

Consequences for Injustice

Habakkuk 2:6-14

SS Lesson for 03/15/2020

Devotional Scripture: Ps 130:1-8

OUTLINE

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Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Key Verse: Hab 2:12

Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

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Never take advantage through dishonest gain (Titus 1:10-11)

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Disaster to the home through the punishment of lack of prospering (Jer 22:30)

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Lesson Background and Key Verse

Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

The destruction of all that Judah had amassed took several years to accomplish. However, when God had finished with His discipline of the people, the old Judah was just as surely gone. Today's lesson is taken once again from the writings of the prophet Habakkuk. Habakkuk 2 begins with Habakkuk's description of himself standing watch on a tower to wait for the Lord's response to his objections (Habakkuk 2:1). The Lord tells Habakkuk to record on tablets the "vision" he is about to receive so that a messenger can deliver it (2:2). Though the prophecy could be read and understood easily, it was ambiguous regarding its timing. But when the time came, events unfolded quickly (2:3). The Lord also described the lawless, arrogant attitude and lifestyle of the typical Chaldean leader (Habakkuk 2:4, 5). In this way, God emphasized that He was not unaware of their faults; nevertheless, He had work for them to do.

Key Verse: Hab 2:12

Woe to him who builds a town with bloodshed, Who establishes a city by iniquity

Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

The prophet's dilemma deepened. Why should God use an ungodly nation such as Babylon as the instrument of judgment on His own people Judah? Habakkuk had boldly lodged his contentions and now he waited for God's reply. Surely some logical explanation would be given.

2:1. Like a sentinel standing in a watchtower to detect the first signs of an approaching enemy, Habakkuk stationed himself **on the ramparts... to see what God would say to him**. He had made his complaint and now he resolved to position himself so he might obtain the earliest and clearest information and then, like a watchman, inform his waiting brethren. It is likely that the **watch** (*mišmeret*, "observation station") and the ramparts (*māšôr*, "watchtower or fortress") refer to the prophet's attitude of expectation rather than his physical location. This vivid imagery was common in Habakkuk's society (2 Sam. 18:24; Isa. 21:6). The prophet or seer, like a lookout, waited to *see* more than *hear* what God would say. The prophet was also concerned about what He would reply **to this complaint**. Probably Habakkuk referred to his own complaint lodged in his dialogue with God (Hab. 1:2-4, 12-17). Some translators, however, say that the "complaint" (*tôkahat*, "correction, rebuke, or argument") was *against* the prophet rather than *by* the prophet. Thus they render the phrase, "what to answer when I am rebuked" (NIV marg.). Whether or not Habakkuk anticipated reproof in God's response one thing is certain: the prophet anxiously anticipated God's answer. True to his profession, Habakkuk was a spokesman for God's revelation. He waited for God's message, not simply for his own satisfaction. He was ready to carry God's message to his people. Habakkuk waited; God spoke.

2:2. God does not mumble. He speaks with clarity and forthrightness. He told Habakkuk, **Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets**. The revelation (lit., "vision") was to be recorded on tablets of baked clay so God's Word would be preserved and, even more important, publicized—**so that a herald could run with it**. This phrase has been mistaken by some to signify that the messenger should be able to read the tablet on the run. On the contrary, the point is that the messenger would read it and then run to spread the news to others.

2:3. Every prophetic revelation demands a certain degree of patience. One must **wait for** its fulfillment. God's words to Habakkuk were reassuring: **the revelation awaits an appointed time**. The prophecy pointed toward a future goal (lit., "it pants toward the end," like a runner toward the finish line). Reference to **the end** seems to signify not only the coming destruction of evil Babylonia but the broader fulfillment of the messianic judgment in the fall of "Babylon the Great" at the close of the Tribulation (Rev. 17-18). One thing is certain: God's revelation **will not prove false**. **Though** the fulfillment seems delayed, **it will... come** to pass in accord with His perfect plan. For those in Judah about to experience the awesome Babylonian invasion and Captivity, this assurance of fulfillment should have been a great comfort. Their barbaric captors would themselves in God's due time suffer divine judgment! The writer of Hebrews referred to this verse in his appeal for persecuted believers to persevere (Heb. 10:37). In his quote, he stressed the messianic significance of this passage in Habakkuk. The day is coming when the King of kings will reign on earth with perfect justice.

