

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

פָּנִים	עַל	גְּתָא	בְּנִים	הַשְׁלָל	בְּיַם	צִירִים	וּבְכָלִים	צִירִים	בְּיַם	וּבְכָלִים	וּבְכָלִים	בְּנִים	עַל	פָּנִים			
That sendeth	by the sea	ambassadors	even in vessels	of bulrushes									H5921	upon			
H7971	H3220	H6735	H3627	H1573									H6440				
the waters	H1980	messengers	ye swift	a nation	מִמְמָשׁ	מִמְמָשׁ	מִמְמָשׁ	מִמְמָשׁ	מִמְמָשׁ	מִמְמָשׁ	מִמְמָשׁ	מִמְמָשׁ	and peeled				
H4325		H4397	H7031	H1471	H4900	H4900	H4900	H4900	H4900	H4900	H4900	H4900	H4178				
אֶל	עַם	נָזֶב	מִן	הַזֹּאת	לְאֶחָד	לְאֶחָד	לְאֶחָד	לְאֶחָד	לְאֶחָד	לְאֶחָד	לְאֶחָד	לְאֶחָד	אֶחָד				
H413	to a people	terrible	H4480	H1931	from their beginning	hitherto	a nation	H1973						H1471			
H5971		H3372															
קָרְבָּן	וּמְבָזָבָן	אֲשֶׁר	בְּזִיאָה	גַּנְקָרִים	אֶרְצָן												
H0	meted out	and trodden down	H834	H958	H5104	H776											
H6978		H4001															

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.