

Job 34:14

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

If he set his heart upon man, if he gather unto himself his spirit and his breath;

Analysis

If he set his heart upon man, if he gather unto himself his spirit and his breath; Elihu contemplates God's absolute sovereignty over human life. The conditional "if" (im, אם) introduces a hypothetical: should God decide to recall what He has given, the consequences would be catastrophic (verse 15). "Set his heart" (yasem el-lev, יָשֵׁם לֵב) means to fix attention or intention upon something—if God focused on withdrawing His sustaining power rather than granting it. "Gather unto himself" (asaph elav, אָסַף אֵלָיו) uses the verb for gathering, collecting, or withdrawing what was dispersed.

His spirit and his breath (rucho u-nishmato, רוּחוֹ וְנִשְׁמָתוֹ) refers to the life-giving power God breathed into humanity (Genesis 2:7). Ruach (רוּחַ) is spirit, wind, or breath—God's animating force. Neshamah (נִשְׁמָה) is breath or life-force. These terms emphasize that human life exists moment-by-moment by divine sustenance, not inherent vitality. Elihu's point is profound: life is not humanity's possession but God's continuous gift. God doesn't merely create and then leave creation autonomous; He actively sustains every breath. This anticipates Colossians 1:17 ("by him all things consist") and Acts 17:28 ("in him we live, and move, and have our being"). The verse should inspire both humility (we depend utterly on God) and worship (He mercifully sustains us despite our sin).

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern creation accounts often depicted gods creating humans as slaves to do work gods found tiresome. Scripture's doctrine is radically different—God creates freely and sustains continuously, not from need but from love. Elihu's point would have resonated in a culture aware of life's fragility, where death from disease, famine, or violence was common. Recognizing God as life's source was essential to covenant faith.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. How does recognizing that every breath depends on God's active sustaining power affect your daily perspective?
2. What does God's continuous sustenance of rebellious humanity reveal about His patience and grace?
3. How should dependence on God for life itself shape our response to His commands and our trust in His purposes?

Interlinear Text

אִם	יִשָּׁם	יְאֵל	לִבּוֹ	רוּחוֹ	וְנִשְׁמָתוֹ	אֵל
H518	If he set	H413	his heart	unto himself his spirit	and his breath	H413
	H7760		H3820	H7307	H5397	
וְאִם יִקָּרֶה						
upon man if he gather						
H622						

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 104:29 (Parallel theme): Thou hidest thy face, they are troubled: thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust.

Job 9:4 (Parallel theme): He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength: who hath hardened himself against him, and hath prospered?

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