

# Woe to the Chaldeans (Part 2)

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[ 0 : 00 ] Last week we started looking at Habakkuk chapter 2 verses 6 through 20 and that's a section! where God detailed five woes that fall on the Chaldeans because of how they've conquered other! nations and how they've treated the captives. Remember that when the cry of woe was uttered! regarding the covenant of the covenant of the covenant of the covenant of the covenant people it alerted them to the danger of their conduct and constituted a call for repentance.

But a similar pronouncement of woe could also be made on foreign nations like the Chaldeans and when that happened the aim of the prophecy was primarily to assure God's people that his judgment was impending on their enemies and also to encourage God's people to remain loyal to him despite their difficulties. We talked about last week how these woes initially were personified as if they came out of the mouths of the captives. So let's read the entire section from Habakkuk 2 verses 6 through 20. After that we'll do some quick review of the first three woes before we get into the last two. So starting with chapter 2 verse 6 of Habakkuk it says, The Messiah is asking, The violence done to Lebanon will overwhelm you, as will the destruction of the beast that terrified them.

For the blood of man and violence to the earth, to cities and all who dwell in them. What prophet is an idol when its maker has shaped it, a metal image, a teacher of lies?

For its maker trusts in his own creation when he makes speechless idols. Woe to him who says to a wooden thing, Awake! To a silent stone, Arise! Can this teach?

[ 3 : 08 ] Behold, it is overlaid with gold and silver, and there is no breath at all in it. But the Lord is in his holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before him. So let's look briefly at the first three woes we covered last week.

The first one we saw was woe to the marauder. The definition of marauder is one who roams from place to place in search of plunder. And that's a perfect description for what the Chaldeans were accustomed to doing.

The second one was woe to the manipulator. And rulers built their house by taking unfair advantage of others. They and members of their family benefited from unjust gain.

And in this instance, house apparently refers to both people and the building. That's because the people benefited from the unjust gain, but the judgment involved stones and woodwork crying out concerning the injustice.

So in other words, the houses showed what unjustness they did to other people. The third one we looked at last week was woe to the murderer. And we talked about how the Babylonians acquired cities by conquering and killing people in unjust battles.

[ 4 : 17 ] Then they further built those cities by making the surviving captives work in unsafe conditions that often led to the captives' deaths. So there were two ways, essentially, that people were murdered by the conquerors.

So now we come to verses 15 through 20, which is the focus for tonight's study. And we're going to break those verses into two sections, one for each of the last two woes.

And the fourth woe is woe to the immoral. So woe to the immoral is what we want to look at there. We see that in verses 15 through 17.

And in those verses, like in the other verses, we see both the woe and the upcoming judgment for it. So listen to 15 through 17 one more time. They say, Woe to him who makes his neighbors drink. You pour out your wrath and make them drunk in order to gaze at their nakedness. You will have your fill of shame instead of glory. Drink yourself and show your uncircumcision.

[ 5 : 20 ] The cup in the Lord's right hand will come around to you, and utter shame will come upon your glory. The violence done to Lebanon will overwhelm you, as will the destruction of the beasts

that terrified them.

For the blood of man and violence to the earth, to cities, and all who dwell in them. We see here that Babylon's sin involved the use of liquor, particularly for the purpose of manipulating other people.

And of course, we still see that happen in our society today. The figure of a drinking party is clear, but its exact translation here is debated.

But either way, we know that the message is clear about what's going to happen to the Chaldeans. But it could be that Habakkuk intentionally played on the various possible meanings or associations of the word, all of which are appropriate in this context.

We know that the Old Testament pictures Babylon as a nation known for its drinking parties, which often turned into wild orgies. Daniel 5 is an example of that.

[ 6 : 23 ] Babylon also would make the neighboring nations drink from the cup and then shame them when they became drunk. So in this woe, the liquor and the orgy give a figurative picture of Babylonian practices.

The Babylonians made the nations they conquered drink from the cup of their wrath and they brought shame and disgrace on the nation. So they amused themselves at their captive's expense. And by those crimes, they further demoralized a conquered community. We know that parties of this kind did occur. But for Habakkuk, the practice symbolized a larger problem of relations between nations.

Babylon took advantage of the other nations, bringing shame on those that they conquered. And more so than in other nations, in Israel, nakedness symbolized shame.

So in their drinking parties, those who became drunk might expose themselves in their drunkenness, similar to what Noah did in Genesis 9. So that is what Babylon had forced on the other nations.

[ 7 : 23 ] And this verse provides an example of the psychological techniques that the Chaldeans employed to keep conquered people cowed and submissive by subjecting them to indignities and stripping them of their self-respect.

