

THE BOOK OF HABAKKUK

“Woe to the Oppressor”

Habakkuk 2:5-8

Review

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

2. Israel was spiritual in a horrible decline: a) unresponsive to God (1:2), b) unrelenting in sin (1:3), and uncontrollable in society (1:4). Therefore, God subjected them to the cruelty of the Assyrians (1:5-10). Foreign gods were given credit for the Chaldeans victories (1:11).

3. While Habakkuk was sure Israel would live (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 (2:1-4).

4. One item is certain from God’s direct revelation to the prophet -- the swollen, puffed up, proud Assyrian was not right. God would not ignore this situation. This is clearly stated in an extension to the previous verse (v. 4a). The Chaldeans are described as:

a. Addicted to wine. The Chaldeans were noted for their drinking (Nah. 1:10; Dan. 5). Secular historians Herodotus and Xenophen testify to the same. Scripture testifies against drink (Prov. 23:31, 32).

b. Addicted to pride. This is a new parallel sentence. Assyria is like a swaggerer. They do not settle down nor come to rest at home. This same word about boasting is used only one other time in the O.T. (Prov. 21:24). As an example or extension of this pride, the relative clause which follows extrapolates the situation. They grasp in an insatiable manner like death itself (1:6, 7, 15-17). The imperfect tense of the verb shows that the Assyrians continually gather up the nations and they heap up all people. This is a graphic description of their military prowess.

5. In view of these established facts, the prophet gives three words to denote what will be spoken about the Assyrians:

a. A proverb. This has reference to a proverbial poem.

b. A song. This has reference to something “turned,” hence not a clear overt saying, but figurative.

c. A riddle. This has reference to an obscure saying that must be completed or solved.

6. Now comes the prophetic threat against the Chaldeans announced in a fivefold woe consisting of five strophes and 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 the Chaldeans.

e. Woe #5 refers to the absurd idolatry of the Assyrians.

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).

7. Consider now the specifics of the first woe:

a. The problem stated v. 6b

Two statements are made: a. Assyria multiplies what doesn’t belong to her. b. Assyria grabs alien property. The quantity of foreign property taken is likened to a heavy mass of pledges which had been taken as an unmerciful usurer (Deut. 24:10).

b. The problem resolved v. 7

Like the bites and stings of furious serpents and vipers, the nations abused by the Chaldeans will suddenly rise up and claim their capital with interest. They will shake the Assyrians and drive them from his possessions, thus becoming a prey to those whom they formerly oppressed.

c. The problem explained v. 8

The law of recompense is set forth here. Because the Assyrians had robbed, they will be robbed. Because they had shed blood, acted violently against land and its peoples, they will suffer similar judgment. Historically it was the Medes and Persians who executed this judgment.

Conclusion

Scripture is clear that whatever one sows, he will also reap (Gal. 5:7). This woe adequately illustrates that truth. Woe to the person who fails to submit to God and His purposes. Self-will and idolatry will ultimately come under God’s righteous judgment. Amen.