

Woe to the Chaldeans (Part 1)

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Preacher: Lee Roberts

[0 : 00] So last week we looked at Habakkuk chapter 2 verses 1 through 5 and in Habakkuk chapter 2! 1 through 5 he started getting some answers to the questions that he's been asking God.

And Habakkuk has been asking God how he could use such an ungodly nation such as Babylon to punish Judah. And the second part of Habakkuk's question has been how long will you let Babylon punish Judah without punishing the Chaldeans themselves?

And God's answer came in verses 3 and 4 of chapter 2. So here are verses 3 and 4 again. They say, The answer Habakkuk has been given assures him that God will act.

He's not to ask if God will act or when God will act. He finds out that it will happen at the appointed time. And what the faithful are to do is to wait with confidence on God.

Avoiding the rebellious attitude of the arrogant, they should rather humbly rely on God, being sure of what we hope for in certain of the things that we do not see.

[1 : 30] And in this way, they will enjoy a life in communion and fellowship with God and be sustained through their darkest hours. We mentioned last week that Habakkuk 2.5 is a transition verse that links the first part of chapter 2 with the part that we'll be studying tonight.

And in verse 2.5, God made it clear that he's fully aware of the Chaldeans' character. Verse 2.5 says, So we see three traits of the Babylonians there.

Excessive drinking, arrogance, and greed. Excessive wine deceives the drinker into feeling more important than is warranted. That's where the puffed up comes from.

It hides danger. And arrogance, by definition, is false pride. And of course, greed marks the way of the wicked like a gravestone. The Babylonians are never satisfied.

They will take all the cultures of the ancient Near East captive, collect the people as a possession, and bring their treasures home. But they'll still want more. They will always be restless.

[2 : 49] And these three traits set up the Chaldeans for the judgment that God details in the remainder of chapter 2. We'll only make it through verse 14 tonight, but we're going to read all the way through the end of the chapter to hear the entire judgment section.

It all goes together. So here are verses 6 through 20 of Habakkuk chapter 2. So verse 6 says, That people labor merely for fire, and nations weary themselves for nothing. For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.

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.

The cup is 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 beast that terrified them.

[4 : 47] For the blood of man and violence to the earth, to cities, and all who dwell in them. What profit 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? 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.

The prophets employed a variety of rhetorical techniques, including adapting forms of speech associated with other occasions to get their message across.

And woe or alas was originally a cry associated with the funeral, and it was followed by the name of the one who had died. It gave expression to the grief that was felt at the loss suffered.

[5 : 46] The prophets instead linked the cry of woe with a description of the behavior of those who were still alive. And it was a very vivid way of pressing home how reprehensible their conduct was in the sight of God.

The prophets saw that they were already as good as dead because God had given his verdict against them. When the cry of woe was uttered against the covenant people, it alerted them to the danger of their conduct and constituted a call to repentance.

A similar pronouncement of woe could also be made regarding foreign nations like what we see here. And when that happened, the aim of the prophecy was primarily to assure the Lord's people that God's judgment was impending for their enemies.

And it was also to encourage the Lord's people to remain loyal to him despite their present difficulties. So from verses 6 through 20, we see five woes that God pronounces against the Chaldeans.

And we'll cover three of those tonight and then we'll cover the other two next week. We'll do this one just a little bit different because the first part of verse 6 serves as an introduction to the woes.

[6 : 53] So we'll go ahead and cover the first part of verse 6 before we get into the woes themselves. And you see that verse 6 begins, The reference to all these points back to the end of verse 5.

So here is the ending of verse 5 again. It said, He gathers for himself all nation and collects as his own all peoples. So the all these in verse 6 are the same as the all peoples at the end of verse 5.

And these are the people that are left from all the nations that the Chaldeans have captured. So Habakkuk 6 through 20 of chapter 2 is a taunt or mocking song that's placed artistically and unexpectedly in the mouths of the nations who had suffered from Babylon's excesses.

So the implication is that the situation of Habakkuk's own day is going to be reversed. The oppressed nations will then be the ones in a position to repay the Babylonians for their cruelty. Take up also could be translated as begin. And the mockery will take the form of a brief poem or a riddle. So let's get into the woes themselves and see what the nations have to say against the Chaldeans.

[8 : 12] So in the last part of verse 6 all the way through verse 8 we see the first woe. And we can call it woe to the marauder. So woe to the marauder is your first fill in.

Marauder is a word we don't hear very often anymore. But the definition of marauder is one who roams from place to place in search of plunder.