2:4. As an introduction to the woeful taunt-songs Habakkuk was instructed to record, God gave His summary condemnation of the conceited character of the Babylonian: **He is puffed up**. Like a bloated toad,

these arrogant people hopped along toward destruction. They were swollen (the Heb. verb *ʿāpal* is used only here in the OT) with evil passions. Their **desires** were **not upright**. Yahweh then declared that a **righteous** person, by stark contrast, **will live by his faith** (*ʿemūnāh*, “steadfastness or faithfulness”). A righteous Israelite who remained loyal to God’s moral precepts and was humble before the Lord enjoyed God’s abundant life. To “live” meant to experience God’s blessing by enjoying a life of security, protection, and fullness. Conversely, an apparently victorious but proud and perverse Babylonian would die. Faithfulness (NIV marg.) and faith are related. One who trusts in the Lord is one who relies on Him and is faithful to Him. The key clause “the righteous will live by his faith” sparkles like a diamond in a pile of soot. In the midst of God’s unrelenting condemnations of Babylon stands a bright revelation of God’s favor that is quoted three times in the New Testament (Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38). In those passages the words “will live” have a broader meaning than in Habakkuk. In the New Testament they mean to enjoy salvation and eternal life. In contrast with the self-reliant, boastful ways of the unrighteous, the righteous are found to be reliant on God and faithful to Him.

2:5. The general description of the Babylonians’ wickedness is made more specific. They were betrayed by **wine**. (They also used wine to betray others, v. 15.) The Babylonians were said to be very addicted to wine. For example, Babylon was conquered while Belshazzar and his leaders were feasting at a riotous banquet (Dan. 5). The treachery of wine is described in Proverbs 23:31-32. It looks so inviting in the glass but “in the end it bites like a snake and poisons like a viper.” As God continued His condemnation, He said the typical Babylonian **is arrogant** (*yāhr*, “haughty,” occurs only here and in Prov. 21:24) **and never at rest**. These proud, restless people were **as greedy as the grave**. Just as **death** and the grave are not **satisfied** till all come into their grasp, so the Babylonians sought to take **captive all the peoples** (cf. Hab. 1:17). Like some hideous monster, the grave devours the nations. Likewise, Babylon opened wide her insatiable jaws to devour all peoples. But this evil nation would not continue unpunished. God’s judgment would fall! The destruction of Babylon intimated in God’s comments to Habakkuk was announced in fuller detail in a song of woe in five stanzas of three verses each (“woe” occurs in vv. 6, 9, 12, 15, 19). All those nations conquered and plundered by the Babylonians would in due time witness the fall of their conqueror and join in a song of derision and denunciation. Habakkuk recorded a satirical outburst or taunt-song. The NIV’s rendering, “Will not all of them taunt him?” (v. 6a) is literally, “Will not all of them take up against him a taunt-song?” The song (*māšāl*) is any form of poetical composition in which parallelism is the principle of construction. It may denote a parable, proverb, ode, or a dirge such as the doleful lamentation recorded here. Five woes follow.

2:6. Woe is an interjection of distress pronounced in the face of disaster or in view of coming judgment (e.g., Isa. 3:11; 5:11; 10:5) because of certain sins. “Woe” was used frequently by the prophets (22 times by Isaiah, 10 times in Jer. and Lam., 7 times by Ezekiel, and 14 times in the Minor Prophets). The first woe compares the Babylonians to an unscrupulous pawnbroker who lends on extortionate terms. As spoil for their own gain they had been merciless in heaping up the wealth of the nations. It was, of course, sheer theft. The valuables taken were not the property of the invaders. **How long must this go on?** How long would these evil aggressors be permitted to retain their ill-gained plunder? (Cf. Habakkuk’s “How long?” about Judah’s violence, Hab. 1:2.)

2:7. The question in verse 6 was answered by two other questions. **Will not your debtors suddenly arise?** The victimized nations would suddenly arise in revolt. The debtors (lit., “biters”) would unexpectedly strike back. They would not only get their bite of the stolen goods but also give their aggressors a good shakedown. **Will they not wake up and make you tremble?** That shake would not be a handshake. With hurricane force the evil creditor would be shaken as a violent wind shakes the leaves and branches off a tree. Babylon would **become their victim**, the victim of the very nations she had victimized. Babylon who had attacked (cf. 1:6, 8-10) and extorted (1:6, 16) would now herself be attacked and extorted.

2:8. The spoiler would be spoiled, for the **plundered** would suddenly rise to **plunder**. The **nations** subdued by Babylon but not destroyed, **the peoples who are left**, would lead the encounter. The boomerang would spin back. Babylon’s intimidation and inhumanity would recoil on their own heads. They would reap what they had sown (Prov. 22:8; Gal. 6:7). They had ruthlessly **shed man’s blood** and had recklessly ravaged (cf. Hab. 1:17; 2:17) both **lands and cities** (lit., “land and city,” in the collective sense). “Blood” is literally “bloods.” “Bloodshed” in verse 12 and “blood” in verse 17 are also “bloods” (pl.). Now Babylon would suffer the penalty for her crimes (cf. 1:12).

2:9. Not only were the Babylonians guilty of **unjust gain** (vv. 6-8), but they also used that plunder for self-aggrandizement. They sought their own exaltation. Like an eagle setting **his nest** inaccessible to all predators by building it **high** on a mountainside, the Babylonians sought to make their empire free from

harm (**to escape the clutches of ruin**). From the low-lying valley of their homeland, these conquerors used their illegal gain to build a towering world empire.

