

Isaiah 17:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Woe to the multitude of many people, which make a noise like the noise of the seas; and to the rushing of nations, that make a rushing like the rushing of mighty waters!

Analysis

'Woe to the multitude of many people, which make a noise like the noise of the seas; and to the rushing of nations, that make a rushing like the rushing of mighty waters!' The focus shifts to invading armies—described as roaring seas and rushing mighty waters. 'Woe' introduces judgment pronouncement. The imagery of seas and waters depicts overwhelming destructive force—armies sweeping across the land like tsunamis. Multiple nations joining together create an irresistible flood. This describes the Assyrian Empire's multi-national military machine—conscripted armies from conquered peoples creating massive forces. Yet verse 13 will show God's sovereignty over even these threatening 'waters.' This demonstrates that apparent overwhelming threats remain under divine control.

Historical Context

Assyrian military organization conscripted soldiers from conquered territories, creating vast multi-ethnic armies. Annals describe campaigns involving forces from dozens of subjugated peoples. To small nations like Israel and Judah, Assyrian armies appeared as an unstoppable flood—the metaphor wasn't hyperbole but accurate description of overwhelming force. Yet despite their apparent invincibility, Assyria itself eventually fell (612 BCE). The imagery of nations as chaotic waters appears throughout Scripture (Psalm 46:2-3; Revelation 17:15), representing humanity's tumultuous rebellious forces ultimately subject to God's sovereignty.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Romans 10:9 – Confession and belief for salvation

Hebrews 11:1 – Definition of faith

Romans 1:17 – The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. What does the sea/water imagery teach about how overwhelming threats appear from human perspective?
2. How does this description prepare for the revelation of God's sovereignty over threatening nations?
3. In what ways do modern geopolitical threats resemble ancient Assyria's apparently overwhelming power?

Interlinear Text

וְהַזְעִמָּה	בְּמֹרְאָתָה	עַמְּךָ יִם	כְּבָבָיִם	יְהִמְמִיאָה	עַמְּךָ יִם
Woe	to the multitude	people	of many	like the noise	of the seas
H1945	H1995	H5971	H7227	H1993	H3220

כְּבָרִ יְמִים מִימִים
לְאַמְּ יְמִים כְּשָׁא וְלְ
כְּשָׁא וְלְ יְמִים מִימִים
יְמִים כְּבָרִ יְמִים מִימִים
like the noise and to the rushing of nations and to the rushing waters of mighty

רְאֵלִים
that make a rushing like the rushing

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 18:4 (Parallel theme): The sorrows of death compassed me, and the floods of ungodly men made me afraid.

Jeremiah 6:23 (Parallel theme): They shall lay hold on bow and spear; they are cruel, and have no mercy; their voice roareth like the sea; and they ride upon horses, set in array as men for war against thee, O daughter of Zion.

Luke 21:25 (Parallel theme): And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring;

Revelation 17:15 (Parallel theme): And he saith unto me, The waters which thou sawest, where the whore sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues.

Revelation 17:1 (Parallel theme): And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, Come hither; I will shew unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters:

Ezekiel 43:2 (Parallel theme): And, behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east: and his voice was like a noise of many waters: and the earth shined with his glory.