

Job 20:24

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

He shall flee from the iron weapon, and the bow of steel shall strike him through.

Analysis

He shall flee from the iron weapon (יבַּרְחֵ מִמְּשָׁק בָּרֶזֶל, yivrah minneshek barzel)—Zophar's vivid battle imagery depicts the wicked as a fleeing warrior. Barzel (iron) represents superior weaponry that Bronze Age armies feared. **The bow of steel shall strike him through** (קֶשֶׁת נְחֻשָׁה, tachlephehu qeshet nechushah)—actually 'bow of bronze' (nechushah), not steel. The KJV's 'steel' reflects translation convention; bronze bows were formidable ancient weapons.

The imagery suggests inescapable judgment: flee from one weapon, you're struck by another. This anticipates Amos 5:19 (flee the lion, meet the bear). Zophar believes divine judgment pursues the wicked relentlessly. His error isn't the theology itself—God does judge sin—but identifying Job as the target. The NT affirms inescapable judgment (Hebrews 9:27) but reveals Christ as both judge and substitute.

Historical Context

Iron weapons became widespread in the ancient Near East during the Iron Age (1200-600 BC), though the Job narrative predates this. The mention of iron may reflect later editorial updating of archaic terms for contemporary readers. Bronze bows required enormous strength and were prized weapons. Composite bows could pierce armor at considerable distance, making them symbols of inescapable divine judgment (Psalm 7:12-13).

Related Passages

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. How does the inescapability of divine judgment in Zophar's speech point to humanity's desperate need for a mediator?
2. What is the relationship between temporal judgments (which the wicked sometimes escape) and final judgment (which no one escapes)?
3. How should the certainty of judgment affect how we warn others, without becoming accusatory like Zophar?

Interlinear Text

וְלֹא־שָׁקַע מִגְּדָל בְּרֵחַת חַלְפֵה תְּשִׁלַּח וְשָׁתַּח
He shall flee weapon from the iron shall strike him through and the bow
H1272 H5402 H1270 H2498 H7198

תְּחַזֵּקְתָּה:
of steel
H5154

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 24:18 (Parallel theme): And it shall come to pass, that he who fleeth from the noise of the fear shall fall into the pit; and he that cometh up out of the midst of the pit shall be taken in the snare: for the windows from on high are open, and the foundations of the earth do shake.

Amos 5:19 (Parallel theme): As if a man did flee from a lion, and a bear met him; or went into the house, and leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him.

2 Samuel 22:35 (Parallel theme): He teacheth my hands to war; so that a bow of steel is broken by mine arms.

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