2:10. To elevate themselves, the Babylonians trampled others down. Their building plans included **the ruin** (lit., “cutting off”) **of many peoples** (cf. “nations” in 1:17; “nations” and “peoples” in 2:5; and “many nations” in v. 8). But their plan to destroy others in order to make themselves secure failed. A **house** built of tortured bodies and stark skeletons is not too habitable. In the fray to erect a monument, they constructed their own shameful (cf. “shame” in v. 16) mausoleum. Death became their due.

2:11. Intriguing witnesses in the trial that would yield the eventual death sentence were **the stones of the wall... and the beams of the woodwork**. Even if every single enemy were exterminated, the very stones and lumber would testify against the rapacious and cruel hands of the Babylonians that had fashioned these building materials to show off their empire’s strength and glory. The stones and timber with which the houses and palaces were built had been obtained through plunder and injustice. The exalted nest (v. 9) would be knocked from its lofty perch and the lavish palace would seal the deaths of its builders. The proud, intemperate building plans only served as evidence of God’s forthcoming judgment on wicked Babylon.

2:12. The plunder mentioned in the first woe (vv. 6-8) and the pride exposed in the second woe (vv. 9-11) were both fed by the sin-sick perversity revealed in the third woe (vv. 12-14). It is as though the stones and timbers of Babylon’s vast building projects took up the song here. **Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed and establishes a town by crime!** The cities of the Babylonian Empire were built by the blood and sweat of enslaved peoples. Murder, bloodshed, oppression, and tyranny were the tools employed in this building project. (The word trans. “bloodshed” is the pl. of the Heb. noun “blood” and always signifies the guilt of murder; cf. the Heb. “bloods” in vv. 8, 17.)

2:13. In each of the previous stanzas of this dirge, the sins introduced by the woe exclaimed in the first verse of each stanza were further exposed in the two verses that followed. Here, however, attention is diverted to **the LORD Almighty** and His penetrating assessment of the sordid scene. It is a welcome break in the midst of the five distressing stanzas. The Lord Almighty, the Sovereign of the universe, declared that their ambitious work had been done in vain: **the people’s labor is only fuel for the fire** (cf. Jer. 51:58). Their carefully hewn stones would serve as the altar and their ornately carved wood as kindling for the giant sacrificial fire that would leave Babylon in ashes. Habakkuk added **that the nations exhaust themselves for nothing**. All their work—the labor of Babylon or any nation like it—is a waste if it is wrought with bloodshed and crime.

2:14. By contrast, **the entire earth will one day be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea**. The wearisome toil of a whole generation of boasting Babylonians provided a little fire and ended up as a heap of ashes in one corner of the earth. But God’s everlasting glory will fill the entire earth! This verse is based on the declaration in Isaiah 11:9 with only minor alterations. (The earth filled with God’s glory is also spoken of in Num. 14:21; Ps. 72:19; and Isa. 6:3.) Isaiah closed his description of the messianic kingdom (Isa. 11:1-9) by stating that the earth would be full of the knowledge of *the Lord*. Habakkuk stated that the earth would be filled with the knowledge of *His glory*. Isaiah dealt with the essence of the kingdom, Habakkuk with the establishment of the kingdom. Isaiah presented the fact, Habakkuk the act. God will overthrow and judge future Babylon (Rev. 17-18) and all ungodly powers (Rev. 19:19) represented by Babylon. The Lord’s glory (Matt. 24:30) and majesty (2 Thes. 1:9) will be made evident in the Millennium and thereby acknowledged throughout the earth. When the Messiah rules in His kingdom, knowledge of the Lord will be worldwide. Everyone will know of Him (cf. Jer. 31:34). So extensive and abundant will be that knowledge that it will be like water covering the sea. The jagged rocks of injustice and the slimy seaweed of sin will be covered with the smooth surface of God’s righteousness.

2:15. The fourth woe turns back to the sordid scene of the Babylonians’ barbaric actions. The focus here is on the inhumanity and the indignity of the conqueror to his subjects. He is pictured as a drunkard giving **his neighbors** wine to intoxicate them so that he may indulge in some evil wantonness and expose his victims to shame. So the Babylonians added lust to their violence and drunkenness. Such action is severely condemned by God (Gen. 9:21-25). An alternate rendering of the phrase **pouring it from the wineskin** is “joining (to it) your wrath.” In other words the Babylonians poured out more than wine. With the wine they mixed “wrath,” a word related to “heat,” signifying any violent passion. This was indeed a “mixed drink.” Hate and passion were poured out together. The nations that were enticed, or more often forced, to partake of the Babylonians’ poisonous mix fell like drunks and lay prostrate in shame and subjugation.

