

## Adam Clarke:

## Introduction

The prophet, waiting for a return to his expostulation, is answered by God that the time for the destruction of the Jewish polity by the Chaldeans is not only fixed in the Divine counsel, but is awfully near; and he is therefore commanded to write down the vision relative to this appalling subject in the most legible characters, and in the plainest language, that all who read it with attention (those just persons who exercise an unwavering faith in the declaration of God respecting the violent irruption of the merciless Babylonians) may flee from the impending vengeance, Habakkuk 2:1-4. The fall of the Chaldeans, and of their ambitious monarch is then predicted, Habakkuk 2:5-10; and, by a strong and bold personification, the very stone and wood of those magnificent buildings, which the Babylonish king had raised by oppression and bloodshed, pronounce his wo, and in responsive taunts upbraid him, Habakkuk 2:11, Habakkuk 2:12. The prophet then beautifully sets forth the absolute impotence of every effort, however well conducted, which is not in concert with the Divine counsel: for though the wicked rage, and threaten the utter extermination of the people of God; yet when the Set time to favor Zion is come, the destroyers of God's heritage shall themselves be destroyed, and the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of God, as the waters cover the sea, Habakkuk 2:13, Habakkuk 2:14. See Psalm 102:13-16. For the cup of idolatry which Babylon has given to many nations, she will receive of the Lord's hand the cup of fury by the insurrection of mighty enemies (the Medes and Persians) rushing like wild beasts to destroy her, Habakkuk 2:15. In the midst of this distress the prophet very opportunely asks in what the Babylonians had profited by their idols, exposes the absurdity of trusting in them, and calls upon the whole world to stand in awe of the everlasting Jehovah, Habakkuk 2:16-19.

## Verse 1

I will stand upon my watch - The prophets are always represented as watchmen, watching constantly for the comfort, safety, and welfare of the people; and watching also to receive information from the Lord: for the prophetic influence was not always with them, but was granted only at particular times, according to the will of God. When, in doubtful cases, they wished to know what God was about to do with the country, they retired from society and gave themselves to meditation and prayer, waiting thus upon God to hear what he would say in them.

What he will say unto me - x'x™ (bi), In me - in my understanding and heart.

And what I shall answer when I am reprov'd - What I shall say to God in behalf of the people; and what the Lord shall command me to say to the people. Some translate, "And what he will answer for my conviction." Or, "what shall be answered to my pleading."

## Verse 2

Write the vision - Carefully take down all that I shall say.

Make it plain upon tables - Write it in a full plain, legible hand.

That he may run that readeth it - That he who attentively peruses it may speed to save his life from the irruption of the Chaldeans, by which so many shall be cut off. The prophet does not mean that the words are to be made so plain, that a man running by may easily read them, and catch their meaning. This interpretation has been frequently given; and it has been incautiously applied to the whole of the Bible: "God's book is so plain, that he that runs may read;" but it is very foolish: God never intends that his words shall be understood by the careless. He that reads, studies, meditates, and prays, shall understand every portion of this sacred book that relates immediately to his own salvation. But no trifler can understand it. If the contents of a play-bill were to be read as many read the Bible, they would know just as much of the one as they do of the other.

## Verse 3

The vision is yet for an appointed time - The Chaldeans, who are to ruin Judea, shall afterwards be ruined themselves: but they must do this work before they receive their wages; therefore the vision is for an appointed time. But at the end it shall speak. When his work of devastation is done, his day of retribution shall take place.

Though it tarry - Though it appear to be long, do not be impatient; it will surely come; it will not tarry longer than the prescribed time, and this time is not far distant. Wait for it.

## Verse 4

Behold, his soul which is lifted up - He that presumes on his safety without any special warrant from God, is a

proud man; and whatever he may profess, or think of himself, his mind is not upright in him. But he that is just by faith shall live - he that believes what God hath said relative to the Chaldeans besieging Jerusalem, shall make his escape from the place, and consequently shall save his life. The words in the New Testament are accommodated to the salvation which believers in Christ shall possess. Indeed, the just - the true Christians, who believed in Jesus Christ's words relative to the destruction of Jerusalem, when they found the Romans coming against it, left the city, and escaped to Pella in Coelesyria, and did live - their lives were saved: while the unbelieving Jews, to a man, either perished or were made slaves. One good sense is, He that believes the promises of God, and has found life through believing, shall live by his faith.

#### Verse 5

Because he transgresseth by wine - From the present translation, it is not easy to see either reason or meaning in the first clause of this verse. Newcome translates, "Moreover, as a mighty man transgresseth through wine, he is proud, and remaineth not at rest." Houbigant thus: "For he, though he be a despiser, and powerful, and proud, yet shall he not have rest."

Nebuchadnezzar is here represented in his usual character, proud, haughty, and ambitious; inebriated with his successes, and determined on more extensive conquests; and, like the grave, can never have enough: yet, after the subjugation of many peoples and nations, he shall be brought down, and become so despicable that he shall be a proverb of reproach, and be taunted and scorned by all those whom he had before enslaved.

And cannot be satisfied - When he has obtained all that is within his reach, he wishes for more; and becomes miserable, because any limits are opposed to his insatiable ambition. It is said of Alexander: -

Unus Pellaeo juveni non sufficit orbis;

Aestuat infelix angusto limite mundi.

Juv. Sat. 10:168.

One world sufficed not Alexander's mind;

Cooped up, he seem'd on earth and seas confined.

And the poet justly ridicules him, because at last the sarcophagus was found too large for his body!

#### Verse 6

Shall not all these take up a parable against him - His ambition, derangement, and the final destruction of his mighty empire by the Persians, shall form the foundation of many sententious sayings among the people. "He who towered so high, behold how low he is fallen!" "He made himself a god; behold, he herds with the beasts of the field!" "The disturber of the peace of the world is now a handful of dust!"