So listen to that definition again and see how well it fits with the Chaldeans. It means one who roams from place to place in search of plunder. So that actually is a perfect definition of what the Chaldeans are doing.

Listen to 2.6b all the way through 8 again and you will hear a form of the word plunder twice and it's implied elsewhere in these verses. Starting at the end of verse 6 with the first woe it says, The Hebrew refers to heaping up stolen goods.

So an alternative translation could be, You take great quantities of things that don't belong to you so God is going to punish you for that. And the question of for how long really applies to the whole statement.

[9 : 48] But it can also be placed with one half or the other half of the statement. And the words really constitute a sigh at all the trouble that has been caused by the Babylonians already.

And the words echo the prophet's own complaint that we saw all the way back starting in verse 2 of chapter 1. You notice the reference to pledges there.

And of course when a rich man lent money the borrower would give him something as a guarantee of repayment. And that was the pledge. So if the money was not repaid the lender kept the pledge. The Babylonians are portrayed as seizing pledges from their victims and then keeping the pledges or making their victims pay what they didn't really owe.

So in this way they extorted goods wrongfully from all of those that they conquered. But verse 7 shows how the tables are going to turn. Look at verse 7 again.

[10 : 44] And it says, Will not your debtors suddenly arise and those awake who will make you tremble? Then you will be spoiled for them. So the word translated debtors in the ESV literally means biters in Hebrew.

So the word to bite also can mean to pay interest. So it's interesting that they associated biting with interest because interest takes a bite out of your pocketbook when you have to pay it.

And so to pay interest or to bite is to be a debtor in this case. So really there is a double play on words here. Because those who have paid interest on unjust debts, which also is called biting, will turn and bite those who have oppressed them.

So in other words they'll take vengeance on the Chaldeans for what they've done. In their extortion of nations, the Chaldeans have become rich because of the debts that they have taken from the other nations.

And they've built up a burden of debt by wrongfully acquiring the wealth of the other peoples. They thought they were taking from them. But in truth, the people are going to rise up and tell them, We were only loaning it to you.

[11:56] You actually are debtors to us. And you owe us both capital and interest. And they're going to tell them that the debt has come due. So the Babylonians will become the victims of those whom they had victimized.

The Babylonians then are going to tremble as those nations wake up and come to collect their debts. And those nations, it says, will plunder the plunderer.

So just in case we miss that message in verse 7, verse 8 builds on it. It says, Because you have plundered many nations, all the remnant of the people shall plunder you for the blood of man and violence to the earth, to cities and to all who dwell in them.

What Babylon had done to others, others are going to do to the Babylonians. And the Babylonians had set off a series of events that would not end until they had been plundered themselves.

And so once again we see here that violence begets violence. So former victims of the Babylonians, the Medes and the Persians, suddenly rose to power in such a fast way that it actually resembled that of the Babylonian Empire when the Babylonian Empire came into power.

[13:11] And the Medes and the Persians carried out this sentence less than 25 years after King Nebuchadnezzar's death. Today the site of Babylon is a desolate waste.

And the only thing there are caves and holes in the ruins that are occupied by wild animals in a desert. So lions and jackals and other animals roam among the ruins that used to be Babylon.

So this prophecy did come true. So now that we've seen the woe to the marauder, let's move to the second woe, and that is woe to the manipulator.

So woe to the manipulator is your second fill-in. And we see the manipulation in verses 9 through 11. Starting in verse 9 it says, The Hebrew reads literally, Woe to the one cutting off an evil cut for his house to set high on his nest to save himself from the hand of evil.

And the verb cutting off may allude to a weaver cutting off a piece of material for sale. So an evil cut in that case was a cut that was shorter than what was promised, so it involved cheating the customer.

[14:46] And it is used more widely of making profits by cheating and violence. The Hebrew word translated house in verse 9 can refer to either a house as in the building or to the people in the house or the family in the house.

So rulers built their house by taking unfair advantage of others. They and the members of their family benefited from unjust gain. And in this instance, house apparently refers to both people and to the building they lived in.

The people benefited from the unjust gain, but the judgment involved the stones and the woodwork crying out concerning the injustice. And we will see the stones and the woodwork crying out when we get deeper into verse 11.

But when it talks about nest in these verses, that really symbolized the arrogance of the Babylonians. They built their nest on high, which was meant to be a symbol of invincibility.

Of all animals, the eagle seems the most impervious to harm. And that's because the eagle built its nest on high and seemed to reign as lord over all that it surveyed.

