



**Sunday School Lesson Summary for July 15, 2007
Released on July 11, 2007**

“Habakkuk Announced the Doom of the Unrighteous”

Devotional Reading: Psalm 37:27-34.

Background Scripture: Habakkuk 2:1-20; 2 Kings 23:35-37.

Printed Text: Habakkuk 2:6-14.

Habakkuk 2:6-14

6 Shall not all these take up a parable against him, and a taunting proverb against him, and say, Woe to him that increaseth that which is not his! how long? and to him that ladeth himself with thick clay!

7 Shall they not rise up suddenly that shall bite thee, and awake that shall vex thee, and thou shalt be for booties unto them?

8 Because thou hast spoiled many nations, all the remnant of the people shall spoil thee; because of men’s blood, and for the violence of the land, of the city, and of all that dwell therein.

9 Woe to him that coveteth an evil covetousness to his house, that he may set his nest on high, that he may be delivered from the power of evil!

10 Thou hast consulted shame to thy house by cutting off many people, and hast sinned against thy soul.

11 For the stone shall cry out of the wall, and the beam out of the timber shall answer it.

12 Woe to him that buildeth a town with blood, and stablisheth a city by iniquity!

13 Behold, is it not of the Lord of hosts that the people shall labor in the very fire, and the people shall weary themselves for very vanity?

14 For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.

TODAY’S AIM

After participating in this lesson, each student will be able to:

1. Tell how God dealt with the unrighteous people of Judah.
2. Explain how the knowledge of the glory of the Lord is a valuable hope.
3. Express his or her eternal hope through one act of kindness in the coming week.

How to Say It

BABYLONIANS. Bab-ih-/ow-nee-unz.

CHALDEANS. Kal-dee-unz.

HABAKKUK. Huh-back-kuk.

Introduction

Habakkuk begins with the prophet asking God how long He was going to observe all the evil in Judah without doing anything about it (1:2-4). God's response was that He was already doing something. He was preparing the Chaldeans to punish Judah (vs. 5-11).

A second question immediately came to mind in verses 12-17: How could God use a wicked nation like that to punish a less wicked one?

The Lord then told Habakkuk that he should communicate the message to the people and by faith trust His workings (Hab. 2:2-4). God then pronounced a series of woes against the wicked people. Once Habakkuk saw what God was doing, he prayed and acknowledged God's sovereign control over His universe (chap. 3). The text this week includes some of the woes.

Lesson Background

There is no clear indication in the book of Habakkuk as to when that man of God wrote or exactly when he served as a prophet. Outside the Bible there is a tradition that Habakkuk was a priest and prophet from the tribe of Levi. This tradition places him in Judah during the later career of Jeremiah and the early days of Daniel. This was a time when the Babylonians had begun to dominate Judah but had not yet destroyed Jerusalem and the temple. That destruction took place in 586 B.C.

The message of Habakkuk fits very well into this period, approximately 600–590 B.C. We know that the ancient Jews held Habakkuk in high esteem. One of the most famous of the Dead Sea Scrolls is a commentary on the book of Habakkuk, dated two centuries before Christ.

The form of the book is unusual among the prophets and more like the book of Job. The first two chapters are a dialogue between the prophet and the Lord. Much like Job, Habakkuk challenges God with some primary issues: Why do the righteous people of the world suffer? Why does God wait to punish evil? And how could God use an ungodly people like the Babylonians to punish Israel, His chosen people? The third and final chapter is a poetic prayer of praise and faith.

WOE ABOUT STEALING- Habakkuk 2:6-8

1. Who were the woes pronounced against in this week's lesson text (Habakkuk 2:6)?

The first three of five woes are in this week's text. They were pronounced against Babylon, the nation of Chaldeans that was going to be used by God to punish Judah. God was also going to deal with Babylon, however, because it was a wicked nation upon which He had already determined destruction. The series of woes is introduced by the personification of an arrogant and greedy nation determined to enlarge its territorial holdings no matter what it might cost others (v. 5).

