

Isaiah 21:14

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

The inhabitants of the land of Tema brought water to him that was thirsty, they prevented with their bread him that fled.

Analysis

'The inhabitants of the land of Tema brought water to him that was thirsty, they prevented with their bread him that fled.' Tema (another Arabian tribe, also descended from Abraham through Keturah, Genesis 25:15) shows mercy to refugees—providing water and bread to fleeing Dedanites. This humanitarian response demonstrates covenant values (hospitality to strangers, care for refugees) appearing even outside Israel. The phrase 'they prevented' (met/anticipated needs) indicates proactive compassion, not mere reactive charity. This models proper response to displaced persons: meeting basic needs (water, bread) for those fleeing judgment. Reformed ethics emphasizes such practical compassion as fruit of genuine faith—orthodoxy must produce orthopraxy. The passage doesn't commend Tema merely for compassion but records it as observable fact—even in judgment contexts, mercy appears through those who act compassionately.

Historical Context

Arabian tribal culture included hospitality codes—providing for travelers and refugees was obligatory honor. This cultural value reflected creation ordinances about human dignity and mutual care, even where biblical revelation wasn't known. Common grace enables pagan cultures to practice genuine virtue, though incompletely and inconsistently. Historically, during Assyrian and Babylonian campaigns, displaced Arabian tribes did seek refuge among related tribes. These migrations are documented in various ancient records. The pattern continues throughout history: wars and judgments create refugee crises, and humanitarian

responses emerge from various sources. Christian ethics, rooted in imago Dei, calls believers to compassionate response to refugees, regardless of cause or origin of their displacement. Tema's example models such proactive compassion.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. What does Tema's compassion teach about virtue appearing even outside biblical covenant community?
2. How should believers respond to modern refugee crises in light of this example?
3. What is the relationship between orthodox belief and orthopraxy (right practice) regarding compassion?

Interlinear Text

לְקֹרֵב אֵת	צָמֵא אֵל	יָבֹא יְהוָה	מַיִם	יֹשְׁבֵי	אֶרֶץ
to him	that was thirsty	brought	water	The inhabitants	of the land
H7125	H6771	H857	H4325	H3427	H776
אֵת תֵּימָא	בְּלֶחֶם וְ	קִדְּמוּ	נִדָּד:		
of Tema	with their bread	they prevented	him that fled		
H8485	H3899	H6923	H5074		

Additional Cross-References

Job 6:19 (Parallel theme): The troops of Tema looked, the companies of Sheba waited for them.

Genesis 25:15 (Parallel theme): Hadar, and Tema, Jetur, Naphish, and Kedemah:

Proverbs 25:21 (Parallel theme): If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink:

Romans 12:20 (Parallel theme): Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.

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