[16:01] And Habakkuk saw the people of Babylon in this same way. They ruthlessly took from others and they built houses and fortunes that appeared to be invincible. And in their arrogance, the Babylonians felt themselves to be untouchable.

But verse 10 makes it clear what's going to happen. And here God speaks directly to the Babylonians. He says, The Hebrew text there literally reads, You plan shame for your house, the ends of many peoples, and sinning against your life or your soul.

So with the repetition of house, this verse is closely tied to the preceding one. People building a house by unjust gain thought they brought fame, prominence, and power to themselves.

Instead, their plans only shamed their house, that is, their families, their ancestors, and their descendants. Destroying other peoples was part of the security plan to isolate themselves from attack or danger.

But God saw the plan from a different perspective. Such a plan incurred guilt and promised sin's wages. And of course, we all know what the wages of sin are.

[17 : 20] The wages of sin are death. Ending lives for others simply ensured deaths for themselves. So rather than receiving adulation from the common people for the wealth that they had, the people actually brought shame on their house by the very actions that brought them that wealth.

And it brought shame on the nation, and that would lead to forfeiting their own lives. So instead of building themselves up, they participated in the process of their own destruction.

And this is a concept that is illustrated throughout the Bible. Think about the rich fool in Luke 12.

The rich fool only thought that he was building larger barns to house more wealth.

He didn't consider that his very riches called out for his soul. And that's the same principle we see here in Habakkuk. So in the text tonight, we alluded to the meaning of cutting off many peoples earlier.

But let's make sure we know what it means in this latter context too. Because the expression of cutting off is a very common Hebrew metaphor as well. It means destroying.

[18 : 26] So because of their cruel treatment of others, the Babylonians have forfeited their own lives. And so God will cut off their lives as their punishment in due time.

And verse 11 is where we see that word picture of the Babylonians' own houses bearing witness against them. It says, It's as if these materials were witnesses of the cruelty and the oppression by the people who built them.

The Babylonians viewed their buildings as a monument to their skill and prestige. But this timber and these stones will not testify to the prowess of the builder, but to his wickedness and greed.

So they had been plundered from other nations. So when an enterprise has an improper foundation, no matter what success it achieves, it's inevitably flawed. And those flaws will eventually be exposed.

So we've seen the woe to the marauder and the woe to the manipulator. In the final three verses we'll cover tonight, we'll see woe to the murderer. So woe to the murderer goes in your third blank.

[19 : 42] And we see that in verses 12 through 14. Here are those verses again. Starting in verse 12, it says, Woe to him who builds a town with blood and founds a city on iniquity.

Behold, is it not from the Lord of hosts that peoples labor merely for fire and nations weary themselves for nothing? For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

If you're wondering how murderer fits in the heading for this section, it comes from the reference to blood in verse 12. Blood is the usual Hebrew idiom for murder.

And it might also take in the loss of life in battle, as well as the loss of life because of the unsafe condition associated with the building sites. The Babylonians acquired cities by conquering and killing people in unjust battles.

And then they further built those cities by making the surviving captives work in unsafe conditions that could lead to the captives' deaths. The use of conquered people as slave labor on building projects was a common practice in ancient times.

[20 : 55] The slaves were treated so badly that they often died. So, if you didn't die in the battle, you might die serving the captives. The word translated iniquity by the ESV in verse 12 also can be rendered as injustice, violence, or crime.

And that description emphasizes that this treatment of others was a recognized policy. It wasn't a one-off event. It was something that happened over and over. The iniquity or crime referred to is the violation of international rights.

And the word refers to the deviation from the standards of right conduct. It can be described also as wickedness or wrong. So, listen to verse 13 again now.

It says, Behold, is it not from the Lord of hosts that peoples labor merely for fire and nations weary themselves for nothing? So, the force of verse 13 describes the futility of getting and spending without being dependent on the Lord.

It's a principle that's illustrated by Psalm 127.1. So, listen to Psalm 127.1 and see how close it is to what Habakkuk has said here.

[22 : 14] Psalm 127.1 says, The nations build and develop only to provide fuel for the fire.

All that they labor for will eventually come to nothing if the Lord is not with them in their efforts.

Human empires glorify man and God will never tolerate anything who challenges him.

God will not yield his glory to another but works instead to accomplish his purposes in history.

Habakkuk 2.13 is very similar to Jeremiah 51.58.