2:16. Those who gloated over the shame of their drunken victims would someday **be filled with shame** (cf. “shaming” in v. 10). Their glory was their shame. This perverted “glory” of the Babylonians contrasted sharply with God’s preeminent glory (v. 14). Far from glory, the Babylonians reveled in shame and soon they would **drink**, fall down intoxicated, **and be exposed** as one who is “uncircumcised” (literal Heb.). To be uncircumcised was, to the Jews, to be scorned. The Babylonians had caused others to drink and be shamefully exposed (v. 15); later the tables would be turned (cf. v. 7) and *they* would be drunk and naked. **The cup** that they must drink was **from the LORD’s right hand**, a figure of divine retribution (cf. Isa. 51:17-23; Jer. 25:15-17; Lam. 4:21). On drinking God’s judgment, Babylon would be covered with **disgrace**. “Shame” in the first line of Habakkuk 2:16 and “disgrace” in the last line translate similar Hebrew words, but the second of these is in an emphatic form in Hebrew (used only here in the OT). It signifies extreme contempt. The once-glorious Babylon was pictured as a disgraceful, contemptible drunk.

2:17. The reason for Babylon’s abject shame was her **violence** (cf. 1:9) **done to Lebanon**. Lebanon, a nation north of Israel, was known for its abundance of cedar trees and wild **animals**. It had suffered the ruthless removal of timber for Babylonian buildings and the destructive slaughter of beasts that lived in the forests. The violence done to the forests would weigh on Babylon and its senseless hunting and killing of the fauna would **terrify** it. The worst charge, however, was that of human bloodshed, already leveled against the Babylonians twice (2:8, 12). They had not only wrecked the forests and ravaged the hillsides, but had also ruined **lands and cities** (cf. v. 8) **and everyone in them**. The indignities on God’s creation and His creatures would bring Babylon from apparent world glory to everlasting shame. God’s great judgment would **overwhelm** her.

2:18. The final stanza does not open with the hollow and ominous “Woe!” (That comes in v. 19.) Rather it begins with the penetrating question, **Of what value is an idol?** The answer is obvious. An idol (lit., “graven image,” i.e., an idol carved out of wood or hewn from stone) and **an image** (lit., “molten image,” i.e., an idol made by melting metal and casting it into a shape of a false god) were of no benefit. Whatever form or seeming beauty those objects may have had, they were still only blocks of wood or masses of metal. To trust in such an idol was to trust in an object **that teaches lies**, for people were deceived and deluded by it, thinking it could help them. But **idols** and images were lifeless. Since they were the worshipers’ own creations, idols could not aid them (cf. v. 19). **Carved** or cast, they were dumb objects. The oracles attributed to them were obvious lies, for idols **cannot speak**.

2:19. God expressed His condemnation of the insidious sin of idolatry. **Woe to him who says to wood, Come to life! Or to lifeless stone, Wake up!** How absurd it is to stand before a piece of wood or some cold stone and cry out, “Arise! Awake!” The scene is like the prophets of Baal when they were taunted by Elijah (1 Kings 18:26-29). No help or **guidance** comes from a lifeless object even if it is encased in **gold and silver** (cf. Isa. 40:19). It has **no breath** or spirit and therefore no life (cf. Gen. 2:7). Isaiah frequently taunted the Babylonians for their trust in numerous false gods, which were nothing but man-made idols (Isa. 41:7; 44:9-20; 45:16, 20; 46:1-2, 6-7; cf. Jer. 10:8-16). Idols are valueless for they cannot talk, come alive, guide, or breathe. And idolatry—worshipping man’s carvings rather than the Creator—stands condemned under God’s woe.

2:20. The last verse of this stanza is unique. In the other four “woe” stanzas each concluding verse starts in the Hebrew with “for” (*k*, vv. 8, 11, 14, 17). However, verse 20 opens with “but.” The contrast is marked and the climax is marvelous: **But the LORD is in His holy temple**. From dumb, man-carved idols, attention shifts to the living Lord, the self-existent, eternal (cf. 1:12; 3:6), holy (cf. 1:12; 3:3) Sovereign who rules the universe from His holy temple, that is, heaven (cf. Pss. 11:4; 18:6, 9; Micah 1:2-3). Instead of shouting, “Arise! Awake,” the whole **earth** must stand in **silent** awe and worship **before Him**. The Hebrew word *hāsāh*, rendered “be silent,” means “hush” (also used in Zeph. 1:7, “Be silent,” and Zech. 2:13, “Be still”). For Habakkuk, the message was clear. Stop complaining! Stop doubting! God is not indifferent to sin. He is not insensitive to suffering. The Lord is neither inactive nor impervious. He is in control. In His perfect time Yahweh will accomplish His divine purpose. Habakkuk was to stand in humble silence, a hushed expectancy of God’s intervention. The closing verse of this woeful dirge recorded by Habakkuk serves as a link to the song of worship that follows in Habakkuk 3.

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

(Note: Lesson outline and cross-references copied from previous lesson dated 07/15/2007)

Woe about Stealing (Hab 2:6-8)

6 "Will not all these take up a proverb against him, and a taunting riddle against him, and say, 'Woe to him who increases what is not his-- how long? And to him who loads himself with many pledges'?"

