

# Habakkuk 2:13

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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?

## Analysis

**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?** God declares the futility of unjust labor. **Is it not of the LORD of hosts** (הֲלוֹא הִנֵּה יְהוָה / halo hinneh me'et YHWH tseva'ot)—this comes from the LORD of armies, the sovereign commander of heaven's forces. **That the people shall labour in the very fire** (וַיִּיגְעוּ עַמִּים בְּדֵי־אֵשׁ / veyig'u ammim bedei-esh)—peoples exhaust themselves only for fire. Their labor produces nothing lasting; it all burns up. בְּדֵי (bedei) means 'enough for' or 'sufficient for'—they work just enough to fuel the fire of judgment.

**And the people shall weary themselves for very vanity** (וְלֵאֻמִּים בְּדֵי־רִיק יֵאָפֹּו / ule'ummim bedei-riq yi'afu)—nations grow faint for mere emptiness. רִיק (riq) means empty, vain, nothing. All the effort, all the building, all the conquest—it amounts to nothing, produces nothing lasting. This echoes Ecclesiastes: 'Vanity of vanities, all is vanity' (Ecclesiastes 1:2). Work disconnected from God and justice produces nothing eternal. Jeremiah 51:58 quotes this verse directly about Babylon: 'The broad walls of Babylon shall be utterly broken, and her high gates shall be burned with fire; and the people shall labour in vain.' All human achievement apart from God ends in fire and vanity.

## Historical Context

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Babylon's magnificent buildings, built through such enormous labor, stood less than a century before the city declined. The Hanging Gardens, one of the ancient world's seven wonders, disappeared completely—archaeologists still debate their exact location. The walls, gates, and palaces gradually crumbled. By the time of Christ, Babylon was largely ruins. Centuries of labor produced structures that burned, crumbled, or vanished. The contrast with Jerusalem is striking: though destroyed multiple times, Jerusalem remains a living city, because it was built on God's purposes, not merely human ambition. The principle applies universally: work not grounded in God's justice and purposes ultimately produces nothing lasting (1 Corinthians 3:12-15). Only what's done for God's kingdom endures.

## Related Passages

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**Colossians 1:16** — All things created through Christ

**Psalms 19:1** — Heavens declare God's glory

## Study Questions

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1. How can you ensure your labor produces lasting fruit rather than 'very vanity' that ultimately burns?
2. What is the difference between human ambition that ends in futility and work grounded in God's purposes that endures eternally?
3. How does this verse challenge cultural definitions of success that emphasize achievement, building, and legacy apart from justice and righteousness?

## Interlinear Text

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וְאֵל	הַיְּהוָה	תִּמְאֵת	יְהוָה	צָבָא	וְיִיגַע
H3808	H2009	H853	H3068	H6635	H3021
			Behold is it not of the LORD	of hosts	shall labour
עַמִּים	בְּדִי	אֵשׁ	וְלֵאמֹר יָם	בְּדִי	רֵיקָן
H5971	H1767	H784	H3816	H1767	H7385
that the people	in the very	fire	and the people	in the very	vanity
					shall weary
					H3286

## Additional Cross-References

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**Jeremiah 51:58** (References Lord): Thus saith the LORD of hosts; The broad walls of Babylon shall be utterly broken, and her high gates shall be burned with fire; and the people shall labour in vain, and the folk in the fire, and they shall be weary.

**Isaiah 50:11** (Parallel theme): Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks: walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled. This shall ye have of mine hand; ye shall lie down in sorrow.

**Isaiah 55:2** (Parallel theme): Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.

**Proverbs 21:30** (References Lord): There is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the LORD.

**Malachi 1:4** (References Lord): Whereas Edom saith, We are impoverished, but we will return and build the desolate places; thus saith the LORD of hosts, They shall build, but I will throw down; and they shall call them, The border of wickedness, and, The people against whom the LORD hath indignation for ever.

**Psalms 39:6** (Parallel theme): Surely every man walketh in a vain shew: surely they are disquieted in vain: he heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who shall gather them.