

Habakkuk 2:15

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Woe unto him that giveth his neighbour drink, that puttest thy bottle to him, and makest him drunken also, that thou mayest look on their nakedness!

Analysis

Woe unto him that giveth his neighbour drink, that puttest thy bottle to him, and makest him drunken also, that thou mayest look on their nakedness! The fourth of five woe oracles condemns Babylon's brutal exploitation of conquered nations. The imagery of forcing drink to expose shame depicts deliberate humiliation—making victims vulnerable to mock their degradation. The Hebrew חֶמֶח (chemah, bottle/wrath) creates wordplay: Babylon offers both literal intoxication and divine wrath.

"Makest him drunken" (וְיִשְׁכַּר/veshakker) indicates coercive action—forcing intoxication to exploit weakness. "That thou mayest look on their nakedness" (לְמַעַן) (לְמַעַן/lema'an habbit al-me'oreyhem) reveals malicious intent—not accidental exposure but deliberate shaming. This describes Babylon's treatment of conquered peoples: stripping dignity, exposing vulnerability, reveling in their humiliation.

The passage applies to all forms of exploitation—using power to degrade others, finding pleasure in their shame. It condemns manipulation, abuse of authority, and treating human beings as objects for entertainment or dominance. God's woe declares that such cruelty will not go unpunished—those who humiliate will themselves be shamed.

Historical Context

Babylonian conquest involved systematic humiliation of defeated peoples. Kings were blinded, princes executed, populations paraded naked in chains. Ancient Near Eastern victory monuments depicted this shaming—visual propaganda celebrating enemies' degradation. Babylon's treatment of conquered Judah included forcing King Zedekiah to watch his sons' execution before being blinded (2 Kings 25:7)—the ultimate humiliation.

The imagery also recalls Noah's son Ham, who 'saw his father's nakedness' and was cursed (Genesis 9:22-25). Exposing shame was considered extreme dishonor in ancient culture. Babylon's deliberate humiliation of nations would be reversed—verse 16 declares Babylon itself will drink God's cup of wrath and be exposed to shame.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How does this woe against exploitation challenge modern abuses of power—economic, political, or social systems that profit from others' degradation?
2. What forms of 'looking on nakedness' exist today—entertainment or media that exploits human vulnerability and shame?
3. How should Christians respond when witnessing or benefiting from systems that humiliate and dehumanize others?

Interlinear Text

מֹשֶׁךְ הַהַרְוָי	רֹעֵה	מִסְפֵּת	סְמִתָּה
Woe	drink	unto him that giveth his neighbour	that puttest
H1945	H8248	H7453	H5596
אֵיךְ	שָׁכֵךְ	לֹמַעַן	עַל
H637	to him and makest him drunken	H4616	also that thou mayest look
	H7937		H5027
מְעוּרִים:			
on their nakedness			

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 51:7 (Parallel theme): Babylon hath been a golden cup in the LORD'S hand, that made all the earth drunken: the nations have drunken of her wine; therefore the nations are mad.

Genesis 9:22 (Parallel theme): And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brethren without.

Revelation 18:3 (Parallel theme): For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies.

Revelation 17:6 (Parallel theme): And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus: and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration.

Revelation 17:2 (Parallel theme): With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication.

Jeremiah 25:15 (Parallel theme): For thus saith the LORD God of Israel unto me; Take the wine cup of this fury at my hand, and cause all the nations, to whom I send thee, to drink it.

Exodus 32:25 (Parallel theme): And when Moses saw that the people were naked; (for Aaron had made them naked unto their shame among their enemies:)

Hosea 7:5 (Parallel theme): In the day of our king the princes have made him sick with bottles of wine; he stretched out his hand with scorners.

2 Samuel 11:13 (Parallel theme): And when David had called him, he did eat and drink before him; and he made him drunk: and at even he went out to lie on his bed with the servants of his lord, but went not down to his house.

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