In this way, the Chaldeans were able to maintain their empire while debasing their subjects. But it's clear here that things will change. Look at verse 16 again.

Verse 16 says, You will have your fill of shame instead of glory. Drink yourself and show your uncircumcision. The cup in the Lord's right hand will come around to you, and utter shame will come upon your glory.

The Babylonians had glorified themselves by shaming their conquest. God says that now Babylon will be the nation that is shamed. We saw in 2.4 that Babylon was puffed up.

2.5 referred to them as arrogant. 2.5 also referred to them as restless and greedy. 3.5. And God decides to reverse the nation's fortunes. 4.5.

[ 8 : 27 ] Like Nineveh, Babylon will become a shadow of its former self, and that will negate its intense pride. 5.5. What Babylon had done to others will be done to them. You see that shame, nakedness, and drinking have played a prominent part in Babylon's sin, and here Habakkuk knew that these elements would play a prominent part in Babylon's punishment.

The theme of drunkenness continues through the use of the verb filled, and it's a translation that really misses the meaning of the actual Hebrew there.

In Hebrew, the verb means to be filled so that no more is wanted. In other words, they had so much that they were absolutely sick of it. So Babylon, the nation which had made others drink and become drunk, would then be filled with disgrace, contempt, and shame.

So the nation which brought its honor by intrigue and power would substitute its honor for intent shame, and the nation who thought it spread its glory and honor across the known world would fall in shame before God's glory known throughout the universe.

We saw that in verse 14 when we covered that verse last week. Exposing the Babylonians would show that they were outside of God's covenant, and that would make their exposure a devil's humiliation.

[ 9 : 44 ] The second half of this verse speaks more explicitly of the punishment as being forced to drink, and this time the Lord is named as the one who causes the punishment.

Notice it says, There are several Old Testament passages in which a cup of wine is used as a symbol of punishment.

Jeremiah spent several verses talking about the wine of God's wrath, and he specifically called out Babylon as well. So if you want to flip to Jeremiah, we're going to look at a few verses from Jeremiah chapter 25, and we'll start with verse 15.

So again, this is Jeremiah 25, and we'll look at verses from 15 through 29. So here are Jeremiah 25, 15, and 16 to start out.

It says, Thus the Lord, the God of Israel, said to me, Take from my hand this cup of the wine of wrath, and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it. They shall drink and stagger and be crazed because of the sword that I am sending among them.

[10:51] The passage in Jeremiah goes on to list several nations that will suffer punishment, and then Jeremiah 15, 26 ends with this sentence.

It says, And after them the king of Babylon shall drink. And then we'll pick up the Jeremiah passage in verses 27 through 29 of chapter 15.

It says, Then you shall say to them, Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, Drink, be drunk, and vomit. Fall and rise no more, because the sword that I am sending among you.

And if they refuse to accept the cup from your hand to drink, then you shall say to them, Thus says the Lord of hosts, You must drink. For behold, I begin to work disaster at the city that is called by my name.

And shall you go unpunished? You shall not go unpunished, for I am summoning a sword against all the inhabitants of the earth, declares the Lord of hosts. So going back to our Habakkuk text for tonight, the end of verse 16 makes clear what will happen when the cup of God's wrath comes around to Babylon.

[11:59] It says, An utter shame will come upon your glory. This is the only time that the word translated utter shame is used in the Old Testament.

It signifies the greatest possible contempt, and it means putrid shame or even shameful vomit. So the picture is of the Babylonians as an object of horror and ridicule, ejecting all that they've swallowed and lying on the floor in their own vomit while they're drunk and naked.

So this vomited shame will wipe out all of their glory. While seeking glory, Babylon would only find disgrace. And we know that in our modern society, seeking after satisfaction and sophistication often produces only shame and disgrace.

But seeking after God and His righteousness produces the good things only God can give. Verse 16 was pretty clear about the judgment that the Babylonians will face, but just in case we missed it, verse 17 reiterates the same thing while mentioning some of the Chaldeans' other crimes.

Listen to verse 17 again. It says, The violence done to Lebanon will overwhelm you, as will the destruction of the beasts that terrified them. For the blood of man and violence to the earth, to cities and all who dwell in them.

[13:24] Once again, we see here that the punishment fits the crime. They're going to reap what they've sown. And we see throughout the Bible that reciprocal justice is often God's way of chastising the sinner.

Most of the time, people have done to them what they have done to others. Lebanon here referred to the Lebanon mountain range, which produced thick forests known for their magnificent cedars and also their thriving animal life.