So, listen to what Jeremiah had to say in 51.58 of his book. Jeremiah wrote, Thus says the Lord of hosts, The broad wall of Babylon shall be leveled to the ground, and her gate shall be burned with fire.

The peoples labor for nothing, and the nations weary themselves only for fire. Verse 14 makes it clear, if we hadn't figured out already, who's in charge here.

[23 : 28] And look at verse 14 again. God says, For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as waters cover the sea. God works in the world to accomplish his purpose.

But God's purpose goes beyond simply punishing the wicked. God desires that all the world will know him. From the very beginning of Israel's history as a people, God declared his intention for all the world to know him.

You can go back and look at Exodus 19 and see that. So, the final verse of the third woe gives an uplifting and positive element to the woes here.

God will work to make himself known in all the earth. In Hebrew thought, knowledge means more than information. Knowledge is seen in fundamental relational terms.

To know God is to be in a right relationship with him, with characteristics of love, trust, respect, and open communication. Knowledge involved intimacy and experience, being used in its most fundamental sense to describe the marriage relationship.

[24 : 40] For the earth to be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord involved knowing God rather than simply knowing about God. And there's a huge difference between knowing God and knowing about God.

Not to know God for Israel and for the other nations invited his judgment. The entire story of the Exodus centered on the fact that Pharaoh did not know God, but God wanted to introduce himself to Israel and make himself known to his people, and not only to his people, but also to Pharaoh and to the Egyptians.

Jeremiah also pictured a knowledge of the Lord that transcended geographical borders and conventional barriers. So all that God is doing has a divine purpose behind it, and that purpose is to introduce God to Israel and to all the other nations.

When the Babylonians are crushed, all the inhabitants of the earth will acknowledge God's power and the awesomeness of his presence. And they'll do that through the extermination of the evildoers because they will see God do that extermination, and they will know or they will have the knowledge of his righteousness, and they'll declare and they'll have to admit that the world is governed solely by God's hand.

The glory of the Lord is manifested in the judgments on ungodly powers. It's also measured by his sovereign majesty, the absolute dominion that he has, and the matchless power that he has.

[26 : 16] And as Habakkuk says there, as the waters cover the sea, it denotes an overflowing abundance. So the knowledge of the glory of the Lord will spread throughout the earth and will saturate every land.

Throughout the Bible, God's glory is revealed more and more, and we'll look at several references that show that. I've listed all the references on your handout so that you don't have to try to follow along here, but just listen to some of these references.

Psalm 19.1 says, The heavens declare the glory of God and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. But creation is not the ultimate revelation of God's glory.

The presence of God in the glory cloud in the tabernacle and in the temple manifested something more of his inner being, namely his grace and love, as reflected in his redemptive presence in the midst of his people.

That Old Testament presentation of the character of God has been eclipsed by the revelation of his Son that we see in the New Testament. Think about Hebrews 1, verses 1 through 3.

[27 : 28] Listen to what the writer of the Hebrews said there. Hebrews 1, 1 through 3 say, Long ago, at many times, and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets.

But in these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom he also created the world. He, speaking of God's Son, is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high. Elsewhere in the New Testament, we see that the eyewitnesses to that glory were some of the disciples. Listen to John 1, 14. In John 1, 14, John wrote, And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. We as believers today are also aware of God's glory. Listen to these words from Paul in 2 Corinthians 4, 6. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 4, 6, For God, who said, Let light shine out of darkness, has shown in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

[29 : 01] 2 Corinthians 4, 6 is great news, but things are going to get even better than that. There's still the eternal glory to come, in which the enjoyment of all that God is will not be clouded over or obscured in any way.

Both the Old and the New Testaments are clear on that point. Listen to Psalm 73, 24. The psalmist says, You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will receive me to glory.

And then in the New Testament, 2 Timothy 2, 10, is where Paul wrote these words, Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

So you can see by just this sampling of verses here how much the Bible speaks of God's glory and shows us that God is working for His glory throughout everything that He does.

That's what we see in Habakkuk and all the other places we've looked at with these cross-references. But there's one more thing we want to talk about, writing about the New Jerusalem.

[30 : 14] John said this in Revelation 21, 23. He said, And the city has no need for sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of the Lord gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb.

So although we have some idea of God's glory now, we're going to see more and more and finally see God's glory fully when we are redeemed and with Him in the New Jerusalem.

Let's think about what we can learn from these verses in Habakkuk tonight. There are at least three things we can see from here. And the first is that rebellion against God has consequences.

