

Comments on Habakkuk 2

This chapter documents the Lord's response to Habakkuk's questioning complaint in 1:12-17. However, the Lord's response takes into account the substance of 1:13. The Lord casts five woes on the king of Babylon, but also casts those same woes onto the men of Judah in each case. As Habakkuk noted in 1:13, the Lord will not look with favor on any who are wicked, and this includes everyone, the king of Babylon in specific, and the tribe of Judah in general. As such, the Lord condemns both.

Habakkuk is trying to argue in favor of Judah against Babylon. The problem is Judah is so corrupt, there isn't much to argue in favor of. They have been so rebellious for so long, the Lord has to take action against them.

The Hebrew in this chapter is often obscure, see the [JPS translation](#) for suggested emendations and differences between the Qumran DSS and Masoretic text. There are also significant differences in the translation. This translation pushes the reading in favor of the woes being more so upon the king of Babylon than the men of Judah.

While the translation is difficult at times, it is clear the five woes are negative and aimed at both the king of Babylon and Judah, which is the most important point. Habakkuk complains in the previous chapter, and the Lord is letting him know Judah doesn't deserve to be spared.

¹ I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reprov'd.

v1 After asking a rather pointed question of the Lord about why He would allow a wicked nation to attack and exile Judah, he patiently awaits a reply, acting in his capacity as the people's watchman, knowing a rebuke is coming.

"when I am reprov'd", Habakkuk asked a good question, one that is only natural. However, he is entirely confident the Lord knows more than he does and anticipates an imminent reproof.

² And the LORD answered me, and said, write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it. ³ For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry.

⁴ Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith. ⁵ Yea also, because he

transgresseth by wine, he is a proud man, neither keepeth at home, who enlargeth his desire as hell, and is as death, and cannot be satisfied, but gathereth unto him all nations, and heapeth unto him all people:

v2-5 The Lord begins His response, first telling Habakkuk to write it down (v. 2), for future reference. It is in the future, but not that far into the future (v. 3).

The Lord then condemns the wicked for his pride, as he is not righteous and does not live by faith (v. 4). This prideful man acts foolishly, like a drunk, and leaves home, eager for more. Like Hell and Death, it is impossible to satisfy him. So he goes to subjugate all nations and peoples (v. 5).

The connection to the king of Babylon is clear, as he is out to conquer foreign lands, and it is clearly the Lord's intent to condemn him for his wickedness. However, this verse doesn't explicitly identify the king of Babylon. It is ambiguous enough to refer to others as well, as the case is built in the following verses as the Lord casts five woes on the wicked in general.

⁶ Shall not all these take up a parable against him, and a taunting proverb against him, and say, woe to him that increaseth that which is not his! how long? and to him that ladeth himself with thick clay! ⁷ Shall they not rise up suddenly that shall bite thee, and awake that shall vex thee, and thou shalt be for booties unto them? ⁸ Because thou hast spoiled many nations, all the remnant of the people shall spoil thee; because of men's blood, and for the violence of the land, of the city, and of all that dwell therein.

v6-8 Won't those who are in debt to unscrupulous lenders rejoice when the unscrupulous lenders financially fail (v. 6), when their creditors come to take account of them? (v. 7). On the same token, those who have been conquered and looted will rejoice when the one who conquered them falls and they get to loot him (v. 8).

While the king of Babylon definitely killed and spread violence across the landscape (v. 8), he probably wasn't a terrible landlord (v. 6-7). Who was a terrible landlord? Apparently the wicked men of Judah.

v6 "thick clay", modern translations render this something like "loans" or "indebtedness", meaning the offender in this verse is making many loans in order to subjugate people.

⁹ Woe to him that coveteth an evil covetousness to his house, that he may set his nest on high, that he may be delivered from

the power of evil! ¹⁰ Thou hast consulted shame to thy house by cutting off many people, and hast sinned against thy soul. ¹¹ For the stone shall cry out of the wall, and the beam out of the timber shall answer it.

v9-11 Those who are eager to make money in any evil way possible will end up suffering disaster (v. 9). They bring shame to their houses and sin on themselves by harming others (v. 10). The opulence of their own houses will testify against them (v. 11), because they are built on the wages of sin.

Clearly, this woe has little to do with the king of Babylon, and more to do with the wicked men of Judah.

¹² woe to him that buildeth a town with blood, and stablisheth a city by iniquity! ¹³ Behold, is it not of the LORD of hosts that the people shall labour in the very fire, and the people shall weary themselves for very vanity? ¹⁴ For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.

v12-14 The Lord casts misery on those who extort others to build themselves and their properties up (v. 12). It is not the Lord's intent that people should labor for nothing and nations accomplish nothing useful (v. 13). The Lord's intent is the earth be filled with His knowledge and glory (v. 14, cp. Isa. 11:9, Hosea 4:1), which is not what these people want.

Again, little to do with the king of Babylon, as he wasn't a robber baron.

v13 "people shall labour in the very fire", a poor translation. A better translation would be "people toil for fire" with "for fire" intended to mean "for nothing". They are working for naught, as whatever they gain is burned up as ashes.

¹⁵ woe unto him that giveth his neighbour drink, that putteth thy bottle to him, and maketh him drunken also, that thou mayest look on their nakedness! ¹⁶ Thou art filled with shame for glory: drink thou also, and let thy foreskin be uncovered: the cup of the LORD's right hand shall be turned unto thee, and shameful spewing shall be on thy glory. ¹⁷ For the violence of Lebanon shall cover thee, and the spoil of beasts, which made them afraid, because of men's blood, and for the violence of the land, of the city, and of all that dwell therein.

v15-17 The Lord casts suffering on those who get their neighbors drunk so they can seduce them (v. 15). Instead of honor, they will be disgraced when the Lord forces them to drink

the cup of his wrath (v. 16). Violence and destruction will overtake them, across their land, the towns and all the people (v. 17).

This strophe presents a clear cause-and-effect formula of sin causing a covenant curse. Because they are drunken adulterers, the Lord punishes them with foreign invasion (cf. Lev. 26:17).

v16 "the cup of the Lord's right hand", the cup of the Lord's wrath, a cup of poison, cp. Isa. 51:17-22, Jer. 25:15-28, Jer. 49:12, Jer. 51:7, Ezek. 23:31-33.

¹⁸ what profiteth the graven image that the maker thereof hath graven it; the molten image, and a teacher of lies, that the maker of his work trusteth therein, to make dumb idols? ¹⁹ woe unto him that saith to the wood, Awake; to the dumb stone, Arise, it shall teach! Behold, it is laid over with gold and silver, and there is no breath at all in the midst of it. ²⁰ But the LORD is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him.

v18-20 What is the point of making idols, which are nothing more than the dead work of a man's hands (v. 18-19). While idols are motionless and unliving, the Lord is available in His temple (v. 20).

This strophe brings in the imagery of Isa. 44:9-20 in castigating Judah for engaging in idolatry, rather than relying on the Lord, who is real and could dwell amid them in His temple.

v20 Likely an oblique reference to Lev. 26:11-12. Had Judah been obedient and loyal to Him, then they would not be facing imminent invasion by Babylon.

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