This was the beginning of God's answer to Habakkuk's question about how He could use such a wicked nation to punish Judah (Hab. 1:12-17). God's basic response was that once He had used Babylon to fulfill His purposes in punishing Judah, He would deal with

her because of her wickedness. Old Testament history reveals that Babylon did conquer Judah in 586 B.C. and continued to be dominant until 539 B.C.

This first woe is about Babylon taking what was not rightfully hers and includes the question, How long will this continue? The description is of a loan shark holding a large stack of pledges. The term "thick clay" (Hab. 2:6) refers to something pledged and indicates that this one is forcing others to pay him off for whatever he is holding over them. It is a form of stealing under the guise of business ventures. Babylon was mercilessly collecting wealth from other nations, which amounted to nothing less than sheer theft.

2. What would other nations do against Babylon one day (vs. 7,8)?

Habakkuk said of Babylon that those they had plundered would rise up and "bite" them. "The thought of this verse is that just as the Chaldeans had placed the 'bite' upon their victims and carried their wealth off to their own land, ultimately the victims would arise and put the 'bite' upon the Chaldeans and take all of the ill-gotten gain from them. The biters will become the bitten, the plunderers will become the plundered, and the victors will become the vanquished" (Falwell and Hindson, eds., *The Liberty Bible Commentary*, Nelson). God consistently causes justice to prevail eventually.

The plundering of the nations by the Chaldeans included not only being conquered by them but also being heavily taxed, which kept them from advancing and improving their lifestyles. The word "spoiled" (Hab. 2:8) means "plundered," that is, to have everything taken away.

The terrible greed of the Chaldeans might have resulted in temporary gain, but they were wicked in God's eyes and would not be allowed to continue much longer. It is true that God was going to use them to chasten His own people in Judah, but once He had fulfilled His purpose in doing that, He would render justice against the Chaldeans. We must be certain that greed does not motivate the way we treat others. When we trust God fully to meet our needs, we will not be driven to find gain at the expense of others.

WOE ABOUT COVETING- Habakkuk 2:9-11

3. What were the Chaldeans trying to accomplish in fortifying themselves at the expense of others (vs. 9,10)?

The second "woe" builds on the first one by emphasizing the Chaldeans' use of evil gain to fortify themselves in an attempt to become impregnable. This was a matter of enhancing or exaggeration of their own importance and power. The phrase "that he may set his nest on high" (Hab. 2:9) refers to having an elevated dwelling place that could not be reached by harm or destruction. Such a position would provide assurance that the city could not be harmed by "the power of evil," meaning the enemies.

Believers realize the importance of learning God's will and following it. When situations arise in which God's will is not easily determined, we seek counsel from other godly people. That might be a pastor, an older person, a teacher, or a spiritually mature friend. Habakkuk 2:10 says that the Chaldeans sought counsel only from themselves. Since their basis of understanding was completely ungodly, their resulting actions were ungodly. This led to their cutting off of many people of other nations, which was a sin against themselves.

It cannot be emphasized too much how important it is for believers not only to know God's will and ways but also to live by them. One of the hardest things for pastors to endure is seeing how many professing believers do not seem to have any earnest desire to live by the standards of God's Word. A lax attitude about obedience to God puts a person in a vulnerable position, for he becomes less and less concerned about pure and holy living. Many get into sin and wake up to the truth of this too late and have to live with the consequences.

4. What secrets (if that is the right term) need to be passed along to younger Christians about walking by faith versus trusting self to do it all?

The danger of trusting self can lead easily to the tendency to use inadequate or sinful means (cheating, violence, undue fear, etc.) to reach the desired results. The servant who buried his one talent is an example (Matthew 25:25).

In contrast, walking by faith means listening carefully to God's instructions and taking steps to follow those instructions. We may find this easier as we become familiar with the ways faithful individuals in the Bible struggled and succeeded in their walk with God. "But the just shall live by faith" (Hab. 2:4b). Many of us will also find it easier if we venture out one step at a time while experiencing God's providential care as new situations unfold. Keeping a journal of the faithfulness of God in our lives will provide reminders over time that God can be trusted in all things.