7 Will not your creditors rise up suddenly? Will they not awaken who oppress you? And you will become their booty.

8 Because you have plundered many nations, all the remnant of the people shall plunder you, because of men's blood and the violence of the land and the city, and of all who dwell in it.

Stealing through dishonesty (6)

Instead of stealing, work so there can be sharing (Eph 4:28)

28 He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.

Love versus being dishonest (Rom 13:8-10)

8 Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. 9 The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself." 10 Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

God hates dishonesty (Zech 8:16-17)

16 These are the things you are to do: Speak the truth to each other, and render true and sound judgment in your courts; 17 do not plot evil against your neighbor, and do not love to swear falsely. I hate all this," declares the Lord.

Never take advantage through dishonest gain (Titus 1:10-11)

10 For there are many rebellious people, mere talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision group. 11 They must be silenced, because they are ruining whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach — and that for the sake of dishonest gain.

Stealing that brings same measure of consequences (7-8)

Consequences that match the treatment we give to others (Luke 6:31)

31 Do to others as you would have them do to you.

Consequences that match the judgment we make of others (Matt 7:2)

2 For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

Consequences that bring matching condemnation (Rom 2:1)

2:1 You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things.

Consequences that come from stubbornness and an unrepentant heart (Rom 2:5)

5 But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed.

Woe about Coveting (Hab 2:9-11)

9 "Woe to him who covets evil gain for his house, that he may set his nest on high, that he may be delivered from the power of disaster!

10 You give shameful counsel to your house, cutting off many peoples, and sin against your soul.

11 For the stone will cry out from the wall, and the beam from the timbers will answer it.

Coveting evil gain (9)

Evil gain that may mean the forfeiting of our soul (Mark 8:36-37)

36 What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? 37 Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?

Evil gain through the teaching of false doctrine (1 Tim 6:3-5)

3 If anyone teaches false doctrines and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, 4 he is conceited and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions 5 and constant friction between men of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain .

Evil gain through dishonesty (Titus 1:11)

11 They must be silenced, because they are ruining whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach — and that for the sake of dishonest gain.

Evil gain through love of possessions and money (Matt 6:24)

24 "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money .

Evil gain that leads to the wandering from the faith (1 Tim 6:10)

10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money , have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

Coveting that brings disaster to the home (10-11)

Disaster to the home because of the sins of forefathers (Isa 14:21)

21 Prepare a place to slaughter his sons for the sins of their forefathers; they are not to rise to inherit the land and cover the earth with their cities.

Disaster to the home because of not listening to God (Jer 36:31)

31 I will punish him and his children and his attendants for their wickedness; I will bring on them and those living in Jerusalem and the people of Judah every disaster I pronounced against them, because they have not listened."

Disaster to the home through the punishment of lack of prospering (Jer 22:30)

30 This is what the Lord says: "Record this man as if childless, a man who will not prosper in his lifetime, for none of his offspring will prosper, none will sit on the throne of David or rule anymore in Judah."

Disaster to the home because of bringing trouble to our family (Prov 11:29)

29 He who brings trouble on his family will inherit only wind, and the fool will be servant to the wise.

Disaster to the home because of cutting off the family (Jer 44:7)

7 "Now this is what the Lord God Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Why bring such great disaster on yourselves by cutting off from Judah the men and women, the children and infants, and so leave yourselves without a remnant?

Watchtowers, Then and Now (from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary)

Watchtowers have played crucial roles in the history of defense and communication. Consider the Greek island of Chios (or Kios in Acts 20:15), in the eastern Aegean Sea. There a series of about 50 watchtowers, called viglas, were built around the perimeter of the entire island. From the top of each vigla, the watcher could see the next two viglas, one on each side. Any sighting of pirates or other enemies could be communicated quickly to the entire island (www.chiosonline.gr). The southern coast of Spain was also once a prime target for pirates. During the Middle Ages, the Moors built a system of watchtowers. These towers could communicate with each other using smoke signals and fires. When the Christians conquered the territory, they kept the tower system and even strengthened it. The system worked well and could transmit news over large distances in a relatively short period of time. Watchtowers helped the populace avoid nasty surprises. Habakkuk is not looking for an enemy attack while he is in his watchtower. Rather, he is alert for communication from the Lord. We would do well to make Habakkuk's choice our own. We can climb into our own, private watchtowers, meaning we make time for daily devotions when we're alone with God and his Word. This will make us more sensitive to his leading. This kind of a watchtower will give us the perspective to perceive his will more clearly. In a roundabout way, using our own watchtowers in this manner can keep us alert to attacks by Satan.

Woe about Iniquity (Hab 2:12-14)

12 "Woe to him who builds a town with bloodshed, who establishes a city by iniquity!