Texts from as early as the third millennium show Lebanon as a major source of wood for temples and ships. Even in prehistoric Egyptian tombs, archaeologists have found coniferous woods that may have come from Lebanon.

Like the Assyrians before them, the Babylonians made ruthless use of Lebanon's timber resources. They used it to construct siege works against cities that withstood them, and they also exported it back home for use in their own massive building programs.

They cut down timber without regard to the regeneration of the forest, and their action will return to haunt them, because others will do the same to Babylon. The exact meaning of the reference to destruction of the beast is debated, but we can still get the gist of what it means.

[14:41] The destruction of the beast is tied to the destruction of the forest. Not satisfied with simply robbing men and nations and with oppressing and ill-treating them, the Babylonians committed wickedness upon the trees and the wild animals of Lebanon.

They cut down the wood either for military purposes or for state buildings, so that the wild animals were unsparingly exterminated and terrified by the devastation.

They lost most of their habitat. And perhaps the Babylonians then are going to be terrified by a vision of those slaughtered beasts. That's what some people think the reference may be. The remainder of the verse emphasizes the sin of Babylon, and the words are the same as the end of the first woe in verse 8. Babylon's sin was against people and ultimately against God. They took advantage of the people of the land, thoughtlessly using up land and resources. God had given the land for the good of his people, but Babylon's destruction produced heartache and misery for generations and centuries to come.

[ 15 : 47 ] The devastation caused by the Babylonians extended beyond the environment and wildlife to people. Their attitude, as we've seen, was to exploit and destroy without regard to anyone or anything.

And God is clear here that that attitude would be punished. So this brings us to the fifth and final woe. In verses 18 through 20, we see a woe to the idolater.

So woe to the idolater is the last one. If you noticed when we were reading it earlier, the fifth woe has a different structure from the preceding ones.

It doesn't begin with the woe, but it begins with the cause of the woe. It says the fundamental reason why Babylon was doing things was misguided and wrong.

They refused to accept the Lord as their ruler in God. So look at verses 18 through 20 again. They say, Babylon trusted in its many gods with a little g, idols made by their own hands that were without power or strength.

[ 17 : 26 ] The Babylonian defied what is not divine or deified what is not divine. And to trust in a false god will prove deceitful. Not only Babylon needed to hear this, but Judah did too.

The people of Judah could easily assume that Babylon's conquest had proven Babylon's gods to be superior to their own gods. But Habakkuk's ironic picture assures them that this is not the case. People who create their own gods invent their own moral standards. Babylon's religious orientation led to all the other atrocities which are cited in this section of Habakkuk.

This also blasts against the idols and removes any hope that the Chaldeans have that their gods would protect them from the judgments which have been threatened in the previous verses.

The ineffectiveness of idolatry is indicated by Habakkuk in several ways. First, an idol is only the creation of man.

[ 18 : 34 ] So how can one who makes a graven or molten image put his trust in that which he has created? Second thing we see here is that Habakkuk points out that an image is a teacher of lies.

And by that he means that it stands for something that is not real. God, in contrast, is invisible, omnipresent, and articulate. He can't be represented by an image which is visible, stationary, and speechless.

An idol gave the appearance that it had the power of a supernatural being. The elaborate rituals of this idolatry seduced people in putting their trust in lifeless images.

And the third thing we see here is that idols are dumb in the sense that they can't communicate.

They're really speechless nothings as some versions translate them.

When you think about it, the person who made the idol knows that there's no life strength or wisdom in it, but for some reason he still trusts in it. So how foolish is that?

[ 19 : 37 ] What is made is always inferior to the maker. The made thing possesses no quality other than what has been given to it by its designer. And so someone who places the hope of his soul in his own creation really defies reason and shows himself to be a fool.

We see the concept of trust being a concept of central theological importance in the Old Testament. It expresses that which is, or at least should be, central in everyone's relationship with God.

Trust almost always refers to a process at the foundation of existence. Whoever trusts relies on something, and everything depends upon the reliability of the thing being trusted.

So someone seeks protection, and that person stands or falls on that who it relies on for protection. And God calls his people to trust him at all times.

People are very trusting folk by nature, but if we choose the wrong things in which to place our trust, we can run into problems. And some of the things we see people put their trust in in the Bible are riches, other important people, military fortifications, beauty, and often personal abilities.

[ 20 : 54 ] But eventually all these things will fail. People need to put their trust in God. But we also have to be careful because even trust in God can be misplaced if it's only ritualistic and not connected to genuine obedience.

So obedience is one way that we demonstrate our trust in God, and it's the main way we show our trust in God is real. Trust in God can help wipe away fear.

