

Jeremiah 51:32

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And that the passages are stopped, and the reeds they have burned with fire, and the men of war are affrighted.

Analysis

And that the passages are stopped, and the reeds they have burned with fire, and the men of war are affrighted. This verse continues the description of Babylon's sudden fall, depicting military collapse from multiple angles. **The passages are stopped** (Hebrew *ma'barot*, מַעְבְּרוֹת) refers to river fords and crossing points—strategic locations controlling movement across the Euphrates. Cyrus's forces seized these crossings, cutting off escape and reinforcement routes.

The reeds they have burned with fire likely refers to burning the marshlands and reed barriers that protected Babylon's waterways, a scorched-earth tactic destroying defensive positions. The Hebrew *agamim* (אֲגָמִים) denotes pools, marshes, or reed-thickets. **The men of war are affrighted** uses *nivhalu* (נִבְהָלוּ), meaning terrified, dismayed, thrown into panic—describing complete demoralization. Elite warriors, once confident in Babylon's impregnability, now flee in terror.

This military description fulfills Isaiah's prophecy that Babylon's mighty men would cease fighting, their strength would fail, and they would become like women (Isaiah 51:30). The panic echoes Exodus descriptions of God throwing enemies into confusion (Exodus 23:27). Revelation 18:10 depicts similar sudden destruction of eschatological Babylon, warning that earthly power collapses instantly when God judges.

Historical Context

This verse describes the night of October 12, 539 BC, when Cyrus the Persian conquered Babylon. Historical accounts (including Herodotus and the Nabonidus Chronicle) confirm that Cyrus diverted the Euphrates River, allowing his troops to enter Babylon through the riverbed under the city walls. The Babylonians were celebrating a festival when the attack came, explaining their unpreparedness. The strategic crossings and waterways that once protected Babylon became avenues of conquest. King Belshazzar (acting for his father Nabonidus) was killed that night (Daniel 5:30). The conquest was so swift and efficient that many citizens didn't realize their city had fallen until morning. This fulfilled Jeremiah's prophecy written decades earlier and vindicated God's word through multiple prophets.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How does Babylon's sudden military collapse illustrate that human strength and fortifications cannot stand against God's judgment?
2. What does the panic of Babylon's warriors teach about the fate of those who oppose God's purposes?
3. How does this historical fulfillment of prophecy strengthen our confidence in God's control over human empires and history?

Interlinear Text

וְהַמַּעְבָּרֹת	נִתְּכָּ שׁוּ	וְאֵת	הָאֲגָמִים	שָׂרְפוּ	בָּאֵשׁ
And that the passages	are stopped	H853	and the reeds	they have burned	with fire
H4569	H8610		H98	H8313	H784
וְאֵנָּשׁ	הַמִּלְחָמָה	נִבְּקְלוּ:			
H376	of war	are affrighted			
	H4421	H926			

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