

HABAKKUK

MINOR PROPHETS SERIES

Habakkuk has now made two complaints to God, first about God's seeming indifference to his cries for help, his lack of intervention against violence, his allowance of rampant sin, and his inaction against injustice. God's answer is that he is going to do something truly amazing and use the wicked Chaldeans to bring judgment upon Judah.

This leads to Habakkuk's second complaint about how God could use such a wicked and ungodly people against his own people. God tells Habakkuk to write down a revelation on tablets to be circulated amongst the people. God will act against the Chaldeans in his own timeframe and in the way of his choosing. God would act against the ungodly, but those who are righteous must live by faith or trust in God.

Woe to the Chaldeans 2:6-20

The Chaldeans were not going to get away with their wicked and ruthless behaviour. In fact, all those they had attacked and conquered would soon rise up to taunt them. The scoffing and riddles show that those who had been formerly humiliated by the Chaldeans would now be in a position to mock and ridicule them. Five woes are pronounced against the Chaldeans beginning in verse 6. These woes show that the Chaldeans would receive in retribution those evils they had perpetrated upon their neighbours.

The word *woe* was used in the Old Testament to indicate a terrible future that awaited a wicked people. Woes were always ominous signs of impending judgment.

The First Woe:

The first woe is aimed at the Chaldeans for their thievery against others. Habakkuk had wondered in his previous complaints about how long God would wait and allow injustice to flourish. The answer he now receives is; not long. The Chaldean's wealth came from stealing and confiscating possessions from others. Now, those from which they had stolen would arise against them and require repayment. The oppressor will become the oppressed. The plunderer will be plundered.¹ In culmination of this prophecy, in 539 BC, Cyrus king of Persia conquers Babylon and frees the captives.

- I. According to verse 8, what actions of the Chaldeans led to retribution at the hands of their former victims?**

The Second Woe:

The Chaldeans faced God's retribution for their intense desire to live richly at the expense of others. What they had "gained" had not come from hard work, ingenuity, and investment, but was

¹ See Prov. 13:11; 22:16; 28:8

obtained in an “evil” manner. Because of how the Chaldeans had ruthlessly subjugated their neighbours and stolen their wealth they believed themselves invincible.

The Chaldean empire was built on evil and was built on false security. The bird builds its nest on high for protection. Likewise, the Chaldeans thought themselves safe and secure. “According to one of his own inscriptions Nebuchadnezzar said that one of the chief purposes for strengthening the walls of Babylon was to make an everlasting name for his reign.”²

In verses 10-11 the empire is likened to a house that is going to fall apart. The stone will cry out from the wall metaphorically likening a crumbling structure to the fall of the empire. The beam which supports the house will also cry out as it is stressed to the breaking point. The Chaldean kingdom was going to be reduced to rubble.

The Chaldean leadership had shamed their victims, but their eventual judgment for their devious actions meant they would forfeit their own lives. They had “cut off” other people through war, carrying captives into exile, and murder and now they faced judgment from God that would be just punishment commensurate with their own deeds. “As harsh as an ‘eye for an eye’ sounds in the modern context, it represents the law of justice in which a wilful oppressor receives from the hand of the God what he deserves.”³

2. How is the Biblical truth that one reaps what he sows illustrated in these verses?⁴

The Third Woe:

The third woe is aimed at the Chaldeans oppression of build their own city. Most civilisations look to establish cities that boast of their power, importance, and prestige. The Chaldeans built their towns and cities off the labour of slaves sometimes at the cost of their own blood.



Nations and cultures fall in time at the Lord’s discretion. Not only does God punish the sin of people, but also that of nations. No nation can live with iniquity and violence and expect to forever escape God’s providential judgment.

3. What is the eventual end of a wicked nation’s achievements? (v. 13)

4. Why does God judge nations as well as individuals?

Verse 14 is a prophecy of the coming of the Messiah and the preaching of the Gospel. The message of Christ will circle the globe and millions of people, both Jew and Gentile, will know of God’s great glory. This same sentiment is found in Numbers 14:21 and Isaiah 11:9.

² Ibid. 193.

³ Robertson, O. Palmer. *The International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephania.* Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1990. p. 188.

⁴ See also Matt. 18:21-35; 2 Thess. 1:6.

The Fourth Woe:

In the fourth woe the Chaldeans are being chastised for compelling their neighbours to drink. It is possible that the Chaldeans forced others to become intoxicated, but it is equally possible that they urged and pressured others to conform to their own flawed morality. The goal was to “gaze at their nakedness!” Intoxication often leads to nakedness and debauchery.



