

Habakkuk 1:11

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Then shall his mind change, and he shall pass over, and offend, imputing this his power unto his god.

Analysis

Then shall his mind change, and he shall pass over, and offend, imputing this his power unto his god. This crucial verse marks the transition from describing Babylon's God-ordained role to identifying its fatal flaw. **His mind change** (אָז חָלַף רוּחַ/az chalaf ruach)—literally "then the spirit/wind passes over." This could mean Babylon's spirit changes, becoming even more arrogant, or that like wind, Babylon passes away after accomplishing God's purposes. The ambiguity suggests both: Babylon will become prouder, and this pride will cause its passing.

Pass over, and offend (וַעֲבֹר וְאָשֶׁם/vayya'avor ve'ashem)—they transgress and become guilty. The same power God used to judge Judah becomes Babylon's condemnation. **Imputing this his power unto his god** (זוֹכֵחַ לְאֱלֹהֵהוּ/zu kocho le'loho)—attributing their strength to their deity rather than recognizing YHWH's sovereignty. This is Babylon's damning sin: failing to recognize that their power is derivative, a temporary gift from Israel's God for His purposes, not proof of their gods' superiority.

This verse introduces the book's central theological tension: How can God use a nation that attributes its success to false gods? The answer appears in chapter 2—Babylon's very pride and idolatry will bring its destruction. God uses wicked nations to accomplish His purposes, then judges them for the wickedness He used. This mysterious providence affirms both divine sovereignty and human moral responsibility.

Historical Context

Nebuchadnezzar's pride is documented in both biblical and extrabiblical sources. Daniel 4 records his boast: "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power?" Immediately after this self-glorification, God judged him with madness. Babylonian inscriptions credit victories to Marduk and other Babylonian deities. Nebuchadnezzar never acknowledged that his power came from YHWH, Israel's God. This failure to recognize the true source of his authority was precisely the sin Habakkuk identifies. When Persia conquered Babylon (539 BC), it demonstrated that Babylon's gods were powerless and its pride unfounded. The empire that seemed invincible "passed over" like wind, gone in a moment of divine judgment.

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. How does attributing success to our own abilities or false sources constitute the sin of pride that brings judgment?
2. What does this verse teach about the relationship between God's use of sinful people/nations and His eventual judgment of them?
3. How can believers avoid Babylon's error by consistently acknowledging God as the source of all gifts, talents, and successes?

Interlinear Text

זָ אָז	חָלַף	רֹחַ	וַיַּעֲבֹר	וַיִּשָּׁם	זֶה
H227	change	Then shall his mind	and he shall pass over	and offend	imputing this
	H2498	H7307	H5674	H816	H2098
כֹּחַ	לֵאלֹהֵי:				
his power	unto his god				
H3581	H433				

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