

Text: Habakkuk 2:5-20

Title: Woe to Babylon

Truth: God promises judgment to the wicked oppressors.

Date/Location: Wednesday June 3, 2020 at FBC

Introduction

The text can be outlined on the basis of the word *woe* which occurs in 2:6, 9, 12, 15, and 19. These woes are directed at the aggressor in the prophecy, who was the Chaldean people, also known as Babylonians.

1. First woe: Wealth taken away, 2:5-8

- A. The nation is drunken—certainly with power—but this is not a metaphor. Literally the people would be drunken with wine.
- B. Babylon is also proud (see 2:4) and it is insatiable in terms of desire for territory and spoils and slaves.
- C. Eventually, their prisoners will criticize them for stealing to take that which does not belong to them. These prisoners themselves will pronounce a “woe” upon the Chaldeans.
- D. His fortunes will turn suddenly. Roles will be reversed: the oppressor will become the oppressed, and the oppressed will become the oppressor.
- E. The *lex talionis* in action – the plunderers will be plundered. They had killed people and destroyed lands and cities, so the same would be done to them.

2. Second woe: What they build will itself cry for judgment, 2:9-11

- A. God Himself pronounces a “woe” on those who steal to build themselves up. They try to insulate themselves from disaster by working disaster upon other people. Their insulation was to build huge walls and fortress structures to protect themselves from the kind of thing they were doing to others!
- B. The Babylonians had plotted the ruin of many peoples. This was going to turn out as a shameful thing and result in them forfeiting their own lives. “Sinning against your soul” refers to the fact that they were self-destructing. When we sin, we also sin against ourselves, and others, and primarily against God. Ultimately our own sin and sinfulness leads to our demise. This was also the case for the Babylonians.

- C. The things that they build with stolen materials will cry out against them. It will be like they are surrounded all the time by witnesses of their destructive behavior. They won't be able to escape it.

3. Third woe: Fire will consume their labor, 2:12-14

- A. A third woe is pronounced on people who build a town upon the blood of slain captives and establish their city by iniquity. Obviously, the opposite would be blessed of the Lord—someone who founds a city for the benefit of the living and who bases its principles of operation upon righteousness.
- B. God has decreed—ultimately, not necessarily immediately—the people who live in such wickedness will end up with nothing. That is true generally, and especially of the Babylonians. What they build will amount to nothing more than firewood and their sweat equity will turn to nothing. They will find that they worked very hard to build a fire. This is not so for the righteous ones, whose work will remain through and after judgment.
- C. In all their work, they considered God was not in the picture. They worshipped themselves. But God will take over, and all that they built for themselves will be burned up. Instead of the world being filled with their construction projects and their glory (Daniel 4:30), it will be filled with God's glory and people who will acknowledge God. The metaphor of waters covering the sea emphasizes just how widespread the knowledge of God will be. The amount of water on the earth is staggering—and so will be the glory of the Lord.

See Ezekiel 38:20 about what will happen to “all people.” Refer also to Zech. 2:13, Isaiah 40:1-6, 66:23-24; Psalm 64:9 and previous verses are very instructive in terms of the contrast.

4. Fourth woe: Evil they do will come on themselves, 2:15-17

- A. Another woe, this one referring to a lewd act. Wicked people do the same kind of thing today. Drunkenness and sexual sin happen together.
- B. A woe is a pronouncement of impending judgment.
- C. God will return their indignities to others upon their own heads. God will be against them. Their glory (military domination, riches) will be turned to shame. The tables will be turned.

- D. This is a repeated idea throughout this section. There seems to be a decent amount of repetition in the passage, emphasizing that it will surely come to pass.
- E. They will be overwhelmed with God’s just judgment. It sure sounds like God has heard Habakkuk’s cry for justice in the land of Judah, and his concern about the wickedness of the instruments of God’s wrath.

5. Fifth woe: Uselessness of idols, 2:18-20

- A. Mocking a false god. There is no profit in an image for a maker to carve it. It teaches lies, but is mute. The maker of the idol trusts in it! This echoes other prophetic passages mocking the false deities of the nations. Their “gods” are dead, never alive.
- B. The “woe” this time is to the one who calls out to the dumb idol to wake up or come to life. It is overlaid with gold and silver—no wonder it cannot talk! It does not have the breath of life. Woe to idolaters.
- C. The true God, v. 20, is in his temple. He *can* speak (in fact He is speaking at the moment Habakkuk was receiving the word). As such, dwellers of the earth should keep silence before Him. They should listen while God speaks. This is unequivocal: do not interrupt God. He is the true God, not some measly idol.

Conclusion

God is saying that the instrument of his wrath against Judah, the nation of Babylon, will get its just desserts in due time. Yes, Habakkuk, they are wicked, and God’s eye is not favorable to them.

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