does to prepare Egypt and Cush and other nations for the gospel.

B. There is God's patient, gradual, deliberate, even subtle work that He does to humble the nations to prepare them for the gospel.

1. Now I want to say from the outset that this is not a work that God has called us to do as His messengers...
 - We are not called to humble men or to prepare them in some way for the gospel,
 - nor are they called to prepare themselves in some way.
 - This work of preparation is a work that God does in the spirit of nations over the centuries and in individuals over their lifetime...
 - It may be described as bringing their wisdom and the things they trust in to naught.
 - He exposes to them the folly of their vain confidence so that they begin to seek after Him.
 - He brings them to an end of themselves.
 - Paul spoke of this to the Greeks at Athens when he said to them:
 - Acts 17:26-28: And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being...
 - The idea here is that God decides how we will fare and gives us our place in this world...

- He determines our times and boundaries of our dwellings in such a way that we will seek after Him.
 - Often, He gives a society great success and prosperity for a time and then brings all their wisdom to naught...
 - It is just as it was at the tower of Babel...
 - They build and they achieve and they succeed in their independence of God, and then He quite suddenly He takes it all away and brings them down.
 - They realise in a very striking way that for all their achievements and all their successes, they cannot stand on their own...
 - And then they seek Him.
 - But Paul does not go to Athens to humble the Greeks by tearing down their city...
 - He comes to them as a people who have been overpowered by the Romans and he instructs them to learn from all this...
 - to learn that it is God who gives them dominion and takes away their dominion...
 - and that now He commands all men everywhere to repent and believe on His Son.
2. In our chapter, Isaiah also ascribes this work of humiliation to God...
- a. In verse 4, He shows the Lord quietly resting, looking upon the earth from His dwelling place in heaven...
 - sending heat and sending rain in their seasons, just as they are needed to make the harvest of the world grow...
 - Even when wicked nations who do not honour God arise to great heights, God is not the least bit agitated by it...
 - It is in fact the result of His work.
 - He is not frantic, He is just patiently carrying out His purposes.
 - Verse 4 says,
 - 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."
 - He is not judging the nations—despite their wickedness—but He is quietly watching them grow under the heat and the rain that He sends.
 - He knows what He has purposed to do.
 - He raises up Pharaoh for His own purposes!

- So here you have these proud, successful, Africans, confidently raising up an army to withstand Assyria...
 - And God all the while watching them and giving them success in their rise to power.
- b. But then to everyone's surprise, God brings them down!
 - Just when they are about to think that nothing is impossible with them in their blinded pride—
 - just when they are supposing that they have arisen to great heights apart from the God who made the world—even as those who are His enemies...
 - Just when the harvest is about to reach its perfection!
 - Verse 5 says that God comes in cut them down with his pruning hook.
 - v. 5: "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.
 - and verse 6 says that He makes them as food for the beasts of the earth.
 - The great nation that ruled world suddenly becomes the nation that those scavengers who have no fight in them easily plunder.
 - v. 6: 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.
 - Here is the nation that everyone feared,
 - now defenceless,
 - now a great feast for scavengers to sustain themselves on all year!

C. Isaiah shows us that this is the work that God will do in Northern Africa!

1. Ancient Egypt was one of the strongest, longest standing, prosperous nations that was ever on the face of the earth!
 - But in His mercy, God brings them down!
 - They have great ambition and great hopes in their independence of the true God,
 - but the Lord brings them down...
2. Now you remember how the LORD humbled them and showed the folly of all their gods at the time of the Exodus.
 - Pharaoh, who at first said, "Who is the LORD that I should obey Him,"
 - was broken and forced to let the people go after God had nearly destroyed the whole land of Egypt.

- All this, and yet the spirit of pride was not yet broken.
3. But now in Isaiah's day, there is another work of humiliation that God does upon Egypt.
- In each of these works, God's chisel is applied to them, breaking away more of their pride—here a little there a little—to prepare them for Christ.
 - How great is His mercy!
 - How wise are His ways!
 - So what is the work He does to humble them in Isaiah's day?
 - How is the chisel applied to them?
 - In this...
 - There was this great coalition spoken of in verse 1 & 2 by this powerful nation that treads their enemies down.
 - It was formed to stand up against Assyria...
 - But when Assyria comes, Egypt goes out to help Ashdod (as we will read about in chapter 20),
 - and they do not succeed!
 - Egypt's coalition fails!
 - The mighty are brought down and humbled by the Lord's working...
 - He takes his sickle and cuts them down.
 - And then to add insult to injury,
 - Assyria comes up to take Judah and God, as promised beforehand, humbles the entire Assyrian army in a single night.
 - What Egypt could not do, Jehovah does without human aid.
 - What a lesson for proud Egypt that they are not in charge!
 - And for the next 700 years Egypt and all the rest of Northern Africa will find themselves under the thumb of one alien force and then another...
 - There will be Babylon, then Persia, then Greece, then Rome!
 - And the same nations will exercise dominion over Israel as well.
 - All this to prepare them for the coming of the messiah so that when He comes they will understand how much they need Him.

Conclusion:

This is marvellous my brothers and sisters!

- God takes several thousand years to prepare Egypt for the coming of Christ.
 - He raises them up to great power for many centuries, and then He repeatedly humbles them to teach them that all they have is from Him.

- That is what God is doing in the world! this fallen world!
 - That is what He has done in you if you are trusting in Him!
 - You can come to the end of your rope and have come to realise that you cannot save yourself...
 - God has used the troubles that the people you are a part of have gone through as well as your own personal troubles to show you that you need to be reconciled to Him...

- And now, thanks be to God, you have come to Him for salvation.
 - or perhaps He has not yet broken you—
 - perhaps you are going on, blinded by your foolish pride...
 - If that is so, then I pray that He will soon break you.

- But oh my brothers and sisters, you who have been humbled!
 - Be thankful for what the Lord has done!
 - How horrible it would be if you were still blinded by your pride, unable to see your need of the Saviour who is blessed for ever,
 - unable to receive His precious salvation that leads you into the joyful service of your God and into the fellowship of Christ's sufferings.
 - Do you see it?
 - Even His own sufferings are the head of the church are meant to humble us...
 - For we see that it was our sin—each one of us—that put Him on that cross.
 - Let us all come to Mount Zion...
 - to Christ who is exalted as the crucified one whose sacrifice was accepted for our sins.
 - Let us come humbly and give thanks to our God and our Saviour.