

God Punished the Wicked But Rescued the Remnant

The book of Habakkuk was written during the time that Jeremiah and Ezekiel were the prophets of Yahweh. Habakkuk's prophecies overlaps those of Jeremiah and precedes Ezekiel's prophecy by fifteen years. All three prophets spoke for the Lord and their messages were directed against Judah. So, when we read the book of Habakkuk, we should expect to read prophecies that are similar to those in the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. We have already discovered the nation of Judah was very wicked before the Babylonian army invaded the land, defeated the city of Jerusalem, and deported large numbers of Jews to Babylon. So, we should not be surprised when we read Habakkuk's complaint to Yahweh in Habakkuk 1:2-4. He said,

How long, O LORD, will I call for help, And You will not hear? I cry out to You, "Violence!"

Yet You do not save.

Why do You make me see iniquity,

And cause me to look on wickedness?

Yes, destruction and violence are before me;

Strife exists and contention arises.

Therefore the law is ignored

And justice is never upheld.

For the wicked surround the righteous;

Therefore justice comes out perverted. Habakkuk 1:2-4 (NASB)

The prophet complains because of the iniquity, wickedness, strife, destruction, violence, contention, disobedience of the Mosaic Law, and injustice in the land. The prophet adds that there are more wicked than there are righteous. Even when justice is implemented, it comes out perverted. It is a very evil picture. The prophet complains in verse 3 that the Lord is causing him to see the wickedness which he did not like to witness. I wonder what did he see? We know he did not see wicked



videos, television programs, movies, magazines, books, or websites. Did he see the wicked activities in the high places in the mountains, in the city, in homes, and at the temple that we learned about in our last study? Did he see sacrifices of children?

We do not know, but the prophet did not like seeing whatever evils he saw.

Then Yahweh replied to him in verses 5-11.

Look among the nations! Observe!

Be astonished! Wonder!

Because I am doing something in your days —

You would not believe if you were told.

For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans,

That fierce and impetuous people

Who march throughout the earth
To dwelling places which are not theirs.
Habakkuk 1:5-6 (NASB)

The Chaldeans is another term for the Babylonians. Yahweh is referring to the Babylonian army. The army is marching.

They are dreaded and feared;
Their justice and authority originate with themselves.
Their horses are swifter than leopards
And keener than wolves in the evening.
Their horsemen come galloping,
Their horsemen come from afar;
They fly like an eagle swooping down to devour.
All of them come for violence.
Their horde of faces moves forward.
They collect captives like sand.
They mock at kings
And rulers are a laughing matter to them.
They laugh at every fortress
And heap up rubble to capture it.
Then they will sweep through like the wind and pass on.
Habakkuk 1:7-11a (NASB)

Yahweh tells the prophet that the Babylonian army will invade and crush Judah and Jerusalem. Why? Because Judah and Jerusalem were very wicked. When a nation abandons God, it progressively becomes evil. It is difficult to notice because it is like boiling an egg in a hot water. It takes time for the egg to become hard. It happens slowly. Once a nation abandons God, it becomes increasingly wicked.

The opening verses of Ezekiel 8 revealed that some people in Jerusalem worshiped something called the “idol of jealousy.” Ezekiel 8:12 told us that the elders worshiped a great variety of gods and goddesses in secret. They thought Yahweh did not see what they were doing. But Yahweh did see the evil and it was an abomination to Him.

Then we were told the women worshiped Tammuz, a god in one of the most sexually licentious religions. Next, we were told the priests worshiped the sun, maybe either Ra or Osiris. In chapter 6, Yahweh said He would destroy all of the high

places. In chapter 4, Yahweh had prophesied that He would destroy the city and the nation. That is the message of Habakkuk. Today most people in our nation do not worship idols. But they do worship cold and lifeless idols, perhaps an empty philosophy, a pleasure, hobby, job, or their favorite cause. Our idols are the things that have replaced our time with God!

