

Isaiah 26:18

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

We have been with child, we have been in pain, we have as it were brought forth wind; we have not wrought any deliverance in the earth; neither have the inhabitants of the world fallen.

Analysis

We have been with child, we have been in pain, we have as it were brought forth wind. This poignant metaphor employs childbirth imagery to express Israel's spiritual futility and disappointment. The Hebrew *harah* (הָרָה, "with child") and *chul* (חָוֵל, "writhe in pain") describe the intense labor and expectation of bringing forth new life. Yet the devastating conclusion—"brought forth wind" (*ruach*, רוּחַ)—reveals that all their efforts produced nothing substantial, only empty breath.

The confession "we have not wrought any deliverance in the earth" uses *yeshuah* (יְשׁוּעָה, "salvation/deliverance"), acknowledging human inability to accomplish redemption through self-effort. The parallel phrase "neither have the inhabitants of the world fallen" means Israel failed to conquer their enemies or establish God's kingdom through their own strength. This represents profound theological humility—recognizing that spiritual fruit comes only through divine enablement, not human striving.

This verse establishes critical truths:

1. religious activity without God's empowerment produces nothing eternal
2. genuine salvation comes from God alone, not human effort
3. spiritual labor must be God-directed and God-empowered to bear fruit
4. honest self-assessment reveals our absolute dependence on divine grace.

Jesus echoed this in John 15:5: "without me ye can do nothing."

Historical Context

Isaiah 26 constitutes a prophetic song of praise anticipating Judah's future deliverance and restoration. Written against the backdrop of Assyrian threats (8th century BCE), this chapter contrasts the strong city God provides (26:1) with human attempts at security and deliverance that fail. The childbirth metaphor was common in ancient Near Eastern literature to describe both hope and disappointment, creative effort and futility.

Israel's history repeatedly demonstrated the pattern described here: zealous religious activity (sacrifices, festivals, prayers) coupled with moral failure and idolatry produced no lasting deliverance from enemies or spiritual transformation. The Northern Kingdom fell to Assyria (722 BCE) despite religious fervor; Judah would later fall to Babylon (586 BCE) despite temple worship. Human religiosity without genuine repentance and reliance on God proved worthless.

This confession anticipates the gospel truth that salvation comes through God's provision, not human achievement. The barren womb motif appears throughout Scripture (Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Hannah, Elizabeth), always requiring divine intervention to bring forth life. Historically, Israel's exile and restoration demonstrated that God alone could accomplish what human effort never could—genuine spiritual renewal and covenant faithfulness.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Study Questions

1. In what areas of your spiritual life are you laboring in the flesh rather than depending on God's power and grace?

2. How does this honest confession of futility challenge contemporary emphasis on human potential and self-improvement?
3. What does it mean practically to acknowledge that "without Christ we can do nothing" in your daily ministry and relationships?
4. How can you distinguish between Spirit-empowered service and mere religious activity that produces only "wind"?
5. In what ways does understanding human inability to accomplish salvation deepen your gratitude for God's gracious provision of redemption through Christ?

Interlinear Text

הָרָא יָנוּ	חַ לָנוּ	כִּמּוֹ ו	יֵלְדָנוּ		
We have been with child	we have been in pain	we have as it were	brought forth		
H2029	H2342	H3644	H3205		
רוּחַ	יְשׁוּעָה	וְכֵן	בְּעֲשָׂה	אֶרֶץ	וְכֵן
wind	any deliverance	neither	we have not wrought	in the earth	neither
H7307	H3444	H1077	H6213	H776	H1077
יָפֵל וְ	יֹשְׁבֵי י	תִּבְלֵ:			
fallen	have the inhabitants	of the world			
H5307	H3427	H8398			

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 17:14 (Parallel theme): From men which are thy hand, O LORD, from men of the world, which have their portion in this life, and whose belly thou fillest with thy hid treasure: they are full of children, and leave the rest of their substance to their babes.

Hosea 13:13 (Parallel theme): The sorrows of a travailing woman shall come upon him: he is an unwise son; for he should not stay long in the place of the breaking forth of children.

Isaiah 37:3 (Parallel theme): And they said unto him, Thus saith Hezekiah, This day is a day of trouble, and of rebuke, and of blasphemy: for the children are come to the birth, and there is not strength to bring forth.

Isaiah 59:4 (Parallel theme): None calleth for justice, nor any pleadeth for truth: they trust in vanity, and speak lies; they conceive mischief, and bring forth iniquity.

2 Kings 19:3 (Parallel theme): And they said unto him, Thus saith Hezekiah, This day is a day of trouble, and of rebuke, and blasphemy: for the children are come to the birth, and there is not strength to bring forth.

Isaiah 33:11 (Parallel theme): Ye shall conceive chaff, ye shall bring forth stubble: your breath, as fire, shall devour you.

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