

HABAKKUK: TEACHER'S NOTES

Title and name of author. [1:1]

"Burden" means heavy load and refers to Habakkuk's oracle or prophecy.

I. God's judgment upon Judah, the wicked people of God, through the Chaldeans [1:2 - 2:3]

A. First perplexity, and Jehovah's reply. (1:2-11)

1. The prophet's lamentation over the rule of wickedness and violence. (2-4)
* Perplexity: How can Jehovah justify His indifference in the presence of wickedness and violence? The prophet had been appealing to Jehovah for an undisclosed period of time. The wicked were in control of the nation; they had twisted and distorted the truth to attain that control. This had been at the expense of the righteous.
2. Jehovah's reply: He is not indifferent; He will raise up the Chaldeans to execute His judgment. (5-11)
 - a. Their rise is of Jehovah. (5,6) Jehovah controls the rise and fall of the nations. Wickedness may be tolerated to a point, but judgment is inevitable. Jehovah will use a wicked nation to bring judgment upon Judah's wickedness. His choice in this matter was the Chaldeans (Babylonians). In this current ascension to world domination, they were unstoppable. They had already defeated Nineveh and would eventually conquer Egypt.
 - b. Their character is of themselves. (7-11) In the world of Habakkuk the Chaldeans were known to be fierce, impetuous, dreaded, and feared. They copied Assyria in the policy of removal of captives to foreign lands to destroy their spirit of nationalism and revolt. The Chaldeans feared no government nor respected no man. Even though Jehovah raised up Babylon to its current status and used it as His instrument of punishment and judgment, they were nevertheless guilty, in the Lord's sight, of the sins committed. Just as God had used the Assyrians to discipline Israel, the Babylonians would chastise Judah.

B. Second perplexity, and Jehovah's reply. (1:12 - 2:3)

1. How can a holy God employ an impure and godless agent? (12-17)
 - a. The confident hope that God's people will not perish. (12)
Habakkuk recognizes that God is eternal and absolutely Holy; therefore the faithful remnant would not perish. They might be chastened, corrected and even carried away, but not destroyed.
 - b. The perplexity: God's use of so wicked a nation as Chaldea. (13-17) Habakkuk recognized Judah's wickedness and was in full harmony with the fact that this wickedness should be punished. But why use Babylon, when they were even more wicked than Judah? But were they? Remember, God does not think like man

thinks. The greater one's opportunity to know and do right, the greater his sin when he refuses both! Perhaps the prophet was referring to the unwarranted punishment of the just remnant. It is an invariable law of God that the just suffer along with the guilty. Judah would be as helpless as fish in the path of the fisherman's nets, when the Chaldeans came. From verse 15 we see that the Chaldeans are totally equipped fisherman, they lack nothing that would insure their success. They are so successful, that they worship and feed off their own power. When and how will the plunderer be stopped? God answers this question in chapter two.

2. Jehovah's reply: The judgment is sure, but not immediate. (2:1-3)
 - a. The prophet's decision: wait. (1) Habakkuk determines to look to Jehovah to reveal the answers he seeks and wait patiently for Jehovah's own time to make known the revelation.
 - b. The command: write plainly, for the promise is certain. (2,3) The prophet is commanded by God to write the answer on tablets, so that all might know God's will. The prophet encourages his listeners to wait for the answer and that the suffering remnant of true believers would survive the ordeal and the destroyer would be destroyed.

II. God's judgment upon the Chaldeans, the ungodly world power. [2:4-20]

- A. Fundamental principle in world government. (4,5)
 1. The righteous live by faith. (4) Although Habakkuk is the first Bible writer to state this principle in these words, the principle itself is not new with him. Paul used this verse as the foundation of his argument against the Jewish legalists as they tried to justify themselves solely by their works of the law (Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11). Also the writer of the Hebrew letter saw the approaching Roman invasion of Jerusalem as a parallel to the Babylonian invasion of Habakkuk's time (Heb. 10:37-39).
 2. The wicked drunken on pride, power, greed will not continue. (5) Using "wine" as a negative characteristic is popular in the Old Testament (see: Prov. 20:1; 23:29-35). Here however, the Chaldeans' "wine" is their pride as it concerns their power and conquest (see: Isa. 29:9; 51:21). Babylon refused to stay at home and build a noble, God-fearing government, but instead set out on its conquest of the world.

Applications for Today

- A. 1:13 - Could a nation more wicked than the USA be used by God to overthrow it? Salvation is based on obedience to God's will and not on comparative righteousness. Lu. 12:42-48; James 1:22-25; 2 Cor. 10:12; 13:5.
- B. 2:4 - The righteous still live by faith. The Hebrew writer urges us to persevere in faithfulness, even to the saving of our souls. Heb. 10:38,39.