13 Behold, is it not of the LORD of hosts that the peoples labor to feed the fire, and nations weary themselves in vain?

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

Iniquity of violence (12)

Violence of the wicked (Ps 7:9)

9 O righteous God, who searches minds and hearts, bring to an end the violence of the wicked and make the righteous secure.

Violence that recoils (Ps 7:16)

16 The trouble he causes recoils on himself; his violence comes down on his own head.

Violence through refusing to do what is right (Prov 21:7)

7 The violence of the wicked will drag them away, for they refuse to do what is right.

Violence plotted in the heart (Prov 24:1-2)

Do not envy wicked men, do not desire their company; 2 for their hearts plot violence, and their lips talk about making trouble.

Iniquity that brings God's judgment (13-14)

God's judgment because of callous hearts (Ps 73:7)

7 From their callous hearts comes iniquity; the evil conceits of their minds know no limits.

God's judgment that brings punishment with rods (Ps 89:32)

32 I will punish their sin with the rod, their iniquity with flogging;

God's judgment because of rebellion (Ps 107:17)

17 Some became fools through their rebellious ways and suffered affliction because of their iniquities .

God's judgment of secret sins (Ps 90:8-9)

8 You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence. 9 All our days pass away under your wrath; we finish our years with a moan.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Commentary Thoughts from Bob Deffinbaugh

God Silences a Protesting Prophet (*Habakkuk 2:2-20*)

I want you to notice several things about Habakkuk chapter 2. *First*, it is God who speaks here (with the exception of verse 1). *Second*, note the way God ends His response:

But the Lord is in his majestic palace. The whole earth is speechless in his presence!" (*Habakkuk 2:20*)

No wonder Habakkuk ceases his protests and begins to praise God in chapter 3. *Third*, the reason for Habakkuk's change of heart must be found here, in chapter 2. *Fourth*, the chapter is dominated by five "woes" that God pronounces upon the wicked.

I can just see Habakkuk standing there at his post, hands on his hips, arrogantly waiting for God's retraction. God's first words to the prophet might be summed up: "Petition denied!" Listen to what God says to His impertinent prophet:

2 The Lord responded: "Write down this message! Record it legibly on tablets, so the one who announces it may read it easily. 3 For the message is a witness to what is decreed; it gives reliable testimony about how matters will turn out. Even if the message is not fulfilled right away, wait patiently; for it will certainly come to pass—it won't be late arriving (Habakkuk 2:2-3).

Had Habakkuk succeeded in changing God's mind about using the Babylonians to judge Judah? Not at all! God emphatically announced that His plans were moving ahead, in spite of the prophet's protests. In fact, one could almost paraphrase verse 2 in this way: "Write these words on a billboard, Habakkuk, so that anyone passing by might read them." The prophet was to proclaim the vision God had revealed. It was going to happen just as planned and prophesied. It was going to happen when God said it would. There was no turning back. The day of Judah's judgment was at hand. The instrument of Judah's judgment was already on standby.

Verses 4 and 5 of chapter 2 are the heart of the book, and the heart of the gospel:

4 "Behold, as for the proud one, His soul is not right within him; But the righteous will live by his faith. 5 "Furthermore, wine betrays the haughty man, So that he does not stay at home. He enlarges his appetite like Sheol, And he is like death, never satisfied. He also gathers to himself all nations And collects to himself all peoples" (NAU).

It was not God who needed to change His plans (as Habakkuk supposed), it was Habakkuk who was wrong and needed to change. According to verse 4, there are two kinds of people: (1) those who are proud, and whose souls are not right; and, (2) those who righteous, and who live by faith. When you boil it all down, it comes to this, doesn't it? Those whose souls are not right are those who are proud. They trust in themselves for salvation. They believe that their good works are sufficient to save them. They disdain grace as a form of charity, which they neither want nor need. Those who are saved have ceased to trust in themselves, in their goodness or good works. They trust in God; they know that He alone can save them from their sins. They humbly accept His provision for salvation, and they live their lives trusting Him and obeying His word. The "faith" in verse 4 also means "faithfulness." The righteous enter into salvation by faith, and they persevere by faith as well. Faith is the cause, and faithfulness is the result.

It looked to Habakkuk as though the Babylonian victory would be the end of all God's people and of His promises to them. The vision Habakkuk received was a promise that God would judge those who were proud and arrogant, and who were sinners. What Habakkuk should also have known is that God's promises to His people would be fulfilled. God would save a remnant of the righteous, as other prophets had indicated. Habakkuk had to believe this by faith, and he needed to endure the days ahead by walking in obedience to God's Word.

The principle of Habakkuk 2:4 is taken up in three places in the New Testament:

For the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel from faith to faith, just as it is written, "the righteous by faith will live" (Romans 1:17).

Now it is clear no one is justified before God by the law, because the righteous one will live by faith (Galatians 3:11).

37 For just a little longer and he who is coming will arrive and not delay. 38 But my righteous one will live by faith, and if he shrinks back, I take no pleasure in him. 39 But we are not among those who shrink back and thus perish, but are among those who have faith and preserve their souls (Hebrews 10:37-39).

