

Habakkuk 2:9

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Woe to him that coveteth an evil covetousness to his house,
that he may set his nest on high, that he may be delivered
from the power of evil!

Analysis

Woe to him that coveteth an evil covetousness to his house, that he may set his nest on high, that he may be delivered from the power of evil! The second woe addresses security through exploitation. **Coveteth an evil covetousness** (בִּצְעַת רָע/botze'a betza ra)—literally 'gains gain of evil,' using repetition for emphasis. בִּצְעַת (betza) means unjust gain, profit obtained through violence or fraud. **To his house** (לְבֵיתוֹ/leveito)—for his dynasty, family, or institution.

That he may set his nest on high (לָשׂוּם בַּמָּרוֹם קִינוֹ/lasum bammarom qinno)—to place his nest in an elevated, supposedly secure position. The image comes from eagles building nests in high cliffs (Jeremiah 49:16, Obadiah 4), thinking themselves unreachable. **That he may be delivered from the power of evil** (לְהִינָצֵל מִכַּף־רָע/lehinnatzel mikka'f-ra)—to escape misfortune's grasp. The irony is devastating: pursuing security through evil guarantees insecurity. Building wealth or power through oppression creates the conditions for eventual destruction. The very 'evil' one tries to escape through wicked gain becomes the means of judgment.

Historical Context

Babylon built massive fortifications—the famous walls, the Ishtar Gate, elevated palaces—attempting to create an impregnable city. Herodotus described walls so

wide chariots could turn on top. Nebuchadnezzar's palace was raised on artificial platforms. This architecture expressed the theology: we have made ourselves secure through our own power. Yet these defenses failed. Cyrus's army entered by diverting the river. No human security system can protect against divine judgment. The same pattern appears in modern history: the Maginot Line, the Berlin Wall, gated communities, offshore accounts—all attempts to create security through human means that ultimately fail. True security comes only through righteousness, not wealth or power (Proverbs 11:4, 18:11).

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. How does pursuing security through unjust gain actually create insecurity rather than safety?
2. What are modern equivalents of 'setting one's nest on high'—attempting to make oneself secure through wealth, status, or power?
3. Where is true security found, and how does this differ from the false security offered by wealth and human achievement?

Interlinear Text

ה וי	בַּצֵּעַ	כִּצְעָה	רָעָה	לְבֵיתוֹ	לֵשׁוֹ וְ
Woe	to him that coveteth	covetousness	an evil	to his house	that he may set
H1945	H1214	H1215	H7451	H1004	H7760
בְּמָרוֹם	קֵנָה וְ	לְהִנָּצֵל	מִכֹּחַ	רָעָה	
on high	his nest	that he may be delivered	from the power	an evil	
H4791	H7064	H5337	H3709	H7451	

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 49:16 (Parallel theme): Thy terribleness hath deceived thee, and the pride of thine heart, O thou that dwellest in the clefts of the rock, that holdest the height of the hill: though thou shouldest make thy nest as high as the eagle, I will bring thee down from thence, saith the LORD.

From KJV Study • kjevstudy.org