B. Woes upon the Chaldeans: a taunt song. (6-20)

1. Woe upon lust of conquest and plunder. (6-8) A taunting proverb is a terse derogatory song, whose meaning the Chaldeans could not miss. It would be sung against them by all of the nations they had oppressed. The woe pronounced here is against conquest of lands to which a nation has no moral right. The prophet makes three charges against Babylon: 1) You have plundered many nations, 2) you have shed men's blood, and 3) you have done violence to land, cities and people. The consequences would be Babylon's destruction which was fulfilled in October of 539 BC.
2. Woe upon effort to build a permanent empire through cruelty and godless gain. (9-11) The gain obtained here is evil because the method used to obtain it is evil. The Chaldeans thought they were invincible and their city impregnable (walls 85 feet thick). Even though God was using Nebuchadnezzar to accomplish His purposes, the Babylonian king was still held responsible for his methods. Even the city of Babylon itself stood as a testimony to the unrighteousness of its people and king. This leads to the third woe.
3. Woe upon the building of cities with blood. (12-14) Greed is the driving force behind the methods of the Babylonians. The use of forced and slave labor to the point of the workman's death is condemned. Jeremiah foretold the destruction of the Chaldeans by the Medes (ch. 51). This prophecy foretold and fulfilled stands as a testament and witness of the deity of Jehovah (2 Pet. 1:19-21).
4. Woe upon cruelty in the treatment of conquered kings and nations. (15-17) Using wine or drugs to get someone intoxicated to the point that they can be taken advantage of, was not invented by Hollywood. The Chaldeans had misused their power in a similar way. Promises were made to the conquered nations and never kept. The victim nations were eventually stripped of their possessions, honor and dignity. The prophecy against Babylon would be for them to receive their own medicine. The Chaldeans had held all of God's creation in contempt, setting themselves up as lords over all. In addition to making men suffer, forests, beasts, land and cities had suffered. It is still a sin against God to strip the world of its natural resources that He created for the good of man.
5. Woe upon idolatry. (18-20) The idol is a lie and a teacher of lies. It promises what it can never produce as it leads people away from Jehovah and towards destruction. A dumb idol cannot speak, and dead stone cannot arise. There is no life in an idol and therefore no intelligence. Jehovah is the ultimate contrast to any idol.

III. Prayer for compassion in the midst of judgment. [chapter 3]

A. Petition. (1,2)

1. Title: author and melody. (1) The book is concluded with a prayer written in the form of a psalm. The prophet's questions have been answered. He

understands that Judah must be punished for her sins and that God will use the evil Chaldeans to perform the chastisement. Finally he understands that the Chaldeans will also be punished for their sins and a faithful remnant of God's people will survive. The poem was composed under strong emotional pressure, it was written in an impassioned and triumphal way. The word "Selah" is perhaps a musical notation signifying a pause or perhaps a crescendo in the music.

2. Revive thy works. (2a) The prophet calls on Jehovah to begin working among His people now.
 3. In wrath remember mercy. (2b) As God had in times past delivered His people, the prophet prays for a similar blessing presently.
- B. The mighty works of Jehovah in the past: judgment and salvation. (3-15)
1. Jehovah's terrible approach. (3-7) (See Duet. 33:2) God comes from high places, such as the mountains. He is depicted as a mighty radiance coming down from the particular mountains of Teman and Paran. His glory and brightness will cover the heavens. Rays coming forth from His hands designates the outpouring of His power. Pestilence is pictured here (as in other prophet's writings) as legitimate weapons of God's wrath. His presence can and will fill the whole earth. As God had previously driven nations asunder, so now will He drive Babylon, Ethiopia (Egypt), and Midia had previously been judged and punished; now it is Babylon's turn.
 2. Question: Why did Jehovah appear? (8-12) The rivers and the seas had been used as instruments of God's wrath. His actions had been for the salvation of His people (Ps. 77). The prophet apparently is referencing Duet. 32:40-42 here in verse 9. Nature reacts when God commands it, whether river, sun, moon, stars, mountains or storms (Isa. 13:9-13; Joel 2:1,2,10; 3:14). Everything God had previously done to deliver His people from His (and their) enemies He could and would do again.
 3. Answer: For salvation of His people. (13-15) God does not act on a whim. His activity always involves the salvation of His people. The remnant of the faithful would produce the Anointed-One, the Messiah. The head of the house of the wicked would be removed, and thus the entire house destroyed. Allies would turn against allies. The Medes had previously helped the Chaldeans defeat Nineveh, now the Medes would join the Persians in defeating the Chaldeans. God's previous use of the Red Sea, the Jordan and the River Kishon would serve as reminders to His people that He could take similar measures in the future against His enemies.
- C. Implicit confidence in Jehovah, the God of salvation. (16-19)
1. Fears and trembling at the tribulation. (16,17) The prophet changes the tempo of his poem to reflect a spirit of calmness and faith. Although he still experienced a sense of dread, he was no longer afraid. The prophet's emotions are akin to an athlete awaiting the starting gun, or a speaker readying himself for a speech. He is ready to meet whatever God brings

forth with dignity and confidence. Even if all resources of food should fail, the prophet will trust Jehovah.

2. Joy and confident trust. (18,19) In the God of his salvation. "Jehovah, the Lord is my strength." Victory and triumph are in Jehovah. Faith is the victory.

Application for Today

- A. 2:20 - God does not need man, man needs God! Acts 17:24-28. Man owes God quiet, humble, reverent submission. Heb. 12:25.
- B. 3:19 - "The Lord God is my strength!" Job 13:15; Heb. 13:5,6; Rom. 8:31; Phil. 4:13.