In Romans and Galatians, Paul defends the gospel against those who wanted to add works to faith, as the basis for one's eternal salvation. Paul makes it very clear that one is saved from his sins by trusting in Jesus Christ, the sinless Son of God, who bore the sinner's punishment as He died on the cross of Calvary. It was He who also arose from the dead and ascended to the Father in heaven. Those who have died in Christ, are dead to their sins and its penalty. These have also risen to new life in Christ, empowered to serve God in the power of the Spirit (Romans 6).

The writer to the Hebrews is applying Habakkuk 2:4 in a way that is very similar to God's dealings with Habakkuk. Days of tribulation and trial were coming upon the Hebrew saints. Some were tempted to "bail out" by returning to Judaism. They were tempted to cast off the New Covenant and live once again under the Old. Like God (Habakkuk 2:2-3), the writer to the Hebrews assures his readers that days of tribulation are soon to come on them, but that these will serve to prepare the way for our Lord's return. Until He comes, they are to continue to "**walk by faith,**" just as they were saved by faith. The righteous are thus preserved ("saved") through the days of trouble as they persevere by faith.

There is another side to this coin, however. Those who do not "**live by faith**" are the proud, who will perish in the time of God's judgment. I have come to the conclusion that the wicked who do not live by faith, and who will perish, include both the unbelieving citizens of Judah and the unbelieving pagans, such as the Babylonians. Let me briefly attempt to illustrate this point, although we do not have the time to pursue it thoroughly.

(1) Jerusalem and Judah are proud and arrogant and will be humbled in judgment:

11 In that day you will no longer experience shame because of all your rebellious actions, for then I will remove from your midst those who proudly boast, and you will never again be arrogant on my holy hill.

12 I will leave in your midst a humble and meek group of people, and they will find safety in the Lord's presence (Zephaniah 3:11-12).

(2) The word for "net" that is found in Habakkuk 1:14-17 (when referring to the wickedness of the Chaldeans) is used in reference to the people of Judah in Micah 7:2. The same violence which Habakkuk abhors in the Babylonians is practiced by the people of Judah:

Faithful men have disappeared from the land; there are no godly men left. They all wait in ambush so they can shed blood; they hunt their own brother with a net (Micah 7:2).

(3) In Habakkuk 2:12 God condemns the Babylonians who "build a city with bloodshed." Now listen to these words from the prophet Micah, condemning God's people for building Jerusalem with bloodshed and violence:

You build Zion through bloody deeds, Jerusalem through violent deeds of injustice (Micah 3:10).

I believe that one can find indictments against Israel and Judah for every sin that God condemns in chapter 2 of Habakkuk. Does God emphatically announce that He will judge the Babylonians for their sins? He surely does. But we must realize that these woes apply to everyone who commits such sins, including His chosen people. The people of Judah are guilty of the very sins for which the Babylonians are condemned. God is giving Judah a "taste of her own medicine."

In verse 4, I see a divine indictment against all who are proud. This, in my opinion, includes Habakkuk. I have to conclude that Habakkuk had an arrogant posture toward God. This petulant prophet accuses God of failing to act as He should, within the time frame Habakkuk has determined. I therefore understand Habakkuk 2:4 as being addressed first to Habakkuk, and then to others. It is as though God had said to the prophet, "Habakkuk, I don't think I like the tone of your petitions. You have accused Me of failing to act when and how you think I should have. Your pride is as offensive to me as the pride of the pagan Babylonians. You need to be humble and to walk by faith. My ways are higher than your ways, so trust in Me."

The last words of chapter 2 serve as a powerful conclusion to God's proclamation to Habakkuk and others:

"But the LORD is in His holy temple. Let all the earth be silent before Him" (Habakkuk 2:20, NAU).

It is amazing how a grasp of God's majesty, high and lifted up, can change our perspective:

1 Then Job answered the Lord: 2 "I know that you can do all things; no purpose of yours can be thwarted; 3 you asked, 'Who is this who darkens counsel without knowledge?' But I have declared without understanding things too wonderful for me to know. 4 You said, 'Pay attention, and I will speak; I will question you, and you

will answer me.' 5 I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye has seen you. 6 Therefore I despise myself, and I repent in dust and ashes! (Job 42:1-5)

15 If I had publicized these thoughts, I would have betrayed your loyal followers. 16 When I tried to make sense of this, it was troubling to me. 17 Then I entered the precincts of God's temple, and understood the destiny of the wicked. 18 Surely you put them in slippery places; you bring them down to ruin. 19 How desolate they become in a mere moment! Terrifying judgments make their demise complete! 20 They are like a dream after one wakes up. O sovereign Master, when you awake you will despise them. 21 Yes, my spirit was bitter, and my insides felt sharp pain. 22 I was ignorant and lacked insight; I was as senseless as an animal before you. 23 But I am continually with you; you hold my right hand. 24 You guide me by your wise advice, and then you will lead me to a position of honor (Psalm 73:15-24).