ANGELIC EXECUTION TEAM IDENTIFIED. That brings us to our study which is Ezekiel 9:1-11. It continues the vision that started in chapter 8. Ezekiel 9:1 says,

Then He cried out in my hearing with a loud voice saying, “Draw near, O executioners of the city, each with his destroying weapon in his hand.” Ezekiel 9:1 (NASB)

The “He” in this verse is Yahweh who called in a very loud voice, “Draw near, O executioners of the city, each with his destroying weapon in his hand.” The Hebrew word for “executioners” is translated differently in various Bibles. The Hebrew word, *pequdda*, has the sense of “oversight,” “officers”, and “punishment.” The context helps us understand that “executioners” is the correct meaning. Verses 2-6 will tell us that these executioners will have the oversight of the killing of the people in the city of Jerusalem.

Notice verse 2,

Behold, six men came from the direction of the upper gate which faces north, each with his shattering weapon in his hand; and among them was a certain man clothed in linen with a writing case at his loins. And they went in and stood beside the bronze altar. Ezekiel 9:2 (NASB)

We are told the executioners are six men, but the following verses reveal they were actually angels. This is not the first time that angels appear as men in Scripture. Genesis 18:1-2 tells us that three men appeared to Abram. Later we discover one of the men was actually a theophany. Genesis 19:1 reveals the other two men were angels. In Hebrews 13:2 we are told some people have entertained angels without knowing it. That is, angels can appear as men.

We are told these six angels come from the direction of the upper gate, and carried a weapon called a “shattering weapon.”

The Hebrew for “shattering” refers to the crushing of a physical object. In verse 1, their weapons were called “destroying.” Together, these two words suggest their destroying weapons will crush people.

Then we are told there was a seventh person. He was also an angel! He is clothed in linen and had a writing case next to his waist. The writing case may have been attached to his hip. Lamar Cooper writes this in his commentary on Ezekiel about the writing kit.

This writing kit usually was made from an animal horn. It had a palette with a slot for pens and a hollow place for two kinds of ink, usually black and red. Professional scribes usually carried this kind of equipment.¹

That means the angel dressed in linen was acting like a scribe in this chapter.

These seven angels then moved over to the bronze altar of sacrifice which stood before the temple. Now we understand that this team of seven angels includes six angels who are executioners and one who is a scribe. They are the angelic execution team of seven.

ANGELIC SCRIBE MARKS THE RIGHTEOUS. Starting in verses 3-4 we discover the task the angel in linen will perform.

Then the glory of the God of Israel went up from the cherub on which it had been, to the threshold of the temple. And He called to the man clothed in linen at whose loins was the writing case. The LORD said to him, “Go through the midst of the city, even through the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations which are being committed in its midst.” Ezekiel 9:3-4 (NASB)

Immediately a very serious event is described. We are told the glory of the God of Israel left the cherub, which was in the Holy of Holies and moved to the threshold of the temple. Normally, the Shekinah glory of the Lord resided above the cherubim in the Holy of Holies. So, why did the Shekinah glory move? We will discover that this is the first step in the glory

of the Lord leaving the temple. This never occurred before! We will learn more later.

Then Yahweh spoke to the angel in linen and told him to go through Jerusalem and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sighed and groaned over all of the abominations that were being committed. The word abominations reminds us of the last three chapters where the word abominations kept being repeated. This angelic scribe was to use his writing kit to mark the foreheads of the men who sighed and groaned over the false worship, the idols, and all of the other evil that was occurring. This reminded me of Lot. 2 Peter 2:7-9a tells us that Lot was a righteous man and was oppressed by the evil in Sodom. The verse says,

And if He rescued righteous Lot, oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men (for by what he saw and heard that righteous man, while living among them, felt his righteous soul tormented day after day by their lawless deeds), 9 then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation . . . 2 Peter 2:7-9a (NASB)

This is an important passage. It gives us insight into how a righteous person will respond to evil surrounding him or her. Lot was oppressed or worn down by the homosexual behavior and other lawless deeds he saw in Sodom. The prophet Habakkuk complained that he had to see the evil in the land. He was a righteous man. This means that we, as believers, should be unhappy² by the evil and the various abominations that we are witnessing. Romans 12:9 says, “Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good.” In fact, recently the news reported a satanic golden Medusa was installed at the New York courthouse.³ It is not the first such event in recent years. It is sad to see the evil in the land. That is a righteous person’s response. This passage also encourages us by telling us the Lord knows how to rescue the righteous from temptation and will rescue them.

