

Job 12:23

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

He increaseth the nations, and destroyeth them: he enlargeth the nations, and straiteneth them again.

Analysis

'He increaseth the nations, and destroyeth them: he enlargeth the nations, and straiteneth them again.' The verbs form antithetical pairs: 'increaseth' (אָשַׁר, saggi) vs. 'destroyeth' (בָּשַׁר, vay'abdem), 'enlarge' (נוֹחֶה, nocheh) vs. 'straiteneth/leadeth away' (נוֹנַחֵם, vaynchem). Job describes God's sovereign control over empires—raising and razing nations according to His purposes. This echoes Daniel 2:21, Acts 17:26, and anticipates Habakkuk's wrestling with God using wicked Babylon as His instrument. If God governs empires without simple moral causation, why assume He governs individuals that way? Job undermines the friends' theology by appeal to observable history. The Reformed doctrine of God's sovereign governance of history for His glory validates Job's observation.

Historical Context

Ancient peoples witnessed empires rise and fall—Egypt, Assyria, Babylon. Job's audience would recognize this pattern and its theological implications about divine sovereignty transcending simple retribution.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. How does God's sovereign governance of nations relate to His care for individuals?
2. What does history's complexity teach us about simplistic formulas for understanding God's ways?

Interlinear Text

רֹאשׁוֹת יְהוָה
He increaseth the nations and destroyeth them he enlargeth the nations
H7679 H1471 H6 H7849 H1471
וְשָׁרֵךְ
and straiteneth
H5148

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 26:15 (Parallel theme): Thou hast increased the nation, O LORD, thou hast increased the nation: thou art glorified: thou hadst removed it far unto all the ends of the earth.

Isaiah 9:3 (Parallel theme): Thou hast multiplied the nation, and not increased the joy: they joy before thee according to the joy in harvest, and as men rejoice when they divide the spoil.

Isaiah 60:22 (Parallel theme): A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation: I the LORD will hasten it in his time.

Psalms 107:38 (Parallel theme): He blesseth them also, so that they are multiplied greatly; and suffereth not their cattle to decrease.