

Isaiah 30:6

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

The burden of the beasts of the south: into the land of trouble and anguish, from whence come the young and old lion, the viper and fiery flying serpent, they will carry their riches upon the shoulders of young asses, and their treasures upon the bunches of camels, to a people that shall not profit them.

Analysis

The burden of the beasts of the south (בְּנַחַת בְּהַמּוֹת תְּבוֹת/massa bahamot negev)—Massa means oracle/burden/pronouncement. Behamot (beasts) refers to pack animals (donkeys, camels) laden with tribute for Egypt. Negev is the southern desert region between Judah and Egypt—barren, dangerous wilderness.

Into the land of trouble and anguish (בְּאָרֶץ אֲכֻה וְאַזְוָה/be'erets tsarah vetsuqah)—The Negev characterized as a land of distress (tsarah) and anguish (tsuqah, straits, hardship). **From whence come the young and old lion, the viper and fiery flying serpent** (לְבִיא לְלִיש מְהֻם אֲפָעָה וְשָׁרָף מְעוּפָף) (lavi valayish mehem ef'eh vesaraf me'ofef)—Catalog of dangers: lions (both lavi and layish, perhaps young and old), vipers (ef'eh, poisonous snakes), and fiery flying serpents (saraf me'ofef). The "fiery serpent" (saraf) appears in Numbers 21:6—venomous snakes whose bite caused burning inflammation. "Flying" may describe their quick strikes or refer to dragon-like imagery. **They will carry their riches upon the shoulders of young asses, and their treasures upon the bunches of camels** (וְשָׂאו עַל-כְּתָף שָׂעִירִים חִילִים) (yis'u al-ketef ayarim chelem ve'al-dabbeshet gemalim otsrotehem)—Vivid imagery: wealth loaded on donkeys' shoulders and camels' humps. Chayil means wealth/resources. Otsrot means treasures. All this valuable tribute risked in deadly desert. **To a people that shall not profit them** (עַל-עַם לֹא)

אלם לו יולע/al-am lo yo'ilu)—Bitter irony: all this danger and expense for a people who cannot help.

Historical Context

This verse captures the foolish extravagance of Judah's diplomatic mission: endangering lives and exhausting treasures to purchase worthless Egyptian alliance. The Negev's dangers were real—lions inhabited the region until medieval times; venomous snakes remain common. Caravans faced robbery, animal attacks, dehydration. Yet Judah's ambassadors made this perilous journey loaded with tribute (gold, silver, precious goods) to secure Egypt's military support. Isaiah's imagery emphasizes the insanity: risking everything for nothing, paying exorbitant prices for worthless merchandise. This was royal folly—squandering national treasure on an ally who would provide zero benefit.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. What 'treasures' (time, money, energy, reputation) do you risk carrying to worthless sources of help?
2. How does the vivid imagery of dangerous journey for worthless destination illustrate the cost of not trusting God?
3. In what ways do we endure 'trouble and anguish' pursuing securities that 'shall not profit' us?

Interlinear Text

מִשְׁא	בְּהַמִּזְבֵּחַ	בְּנֵי נָבָט	בְּאֶרֶץ	צָבָה הָאָזְנָבָה	צָבָה הַמִּזְבֵּחַ
The burden	of the beasts	of the south	into the land	of trouble	and anguish
H4853	H929	H5045	H776	H6869	H6695
לְבָבְךָ יָא	מִלְּאָשָׁר	מִלְּאָשָׁר	אַפְּנָה	וְשָׁבָר	מַעֲופָר
from whence come the young	and old lion		the viper	and fiery	flying
H3833	H3918	H1992	H660	H8314	H5774
וְשָׁאָוֹן	עַל	כְּתַף	עִירִים	כִּילָּה	עַל
they will carry	upon the shoulders	of young asses	their riches		
H5375	H5921	H3802	H5895	H2428	H5921
דְּבָשָׁת	גִּמְלִים	אַזְּרָתָם	עַל	עַם	לְאַ
upon the bunches	of camels	and their treasures		to a people	
H1707	H1581	H214	H5921	H5971	H3808
וְעַילָּה					
that shall not profit					
H3276					

Additional Cross-References

Deuteronomy 8:15 (Parallel theme): Who led thee through that great and terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents, and scorpions, and drought, where there was no water; who brought thee forth water out of the rock of flint;

Jeremiah 11:4 (Parallel theme): Which I commanded your fathers in the day that I brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, from the iron furnace, saying, Obey my voice, and do them, according to all which I command you: so shall ye be my people, and I will be your God:

Deuteronomy 4:20 (Parallel theme): But the LORD hath taken you, and brought you forth out of the iron furnace, even out of Egypt, to be unto him a people of inheritance, as ye are this day.

1 Kings 10:2 (Parallel theme): And she came to Jerusalem with a very great train, with camels that bare spices, and very much gold, and precious stones: and when she was come to Solomon, she communed with him of all that was in her heart.

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