

Habakkuk 2:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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.

Analysis

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. Babylon's specific crimes are detailed. "The violence of Lebanon" (לְבָנָן/chanas Levanon) likely refers to deforestation—stripping Lebanon's famous cedars for building projects. "The spoil of beasts" (בְּהַמִּתְחָדָד וְשָׁדֵד/veshod behemot) indicates environmental destruction that terrorized wildlife.

But the primary indictment is bloodshed: "because of men's blood" (מִדְםֵי אָדָם/middmey adam) and "violence of the land, of the city, and of all that dwell therein" (חַמָּס אֶרֶץ קִרְיָה וְכָל-יֹשְׁבֵי בָּה/chamas eretz qiryah vekhol-yoshvey vah). Babylon's empire was built on slaughter—cities destroyed, populations massacred, blood soaking the earth. The word חַמָּס (chamas, violence) appears twice, emphasizing the brutality of Babylon's methods.

Divine justice operates on the principle of measure-for-measure: "the violence of Lebanon shall cover thee"—the violence you inflicted will overwhelm you. Environmental exploitation and human bloodshed both cry out for judgment. God holds empires accountable not just for idolatry but for concrete violence against people and creation.

Historical Context

Babylon's building projects were legendary—the Hanging Gardens, Ishtar Gate, massive temples and palaces—all requiring vast timber from Lebanon's forests. Nebuchadnezzar's inscriptions boast of importing cedars for construction. This environmental exploitation accompanied human exploitation: hundreds of thousands killed in military campaigns, entire populations enslaved or deported.

The destruction of Jerusalem (586 BC) exemplified Babylon's violence: prolonged siege causing mass starvation, breached walls, temple burned, city destroyed, population slaughtered or exiled. Archaeological evidence confirms widespread destruction throughout Judah. Habakkuk's indictment wasn't exaggeration but accurate accounting of imperial brutality. When Persia conquered Babylon (539 BC), poetic justice was served—the violent empire experienced violence.

Related Passages

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. How does this passage hold nations accountable for both environmental destruction and human violence?
2. What does measure-for-measure justice teach about God's moral governance—that consequences match actions?
3. How should Christians today address systemic violence—economic exploitation, environmental destruction, military aggression—in light of God's judgment against such practices?

Interlinear Text

בָּהַמְּ וְתַּ	לְבָנָן	יְכַפֵּה	וְשַׁתְּ	בָּהַמְּ וְתַּ
H3588 For the violence	H2555 of Lebanon	H3680 shall cover	H7701 thee and the spoil	H929 of beasts
אֲרַץ	תִּקְרָם	אֶתְּמָמָן	בָּהַמְּ וְתַּ	
which made them afraid	blood	because of men's	For the violence	of the land
H2865	H1818	H120	H2555	H776
בָּהַמְּ וְתַּ	וְשַׁבֵּת	וְשַׁבֵּת	בָּהַמְּ וְתַּ	
of the city	H3605 and of all that dwell	H0		
H7151	H3427			

Additional Cross-References

Habakkuk 2:8 (Blood): 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.

Psalms 55:23 (Blood): But thou, O God, shalt bring them down into the pit of destruction: bloody and deceitful men shall not live out half their days; but I will trust in thee.

Zechariah 11:1 (Parallel theme): Open thy doors, O Lebanon, that the fire may devour thy cedars.

Psalms 137:8 (Parallel theme): O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed; happy shall he be, that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us.

Proverbs 28:17 (Blood): A man that doeth violence to the blood of any person shall flee to the pit; let no man stay him.

Jeremiah 51:24 (Parallel theme): And I will render unto Babylon and to all the inhabitants of Chaldea all their evil that they have done in Zion in your sight, saith the LORD.

Jeremiah 50:28 (Parallel theme): The voice of them that flee and escape out of the land of Babylon, to declare in Zion the vengeance of the LORD our God, the vengeance of his temple.

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