An Israelite tradition demands and recognizes an absolute exclusive devotion to God. This trust in God includes the hope of salvation and faith in the God of their fathers.

So like Habakkuk, the prophets mocked the Babylonians for their worship of idols, and the people of Judah for wanting to be like the Babylonians in their worship. Everyone who treats lifeless idols as though they were living comes under the judgment of God.

Idolaters had to awaken their idol each morning. If they wanted them clean, they had to bathe them themselves. Some pretended to feed them and even acted like they were living beings.

[ 22 : 04 ] And the image was often overlaid with precious metal. So outwardly, the idol was beautiful. But the image couldn't teach or communicate no matter how beautiful it was.

It had no breath or life in it. So the glittering gold couldn't conceal the lifelessness of the idol any more than a burial mask can conceal the lifelessness of a mummy.

And the expression in verse 19, at the end of verse 19, has more ridicule and scorn in it than the English implies. The actual Hebrew gives us quite a bit more ridicule and scorn.

So it actually implies a person standing there mockingly before an idol and saying, look, it teaches. Look, it's gold and silver and it's full of breath. And then saying, oh wait, there's nothing to it.

There's nothing really there at all. I was wrong. So that's the kind of mocking that Habakkuk is implying there. So in other words, he's saying exactly what they say and then saying, oh wait, you're completely wrong about it.

[ 23 : 05 ] So an alternative translation model for this verse is, God will destroy you. You say to a piece of wood or a block of stone, wake up and get up. Can an idol tell you anything?

Even though people have covered it with silver and gold, it cannot say anything. It's really easy for us today to think that we'll never be idolaters.

But let's look at a couple of New Testament scriptures and see if we need to be concerned about idolatry ourselves. The first is Ephesians 5 verse 5.

And Ephesians 5 verse 5 says, And then Paul said these words in Colossians 3 verses 5 and 6. He said, So you can see from these verses that one thing they have in common is that Paul refers to covetousness as idolatry.

[ 24 : 28 ] So if we covet something, we're guilty of idolatry. Although we're too sophisticated, at least in our minds, to worship inanimate objects, a desire for things can become idolatry.

Said another way, modern man is even more tempted to worship possessions or things that were also made with human hands and coveted with human hearts. And that too is idolatry.

So even though it may not be the shape of an idol that they had in past years, if people value their possessions more than God, they're still being idolaters as well.

An insatiable desire for things not rightly possessed really shows that people are guilty of thinking that things can satisfy rather than God himself. And whenever a person sets his priorities on things that are made rather than the maker of things being God, that person is guilty of idolatry.

Another way to define an idol is anything that gets in the way of putting God first in your life. And by that definition, we have a lot of things that we could be in danger of making idols in our own lives, perhaps even more than the people of Habakkuk's day had.

[ 25 : 42 ] But let's go back to tonight's text and look at the last verse of chapter 2. Habakkuk has spent a couple of verses talking about the folly of worshiping lifeless idols, but look at the contrast in verse 20.

He says, But the Lord is in his holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before him. So think about an idol one more time. The idol sits where it's put without the ability to hear or respond.

But the Lord responds by his almighty power in his holy temple, and he's ready to respond to the needs of his people. So God is present in the temple he has created.

He teaches truth, as in this revelation. God is speaking. He's alive. He's awake. He gives guidance. And he is the one who gives the breath of life. So silence is for the people and the whole earth to keep in his presence.

Nobody has to call out to God to wake him up or ask him to teach. He's already spoken, and he's still active today. For Habakkuk, the temple probably meant not only the temple in Jerusalem, but also the heavenly sanctuary.

[ 26 : 53 ] From that heavenly temple, the Lord rules over heaven and earth and receives the honor due to him alone. And the proper response to a God who's enthroned above us is odd silence.

And the word for keep silence is actually an interjection with the force, much like Habakkuk is yelling at us to hush, that the only proper response is to be quiet before God.

So we see that this verse pictures the contrast between those who are not gods, the idols, and the one God who is in heaven ready to respond to human need and to human questions.

Habakkuk himself knew from experience that he could take his questions to God, and he would get an answer. The last verse serves as a fitting conclusion to the final woe, as well as a conclusion to the series of woes.

It also points back to Habakkuk making demands of God, asking questions of God, and then retreating to his watchtower to wait for God's answers, impatient at God's silence.

[ 27 : 54 ] So, there are a few things we need to look at as we go through these verses, because now the prophet hushes himself and all the world, willing to let God act in God's time, and willing to wait for God to open his mouth whenever God chooses.

And the final verse of the chapter points the reader to the holy God enthroned in his temple. So, God's holiness was vindicated, and the prophet was able to reconcile his theology with God's action.

