

Jeremiah 51:18

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

They are vanity, the work of errors: in the time of their visitation they shall perish.

Analysis

They are vanity, the work of errors—idols are "vanity" (הֶבֶל, hevel, vapor, breath, vanity)—the same word describing life's futility in Ecclesiastes. Idols are insubstantial, worthless, fleeting. The phrase "work of errors" (מַעֲשֵׂה תַעֲתוּעִים, ma'aseh ta'tu'im, work of mockeries/delusions) suggests both the craftsmen's deluded effort and the idols' mockable nature. God ridicules what people worship.

In the time of their visitation they shall perish—"visitation" (פְּקֻדָּה, pequddah) means divine inspection, often for judgment. When God examines idols, they perish because they cannot withstand scrutiny. This likely refers both to idols' literal destruction (conquering armies destroyed enemy gods' images) and theological exposure of their impotence. Babylon's gods could not prevent the empire's fall—their "visitation" exposed their worthlessness. This anticipates 1 Corinthians 8:4: "An idol is nothing in the world."

Historical Context

When Cyrus conquered Babylon, Babylonian gods' impotence became evident—Marduk, chief deity, could not save his city. Though Cyrus claimed to honor Babylonian gods (a political strategy), the conquest demonstrated their powerlessness. Later, Alexander the Great's conquest (331 BC) further humiliated Babylonian religion. Eventually, Babylonian temples fell into ruins, and worship of Marduk, Ishtar, and other deities ceased entirely. Archaeological sites now display

these once-feared gods as museum curiosities—fulfilling prophecy that 'in the time of their visitation they shall perish.'

Related Passages

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. What does the term 'vanity' (vapor) teach about the insubstantial nature of what people worship instead of God?
2. How does the 'time of visitation' (divine inspection) expose false gods and ideologies' impotence?
3. What modern 'works of errors' face inevitable exposure and perishing when God visits in judgment?

Interlinear Text

הֵם בָּל	הַ מְאֵה	הַ מַּעֲשֵׂה	תַּעֲלָתָם יִם	בַּיַּת	פְּקֻדָּתָם
They are vanity		the work	of errors	in the time	of their visitation
H1892	H1992	H4639	H8595	H6256	H6486
יִאָּבְדוּ:					
they shall perish					
H6					