

“Life Beyond The Guardrail”

Text: Habakkuk 2:5-20

Series: Book of Habakkuk, #5

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Theme: **God Will Judge All Who Reject Him.**

Introduction

We have followed Habakkuk’s serious and sincere questions to God about the evil in his own nation of Judah and also Babylon. Last Sunday we began looking at God’s second answer to him. God told the prophet this message was important and urgent. He assured Habakkuk that He will judge the wicked. And He reminded him that there are only two options for life until then: either live with faith in yourself or with faith in God.

Now we take up the longest part of chapter 2, verses 5-20. It is a message of judgment. Now I realize that judgment is not a popular subject, often even in the church. But this *is* a message of judgment. It is outlined by five “woes” that God addressed to the Chaldeans, and to all who reject Him; to all who are still on the path of living by faith in themselves.

We have here a picture of “*Life Beyond The Guardrail.*” When you drive on an open highway sometimes there are guardrails—posts with metal strands between them to serve as a protective barrier. They usually are placed where there is a steep edge or hazard off the roadway. If you hit one with a glancing blow, the guardrail may keep you on the road. But if you hit it at a sharp angle and at high speed, you will go through it. Usually, nothing good happens at that point. *Life beyond the guardrail* is hazardous, and sometimes brief.

Living by our own standards, by faith in ourselves, without faith in God and His truth—Living Beyond The Guardrail—is hazardous and deadly. This is true because *God will judge all who reject Him.* These five *woes* give us five pictures, examples of God’s judgment.

First, God says that the greedy plunderers will be plundered. Let’s go to verse 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.”

Now to the middle of verse 6, “...Woe to him who increases what is not his—for how long—and makes himself rich with loans?” And then continue at verse 8, “...you have looted many nations...”

Pride and plundering go together. “Haughty,” or “arrogant” is a different word than “pride” back in verse 4, but it is along the same lines. This *haughty* or *arrogant* person is one who is self-centered and has an overstated or exaggerated sense of his own importance or abilities. For me to be on the throne of my life rather than God is arrogant. How it plays out

from there is a matter of degree. Self-centered, arrogant people plunder—they take things, and even people, where they do not have the right.

The plundering of Babylon described here includes an ever-increasing appetite for swallowing up, for collecting and gathering nations, and making itself rich with *loans*, or in the NIV, *extortion*. This word means to take or give a pledge for a debt. The sense is that Babylon was making itself rich by taking excessive pledges and tributes as part of stealing the wealth of other nations.

And, as noted earlier, God’s statement is not limited to the Babylonians. There were people in Judah doing the same things. We see an unbroken chain of plundering down to our own day. Nations, certainly. But there also are many takers, manipulators, users, con artists—many plunderers—in the business world, communities and families.

What does God have to say about the plunderers and their plundering? First, note how they did it, stated in the middle of verse 8, “because of human bloodshed and violence done to the land, to the town and all its inhabitants.” Then notice God’s decree in verse 7, “Will not your creditors rise up suddenly, and those who collect from you awaken? Indeed, you will become plunder for them.” “The plunderers will be plundered.”

This rings of poetic justice, of rightful retribution, and reflects God’s principle of harvesting what you plant. God was saying to Babylon, “You are getting rich by gouging and stealing from others, but your day is coming! The tables will be turned!” It is interesting that the word *creditors* literally means “the bite.” It came from lending practices. For example, a lender might charge an up front fee, or make a substantial deduction from the proceeds of the loan. I borrow \$100 from you. You deduct a fee of \$25, so I actually only receive \$75, but I still have to pay the interest on and the principle of \$100.

Babylon’s day was coming as they built up a massive debt of resentment and hatred among people who, like creditors, would quickly, unexpectedly take massive bites, devouring the kingdom.

The first part of God’s message to Habakkuk is, “Yes, the Babylonians are coming. Yes, they are ruthless and cruel. Yes, they plunder. But they too will be plundered.” God will judge all who reject Him.