5. What did God say would cry out against the Chaldeans? Why (v. 11)?

So evil were the actions of the Chaldeans that inanimate objects were described as crying out against them. This is because that lavish home had been built with ill-gotten wealth. Mighty *stone* walls were paid for by cheating the innocent. Massive ceiling beams were financed from the proceeds of criminal activity.

These stones and beams represented all that was taken through greed and evil gain, and metaphorically speaking, it was as if they would cry out for vengeance against the ruthless conquerors who had no concern for those destroyed.

WOE ABOUT INIQUITY- Habakkuk 2:12-14

6. What did God say about how the Chaldeans used violence (v. 12)?

The third woe is a condemnation against the violent, wicked Chaldeans in power. A *city* built on crime and injustice cannot endure and will never be blessed by God.

To build a town "with blood" means that a lot of death was involved in the process. No doubt this refers to the deaths of those conquered.

We recognize that there is nothing wrong with building buildings or an entire city as long as the means of doing it are legitimate. What makes the means wrong is the desire to expand at the expense of others. The Chaldeans had resorted to violence in expanding. Greed and injustice will lead to more evil ways of getting what one wants.

The Apostle Paul wrote this word of advice to young Timothy: "And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows" (1 Tim. 6:8-10). The danger for us today is just as great as it was for the Chaldeans.

7. What is going to follow God's judgment on Israel's enemies (vs. 13, 14)?

No matter how much people might seem to get ahead by evil ways, God remains in control. What Habakkuk said was going to happen was going to be the result of the direct control of "the Lord of hosts."

All created agencies and forces are under God's control. So once God has determined a plan of action, it will hap-pen without interference. In this case God determined that everything the Chaldeans had accomplished was going to become fuel for a great fire. Jeremiah also wrote of this: "Thus saith the Lord of hosts; The broad walls of Babylon shall be utterly broken, and her high gates shall be burned with fire; and the people shall labour in vain, and the folk in the fire, and they shall be weary" per. 51:58).

There will come a day when all the enemies of Israel will have been dealt with by God, and Israel's Messiah will reign on earth. At that time the entire world will know about Israel's God. Isaiah says, "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea" (11:9).

These words are descriptive of the millennium that will follow the seven years of tribulation that will occur after Christ's return for His people.

Any nation that spends its time and effort exalting itself will find that it was in vain. What is important for any nation and for every individual living is finding a relationship with God through His Son, Jesus. Anything less than that will end in emptiness.

CONCLUSION

Our lesson this week has stressed two things in particular. First, we cannot get wealth through wrong means and expect it to last. Second, we are called to acknowledge that our God is indeed the one who should fill our lives with His glory.

Our challenge this week is to turn from whatever wrongs we have done and turn to our God and recognize that He should be given His rightful place in our lives.

Living by Faith

The life of faith means utter trust in God. It means that we serve Him diligently. And, yes, it means that we work hard and enjoy life. But at the end of the day we continue in hope without fear, for we know that God controls the future, and we rest secure in Him. This is what it means to live by faith.

Most of all, living by faith means that we trust in God for salvation. We do not fear judgment, for Jesus our Savior has prepared a place for us in Heaven (John 14:3). Martin Luther said that "the only saving faith is that which casts itself on God for life or death." May we have that faith!

PRAYER

God of Glory, may it be said of us as it was of King Hezekiah, "He trusted in the Lord." Forgive us when we doubt. Strengthen us when we believe. We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ, Your only Son, amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Live by faith, especially in the midst of evil (See Habakkuk 2:4b).

ANTICIPATING NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

In our lesson next week we learn from the Prophet Jeremiah about accountability. Study **Jeremiah 7:11–15; 2 Kings 23:36, 37.**

Lesson Summarized By

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