

Isaiah 18:2

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

That sendeth ambassadors by the sea, even in vessels of bulrushes upon the waters, saying, Go, ye swift messengers, to a nation scattered and peeled, to a people terrible from their beginning hitherto; a nation meted out and trodden down, whose land the rivers have spoiled!

Analysis

'That sendeth ambassadors by the sea, even in vessels of bulrushes upon the waters, saying, Go, ye swift messengers, to a nation scattered and peeled, to a people terrible from their beginning hitherto; a nation meted out and trodden down, whose land the rivers have spoiled!' Ethiopia sends ambassadors in papyrus reed boats (Egyptian/Cushite watercraft) seeking alliances. The 'swift messengers' carry diplomatic overtures. But to whom? The descriptions—'scattered and peeled' (tall and smooth-skinned), 'terrible from their beginning' (feared), 'meted out and trodden down' (measured and trampled)—likely describe Ethiopia itself, creating interpretive complexity. God may be commanding messengers to go TO Ethiopia with His message, or describing Ethiopian messengers' frantic diplomacy. Either way, human diplomatic maneuvering proves futile compared to divine sovereignty.

Historical Context

Papyrus reed boats were distinctive Egyptian/Cushite watercraft, light and fast for river travel. Ethiopian diplomacy during this period actively sought anti-Assyrian coalitions throughout the Levant. The descriptions fit Ethiopian/Cushite people: tall stature, smooth skin, fearsome reputation as warriors, and the Nile's annual flooding ('rivers have spoiled') defining their land. Historically, Ethiopia's anti-

Assyrian efforts failed—Assyria defeated Egypt and Ethiopia at Eltekeh (701 BCE) and later campaigns. Despite fierce reputation and diplomatic efforts, Ethiopia couldn't prevent Assyrian dominance. Only God's direct intervention (701 BCE deliverance of Jerusalem) accomplished what Ethiopian military power couldn't.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. What does Ethiopian diplomatic activity teach about human efforts to secure safety apart from God?
2. How do the descriptions emphasize Ethiopia's impressive yet insufficient human qualities?
3. Why did Ethiopian military power fail while God's direct intervention succeeded?

Interlinear Text

הַשִּׁלְ הַ	בַּיָּם	צִירֵי	וּבְכֵלֵי	גִּמְא	עַל	פָּנֵי
That sendeth	by the sea	ambassadors	even in vessels	of bulrushes	H5921	upon
H7971	H3220	H6735	H3627	H1573		H6440
מֵיִם	לְכָוָן	מַלְאָכָיִם	קָלִיִּם	אֶל	גּוֹי	וּמִוּכָּט
the waters	H1980	messengers	ye swift	H413	a nation	and peeled
H4325		H4397	H7031		H1471	H4178
אֶל	עַם	נוֹכָא	מִן	הָיָא	וְהָלְאָה	גּוֹי
H413	to a people	terrible	H4480	H1931	from their beginning hitherto	a nation
	H5971	H3372			H1973	H1471
קָוָה	קָוָה	וּמְבוֹסָה	אֲשֶׁר	בְּזָא וְ	נְהָרֵי	אֶרְצוֹ
H0	meted out	and trodden down	H834	have spoiled	the rivers	whose land
	H6978	H4001		H958	H5104	H776

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 18:7 (Parallel theme): In that time shall the present be brought unto the LORD of hosts of a people scattered and peeled, and from a people terrible from their beginning hitherto; a nation meted out and trodden under foot, whose land the rivers have spoiled, to the place of the name of the LORD of hosts, the mount Zion.

2 Chronicles 16:8 (Parallel theme): Were not the Ethiopians and the Lubims a huge host, with very many chariots and horsemen? yet, because thou didst rely on the LORD, he delivered them into thine hand.

2 Chronicles 14:9 (Parallel theme): And there came out against them Zerah the Ethiopian with an host of a thousand thousand, and three hundred chariots; and came unto Mareshah.