

when Egypt will fear the great military prowess of Judah? It would be difficult to think of a time in past history when this has been the case. Many commentators interpret it as meaning that so terrible a fate will befall the land of Judah that knowledge of it will strike terror into the heart of Egypt so that everyone in Egypt who mentions what has happened to Judah will be overcome with fear, saying, "If He has treated His own people so frightfully, think what terrible things He may do to us, who are His enemies!" Yet this certainly is not the natural interpretation of the verse. It would be very easy for the prophet to express that thought if that was what he had in mind. As it reads in the King James Version and the American Standard Version -- "the land of Judah shall be (American Standard Version become) a terror to Egypt" -- it would hardly give anyone such an idea as that. Moreover, history records no evidence that the people of Egypt have ever been affected in this way by news of Jewish suffering.

Examination of the Hebrew words shows that the translation deserves reconsideration. Superficial translation could easily produce our common rendering, which occurs as early as the Septuagint. It might seem natural to a patriotic Jew, reading of Egypt's disasters and expecting a promise of Jewish supremacy. Several of the words are far from requiring the translation usually given, and in the case of one of them it is extremely dubious.

The verse does not contain the common word for "land," but rather the word for "ground" or "earth." It speaks of the soil of Judah, rather than of its people.

The word which is here translated "terror" occurs nowhere else in the Hebrew Bible. Considerable twisting is necessary to find a way to secure the meaning "terror" from it. It seems to be related to a Hebrew root that means "make a pilgrimage, keep a pilgrim feast." This root is often used in connection with the great festivals in which Israelites worshipped God in accordance with the commands He had given them. Some think that this word refers to the general exhilaration of a person in a festive dance, from which they get the idea of one who is reeling to and fro, and from that the idea of terror. Surely this is a very long jump. From the preceding context it is easy to see how "terror" could be