

THE WATCHMAN'S VISION: DIVINE ASSURANCE AND JUDGMENT (HABAKKUK 2:2-20)

GOD'S ASSURANCE TO THE WATCHMAN: THE CERTAINTY OF THE VISION (HABAKKUK 2:2-4)

See session 2

THE WATCHMAN'S PROCLAMATION OF WOES: FORETELLING THE DOOM OF OPPRESSORS (HABAKKUK 2:5-20)

Interpreting verse 4 shapes the understanding of verses 5 to 20. If directed to the Chaldeans, the subsequent verses warn against their oppressive rule. If aimed at the Antichrist, they prophesy the downfall of oppressive powers in the end times. If generally directed, they serve as a timeless warning against the outcomes of pride and oppression. All interpretations provide unique insights: historical context, eschatological themes, and timeless wisdom. A well-rounded understanding considers all these views.

VERSE 5 -

The Lord portrays the aggressor from verse 4 as a power-hungry drunkard, with desires as insatiable as death, aiming for all nations and peoples. Prophetic poetry's use of singular and plural pronouns may refer to a "national whole," potentially hinting at the Chaldean nation. However, it could also describe King Nebuchadnezzar or the anticipated Antichrist, with the latter being a more likely focus in prophetic scripture.

Revelation 13:7 and 15 confirm the Antichrist's widespread killing. Verse 7 states he will wage war on the saints and overcome them, gaining power over all nations. Verse 15 mandates the execution of those not worshipping the beast's image, resembling the prophecy of insatiable desire and collection of nations (Habakkuk 2:5).

Exercise caution when considering Antichrist narratives. Not every power-hungry individual or nation is the Antichrist. The desire for global rule is historical, with many achieving but ultimately failing. The future Antichrist, as prophesied, will come closest. As Benjamin Franklin might've said today, only death, taxes, and government expansion are certain.

VERSES 6-8 — THE FIRST WOE

The first "woe" in the next three verses foretells judgment on the unjust who profit from others. This person is compared to a ruthless lender who exploits others. However, the exploited will retaliate, leading to his downfall. This prophecy mirrors the concept of reaping what one sows, a principle recognized universally.

The Antichrist, as depicted in Revelation 13:16-17, enriches himself at others' expense, paralleling Habakkuk's description of greed and unjust accumulation. The "remnant of the people" could represent those opposing the Antichrist due to violence in the land and city, possibly referring to Israel and Jerusalem.

Examining prophetic scriptures for a remnant against the Antichrist:

1. **Revelation 12:17** - The dragon (Satan) wages war with the woman's (Israel) offspring, potentially a remnant resisting the Antichrist.
2. **Revelation 20:4** - Souls of faithful individuals resist the Antichrist and reign with Christ, implying vindication.
3. **Daniel 11:32-35** - Prophecies suggest that a faithful remnant could resist the Antichrist.
4. **Daniel 12:1** - Despite great distress, Daniel's people are delivered, possibly indicating resistance against the Antichrist.
5. **Matthew 24:22** - The elect endure and possibly resist during the Antichrist's tribulation.

This passage underlines that though wicked leaders may seem to dominate, they will face the repercussions of their actions. It warns of the inevitable rise and dissent of the oppressed, resulting in the fall of unjust leaders, highlighting the significance of justice, fairness, and empathy in leadership.

VERSES 9-11 — THE SECOND WOE

The second woe criticizes those who fuel their greed relentlessly, seeking wealth even at the expense of others. They aim to rise above all, seeking safety from harm. A vivid image of pride and self-reliance, they see themselves as invincible and untouchable.

This could represent the Antichrist, who seeks to rise above God (2 Thessalonians 2:4). The phrase "that he may set his nest on high" could allude to Numbers 24:21, referencing the Kenite or "child of Cain," possibly hinting at the Antichrist.

Ironically, the upcoming man of sin, embodying evil, desires deliverance from it (v. 9). He "has sinned against thy soul" (v. 10), echoing Judas, who prefigures the Antichrist.

The wicked man's actions are so extreme that even his house's stones and beams will testify against him (v. 11), echoing Luke 19:40. Similarly, natural disasters in Revelation (6:12-17; 8:7-12; 16:1-21) represent the physical world reacting to spiritual evil, possibly a form of witnessing.

VERSES 12-14 — THE THIRD WOE

The third woe condemns those who build a town with blood and establish a city with iniquity. It emphasizes divine judgment against those who use violence and injustice to achieve their goals.

This verse hints at the Antichrist's future rebuilding of Babylon, mirroring Revelation 18:24. It suggests a city built on violence, notably the persecution of God's people, symbolizing defiance against God and His righteousness.

