

Habakkuk 1:9

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

They shall come all for violence: their faces shall sup up as the east wind, and they shall gather the captivity as the sand.

Analysis

They shall come all for violence: their faces shall sup up as the east wind, and they shall gather the captivity as the sand. The Chaldean invasion has a singular purpose: **violence** (חָמָס/chamas)—not merely military conquest but brutal devastation. This is the same word Habakkuk used in his initial complaint (1:2-3) about violence in Judah. Now God responds that He will judge Judah's violence through an even more violent nation—a troubling answer that intensifies the theodicy problem.

Their faces shall sup up as the east wind (מִגַּמַּת פְּנֵיהֶם קְדִימָה/megammat peneihem qadimah)—a difficult Hebrew phrase, literally "the eagerness of their faces is forward." The east wind (קְדִימִים/qadim) in Palestine was the scorching desert sirocco that withered vegetation and made life unbearable. Babylon's advance is like this destructive wind—relentless, overwhelming, leaving devastation. Their faces are set forward with singular determination, nothing deflecting them from their purpose.

Gather the captivity as the sand (וַיַּעֲסֹף כַּחֲסֹף שָׁבִי/vayye'esof kachol shevi)—they collect captives innumerable as sand grains. This wasn't hyperbole; Babylonian deportation policy involved mass population transfers. After Jerusalem's fall (586 BC), tens of thousands were exiled to Babylon, fulfilling this prophecy literally. The comparison to sand emphasizes both quantity and the casual ease with which Babylon gathered victims.

Historical Context

Babylonian records confirm their systematic deportation practices. They forcibly relocated conquered populations to prevent rebellion and provide labor for Mesopotamian building projects. Jeremiah 52:28-30 records specific numbers: 3,023 Judeans in Nebuchadnezzar's seventh year, 832 in his eighteenth year, 745 in his twenty-third year—totaling 4,600 persons, though this likely represents only male heads of households. Including families, the actual number would be much higher. These exiles experienced precisely what Habakkuk predicted: violent conquest, forced march to Babylon, and displacement far from homeland. The "east wind" metaphor proved accurate—Babylon's invasion left Judah devastated, a scorched land depleted of population and resources.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. How does God's use of violence (Babylon) to judge violence (Judah) illustrate the principle that sin contains its own judgment?
2. What does the east wind imagery teach about the comprehensive, devastating nature of divine judgment?
3. How should believers understand God's sovereignty over historical catastrophes involving mass suffering and displacement?

Interlinear Text

כָּלֶה

H3605

לְחָמַם

all for violence

H2555

יָבֹאוּ

They shall come

H935

תִּמְגַּמְתוּ

shall sup up

H4041

פְּנֵיהֶם

their faces

H6440

קֶדֶד יָמָה

as the east wind

H6921

וַיֵּאָסְפוּ

and they shall gather

H622

כַּחַם וְלֹא

as the sand

H2344

שְׁבִי:

the captivity

H7628

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