

THE BOOK OF HABAKKUK

Woe to Builders with Blood”

Habakkuk 2:12-14

Introduction

1. Habakkuk is a pre-exilic prophet. He was a contemporary of Jeremiah.
2. Following the death of Josiah, the politics in Judah were terrible. The power of Assyria and Egypt waned as that of the Babylonians increased. The “times of the Gentiles” was immanent (Luke 21:24).
3. The sin of Judah was a burden to Habakkuk (1:1). The people were unresponsive to God (1:2), unrelenting in sin (1:3), and uncontrollable as a society (1:4).
4. Because of the sin of the people, God subjected them to the cruelty of the Assyrians (1:5-10). The Assyrians attributed their success to foreign gods (1:11). Although Habakkuk was sure Israel would live (1:12) he was baffled at the situation because he knew how God sees (1:13) and what God does (1:14, 15). He was told to believe God and quietly wait upon Him (2:1-4).
5. Assyria was addicted to wine and pride (2:5). God promised divine intervention (2:6) which is recorded in the prophecy of Habakkuk with five woes: 1) To the Oppressor. 2) To the Covetous. 3) To the Builders with Blood. 4) To the Abusers. 5) To the Idolaters.
6. God has His own way to bring His glory into the world scene. All attempts to glorify man are futile and doomed to failure. Babylon’s efforts are an example. This is patently expressed by:

1. A divine WOE v. 12

a. About Whom?

The obvious reference here is to the Chaldeans or Babylonians (v. 6). This is confirmed (v. 13). Hence, the very nation which has baffled Habakkuk is the target of God’s divine “woe.”

b. For What?

No doubt is left as to what Babylon has done to warrant this woe of God. Two verbs explain the situation. “Build” is a participial form referring to proud works in the godless city of Babylon. “Town” is the word for “city,” hence, the erection of buildings related to the “city” of Babylon. The word “city” is a synonym for “town” (v. 8). The finite perfect tense verb “establish” means to set or place. The reference, obviously, is to something permanent.

c. How?

Two words are emphasized to answer this question: blood (pl) and wickedness (sing.). Both nouns are prefixed by a preposition expressing means to attain a desired end. Reference is probably made to conquest, destruction, and exile.

NOTE: The wicked rulers of Jerusalem are accused of the same activity as described here (Micah 3:10). Moreover, Jehoakim is censured for his method of doing this (Jer. 22:13-19).

2. A divine DECREE V. 13

The particle “behold” is employed to gain attention. It is connected with the negative “no” and the letter “h” indicating a question (cf. 2 Chron 25:26). Something great and worthy of response is before the prophet.

a. Expresses intervention

Incredible as it may seem, the “Lord of hosts” is the One Who is actually involved. “Lord” is associated with the “hosts” of heaven. The middle verse in the other “woes” provides additional description of the wrongs mentioned. Here, however, the powerful almighty LORD ordains and decrees specific action for the people. God expresses Himself as the Sovereign of the Universe.

b. Expresses vexation

The “people” are the captives of Babylon. Under the direction of their captors, they attempt to “build” and “stablish” but without success. They actually labor or toil “for the fire” i.e. for the fire to devour (cf. Nah. 2:13; Isa. 40:16). Furthermore, they weary themselves “for vanity” i.e. for nothing!

NOTE: God has decreed it: the Gentile world (Babylon) is doomed. No matter how they seem to prosper. It will all come to naught. Israel will yet gain pre-eminence.

3. A divine PROMISE v. 14

The initial word of each verse (vv 12-14) is significant: “woe,” “behold,” and now “for.” Here is God’s Word about the finality of things under the Messiah.

a. Stated

The earth (Hareretz,” word for “Israel”) shall be filled. God said it. That settles it.

b. Detailed

“With the knowledge” is actually an infinitive and not a noun, thus “with the acknowledging” of the glory of the LORD. Incredible expression of what will come when Messiah returns! There will be a boundless abundance of this because it will be “as the waters upon the sea” (Num. 14:21; Psa. 97; Isa. 2:10-21; 6:3; Zech. 2:12).

Conclusion

Babylonians usurped glory will be destroyed -- no matter how it is built -- in order that the glory of God may fill the earth. His glory will be manifested in judgment and with the overthrow of all ungodly powers. Come, Messiah, come!