This interpretation views the Antichrist as the epitome of pride and wickedness. His reconstruction of Babylon, a city known for defiance against God, aligns with his character. This mirrors the two Nebuchadnezzars: the Babylonian king and the man of sin.

Verse 13 underscores the fruitlessness of building a city through wrongdoing. The rhetorical question highlights the vanity of such efforts. The exertion in building these cities will be futile, like laboring in fire, suggesting a self-destructive task leading to exhaustion and dissatisfaction, not fulfillment.

The "LORD of hosts" reference emphasizes divine power bringing judgment. It warns of divine retribution for those causing violence and injustice. The construction of Babylon, historically and prophetically, is futile. It mirrors the Tower of Babel's building, the original "man's city", defying God, resulting in confusion and dispersion (Genesis 11:1-9). These city's futile constructions symbolize human's proud, but fruitless, rebellion against God.

Verse 14 contrasts prior themes of violence and judgement with a hopeful vision of redemption: "For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea." It signifies a future where God's glory triumphs over human wickedness.

This verse hints at an eschatological view, suggesting its full realization during Christ's second coming. It foresees a time when God's presence and righteousness will be universally acknowledged.

The prophecy of a world filled with the knowledge of God's glory is echoed in Numbers 14:21 and Isaiah 11:9. These verses provide hope amidst descriptions of judgement, reminding us of the ultimate plan - God's righteous kingdom on earth.

Although Habakkuk primarily refers to the Babylonian empire, the eschatological interpretation anticipates the ultimate establishment of God's kingdom, affirming His control over history and triumph over human wickedness.

VERSES 15-18 — THE FOURTH WOE

Verse 15 presents the fourth woe against those who exploit others for personal gain, symbolized by making one's neighbor drink the wine of wrath. This figure reflects oppressive leaders who lead their subjects to ruin. The image of making one drunk to exploit them is also seen in Revelation 17:2, where a leader seduces others with false promises, leading them to destruction. This verse serves as a warning against power abuse, emphasizing biblical principles of justice, integrity, and concern for others' well-being. It warns that leaders exploiting their position at the expense of others will face divine judgment.

Verse 16 pronounces judgment on the one who shamed others, indicating the oppressor will face the shame they caused. The cup in the Lord's right hand, a symbol of divine judgment, suggests this.

"Let thy foreskin be uncovered" signifies the oppressor's exclusion from God's covenant. In the Bible, circumcision denotes inclusion in God's covenant, so its lack indicates estrangement from God's grace and mercy.

If applied to the Antichrist, the verse underscores his destiny as outside God's covenant, facing divine judgment for his rebellion. The Antichrist may be of Jewish lineage, but his lack of circumcision—literal or metaphorical—represents his rejection of God's covenant and

estrangement from God. This highlights the depth of his spiritual alienation and the impending shame.

Verse 17 mentions "the violence of Lebanon." Rashi, a medieval Jewish commentator, interprets this as a reference to the Temple, due to a symbolic relationship between Lebanon and the Jerusalem Temple. This connection is due to Solomon's Temple being built with Lebanese cedars, representing beauty, strength, and God's presence among His people.

Rashi suggests that the verse condemns not just literal violence against Lebanon, but also Babylon's actions against the Temple. This links Babylon's violence to the destruction of a sacred Jewish site, highlighting their profound sacrilege. The Babylonians, led by King Nebuchadnezzar, destroyed the Temple in 586 BC, starting the Babylonian Exile.

The "spoil of beasts" could refer to the destruction of the Chaldean forces or future forces against Jerusalem. All of this is directed to "the land" and "the city" and "and of all that dwell therein" (v. 17).

Verse 18 criticizes idolatry, highlighting its futility and the foolishness of those who trust in lifeless idols, leading to their downfall. This condemnation is relevant to Habakkuk's context and prophetically significant. Revelation speaks of a future where people must worship an image of the beast or face death, reflecting the idolatry Habakkuk condemned. This poses a test of allegiance, forcing a choice between God and worldly survival. Those who choose the image reject God and align with the Antichrist, resulting in eternal separation. However, those who resist, despite persecution and death, will be rewarded in God's kingdom. The choice between temporary survival and eternal life is a recurring eschatological theme.

VERSES 19-20 — THE FIFTH WOE

Verses 19-20 critique idolatry, highlighting the absurdity of expecting guidance from a lifeless idol. This is applicable historically and prophetically, referencing Revelation 13:15's end times prophecy. Verse 20 contrasts this with the living God, emphasizing His majesty and authority. It calls for awe, reverence, and submission to God, underlining the futility of idolatry and His supreme worthiness of worship.