

Habakkuk 1:7

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

They are terrible and dreadful: their judgment and their dignity shall proceed of themselves.

Analysis

They are terrible and dreadful: their judgment and their dignity shall proceed of themselves. God's description of the Chaldeans continues with emphasis on their fearsome autonomy. **Terrible and dreadful** (אַיִם וְנָרָא/ayom venora) uses terms typically reserved for God Himself—inspiring awe and fear. Babylon's reputation was so formidable that mere mention of their approach caused terror. Nations capitulated without resistance when facing their overwhelming military might.

Their judgment and their dignity shall proceed of themselves (מִמְנָנוּ מִשְׁפָטָנוּ/mimmennu mishpato use'eto yetze)—they are a law unto themselves, recognizing no external authority. The phrase "proceed of themselves" indicates complete autonomy: Babylon creates its own legal standards, determines what is right based on its own power, and elevates itself without external validation. This self-generated authority makes them instruments both of divine judgment and ultimate objects of divine judgment for their pride.

This verse captures the paradox at Habakkuk's heart: God uses a nation that recognizes no authority—not even His—to execute His purposes. Babylon doesn't see itself as God's instrument but as sovereign power accountable to none. This self-deification, while useful for God's immediate purposes (judging Judah), will ultimately bring Babylon's destruction. Nations that make themselves the measure of right and wrong inevitably face divine judgment.

Historical Context

Babylonian royal inscriptions confirm this self-aggrandizement. Nebuchadnezzar's records boast of his achievements, attributing success to his own greatness and Babylon's gods. He acknowledged no higher authority than himself and Babylon's pantheon. This autonomous self-elevation was characteristic of ancient Near Eastern imperial ideology—the king as supreme authority, accountable to none but his own deities. When Babylon conquered Jerusalem (586 BC), they acted according to their own "judgment"—brutal deportation, temple destruction, and systematic dismantling of Judean society. Yet this very autonomy and pride would lead to their downfall when they faced God's judgment through Persia (539 BC). The same self-exaltation that made them effective instruments of judgment made them ripe for judgment themselves.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How does self-generated morality—determining right and wrong apart from God—characterize both ancient empires and modern secular culture?
2. What does it mean that God uses nations or individuals who don't acknowledge His authority to accomplish His purposes?
3. How should believers respond when facing powers that recognize no law but their own strength and will?

Interlinear Text

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