1 In the year of King Uzziah's death, I saw the sovereign master seated on a high, elevated throne. The hem of his robe filled the temple. 2 Seraphs stood over him; each one had six wings. With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and they used the remaining two to fly. 3 They called out to one another, "The Lord who leads armies has absolute sovereign authority! His majestic splendor fills the entire earth!" 4 The sound of their voices shook the door frames, and the temple was filled with smoke. 5 I said, "Too bad for me! I am destroyed, for my lips are contaminated by sin, and I live among people whose lips are contaminated by sin. My eyes have seen the king, the Lord who leads armies" (Isaiah 6:1-5).

29 After twelve months, he happened to be walking around on top of the walls of the royal palace of Babylon. 30 The king uttered these words: "Is this not the great Babylon that I have built for a royal residence by my own mighty strength and for my majestic honor?" 31 While these words were still on the king's lips, a voice came down from heaven: "It is hereby announced to you, King Nebuchadnezzar, that your kingdom has been removed from you! 32 You will be driven from human society, and you will live with the wild animals. You will be fed grass like oxen, and seven times will pass by for you before you understand that the Most High is ruler over human kingdoms and gives them to whomever he wishes." 33 Now in that very moment this pronouncement came true with Nebuchadnezzar. He was driven from human society, he ate grass like oxen, and his body became damp with the dew of the sky, until his hair became long like an eagle's feathers, and his nails like a bird's claws. 34 But at the end of the appointed time I, Nebuchadnezzar, looked up toward heaven, and my sanity returned to me. I blessed the Most High, and I praised and glorified the one who lives forever. For his rule is an everlasting rule, and his kingdom extends from one generation to the next. 35 All the inhabitants of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he wishes with the army of heaven and with those who inhabit the earth. No one slaps his hand and says to him, 'What have you done?' 36 At that time my sanity returned to me. I was restored to the honor of my kingdom, and my splendor returned to me. My ministers and my magistrates were seeking me out, and I was reinstated over my kingdom. Tremendous greatness was restored to me, greater than before. 37 Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, for all his deeds are right and his ways are just. He is able to bring low those who live in pride" (Daniel 4:29-37).

(Adapted from URL:<https://bible.org/seriespage/41-just-shall-live-faith-habakkuk>)

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

What *Gone with the Wind* so dramatically portrayed about the 1864 burning of Atlanta is what Habakkuk said awaited the Chaldeans. All their possessions would be fuel for the fire (Habakkuk 2:13). This is in fact the future that awaits the entire world (again, 2 Peter 3:10). Today's lesson reminds us that the Lord will make certain that justice is carried out against evildoers. "Justice for all" is very easy to say and desire. But putting hands and feet to this desire is quite another matter. Cries for justice echo throughout every society. Acts of violence against individuals or groups are followed by demands that justice be served and those responsible for the violence be punished. Systems that methodically keep people in positions to be mistreated are protested because they perpetuate injustice—sometimes on a massive scale. The whole world longs for justice. Today's study from Habakkuk, along with the testimony of Scripture as a whole, assures us that God will right all wrongs committed by human beings. Sinners may escape the punishment required by human law, but they cannot dodge Heaven's law so cleverly.

Concluding Thoughts from the Echoes Commentary

No Overlooking Sin - God used Babylon, a cruel, ungodly nation, to bring judgment upon His people in Judah. However, God also had something in mind for the wickedness of Babylon. Habakkuk listed "woes" coming upon this population for their sin. It is an important reminder—God refuses to overlook sinful behavior. Being motivated and ambitious is an excellent characteristic to possess. However, if your drive leads to greed, selfishness, or abuse, that's not good. The Babylonians viciously took land and possessions that belonged to other countries and built their empire. The citizens of the captured countries suffered violence and murder. The survivors endured extreme ill-treatment and slavery. Habakkuk anxiously asked the Lord, how long before the Babylonians are punished? For a time, the Babylonians stood strong. All those watching this nation overthrow country after country started to wonder, are they unstoppable? But the Lord brought them to a halt. He raised the Medes and Persians to overpower the Babylonians. The arrogant Babylonians became the victims, reaping the consequences of their atrocious actions.

Woe to Those Who Exalt Themselves and Mistreat Others - The Babylonians pridefully thought they were invincible. They built their empire on the backs of slaves and exploited the people in the nations they conquered. God would not tolerate their injustices forever. Cities built by the hands of the oppressed will perish. Habakkuk reminded God's people there is a kingdom coming, not built by human hands but by God- Its foundation is righteousness, and it will never be destroyed. Those mistreating others like the Babylonians did need to pay attention. A nation or individuals can be on top, bragging about accomplishments, but God can instantly bring it all to an end. God will not be mocked. Whatever a man sows—a reaping time eventually comes.