

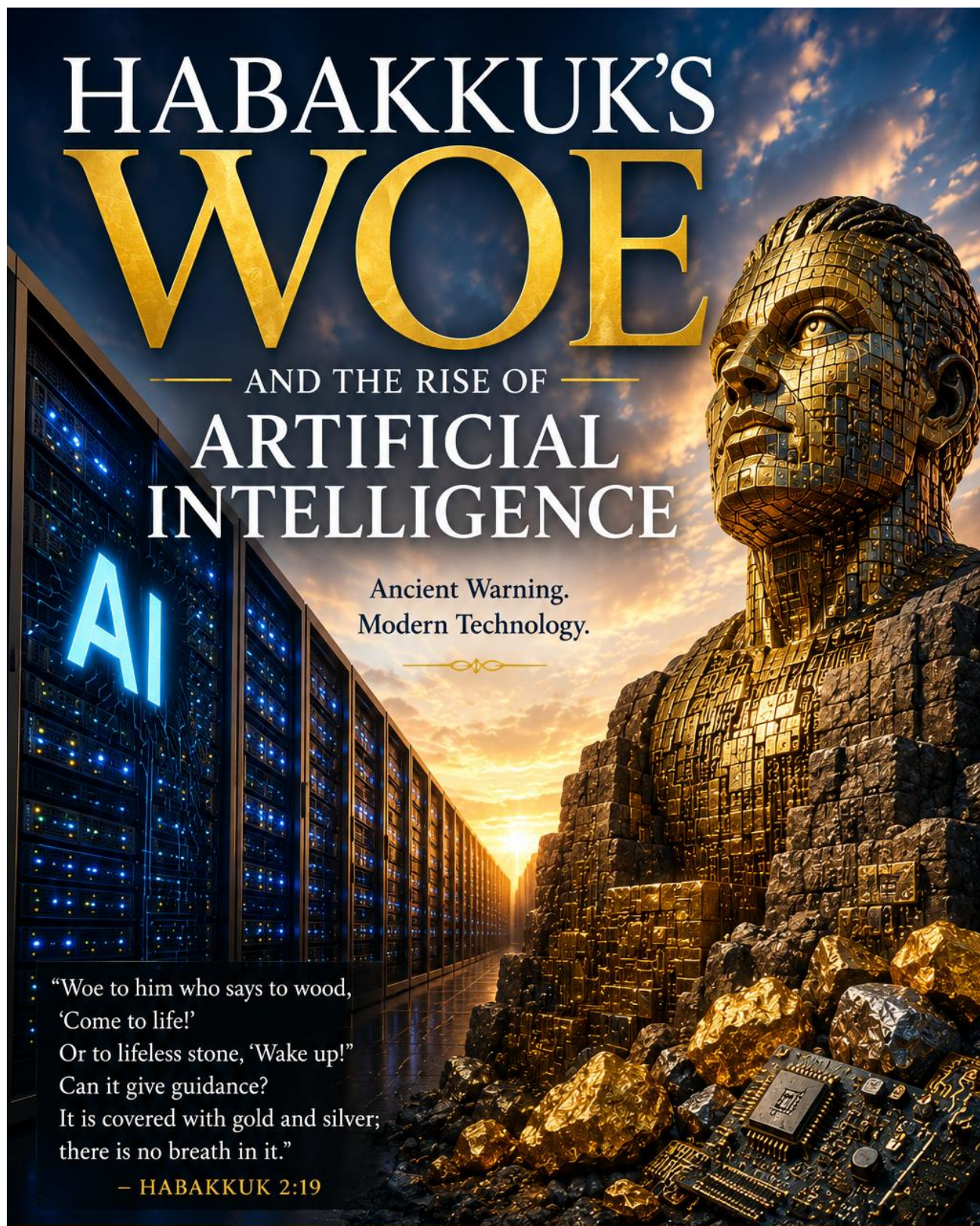
HABAKKUK'S WOE

— AND THE RISE OF — ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Ancient Warning.
Modern Technology.

“Woe to him who says to wood,
‘Come to life!’
Or to lifeless stone, ‘Wake up!’
Can it give guidance?
It is covered with gold and silver;
there is no breath in it.”

— HABAKKUK 2:19



Habakkuk's Woe and the Rise of Artificial Intelligence

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For over two thousand years, readers have understood Habakkuk's warning as a condemnation of idolatry. Men carved images from wood and stone, overlaid them with precious metals, bowed before them, and expected wisdom, protection, and guidance from objects that possessed no life.

Yet the principle behind the warning reaches far beyond ancient idols.

Today humanity is creating something unprecedented: machines capable of answering questions, composing essays, generating images, writing software, diagnosing diseases and even carrying on conversations that appear remarkably human. Artificial Intelligence has become the newest source to which millions turn daily for guidance.

AI is not an idol in the traditional sense. Nevertheless, Habakkuk's warning invites an important question:

What happens when mankind begins trusting an intelligence that has no breath, no conscience, and no love?

