

## Lesson 8

# God Will Judge Judah & Babylon

## Introduction

In the previous chapter of Habakkuk, we witnessed Habakkuk's frustration with the silence of God after his expression of real concerns and worries. Habakkuk struggled to understand how God would raise up an evil nation to punish Judah for its transgressions. In the closing verses of chapter one, Habakkuk outlines his concerns concisely. Babylon was non-discriminate in who they conquered, 1:14. They were extremely brutal and arrogant (1:15), worshipped the power of their army (1:16), and were unrelenting in their actions to conquer everything in their path, 1:17. After posing his thoughts and feelings, Habakkuk patiently waits for the Lord's answer in 2:1: *I will stand on my guard post And station myself on the rampart; And I will keep watch to see what He will speak to me, And how I may reply when I am reproved.* In verse two, we find that the Lord answered Habakkuk and His answer was to be proclaimed to the people. He was to record the vision and make its message known on tablets. We also notice a sense of urgency in the message. The people needed to hear the message of God. Throughout the Old Testament, prophets are often seen as urgently spreading God's message to the people.

The vision Habakkuk saw was *for the appointed time*, 2:3. When is this "appointed time"? Does it refer to the destruction of the Babylonian Empire? While this would help Habakkuk grasp God's dealings with the immediate problem, some take the vision here and propose its application comes later with the coming of the Messiah. Some even take it out to the end of time. The best application is to put the vision in the context of Habakkuk's day. Of what help would this vision be to Habakkuk, struggling with the uncertainties of his day, if it were referring to something in the distant future? While there are things that may make the vision fit with later events, we cannot be certain of exactly how far in the future its contents would apply. Whenever the application, God says that the vision *hastens toward the goal and it will not fail. . . it will certainly come, it will not delay*, 2:3.

The Babylonians were a proud, arrogant people. As their power increased, so did their haughtiness. This is contrasted by a notable principle that will be built upon in the New Testament: *the righteous will live by his faith*, 2:4. Paul would use these words in Romans 1:17 and Galatians 3:11 in explaining the superiority of the Law of Christ. Pride and arrogance are the exact opposite of what God wants from His creation. The Chaldeans were given over to the pleasures of the flesh. They were constantly seeking to enlarge the borders of their kingdom, but were *never satisfied*, 2:5. The quest for power and earthly treasures can be insatiable. But there would come a day when the prideful empire would be subjected to a *taunt-song against [them]*, 2:6. In a few generations, those who had been oppressed by the Chaldeans would revolt against them and rejoice in the fall of the oppressor. Some have likened the words of Habakkuk in chapter two to a funeral lament where God's people are standing over those who have been justly repaid for the evil they have committed.<sup>1</sup>

As God continues to lay out the vision to Habakkuk, we are told that the Chaldeans would be judged for *looting many nations*, shedding human blood, and committing violence. While they took great security in

their fortresses, they had gained their position of power by committing evil, 2:9-10. To this, God says: *So you are sinning against yourself*, 2:10. The great treachery of the Chaldeans would lead to the eventual downfall of their cities and fortifications, wall by wall and brick by brick. Their towns were founded on violence, 2:12. All their work and toil would ultimately profit them nothing, 2:13. Hailey points out that this prophecy parallels Jeremiah 51. What God foretold did come to pass and this proves the power, glory, and authority of the Lord, 2:14.

The next *woe* pronounced on the Chaldeans is found in verses fifteen through eighteen. They took every opportunity to take advantage of their enemies to increase their “take” of national assets. Because of this, God says they will one day be filled with disgrace. The tables will be completely turned. The time would come when they (the Chaldeans) would be repaid for the violence done to the nations it conquered. Even their idols would be unable to save them! See 2:17-18. The idol was of little benefit to them. They would only realize this too late. Their idols were only fancy pieces of wood overlaid with silver and gold. *And there is no breath at all inside it*, 2:19. This is contrasted to the Lord who is in His holy temple, 2:20. God is above all. Everyone and everything is subject to Him. In response to His majesty, *Let all the earth be silent before Him*, 2:20

