

Isaiah 33:23

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Thy tacklings are loosed; they could not well strengthen their mast, they could not spread the sail: then is the prey of a great spoil divided; the lame take the prey.

Analysis

Thy tacklings are loosed; they could not well strengthen their mast, they could not spread the sail (נִטְשׁוּ חַבְלֵיךָ בַּל־יַחְזִיקוּךָ תַּרְנָם בַּל־פָּרְשׁוּ נֵס, nitteshu chavalayikh bal-yechazzequ-khen tornam bal-parsesu nes)—your ropes (חֶבֶל, chevel) are loosened (נָטַשׁ, natash), they can't strengthen (יָחַזַּק, chazaq) the mast (תֹּרֵן, toren), can't spread (פָּרַשׁ, paras) the sail (נֵס, nes). **Then is the prey of a great spoil divided; the lame take the prey** (אֶז חֶלֶק עַד שָׁלַל מַרְבֵּה פִּסְחִים בָּזְזוּ וָז, az chullaq ad shalal marbeh pischim bazzu vaz)—even פִּסְחָה (pisseach, lame) plunder (בָּזַז, bazaz) the spoil (שָׁלַל, shalal).

This addresses Assyria (or any enemy) in defeat—their ship disabled, ropes loose, mast unsecured, sail unspreadable. The nautical metaphor depicts complete incapacitation. Then even the lame can plunder them—those normally disadvantaged in battle easily overcome the paralyzed enemy. This fulfills verse 4's locust imagery. God so thoroughly defeats enemies that the weakest Judeans can gather spoils. David, before fighting Goliath, declared: 'the battle is the LORD's' (1 Samuel 17:47). When God fights, even the weak triumph.

Historical Context

Though Assyria was a land power, nautical imagery depicts their helplessness. Ancient ships with loosened rigging were uncontrollable—dead in water, unable to escape or fight. Assyria's mighty army, reduced to corpses (Isaiah 37:36), became

helpless prey. The 'lame' plundering them shows complete reversal—normally excluded from warfare (2 Samuel 5:8), now even they participate in victory spoils. God's deliverance is so complete it includes the marginalized.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. How does God sometimes disable enemies so thoroughly that even the weak can overcome them?
2. What 'loose tacklings'—areas of incapacity and failure—characterize those who oppose God?
3. When have you, in weakness, experienced victory because God fought for you?

Interlinear Text

נָטָשׁוּ are loosed H5203	חֲבָלֵי יָרֵךְ Thy tacklings H2256	בָּל H1077	יַחֲזִיקוּ strengthen H2388	כִּן they could not well H3653	תִּרְנָם their mast H8650	בָּל H1077
פָּרְשׁוּ they could not spread H6566	יָם the sail H5251	אֶז H227	חֲלָק divided H2505	עַד then is the prey H5706	שָׁלַל spoil H7998	מִרְבֵּה of a great H4766
פֶּסֶחַ יָם the lame H6455	בִּיזָו take H962	בָּזָה the prey H957				

Additional Cross-References

2 Kings 7:8 (Parallel theme): And when these lepers came to the uttermost part of the camp, they went into one tent, and did eat and drink, and carried thence silver, and gold, and raiment, and went and hid it; and came again, and entered into another tent, and carried thence also, and went and hid it.

Psalms 68:12 (Parallel theme): Kings of armies did flee apace: and she that tarried at home divided the spoil.

1 Corinthians 1:27 (Parallel theme): But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty;

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