Secondly, God tells us that the selfish sin against themselves. We see one view of a selfish person in verse 9,

“Woe to him who gets evil gain for his house to put his nest on high,
to be delivered from the hand of calamity!”

This is a picture of building security for yourself and your family so you won’t be touched by disasters. Thoughtful, careful planning is important. That certainly has been underscored in the financial chaos going on at the present time. But what we have here goes beyond that. The means is “evil gain.” It is another version of the ends justifying the means. It is getting what I want without regard to the way I get it, to the rights, needs and lives of others. It is

self-centered and selfish.

How does God view this? Go to verse 10,

“You have devised a shameful thing for your house by cutting off many peoples; so you are sinning against yourself. Surely the stone will cry out from the wall, and the rafter will answer it from the framework.”

Selfishness is shameful and sinful. We not only sin against God, but we sin against ourselves in that by not trusting God and serving Him and others, but by serving ourselves and taking from others, we actually undermine our own well being. This will be revealed. Even the physical and financial hedges we build to protect us will become a visible declaration of our self-centered sin, and so cry out against us. As God said about Edom through Obidah,

“The arrogance of your heart has deceived you, you who live in the clefts of the rock, in the loftiness of your dwelling place, who say in your heart, ‘Who will bring me down to earth?’ Though you build high like the eagle, though you set your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down, declares the LORD.” (verses 3-4)

There is ample evidence of this in Babylon. Turn to Daniel 4. The chapter opens with a formal statement of King Nebuchadnezzar’s dream or vision of a large, tall tree and the message that came with this picture. Daniel interpreted it: it was a picture of the king who would lose his mind for seven years so all would know that God is sovereign over all rulers and nations. Daniel appealed to the king to repent, to turn to God. Let’s pick it up at verse 28,

“All this [i.e., the details of the vision] happened to Nebuchadnezzar the king. Twelve months later [i.e., after the vision] he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon. The king reflected and said, ‘Is this not Babylon the great, which I myself have built as a royal residence by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?’ While the word was in the king’s mouth, a voice came from heaven, saying, ‘King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is declared: sovereignty has been removed from you, and you will be driven away from mankind, and your dwelling place will be with the beasts of the field. You will be given grass to eat like cattle, and seven periods of time will pass over you until you recognize that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind and bestows it on whomever He wishes.’ Immediately the word concerning Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled; and he was driven away from mankind and began eating grass like cattle, and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair had grown like eagles’ feathers and his nails like birds’ claws.” (4:28-33)

The principle remains true: the selfish sin against themselves.

Next, God addresses tyrants and tells us that Tthe tyrants build, but what they build will not last. Take a look at a tyrant, verse 12, “Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed and founds a town with violence!”

Babylon ruled and built with violence and bloodshed. Habakkuk and the people of his day knew this. They knew about the Chaldeans’ extreme brutality that crushed many nations. As I pointed out while in chapter 1, they sometimes beheaded people they defeated and made pyramids of the heads to mark their path. They would impale, skin and burn men alive. They would cut off hands, feet, ears or noses of men and send their women and children into slavery. And so, as these tyrants moved quickly, ruthlessly, they struck fear into the hearts of the people, armies and kings in their path (cf. 1:7).

Go on to verse 13 for God’s perspective and response: “Is it not indeed from the LORD of hosts that peoples toil for fire, and nations grow weary for nothing?” Jeremiah, Habakkuk’s contemporary, recorded the same message from God (51:58),

“Thus says the LORD of hosts, ‘The broad wall of Babylon will be completely razed and her high gates will be set on fire; so the peoples will toil for nothing, and the nations become exhausted only for fire.’”

You can work hard to be rich, gain security, burning yourself out, only to see it all go up in smoke. God is sovereign!

A time will come when all the tyranny and tyrants will be banished—verse 14, “For theearth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.” God revealed the same truth through Isaiah, “They will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea” (11:9). And this was the prayer of David recorded by Solomon in Psalm 72:19, “...blessed be His [the LORD God’s] glorious name forever; and may the whole earth be filled with His glory. Amen, and Amen.”