Despite God's apparent silence, God still remains with the people of Israel. He's still in control of their destiny, and they should wait upon him in the odd silence that is the most appropriate expression of true worship.

And when I say odd silence there, that's A-W-E-D, not O-D-D. It's a silence that is filled with awe. So, on the one hand, dead idols cannot speak because of their impotency.

On the other hand, inhabitants of the world are bidden to keep silent because of God's majesty and power. So, the dialogue with God is over.

[ 29 : 05 ] He's responded to, though not directly answered, Habakkuk's question about the suffering of the righteous and the success of the wicked. Habakkuk actually accepts God's response, and for proof of that, you'll have to come back next week and see chapter 3.

But the response to the first question in 2-4b, the righteous shall live by his faith, and to the second question in 2-6-20, that the wicked will reap what they sow, are actually accepted in verses 16-19 of chapter 3.

In the meantime, the only response for Habakkuk to do is to worship. So, let's think about what we can learn from these verses. One thing is that to remember that we're not that much different than the Babylonians.

If not for Jesus' sacrifice on behalf of our sins, we would be subject to the same type of wrath that Babylon faced. We looked at an Old Testament example of the cup of God's wrath.

Jesus used the same symbolism several times in the New Testament. In fact, he used it at least four times on the night of his arrest. Matthew 26 tells us about Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night that he was arrested.

[ 30 : 24 ] Listen to Matthew 26-39. It says, Then he wakes up the disciples who had fallen asleep, and then he prays again in verse 42.

Verse 42 says, Again for the second time he went away and prayed, My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done. Jesus tried one more time to wake up the disciples before another prayer is recorded in verse 44.

And verse 44 simply says, So leaving them again, he went away and prayed for a third time, saying the same words again. Later that night, when the soldiers came to arrest Jesus, remember that Peter cut off the servant's right ear with the sword.

And that's when Jesus mentioned the cup of God's wrath one more time. This time, this is from John 18-11. And that verse says, So Jesus said to Peter, Put your sword in its sheath.

Shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me? We can take comfort in that because Christ has drunk the cup of God's wrath against sin, God's people are exempt from the punishment, which would otherwise be afflicted on them.

[ 31 : 52 ] But that should make us grateful and be thrilled that we are saved from that rather than look down on people like the Babylonians. The second thing we see is that God's judgment fits the crime.

This concept of reciprocal justice often doesn't appeal to humanity, but it's God's way of doing things. Think about what the state was called on to do in the Old Testament.

It was eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth, life for a life. And by this type of punishment, God proves himself to be impartial and righteous as a judge. By this way, he establishes himself as just and yet also the justifier of the ungodly who believe in him.

So Jesus, as we saw, drank the cup of God's fury to the dregs and he became the savior of all who would renounce their own pride and violence, looking to Jesus alone for salvation.

The third thing we can take away from this is that idols or gods of our own invention still threaten people today. Human beings can make things of wood and stone, but the Lord can make human beings, so why shouldn't we worship him?

[ 33 : 05 ] The last thing we can take away from this is that the true God is the one who deserves genuine worship. Only the God of the Bible is in his temple and on his throne.

So even though this series of woes was first directed against Babylon, it contains vital information about present living. We're not to get so drawn into an earthly perspective that we forget about God's control of history and also his control of the future.

Whatever people put in their lives in place of God will ultimately be shown to be futile. God's in control and the command that goes out to his people in the midst of the wars and tumults is always the same.

And that is the verse that we see in Psalm 46.10. It says, Be still and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations.

I will be exalted in the earth. So here are a couple of questions for reflection. One, is idolatry something we no longer have to worry about?

[ 34 : 12 ] Hopefully that's a question we've already answered with tonight's study, but if you need more proof, there are some other scripture references there, some of which we looked at tonight as well. The second thing is, How can we practice being silent before God?

And maybe that actually is better worded, How should we practice being silent before God? One way to think about that silence is remember what Psalm 46.10 says when it says, Be still and know that I am God.

I will be exalted among the nations. I will be exalted in the earth. And of course we can remember Habakkuk's last line as well when he says, The Lord is in his holy temple.

Let all the earth keep silence before him. So with that, let's close in prayer. Father, we thank you for the reminder that you are in control of what goes on.

And even though it may not seem to us that things are progressing the way they should, and it may look sometimes that things are out of control, let us always put our faith and trust in you instead of anything else.

[ 35 : 19 ] Give us the patience to wait on your timing and your judgment. Meanwhile, help us be willing to share your gospel with more and more people. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Thank you.