

Habakkuk 1:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Shall they therefore empty their net, and not spare continually to slay the nations?

Analysis

Habakkuk's second complaint concludes: 'Shall they therefore empty their net, and not spare continually to slay the nations?' (ha'al-ken yariq chormo vetamid laharog goyim lo yachmol). Will Babylon endlessly conquer ('empty their net')? Will they 'not spare continually to slay the nations' (lo yachmol laharog goyim tamid)—showing no mercy, killing perpetually? The question demands answer: does conquest continue forever, or will God eventually intervene? This expresses the heart-cry of all oppressed peoples: how long will tyrants prosper? When will justice arrive? The question sets up chapter 2's divine response: Babylon's success is temporary; judgment awaits. God governs history according to His timing, not human impatience. Though evil prospers temporarily, it will not prevail ultimately.

Historical Context

When Habakkuk prophesied, Babylon's rise seemed unstoppable. They had defeated Assyria, crushed Egypt, and were conquering westward. It appeared they might rule indefinitely. Yet within 70 years of destroying Jerusalem (586 BC), Babylon itself fell to Persia (539 BC). The empire that seemed eternal lasted less than a century as dominant power. This pattern—seemingly invincible empires rising and falling according to divine timing—repeats throughout history. Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome—all seemed permanent, all fell. The passage teaches that God tolerates evil for His purposes but never permanently. Justice delayed is not justice denied; God's timing is perfect even when mysterious to us.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How should believers maintain hope during periods when evil seems to prosper indefinitely?
2. What does God's eventual judgment of Babylon teach about divine justice's certainty despite apparent delay?
3. How can Christians balance patience for God's timing with urgency in pursuing justice and opposing evil?

Interlinear Text

יֵן הַ עַל	יֵר יֵק	חֶמ ו	וְתָמ יֵד	לִהַר ג
H5921	H3651	H7324	H2764	H8548
	Shall they therefore empty	their net	continually	to slay
			H2026	
גוֹיִם	לֹא	יִחְמֹל:		
H1471	H3808	H2550		
the nations	and not spare			