

THE BOOK OF HABAKKUK

“Woe to Idols”

Habakkuk 2:18-20

Introduction

1. Assyria was at its zenith politically and gained ascendancy at the expense of Babylon, Egypt, and now Israel. Such was the international scene of the Habakkuk period.

2. While Habakkuk was sure Israel would survive (1:12), he was perplexed at the situation (1:12-17). From a quiet waiting upon God, Habakkuk was told to have faith in God’s ultimate solution of the paradox (2:10-4).

3. The threat by God against the Chaldeans is announced in a fivefold woe consisting of five strophes with each containing three verses:

a. Woe #1 refers to the rapacity and plundering of the Chaldeans (vv. 6-8).

b. Woe #2 refers to the efforts by the Chaldeans to establish his dynasty by force and cunning (vv. 9-11).

c. Woe #3 refers to Assyrian’s wicked ways to build (vv. 12-14).

d. Woe #4 refers to the scandalous treatment of subdued nations by Chaldeans (vv. 15-17).

e. Woe #5 refers to the absurd idolatry of the Assyrians (vv. 18, 19).

N.B. The first and fourth strophes end with the same refrain while the third and fifth end with a promise which supports the woes (vv. 14, 20).

4. We come now to the final woe. It is directed against the idolatry of the Chaldean and is fittingly placed at the end as a climax. All Gentile nations confided in the power of their gods, so also the Chaldean. Such trust will not help nor save them. Such is the message about idols here. Consider four salient facts about idols.

1. IDOLS: QUESTIONED v. 18

a. Their profit

The hifil (causative) form questions the help, worth, or eminence of idols. What good can an idol serve? The answer is negative (cf. Jer. 2:11; Isa. 44:9, 10). The perfect tense of the Hebrew verb expresses the truth as a fact established by experience.

b. Their uselessness

This is clearly a question since idols are declared to be “dumb idols” or “dumb nonentities” (Ps. 135:15-18; 1 Cor. 12:2). They are also “dumb stone” and have “no breath” (no feeling, intellect, lifeless).

N.B. That image worship flourished in those days is not doubted (cf. Isaiah; Jeremiah;

Daniel), but it was and still is senseless.

2. IDOLS: PREPARED vv. 18, 19

a. Being graven

The verb denotes to cut, carve, or form by cutting. The product was stone or wood.

b. Being made

The word “molten image” refer to the making or forming (same verb as of God in Gen. 2:19) of the metal idol.

c. Being overlaid

This means to cover the idol. Gold and silver are employed. Incredible!

3. IDOLS: ADDRESSED vv. 18, 19

a. Teach

This word is really an exclamation, an astonishment. Think of it! These pieces of carved wood, stone, or molten metal, covered with gold and silver are described. “It teaches.” Unbelievable.

b. Awake/Arise

These are calls for help. Idolaters turn to wood, stone, metal, lifeless things for a response. There can be no response.

c. Trust

This is the most insane action suggested. To trust in a nonentity is of all things most senseless.

N.B. Admittedly Scripture satirizes the total vanity of idolatry (cf. Isa. 44:9-20; Jer. 9:3-5). The Bible also inveighs against idols (1 Cor. 8).

4. IDOLS: COMPARED v. 20

a. With the Person of God

He is identified as the one and only true God (cf. Ex. 3:14; Isa. 45:20-22). The use of the tetragrammaton is significant and unique.

b. With the Position of God

The Holy temple is heaven and not some mundane structure. He is elevated in Divine majesty.

c. With the Purpose of God

The call for silence is God’s intention to bring judgment. The Chaldean with all his might and glory will be destroyed. That is the meaning of the five woes. The earth must be still in view of this. Judgment is immanent (cf. Zeph. 1:7; Zech. 2:12).

Conclusion

What a remarkable chapter. God -- help us to be still before Thee in submissive waiting on Thee to demonstrate Thy majesty. Amen.