David was praying for, God was speaking of the time when the Messiah, Christ would reign on earth. A time when all people will know the truth and there will be no tyranny. Yes, the tyrants build, but what they build will not last. God will judge all who reject Him.

Next God declares that the perverters’ glory will become their shame. The picture of the perverter here is, as always, not pleasant. Verse 15,

“Woe to you who make your neighbors drink, who mix in your venom even to make them drunk so as to look on their nakedness!”

Verse 17,

“For the violence done to Lebanon will overwhelm you, and the devastation of its beasts by which you terrified them, because of human bloodshed and violence done to the land, to the town and all its inhabitants.”

The images picture the base, degraded, perverse nature of the proud Babylonian leaders and armies toward everyone else, especially the countries they conquered.

And, of course, violence is in all of this. Violence both toward people created in the image of God and toward the creation, of which people are to be good and faithful caretakers, not destroyers. While in chapter 1 we noted that after conquering and looting a city, the Babylonians sometimes burned it and destroyed any forest or other things of value that could be used to reestablish it.

God's judgment is in verse 16.

“You will be filled with disgrace rather than honor. Now you yourself drink and expose your own nakedness. The cup in the LORD'S right hand will come around to you, and utter disgrace will come upon your glory.”

Once again, what they have planted they will harvest. While seeking their own wealth, prominence and power through perverted values, their evil will be laid out in the full light of day for everyone to see. What they saw as their great strength and honor will become their disgrace. And it is God with His powerful right hand of judgment who will make this happen.

Mighty, invincible Babylon. Habakkuk had questioned God, “Will you let them go on doing this forever?” (cf. 1:17). God's answer: “No. I will judge them.” Mighty Babylon, the invincible conquerors, ruled the stage from 626-539 B.C. — that is less than 100 years! It was a very short time as far as great empires go. The perverters' glory became their shame as God judged them.

Then we come to the fifth and final statement, the idolaters' trust will not rescue them from judgment. The most serious wickedness is saved for the last. Yes, greed, selfishness, tyranny and perversion are very serious. All sin is subject to God's righteous judgment. Idolatry is the most serious. We see that in the opening of the 10 commandments, Exodus 20:1-7. The first three:

“Then God spoke all these words, saying, ‘I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments. You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain.’”

We see the importance, the weight of these first three commandments relating directly to God in their priority at the beginning, and also in the amount of detail. The most serious offence against the Eternal, Sovereign Creator and Judge is to put anything, anyone in a place that is His.

And so, God points out the foolishness, the absolute absurdity of such actions. Verse 18,

“What profit is the idol when its maker has carved it, or an image, a teacher of falsehood? For its maker trusts in his own handiwork when he fashions speechless idols. Woe to him who says to a piece of wood, ‘Awake!’ To a mute stone, ‘Arise!’ And that is your teacher? Behold, it is overlaid with gold and silver, and there is no breath at all inside it.” (18-19)

“It’s ridiculous! It’s absurd!” Psalm 115 puts it this way,

“... our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases. Their idols are silver and gold, the work of man’s hands. They have mouths, but they cannot speak; they have eyes, but they cannot see; they have ears, but they cannot hear; they have noses, but they cannot smell; they have hands, but they cannot feel; they have feet, but they cannot walk; they cannot make a sound with their throat. Those who make them will become like them, everyone who trusts in them.” (3-8)

Yes, “It’s ridiculous! It’s absurd!” Make it simple or ornate, small or large, beautiful or ugly, expensive or cheap, quickly or over years... it is ridiculous, absurd.

Now, an idol of wood or stone is just an obvious example. Anything, anyone—including ourselves—that we give a place which is God’s is an idol. 1:16 tells us the Babylonians “offer a sacrifice to their net and burn incense to their fishing net, because through these things their catch is large.” The reference is to their military might in capturing nations as fisherman catch fish with their nets. They did not have altars to their military machine, but they trusted in it. Their confidence for strength and victory was in it. So, it took a place that only God should have—it became an idol to them. No idols—things or people—have the power to deliver, to really help when it comes to our fundamental, to our ultimate needs.