## Habakkuk's prayer

Through God's revelation, Habakkuk became more aware of God's workings in this world. Such knowledge made him move with fear. This prayer is set forth in a psalm. *According to Shigionoth* is a word that “appears to designate a song that was to be sung with great emotion. It was designed to be sung in the temple by the Levitical singers.”<sup>2</sup> Hailey explains, “The word describes the poem as having been composed under strong emotional pressure. The report makes the prophet tremble, but his fear draws him closer to His God.”<sup>3</sup>

In his prayer, Habakkuk sees the coming of God. He is filled with great hope. Habakkuk sees God coming from Teman and Mount Paran. Teman was in Edom and Mount Paran was in the desert to the south of Judah. Habakkuk is recounting the route God took in bringing His people up from Egypt to the Promised Land. This time God is coming from that direction to bring justice and retribution upon His people who had been greatly oppressed. In the next few phrases, Habakkuk uses human expressions to describe the radiance of God. Habakkuk 3:3b-4 says: *His splendor covers the heavens, And the earth is full of His praise. His radiance is like the sunlight; He has rays flashing from His hand, And there is the hiding of His power.*

Note how Habakkuk describes God's power in the following verses:

- The perpetual mountains were shattered, the ancient hills collapsed, 3:6.
- The nations of Cushan and Midian trembled in the presence of God as they suffered the fruit of their transgressions: the judgment of God. These once powerful nations were impotent in their resistance against God. The mighty and proud Chaldeans would experience the same fate, 3:7.
- God has the power to use great rivers and seas as tools of His judgment against the wicked, 3:8.
- God would use all the weapons in His arsenal to come to the aid of His oppressed people and bring judgment against those who worked evil, 3:9.

- The creation recognizes the power of God, 3:9-11.
- God's purpose in this judgment is to execute justice on those who practice evil, 3:12. The indignation mentioned here is righteous indignation, not irrational anger. God has no joy in punishing the wicked.

Verses thirteen through fifteen state the purpose behind God's actions. It was *For the salvation of [the] people, for the salvation of [the] anointed*. Even though the enemies might have a short time to rejoice and feel good about their conquests, their death and destruction would be complete.

As Habakkuk heard what was going to happen to his people, he trembled. A time would come when the Chaldeans would conquer his land. There were times of great adversity ahead. There would be some time elapse between the time he received the revelation and the actual invasion of the enemy, 3:16. After reading this verse, we might identify with similar times in our own lives where we know adverse times are coming and we must mentally prepare for it. Times were coming when everything that sustained physical life would be scarce, 3:17. Come what may, Habakkuk would trust in the Lord, 3:18-19. He could now approach this unpleasant situation with full faith, hope, and trust that after God dealt out justice on Judah, that they would be delivered from their oppressors.

Habakkuk trusted in the ultimate victory that comes through trust in God. I especially like Smith's statement on this verse: "the revelation of ultimate victory enables believers to live triumphant lives. Habakkuk's personal faith in God and his firm commitment to remain faithful to him are the best illustrations of what was meant in 2:4, 'the righteous shall live by his faith.' He would keep on trusting in God despite any calamity which might befall him and his country."<sup>4</sup>

## For Discussion

1. After Habakkuk expresses his concerns to God in chapter one, what does he do? (2:1) Are there any modern applications?
2. Is there any urgency with God's message today? What can help us develop a sense of urgency in getting the word of God to the lost?
3. What time do you believe "the appointed time" is referring to in 2:3?
4. Would what is contained in God's vision fail? (2:3)

5. What would those who had been oppressed by the Chaldeans rise to do? (2:6)
  
6. How does Habakkuk describe the futility in trusting in idols? (2:18-19)
  
7. Do you see a great contrast between 2:18-19 and 2:20? How?
  
8. What did *Shigionoth* designate? (3:1)
  
9. What was God coming to do?
  
10. How does Habakkuk describe the glory of God? (3:3b-4)
  
11. How does Habakkuk describe the power of God? (3:6-12)
  
12. What was God's purpose in destroying His enemies? (3:13)
  
13. As Habakkuk contemplated the coming destruction of his homeland, what was his reaction?

14. What can we learn from Habakkuk's great faith?

(Endnotes)

- 1 Smith, James E. *The Minor Prophets*. p. 453
- 2 Smith, James E. *The Minor Prophets*. p. 460
- 3 Hailey, Homer, E. *A Commentary on the Minor Prophets* (Louisville, KY: Religious Supply, 1993), p. 289
- 4 Smith, James E. *The Minor Prophets*. p. 468