Perhaps the wicked Chaldeans may have had some idea of committing sexual immorality with their neighbours since this often is associated with drunkenness,⁵ but primarily the idea is that they wished to see their neighbours exposed and vulnerable so that they might take advantage of them. It is often true, as it is with drunkards, that the sinner wishes to see others join him in his own debauchery.

4. Why do sinners often want others to join them in their sin?

The ancient Babylonians were noted for their excessive use of alcohol which even played a part in their eventual downfall. In verse 16 the drunkard is pictured as filled with shame and his drunkenness shows him to be uncircumcised; or not a part of God's covenant people. What he expected to bring glory instead brings him shame.

The Chaldeans forced drink upon his victims and in just punishment they will now taste the cup of the Lord's right hand. The cup in the Lord's right hand is a metaphor for his wrath which the Chaldeans will fully taste. The shame the Chaldeans will experience is extreme. The word translated as “utter shame” in the ESV is “a compound word constructed by Habakkuk to indicate the magnitude of the disgrace which the Chaldeans will experience. The word literally means something like “vomit-like shame.”⁶ The picture in verse 16 is that of the “king of Babylon lying drunk and naked in his own vomit.”⁷

5. Describe how wicked acts meant to bring personal honour and pleasure can end up bringing personal shame and destruction?

Previously in verse 8 God had accused the Chaldeans of violence done to the earth and now in verse 17 the violence is directed toward Lebanon. Not only did they harm people, but also the land. They had destroyed many of the beautiful forests of Lebanon for their building projects and military campaigns. The Chaldeans also destroyed the animals perhaps by the destruction of their habitat, for food, or for fun.



6. How did God view the forests of Lebanon, the animals, and those who destroyed them according to Habakkuk 2:17; 2 Kings 19:23; Psalm 104:16; and Proverbs 12:10?

7. Why is God so concerned about the protection of the earth and animals?

⁵ See Genesis 19:32-35; 9:21.

⁶ Smith, James E. *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah: A Christian Interpretation*. Lulu, 2011. p. 166.

⁷ Ibid. p. 166.

While most of the modern environmental movement has no belief in God and places the creation above man who is created in the image of God, it is also true that God expects man to be a good steward of the creation. A wise man will care for the land and for the animals. The Chaldeans cared not for the land, the animals, or mankind who is created in God's image.

The Chaldeans shed human blood, were violent to the earth, and destroyed the cities and those who dwelt in them. Note that the end of verse 17 and verse 8 are identical emphasising the seriousness of this offence.

The Fifth Woe:

The fifth is introduced in verse 18 and is at the core of all of the Chaldean's wrongdoing. They are an idolatrous people. The idols they fashioned of wood, metal, or stone with their own hands are unable to help them. In fact these idols are liars because, though they look impressive as they are expertly crafted by those who make them, they provide no answers and no help to those who expect help from them.

8. What is the answer for the rhetorical question in verse 18?

The God of Creation makes man in his image, but the idolatrous man tries to make a god from an image he has within his mind. These idols do not speak, they do not awaken when called, they always remain silent since they are just wood, metal, or stone.



9. What is the answer for the rhetorical question in verse 19?

Idols are lifeless (they have no breath) so they cannot speak, cannot teach, and cannot help. The Lord (Yahweh) is different. His holy temple in verse 20 is heaven itself. God can see every man and every man's deeds from his lofty position. While the idols are silent when called by their creators, the true Creator speaks and his wise creation remains silent before him.

"The only response to Yahweh's awesome rule is silence (cf. Isaiah 41:1; Zephaniah 1:7; Zechariah 2:13). The idea is that those who oppose him, those who presume to instruct him, those who question him should submit to his majesty. These words point to the transcendent majesty of Yahweh. Opposition to him is useless. It is not our place to dictate to him how he should be running the world."⁸

There is much to learn from the woes pronounced against the Chaldeans. 1) God will act in his timeframe, but he will act against wickedness. 2) God will judge not only every person, but every nation which acts contrary to his will. 3) People and nations will reap what they sow. 4) God cares for his Creation. He cares most for people that he made in his image, but he also expects man to care for the land, resources, and animals he has made. 5) People who place their trust in any man made idol have no help in times of need. 6) The best response a people can make to a holy God is often to remain silent in awe of Him.

⁸ Ibid. p. 171.