God’s view of this is seen in His final, strong, sober statement in verse 20, “But the LORD is in His holy temple. Let all the earth be silent before Him.” God *is* sovereign! God *is* holy! He sees all, knows all, rules over all! He judges everyone who places anything in His place.

So,

- Stop speculating!
- Stop babbling!
- Be quiet!
- Listen to Him! Learn from Him!

- Worship and obey Him!

King David wrote in Psalm 11:4, “The LORD is in His holy temple; the LORD’s throne is in heaven; His eyes behold, His eyelids test the sons of men.”

Yes, *God will judge all who reject Him.*

- The greedy plunderers will be plundered.
- The selfish sin against themselves.
- The tyrants build what will not last.
- The perverters’ glory will become their shame.
- The idolaters’ trust will not rescue them from judgment.

And, that is only the beginning of God’s judgment.

So what does this mean to us?”

The first thing is to clearly realize that there is no rescue from God’s righteous judgment by any idol, by any means other than God and what He has provided. Let me say again, we all live on one of two paths: faith in ourselves, or faith in God. We either accept God’s judgment on our sin laid on Christ on the cross or cling to His judgment, everlasting judgment for our sin.

Let’s wrap this up with a few *So whats* for us who are in Christ. What the truth we have seen today means for us now and in the future. Out of a number, think about three. First, live with a certain hope in every circumstance. True biblical hope is a certain expectation of what will take place based on God and His truth.

There are more unfair, unjust, terrible things happening in the world, and even in our own worlds, than we can count. We can have a certain hope about how it is all going to end. It will end in God’s time and in His way. He will judge all sin, He will judge all who reject Him. When hurricanes of unfair, terrible and evil things rage, we can look up to God knowing it will not always be this way, knowing that all the evil and wickedness *will be silenced.*

Secondly, live with a solid faith in every moment. All you have to do is to read or watch the news to know that many people have lost faith in our financial systems. We watched oil open the year at \$99 a barrel, spike at \$147, up 48%, and then fall back. It now is, however briefly, at about \$64, down 48% from the high. Our Canadian dollar started the year at just a shade over \$1.00 US, hit a high of over \$1.02, then fell to a low for the year this last Tuesday at \$0.78 and is now just under \$0.825 USD. People have been worried and some have panicked as they look at this and search for things they can see and find to understand what is going on, and what will happen next.

Hebrews 11:1 tells us, "...faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." Not blind faith. But faith in Eternal, Unchanging God, even in the most frightening, disastrous moments. A pastor noticed a weathered inscription on a old windmill. It read, "God is faithful." He asked the owner, " Since you have that on your windmill, do you mean God's faithfulness depends on the direction the wind is blowing?" The owner answered, "No, not at all. It means that regardless of which way the wind blows, *God is faithful.*"

And, one more, live with a clear testimony to every person. God is going to judge all sin, all sinners. When you placed your faith in Christ, all of your sins were fully judged, fully paid for by Christ's death.

When we think of all the terrible things some people do, we should never succumb to thinking, "Someday they are going to get theirs! God will make them pay for this!" Jude verse 22 tells us, "...have mercy on some, who are doubting; save others, snatching them out of the fire; and on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh."

Yes, as the writer of Hebrews says, "It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (10:31). And for those who do not come to God through faith in Christ, who reject God's grace and mercy seen in creation and spelled out in the gospel, their just judgment will be terrifying forever.

Yes, God "...is patient ... , not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). So we should patiently, urgently live and speak the good news of Christ to everyone. This needs to go with the first two—hope and faith—because it reflects the heart of God, because keeps us in touch with our mission in this world, and also because it helps keep us in balance as we look out beyond ourselves.

Think about these things with God now.

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