

Jeremiah 9:23

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches:

Analysis

Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: Jeremiah delivers God's prohibition against humanity's three primary sources of self-confidence. The Hebrew al-yithalel (אֲלֵיתְהַלֵּל, "let not glory") uses the reflexive form of halal, meaning to boast, praise oneself, or glory—the root from which "hallelujah" derives. The threefold repetition creates powerful emphasis and comprehensive scope.

"The wise man" (hakham, חָכָם) refers to human intellect, education, and philosophical understanding. "His wisdom" (chokmato, חָכְמָה) encompasses all human reasoning and knowledge. "The mighty man" (gibbor, גָּבָור) means warrior, strong man, hero—representing physical strength, military power, and human achievement. "The rich man" (ashir, אֲשִׁיר) denotes material wealth, economic power, and financial security.

God targets the three pillars of human pride: intellectual superiority, physical/political power, and material prosperity. These represent what cultures across time value most highly and what individuals trust for security and significance. The command "let not... glory" forbids making these the basis of identity, confidence, or ultimate value. Verse 24 provides the proper object of boasting—knowing and understanding Yahweh who exercises lovingkindness, justice, and righteousness.

Paul echoes this passage in 1 Corinthians 1:26-31, declaring that God chose the foolish, weak, and lowly to shame human boasting.

Historical Context

Jeremiah prophesied during Judah's final decades (627-586 BC), warning of Babylonian conquest due to persistent idolatry and covenant unfaithfulness. Judah's leaders trusted political alliances (Egypt, Babylon), military strength, and religious ritual while ignoring justice and true worship of Yahweh. Jeremiah 9 comes amid extended judgment oracles condemning national sin.

Ancient Near Eastern cultures gloried in precisely these three areas. Egyptian wisdom literature celebrated intellectual achievement. Assyrian and Babylonian annals boasted military conquests and imperial might. Solomon's wealth made Israel internationally famous (1 Kings 10). Yet all these kingdoms fell despite their wisdom, might, and riches. Jeremiah witnessed this firsthand as Babylon destroyed Jerusalem in 586 BC.

The prophet's contemporary audience included educated scribes and priests (wise men), military leaders and warriors (mighty men), and wealthy merchants and nobles (rich men). Each group trusted their particular advantage for security and status. Jeremiah's message—that none of these provide ultimate security or significance—contradicted every human instinct and cultural value. Jesus later taught that life doesn't consist in possessions (Luke 12:15), that the meek inherit the earth (Matthew 5:5), and that God hides truth from the wise and reveals it to children (Matthew 11:25).

Related Passages

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. Which of these three (wisdom, might, riches) do you most naturally trust instead of God?
2. How does modern culture's glorification of intelligence, power, and wealth contradict God's values?
3. What does it mean practically to "glory in" knowing God rather than personal achievements?
4. How should this passage shape Christian attitudes toward education, success, and wealth?
5. Why does God oppose human boasting but command boasting in Him (verse 24)?

Interlinear Text

בְּחִכְמַת וְיַתְבֵּל לְאַל יְהִי אֶתְמָרָה כִּי הַיְלָדָה הַזֹּאת
H3541 Thus saith the LORD H408 man glory Let not the wise in his wisdom
H559 H3068 H1984 H2450 H2451

בָּגְבוּכָתׁוּ לֹא לֹא יִתְהַלֵּל הַגֵּב וְרַא יִתְהַלֵּל לֹא יִתְהַלֵּל
H408 man glory H1984 neither let the mighty H1368 in his might H1369 H408 man glory H1984

בְּעַשְׂרָה: יְרַעַשׁ
let not the rich in his riches
H6223 H6239

Additional Cross-References

Ecclesiastes 9:11 (Parallel theme): I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all.

Isaiah 5:21 (Parallel theme): Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!

Romans 1:22 (Parallel theme): Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools,

Ezekiel 7:19 (References Lord): They shall cast their silver in the streets, and their gold shall be removed: their silver and their gold shall not be able to deliver them in the day of the wrath of the LORD: they shall not satisfy their souls, neither fill their bowels: because it is the stumblingblock of their iniquity.

Proverbs 11:4 (Parallel theme): Riches profit not in the day of wrath: but righteousness delivereth from death.

Psalms 62:10 (Parallel theme): Trust not in oppression, and become not vain in robbery: if riches increase, set not your heart upon them.

Daniel 4:37 (Parallel theme): Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase.

Deuteronomy 8:17 (Parallel theme): And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth.

1 Timothy 6:10 (Parallel theme): For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

Mark 10:24 (Parallel theme): And the disciples were astonished at his words. But Jesus answereth again, and saith unto them, Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God!