

## The Justification for Judgment – Habakkuk 2:6-14

**Main Idea:** God pronounces woe over every counterfeit the human heart trusts in place of him, because the earth he made will be filled with the knowledge of his glory, and he will not share that glory.

### **I. The Counterfeits | Habakkuk 2:6-13**

After Habakkuk took his position at the watchpost, God answered him with a vision and a promise that the righteous shall live by his faith. But God also gives him the content of that vision. God's response comes as a song of five woes against Babylon by the very nations they conquered, and verses 6 through 13 are the first three of them. The Hebrew word for "woe" is usually used to describe a funeral cry, the wail a mourner lets out at a graveside, and it is the same word Jesus repeats seven times over the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23. When God pronounces woe he is mourning the sin and announcing the judgment at the same time. This is God expressing a verdict that fits the crime, and each of the three woes names a sin and reveals the consequence associated with it.

The first woe addresses greed. The image in verses 6 through 8 is of a man standing on top of a mountain of stolen goods. Scripture doesn't condemn wealth, it calls the love of money as evil (1 Timothy 6:10). The issue is not how much money, but how and why you ended up with it. Babylon heaped up what was not its own, and underneath that is a discontentment with what God had given. This sin goes all the way back to the original sin. The serpent told Eve in Genesis 3 that God was holding out on her, that there was something God did not let her have, and she believed him and took of the fruit. **Part of the first sin in human history was taking what God had not given because the heart had decided what God had given was not enough.** Babylon was doing the same thing on a national scale, and people today still do it on a personal scale because they cannot believe what God has given is sufficient. Greed shows up in many different forms, but the root is always the same. The punishment God issues for all of the woes lines up with the sins committed. This isn't karma, this is God's justice and the consequences of sowing to worldly behaviors (Galatians 6:7-8).

The second woe in verses 9 through 11 shows the man who has gathered his plunder now using it to construct a fortress. He sets his nest on high, trying to place himself beyond the reach of harm. If greed grew out of discontentment, false security grows out of pride, and pride is the second lie the serpent told in Eden. **Eve was tempted to believe not only that God had not given her enough, but also that He had not made her enough.** Once someone has secured what is not their own, they tend to believe they are untouchable and free from consequences. But verse 10 says the very act of building the fortress is what led to the loss of life. The fortress turned out to be the very thing that led to the fall of the Babylonians. **Any person who attempts to save their life by their own hands will end up finding it lost (Matthew 16:24-25).** Ultimately, the person trying to secure themselves is using the gifts given by God to avoid God himself. They believe, in their pride, that they have secured life apart from the giver of life.

The third woe in verses 12 and 13 follows the same pattern. Greed gathers. Pride builds. Violence defends. The man who has piled up what is not his own and secured it must now keep it safe, so he builds his city on bloodshed and iniquity. And underneath the violence habitual sin is the third root, the love of self. Scripture is clear that we are to consider others more important than ourselves (Philippians 2:3-4) and that those who love themselves love their sin (John 3:19-20). **Sinful self-love is actually a form of self-hatred. When we place ourselves on God's throne, we are doing what is in our worst interest. This type of self-love hurts, destroys, kills, and leads to unhappiness and judgment.** Verse 13 then tells Habakkuk where all of this is heading. The peoples labor merely for fire, the nations weary themselves for nothing. Every empire built on bloodshed becomes kindling for the flame of God's judgment, and every life poured out in service of self apart from God is a striving after wind. Solomon already saw this in Ecclesiastes. Habakkuk announces that God himself has decreed it as judgement.

### **To Ponder:**

1. Why is it important for Christians to understand that sin originates in the heart and to recognize those underlying heart issues rather than seeing sin as merely a list of behaviors? How does this affect the way we share the Gospel with people?

2. How does this passage challenge the idea that people are basically good but occasionally make mistakes?
3. What are some ways Christians might try to secure their lives apart from trusting God and what area of your life most tempts you to seek control, security, or identity apart from God?

## II. The Glory | Habakkuk 2:14

After three woes announced over Babylon's sin, God declares, "For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." Verse 14 is the reason the woes are coming. **The judgments of verses 6 through 13 are not God lashing out in anger but God clearing the ground, because His glory is coming and God will not share his glory with man's wickedness.** The earth and everything in it was made for God's glory (Isaiah 43:1-7; Colossians 1:16), and every counterfeit trust is attempting to occupy space that belongs to His glory.

The image God gives Habakkuk to make the point is amazing. The waters cover the sea. There is no corner of the sea where the water has not reached. The water does not cover most of the sea or the important parts of the sea. The water covers the sea entirely. That is the picture of how the knowledge of God's glory will fill the earth. Every corner, every culture, every heart. **There will be no human soul, in heaven or in hell, that does not know exactly who he is (Isaiah 45:23).** This same promise echoes through the Old Testament in Numbers 14:21 and almost word for word in Isaiah 11:9, and the consistency of the promise tells us this is where history is going, and no amount of human effort can prevent it. Believers can rest in the promise of God's glory because they know God's coming glory is rest for them.

Verse 14 can be viewed as an already-not yet passage. Babylon's fall to the Persians in 539 B.C. was a real and historical preview of verse 14. The nations who watched it happen knew that the God of Israel had brought the great city to dust. That corner of the earth was filled, in that moment, with the knowledge of his glory. But the whole earth has not yet been filled, and that brings us to the not yet. The final, world-filling display of God's glory is still on its way. **There will not be one glory for the saved and a different glory for the lost. The same God who is the joy of the believer will be the terror of the unbeliever.** Paul says it clearly in 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10 how God's glory will come in Christ's return, where the very revealing of the Lord Jesus is the punishment of those who do not know God and at the same time the day he comes to be marveled at among all who have believed. One coming, one glory, two responses. The only thing that will matter on that day is whether you knew him, whether you trusted Christ in repentance and faith, or whether you held on to your counterfeits to the end. **If every person will come face to face with God's glory, then believers should have an urgency to reach the lost with the Gospel in the hopes that many more might welcome God's coming glory rather than reject it.**

### To Ponder:

4. The promise of God's glory filling the earth will be fulfilled in Christ's second coming. How and why has the Church lost the anticipation of that second coming and what are the effects of that loss?
5. Why do you believe so many western Christians struggle with evangelism? How can you practically take steps to engage in evangelism more naturally?
6. Paul says in 2 Thessalonians 1 that the same coming of Christ will be the joy of those who believed and the terror of those who did not. If every person will one day stand before the glory of Christ, how should that determine our priorities, conversations, and life choices now?