

A minor prophet has a major conversation with God about justice!

Week 5: Five woes

WELCOME

Spend time relaxing and sharing together.

Icebreaker. What evidence do you see that, “the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea” (Habakkuk 2.14)?

WORSHIP

Listen to the hymn, God is Working His Purpose Out

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cr3goa3DXsw>

Alternatively read Isaiah 6.1-7 and use it as a springboard into praising the Lord.

WORD

Chapter one ended with the prophet perplexed that God could use the wicked nation of Babylon to judge an ungodly Judah. At the beginning of chapter two, Habakkuk waited patiently for God to respond to his second complaint. This wasn't a passive waiting, rather he was engaged: watching and expecting God to speak again.

We don't know how long it took, but God did respond by saying that the righteous will live by faith, which we looked at in the previous study.

Chapter two continues with the Lord listing five 'woes' (great sorrow, distress and trouble) that will come upon any nation or society that brings woe upon others.

Read Habakkuk 2.6-20

1. What are the five woes?

Growth Group Notes

Summer 2021



Thankfully because of what Jesus did on the cross those who have committed injustice against others have an opportunity to turn to Jesus, to confess their sins and to receive forgiveness. Let's study the woes and some of the questions Mark posed in his sermon.

The first woe (vv6-8) is the doom of the robber, thief, the embezzler, the dishonest person, the one who appropriates for himself that which belongs to another. Such a person may continue in such actions but sooner or later, like creditors, the oppressed people will revolt against their oppressor and make him pay the last penny. See also Galatians 6.7-8.

2. How might the UK in times past be rightfully accused of taking such actions?

The second woe (vv9-11) is the doom of the exploiters and extortioners. The term 'evil gain' or 'unjust gain' (Hab 2.9) comes from a weaver's term "to cut off the threads". It is used several times in the Old Testament in the sense of evil gain (Gen 37.26; Jer 6.13; Hab 2.9), "to make one's cut." We still use the expression, "to get one's cut" in a bad sense. Those who get their wealth by illegal methods feel the need for security. They build their nest on some high, secluded spot guarded by every security device available. But the stone in the walls of the house and the wood in the beams will cry out against them.

3. How might the UK in times past be rightfully accused of taking such actions?

The third woe (vv12-14) is the doom of evil and violence. The tyrant builds his society the bulldozer way. He runs roughshod over anyone who gets in his way (v 12). But such a tyrant will not succeed, because the Lord will

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see to it that social structures built on violence and bloodshed will amount to nothing. They will be consumed in the flames (v13).

4. What examples in society today and in recent times, can you think?
5. What does the passage say about kingdoms built on the glory of God (v14)?

The fourth woe (vv15-17) is the doom of debauchery. The guilty ones here are those who ruin their fellow men by strong drink in order to gaze on their shame. See also Genesis 9.20-25. Strong drink, drugs, crime and immorality often go together. The Lord says that the one who makes his neighbour drunk will himself drink the cup of the wrath of God (v16). Verse 17 must be dated after the Babylonians came through Lebanon and ravaged the forests of cedar, and the herds of wild animals.

6. What is the ecological message in verse 17? Can you think of other examples?

The fifth woe is the doom of idolatry. Idols are instruments of lies and deception. An idol is as silent as the stone out of which it is made. It cannot teach or give directions. It may look expensive, but it is not alive.

8. What might be the idols of this age be?

WHAT NEXT?

Habakkuk had previously thought that God was inactive, blind to the sins being committed in his day. How wrong he was! In laying out the five woes God outlined specific reasons for the coming judgement of both Judah and Babylon. These reasons apply just as well for the world today as they did then. If the days ahead get darker, the key verse in this chapter will become all the more important, “the righteous shall live by their faith” (v4). It’s so important that followers of Jesus stay close to the Lord and trust him despite all that occurs in this world. And, as always, our hope is in the return of the Lord.

In contrast to an idol, the Lord is in his holy temple, let all the earth bow in hushed silence before him – all the forces that oppose God will ultimately be silenced (v20).

Mark concluded:

- God is in control and injustice will be beaten and justice will prevail
- God wants a relationship with us
- Our responsibility is to put God first, and to trust him

If time allows look at Luke 21.27-28; 1 Thessalonians 1.9b-10; Romans 8.31; Psalm 46.10 and use them to guide your prayers.

God brought Habakkuk assurance of his power, changed his perspective and enabled him to have greater confidence in God. The Lord is in charge and acts in his perfect timing. The world will not be dominated by any human power but by God. “For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea” (Habakkuk 2.14).