

Habakkuk 2:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Yea also, because he transgresseth by wine, he is a proud man, neither keepeth at home, who enlargeth his desire as hell, and is as death, and cannot be satisfied, but gathereth unto him all nations, and heapeth unto him all people:

Analysis

Yea also, because he transgresseth by wine, he is a proud man, neither keepeth at home, who enlargeth his desire as hell, and is as death, and cannot be satisfied. This verse introduces the five woes against Babylon (verses 6-20), beginning with a character portrait of the oppressor. **He transgresseth by wine** (בְּגַד/yayin boged)—wine is treacherous, making men faithless and unreliable. Wine represents intoxication with power and conquest, leading to betrayal of moral boundaries.

A proud man (גָּבָר/yahir) describes the arrogant tyrant who **neither keepeth at home** (לֹא יִתְּבַּחֵר/yinveh)—refuses to stay within proper boundaries, constantly expanding territory. **Who enlargeth his desire as hell** (רְחַחֵב כָּשָׂאָל) (hirchiv kishe'ol nafsho)—appetite as wide as Sheol, the grave that never says 'enough' (Proverbs 27:20). **And is as death** (כְּמוֹת/vehu kammavet)—insatiable as death itself, which consumes all. This describes imperial greed that devours nations endlessly, never satisfied regardless of how much it conquers. The imagery warns that insatiable ambition ultimately destroys those who harbor it—Babylon's unchecked appetite would lead to its own demise.

Historical Context

Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar II exemplified insatiable imperial ambition. Between 605-562 BC, Babylon conquered Egypt, Judah, Tyre, and numerous other nations, building the largest empire in Near Eastern history to that point. Neo-Babylonian inscriptions boast of endless conquests and tribute. Yet this empire, seemingly invincible, fell to Persia in 539 BC—just 66 years after Nebuchadnezzar's first conquest. The very greed and overreach that built the empire contributed to its collapse. The pattern repeats throughout history: empires driven by insatiable ambition eventually overextend and collapse. Rome, the Mongols, Napoleon, Hitler—all fell partly due to overreach born of uncontrolled ambition.

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How does insatiable ambition—whether for power, wealth, or success—function as spiritual intoxication that leads to self-destruction?
2. What are the modern equivalents of 'enlarging desire as hell'—never being satisfied regardless of achievement or acquisition?
3. How does contentment function as spiritual protection against the destructive cycle of endless striving and consumption?

Interlinear Text

בַּיִן	בַּגְדָּה	בַּגְדָּה	בַּגְדָּה
by wine	Yea also because he transgresseth	because he transgresseth	because he transgresseth
H3588	H3196	H898	H898
וְאֵין	אֲשֶׁר	אֲשֶׁר	אֲשֶׁר
neither keepeth at home	who enlargeth	who enlargeth	as hell
H3808	H5115	H834	H7585
אֵלָא	הַרְחֵךְ יְבָשָׂה	הַרְחֵךְ יְבָשָׂה	כְּשָׁאָל
and is as death	and cannot be satisfied	and cannot be satisfied	his desire
H1931	H3808	H7646	H5315
וְאֵין	וְאֵין	וְאֵין	וְאֵין
unto him all nations	and heapeth	and heapeth	unto him all people
H3605	H1471	H413	H3605
כָּל	כָּל	כָּל	כָּל
unto him all people	unto him all people	unto him all people	unto him all people
H5971	H3605	H413	H5971

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 27:20 (Parallel theme): Hell and destruction are never full; so the eyes of man are never satisfied.

Proverbs 20:1 (Parallel theme): Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.

Isaiah 2:17 (Parallel theme): And the loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be made low: and the LORD alone shall be exalted in that day.

Isaiah 5:8 (Parallel theme): Woe unto them that join house to house, that lay field to field, till there be no place, that they may be placed alone in the midst of the earth!

Isaiah 21:5 (Parallel theme): Prepare the table, watch in the watchtower, eat, drink: arise, ye princes, and anoint the shield.

Isaiah 16:6 (Parallel theme): We have heard of the pride of Moab; he is very proud: even of his haughtiness, and his pride, and his wrath: but his lies shall not be so.

Psalms 138:6 (Parallel theme): Though the LORD be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly: but the proud he knoweth afar off.

Ecclesiastes 5:10 (Parallel theme): He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase: this is also vanity.

2 Kings 14:10 (Parallel theme): Thou hast indeed smitten Edom, and thine heart hath lifted thee up: glory of this, and tarry at home: for why shouldest thou meddle to thy hurt, that thou shouldest fall, even thou, and Judah with thee?