

on the ground, or perhaps to the great number of winged insects.

It might be noticed that the word translated "woe" in verse 1 is not necessarily a declaration of misery ahead. It is an interjection which is quite often used to introduce a statement of God's judgment, but by no means always. Thus we find it translated "Ah" in Isaiah 1:4 and Jeremiah 22:18. It is translated "O" in Isaiah 10:5 and Jeremiah 47:6. It is translated "Ho" in Isaiah 55:1. In this last reference it calls upon every one who thirsts to come and receive God's help through the wonderful free provision that He has made. The message of our present chapter is more similar to the glorious promise of mercy in Isaiah 55 than it is to the declarations of doom that are sometimes introduced by this Hebrew word.

Verse 2a tells of the situation of these people at this time. They are sending messengers in vessels of bulrushes. The word is better translated papyrus, as in the American Standard Version. It describes the paper-like substance of which light boats were constructed for use on the Nile River. The nation is hurriedly sending ambassadors here and there in order to try to get help in the emergency produced by the onrush of the Assyrian armies across Asia.

In chapter 37:9 we are told that Sennacherib's conquest of Palestine was interrupted by the news that King Tirhakah had come out to oppose him. Like the Israelites, who were so disturbed by the constant aggression of Assyria, the Ethiopians and Egyptians knew that they were next in line. They were concerned for their sphere of influence, which reached quite a distance into Asia. Isaiah 30 and 31 picture the Israelites sending large amounts of tribute down to Egypt in order to get Egyptian help against Assyria. Here in chapter 18 we see Ethiopia sending its ambassadors to get as many nations as possible to stand solidly with them against the Assyrian aggressors.

Verses 2b to 6 give God's reply to the Ethiopian ambassadors. It is easy to be confused by the fact that the King James Version and the American Standard Version insert the word "saying." This word is not in the original. Its insertion makes it look as though this was the Ethiopian command to their ambassadors, rather than the reply God desired His people to give to them. The prophet tells the swift messengers