#### Verse 7

Shall they not rise up suddenly - Does not this refer to the sudden and unexpected taking of Babylon by Cyrus, whose troops entered into the city through the bed of the Euphrates, whose waters they had diverted by another channel; so that the Babylonians knew nothing of the matter till they saw the Persian soldiers rise up as in a moment, in the very heart of their city?

#### Verse 8

For the violence of the land - Or, for the violence done to the land of Judea, and to the city of Jerusalem.

#### Verse 9

An evil covetousness to his house - Nebuchadnezzar wished to aggrandize his family, and make his empire permanent: but both family and empire were soon cut off by the death of his son Belshazzar, and the consequent destruction of the Chaldean empire.

#### Verse 10

Hast sinned against thy soul - Thy life is forfeited by thy crimes.

#### Verse 11

The stone shall cry out of the wall, and the beam out of the timber shall answer it - This appears to refer to the ancient mode of building walls; two or three courses of stone. and then one course of timber. See 1 Kings 6:36: thus was the palace of Solomon built. The splendid and costly buildings of Babylon have been universally celebrated. But how were these buildings erected? By the spoils of conquered nations, and the expense of the blood of multitudes; therefore the stones and the timber are represented as calling out for vengeance against this ruthless conqueror.

#### Verse 12

Wo to him that buildeth a town with blood - At the expense of much slaughter. This is the answer of the beam to the stone. And these things will refer to the vast fortunes gained, and the buildings erected, by means of the slave-trade; where, to a considerate and humane mind, the walls appear as if composed of the bones of negroes, and cemented by their blood! But the towns or houses established by this iniquity soon come to ruin; and the fortunes made have, in most cases, become as chaff and dust before the whirlwind of God's indignation. But where are the dealers in the souls and bodies of men? Ask him who has them in his keeping. He can tell.

#### Verse 13

The people shall labor in the very fire - All these superb buildings shall be burnt down. See the parallel passage, Jeremiah 51:58 (note), and the note there.

Shall weary themselves for very vanity? - For the gratification of the wishes of ambition, and in buildings which shall be brought to naught.

#### Verse 14

For the earth shall be filled - This is a singular and important verse. It may be first applied to Babylon. God's power and providence shall be widely displayed in the destruction of this city and empire, in the humiliation of Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel 4:37, and in the captivity and restoration of his people. See Newcome, and see Isaiah 11:9.

Secondly. It may be applied to the glorious days of the Messiah. The land of Judea should by his preaching, and that of his disciples, be filled with the knowledge of God. God's great design fully discovered, and the scheme of salvation amply explained.

Thirdly. It may be applied to the universal spread of the Gospel over the habitable globe; when the fullness of the Gentiles should be brought in, and the Jews gathered in with that fullness. The earth cannot perish till every continent, island, and inhabitant, is illuminated with the light of the Gospel.

#### Verse 15

Wo unto him that giveth his neighbor drink - This has been considered as applying to Pharaoh-hophra, king of Egypt, who enticed his neighbors Jehoiachin and Zedekiah to rebel against Nebuchadnezzar, whereby the nakedness and imbecility of the poor Jews was soon discovered; for the Chaldeans soon took Jerusalem, and carried its kings, princes, and people, into captivity.

#### Verse 16

The cup of the Lord's right hand - Among the ancients, all drank out of the same cup; was passed from hand to hand, and each drank as much as he chose. The Chaldeans gave to the neighboring nations the cup of idolatry and of deceitful alliance: and in return they received from the Lord the cup of his fury. So Grotius.

#### Verse 17

For the violence of Lebanon - Or, the violence done to Lebanon; to men, to cattle, to Judea, and to Jerusalem. See the note on the parallel place, Habakkuk 2:8 (note). This may be a threatening against Egypt, as the former was against Chaldea.

#### Verse 18

What profiteth the graven image - This is against idolatry in general, and every species of it, as well as against those princes, priests, and people who practice it, and encourage others to do the same. See on Isaiah 44:9-10 (note); Isaiah 46:2 (note).

Dumb idols? - *elilim illelim*, dumb nothings. This is exactly agreeable to St. Paul, 1 Corinthians 8:4, who says, "An idol is nothing in the world." What signify the idols worshipped by the Chaldeans, Tyrians, and Egyptians? They have not been able to save their worshippers.

#### Verse 19

Wo unto him - How foolish and contemptible to worship a thing formed by the hand of man out of wood, stone, gold, or silver! The meanest brute is superior to them all; it breathes and lives, but they have no breath in them. However, they are said above to be teachers of lies; that is, they appeared to give out oracles: but these were lies; and were not given by the statue, but by the priest.

#### Verse 20

The Lord is in his holy temple - Jehovah has his temple, the place where he is to be worshipped; but there there is no image. Oracles, however, are given forth; and every word of them is truth, and is fulfilled in its season.

And this temple and its worship are holy; no abomination can be practiced there, and every thing in it leads to holiness of heart and life.

Let all the earth keep silence before him - Let all be dumb. Let none of them dare to open their mouths in the presence of Jehovah. He alone is Sovereign. He alone is the arbiter of life and death. Let all hear his commands with the deepest respect, obey them with the promptest diligence, and worship him with the most profound reverence. When an Asiatic sovereign goes to the mosque on any of the eastern festivals, such as the Bairham, the deepest silence reigns among all his retinue, viziers, foreign ambassadors, etc. They all bow respectfully before him; but no word is spoken, no sound uttered. It is to this species of reverence that the prophet alludes, and with this he concludes the prophetic part of this book. What God has threatened or promised, that he will fulfill. Let every soul bow before him, and submit to his authority.