

What is the significance of Elam in the Bible?

<https://www.gotquestions.org/Elam-in-the-Bible.html>

The word Elam (or Elamites) is found almost thirty times in the Bible. Elamites refers to a people group, and Elam to the land area they inhabited.

Elam is also listed several times as a name in a list or genealogy, unrelated to the Elamites (1 Chronicles 8:24; 26:3; Ezra 2:7, 31; 8:31; 10:26, Nehemiah 7:34; 10:14; 12:42).

In Genesis 10:22, Elam is listed as one of the sons of Shem, which would make him the grandson of Noah. By the time of Abraham, the Elamites are a defined people group. Kedorlaomer is the king of Elam who had subjugated a number of other kings in the area. The vassal states rebelled against him, and he and his allies defeated them and carried off the spoils, including Abraham's nephew Lot. Abraham raised an army and rescued the captives (Genesis 14).

In Isaiah's day, Elam was one of Israel's neighbors and also an instrument of judgment. God was going to use Elam to attack Babylon, as a judgment upon Babylon (Isaiah 21:2); likewise, Elam would attack Jerusalem, bringing God's judgment (Isaiah 22:6). However, Elam would also be judged because of her actions against Jerusalem (Jeremiah 25:25; Ezekiel 32:24). This raises an interesting question. How can God send Elam to attack and bring judgment to Israel and then turn and punish Elam for attacking Israel? We must not think of God telling the leaders of Elam to attack Israel and the leaders responding in humble obedience to God, and then God punishing them for obeying Him. No, the leaders of Elam had their own selfish purposes for attacking Israel, and God simply used them to bring judgment.

A similar situation occurs in the life of Joseph when he was sold into slavery by his brothers. That evil action was still part of God's over-arching plan. "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today" (Genesis 50:20). In Elam's case, even though their aggression was in God's plan, Elam meant it for evil. Every act, including every evil act, is still under God's sovereign control. Although God uses all of it to accomplish His purposes, those who do evil with evil motives are held responsible (see Mark 14:21).

Jeremiah 49:33-39 is the longest single passage about the judgment of Elam, but it ends with hope: "'Yet I will restore the fortunes of Elam in days to come,' declares the Lord" (verse 39).

Perhaps one of the ways in which Elam found grace is found in Acts 2. On the Day of Pentecost, the apostles were speaking of "the wonders of God" (verse 11), and people from all over the Roman Empire heard them in their own languages: "Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia" all heard the gospel that day.