

Jeremiah 49:35

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Behold, I will break the bow of Elam, the chief of their might.

Analysis

Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Behold, I will break the bow of Elam (הִנֵּנִי שֹׁבֵר אֶת־קֶשֶׁת עֵילָם, hineni shover et-qeshet Elam)—Hineni ('behold, I am about to') signals imminent divine action. Elam was famed for archers (Isaiah 22:6), making the bow their military pride and economic strength (archery skills were marketable as mercenaries). God's breaking of their bow parallels His breaking of Babylon's weapons (51:56) and demonstrates that no human military advantage survives divine opposition.

The chief of their might (רִאשִׁית גְּבוּרָתָם, re'shit g'vuratam)—Their 'firstfruits' or 'best' of military strength. The bow represented not just weaponry but national identity and confidence. When God breaks it, He dismantles their entire security apparatus. This surgical strike on Elam's specialty reveals God's intimate knowledge of each nation's distinctive strengths—and His power to neutralize them. Human expertise means nothing against the Almighty.

Historical Context

Elamite archers appear in Assyrian reliefs and Persian armies. Their archery reputation dated to the 3rd millennium BC. When Elam was subjugated by Persia (circa 550s BC under Cyrus), their military independence ended—the 'bow' was indeed broken as they became Persian subjects rather than independent military actors.

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. Why does God target the specific strength (archery) of each nation in His judgments?
2. What modern 'bows'—distinctive national or personal strengths—might we wrongly trust in for security?
3. How does the 'breaking' motif demonstrate God's active, personal involvement in humbling the proud?

Interlinear Text

כֹּה	אָמַר	יְהוָה	אֲבָא וְ	הִנֵּנִי	שֶׁבֶר	אֶת
H3541	Thus saith	the LORD	of hosts	H2005	Behold I will break	H853
	H559	H3068	H6635		H7665	
גְּבוּרָתָם:	רֹאשׁ יֵת	עֵילָם	קֶשֶׁת			
	the bow	of Elam	the chief	of their might		
	H7198	H5867	H7225	H1369		

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 22:6 (Parallel theme): And Elam bare the quiver with chariots of men and horsemen, and Kir uncovered the shield.

Psalms 46:9 (Parallel theme): He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth; he breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder; he burneth the chariot in the fire.

Jeremiah 51:56 (References Lord): Because the spoiler is come upon her, even upon Babylon, and her mighty men are taken, every one of their bows is broken: for the LORD God of recompences shall surely requite.

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