Scripture teaches that genuine wisdom does not originate with human ingenuity. As Proverbs 9:10 declares,

"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding."

True wisdom begins with God. Any source of knowledge divorced from Him, no matter how impressive, can never become the ultimate authority for life.

Habakkuk's ancient warning therefore deserves renewed attention.

“There Is No Breath in It”

The Hebrew Scriptures repeatedly distinguish living beings from lifeless objects.

God breathed into Adam "the breath of life" (Genesis 2:7). Human life comes from God.

By contrast, Habakkuk says of the idol:

“There is no breath in it.”

The idol appears impressive. It is decorated with gold. It inspires admiration. People gather before it seeking answers.

Modern artificial intelligence presents a striking parallel. It can analyze vast quantities of information within seconds, imitate compassion, wisdom, humor, and empathy. It can compose persuasive arguments, and generate responses that often sound remarkably human.

Yet beneath this extraordinary appearance lies the same fundamental reality:

“There is no breath in it.”

AI possesses no conscience. It bears no moral responsibility. It does not love; it does not know God. Its *apparent wisdom* is ultimately the product of statistical prediction built upon data generated by *fallen* humanity.

Covered with Gold and Silver

Habakkuk's description of the idol as being "covered with gold and silver" takes on an intriguing modern parallel. Ancient idols were literally adorned with precious metals to project beauty, value, and authority. Today's artificial intelligence is likewise built upon extraordinary quantities of the world's most valuable materials. Gold is indispensable in advanced processors, memory modules, and circuit boards because of its exceptional conductivity and resistance to corrosion. Silver, the most conductive metal known, is used throughout electronic components, specialized connectors, and high-performance power systems. Massive AI data centers containing tens of thousands of processors require enormous quantities of gold, silver, copper, and rare-earth elements to operate.

In a very real sense, modern AI is built upon gold and silver. Yet despite its technological magnificence, Habakkuk's verdict remains unchanged:

“There is no breath in it.”

AI does not possess conscience.

It does not possess moral accountability.

It does not love.

It does not know God.

"Can It Give Guidance?"

Habakkuk asks a piercing question:

"Can it give guidance?"

Ironically, guidance is becoming one of AI's primary functions.

People increasingly ask AI:

- What career should I pursue?
- Should I marry this person?
- How should I raise my children?
- What is truth?
- What should I believe?
- How should nations govern themselves?

The danger is subtle. Ancient people sought counsel from carved images. Modern people may seek counsel from algorithms. Both involve placing confidence in something that cannot bear moral responsibility for its answers.

Scripture repeatedly teaches that true wisdom begins elsewhere: "The fear of Jehovah is the beginning of wisdom." (Psalm 111:10) Machines may process information. Only God gives wisdom.

The Meaning of "Woe"

Habakkuk begins this passage with one simple word:

"Woe."

In Scripture, a woe is more than a warning. It announces that judgment inevitably follows a particular course of action. The consequences may not appear immediately, but once the conduct reaches maturity, divine judgment follows.

Could AI Become Another "Work of Our Hands"?

Artificial Intelligence is unquestionably one of humanity's greatest technological achievements. Used wisely, it can benefit medicine, education, engineering, scientific research, and communication. But Scripture consistently warns against confusing human achievement with ultimate authority. The danger is not that computers become evil by themselves. The danger is that people begin attributing to AI qualities that belong only to God:

- perfect wisdom

- ultimate authority
- unquestionable truth
- moral judgment
- complete trust

Whenever created things replace the Creator, idolatry has begun.

The Greater Danger

Every generation has been tempted to trust something other than God.

Some trusted kings. Some trusted military power. Some trusted wealth. Some trusted religious institutions. Some trusted idols of wood and stone.

Our generation may be tempted to trust artificial intelligence.

Habakkuk reminds us that no matter how impressive man's creation becomes,

“There is no breath in it.”

It cannot replace divine wisdom from above.

Conclusion

Habakkuk's ancient warning speaks with remarkable relevance:

"Woe to him who says to wood, 'Come to life!'"

Our generation no longer bows before carved statues. Instead, we increasingly ask machines to think for us, advise us, comfort us, and sometimes even define truth for us. Technology is a remarkable servant, but it was never intended to become humanity's master.

These concerns are echoed more broadly by recent scientific assessments. An independent United Nations panel has warned that AI development is outpacing governance and that advanced systems could enable misinformation, cyberattacks, biological threats, deceptive behavior, and failures of human control if adequate safeguards are not established.

Anthropic CEO Dario Amodei stated: “Humanity is about to be handed almost unimaginable power, and it is deeply unclear whether [we] possess the maturity to wield it”

The challenge for Christians is therefore not to fear technology, but to resist the temptation to place our confidence in the works of our own hands. However extraordinary artificial

intelligence may become, it remains a creation of man. It can process information, but it cannot possess the breath of life, nor can it impart the wisdom that comes only from God.

Only the living God possesses true wisdom. Righteousness and justice *are* the foundation of His throne (Psalm 89:14)

Only His Spirit has breath.