Rebellion against God has consequences. You'll notice when we looked at the earlier verses that Habakkuk used some general descriptions.

He didn't specifically address everything just to the Chaldeans or the Babylonians. And so most people think that the use of general descriptions invites us to go further than hearing these denunciations as being addressed only against Babylon or to a specific individual such as the king of Babylon.

[31 : 27] Remember we saw earlier in Habakkuk that there were those within Judah who were also unscrupulous and corrupt. If you look back at Habakkuk chapter 1 verses 2 through 4 you'll see where Habakkuk complained about that.

King Jehoiakim himself is the subject of a woe that's documented in Jeremiah 22. So instead of being a warning just to the Babylonians these woes are a warning to all who are like the Babylonians in their conduct.

And that warning still is in effect today. Rebellion against God is not just a matter of ancient history. We see rebellion going on against God today and it still characterizes the human race and will continue to characterize the human race.

And the consequences of that rebellion remain what they always have been. Eventually the rebels will pay for those sins unless they repent and turn to God.

And that leads us into the second thing we see illustrated in this passage and that is that God will humble the arrogant. So God will humble the arrogant.

[32 : 40] When we're arrogant we see no need to be dependent upon God and that leaves us to our own devices. And doing our own thing without regard for God is a sure prescription for ruin.

It may take a while but eventually things will catch up to us. Security can never be found in buildings, locks, or security systems. Security is only found by dependence upon God.

Listen to what Jesus said in Matthew 23, 12. Jesus said whoever exalts himself will be humbled and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

And of course he was referencing a passage from the Psalms as well. So we see that God will humble the arrogant even if it may take him a while because he's doing it on his time and not ours. The third thing we see is what we spend a lot of time looking at the cross references about and that is that God is working all things for his glory. God is working all things for his glory.

[33 : 46] Because of the all-encompassing purpose of God that's to bring glory to himself Habakkuk and we as well can find comfort and courage to face the difficulties around us.

God's determination to exhibit his glory ensures that all that is contrary to God will be judged and banished from his eternal kingdom. One day we won't have to deal with people who disregard God at all.

The fall of the tyrants in the past should encourage us to wait the final overthrow of the Babylon that's represented in Revelation chapter 18. So that brings us to some questions for reflection.

So let's look briefly at those questions. The first is how should knowing the consequences of rebelling against God motivate us to witness to the unsaved?

How should knowing the consequences of rebelling against God motivate us to witness to the unsaved? Secondly, you've got some New Testament references there and it says in what ways are woes pronounced in the New Testament?

[34 : 56] So in what ways are woes pronounced in the New Testament? If you look at those cross references you'll see several cross references to the woe that Jesus did to the Pharisees.

And the pictures that the woes present reach their consummation in Revelation where Babylon epitomizes the weakness or the wickedness of all of the nations. So we can trace the ways in which what was said in Babylon in Old Testament times is applied to the Babylon that's referred to in Revelation 17 and 18.

The third thing to consider is what guidelines can be established from Scripture about the way workers ought to be treated. Remember we saw earlier in our study where a lot of the workers taken captive suffered and died because they were treated so poorly.

But Scripture gives us some very clear guidelines about how workers should be treated. And finally the fourth thing is what part should thinking about future glory play in our present living?

So what part should thinking about future glory play in our present living? Israel expected God's glory to fill their place of worship so Habakkuk joined a prophetic chorus calling for more than that.

[36 : 18] God's glory should be recognized as filling the entire universe not just a place of worship. And when God's glory fills all the universe it lets all the people of the world experience and respond to God's manifest presence.

we know that not all will but all will at least be exposed to that glory. The prophet wanted the knowledge of God to be as pervasive as the water that fills the seas.

For Christian believers Habakkuk 2.14 takes us in mind and heart to the work of Christ who came into the world to make God known in the most unique way possible.

Through Christ the earth may be uniquely filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord.

Remember what verse 14 clearly said. It said for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

It doesn't say might be filled or could be filled it says for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord. We just have to wait for it to happen. So with that let's close in prayer.

[37 : 29] Father we thank you for the reminder that Justice Habakkuk was impatiently waiting for you to judge and make things right. You are always waiting on the right time in your timetable to judge and make things right.

Give us the patience and the understanding to know that you will eventually set things right and give us the confidence and the boldness to help others to see what judgment awaits them unless they turn to you.

Be with us as we go through the rest of the week and bring us back safely on Sunday. In Jesus name we pray. Amen. Amen.