SIX ANGELIC EXECUTIONERS SLAUGHTER PEOPLE. So, that was the task of the angelic scribe. Verses 5-6a gives us insight into the task of the six angelic executioners.

2. “Be unhappy” does not mean that believers should hurt other people. Romans 12:9-21 says we are to leave that to God.

3. Nikolas Lanum. “Satanic golden medusa’ abortion statue outside New York City courthouse ruthlessly mocked: ‘Monstrosity’” FoxNews.com. January 26, 2023.

1. Lamar Cooper. Ezekiel. The New American Commentary. B&H Publishing Co. 1994. Vv. 17., p. 126-127.

But to the others He said in my hearing, “Go through the city after him and strike; do not let your eye have pity and do not spare. Utterly slay old men, young men, maidens, little children, and women, but do not touch any man on whom is the mark; and you shall start from My sanctuary.” Ezekiel 9:5-6a (NASB)

Now Yahweh told the six angelic executioners to follow the angelic scribe and “strike; do not let your eye have pity and do not spare.” That echoes Yahweh’s statements in chapters 5, 7, and 8. There Yahweh repeatedly said He would not show pity and He would not spare this evil and perverse people. He would not show them pity nor spare them because He had repeatedly called them to repent, but for decades they had refused to repent. Their hearts were very hard. But they were not to strike any person with a mark on their forehead.

Verses 6b-7 describes what happened next.

So they started with the elders who were before the temple. 7 And He said to them, “Defile the temple and fill the courts with the slain. Go out!” Thus they went out and struck down the people in the city. Ezekiel 9:6b-7 (NASB)

The six angelic executioners started killing every person who did not have a mark on their forehead, beginning with the elders who were before the temple. Then Yahweh commanded that they defile the temple and fill the temple courts with dead people. That is a very significant statement. According to the Mosaic Law, touching anything that was dead caused great defilement. Numbers 19:11-13 warned Israelites that touching a dead person caused a person to be unclean for seven days. Why did Yahweh give this command? Part of the answer is the temple had already been defiled inside and outside by both the worship of the “idol of jealousy,” or Tammuz, and the sun god. Second, the Ten Commandments prohibit anyone from making idols of anything in heaven, on the earth, in the water, or beneath the earth. They were prohibited from worshiping them too (Exodus 20:2-5)! So, Yahweh wanted to defile the temple with dead bodies to prevent anyone from entering the temple. This suggests they were careful about religious laws, but their hearts were far from God. This can be true of us!

A massive slaughter then occurred as the six angelic execu-

tioners killed everyone throughout the entire city of Jerusalem who did not have the mark on their forehead.

GOD ALWAYS HAS A REMNANT. Verse 8 reveals that during this massive slaughter the prophet Ezekiel began to fear that he was the only one left alive. It says,

As they were striking the people and I alone was left, I fell on my face and cried out saying, “Alas, Lord GOD! Are You destroying the whole remnant of Israel by pouring out Your wrath on Jerusalem?” Ezekiel 9:8 (NASB)

He sounds like Elijah who thought he was the only follower Yahweh had left in Israel. Yahweh told Elijah that he was not alone. Yahweh had seven thousand in Israel who had not worshiped Baal (1 Kings 19:11-18; Romans 11:2-4). So, as the angelic executioners were killing so many people, Ezekiel fell on his face and asked, “Are You destroying the whole remnant of Israel by pouring out Your wrath on Jerusalem?” Verse 9 gives Yahweh’s reply.

Then He said to me, “The iniquity of the house of Israel and Judah is very, very great, and the land is filled with blood and the city is full of perversion; for they say, ‘The LORD has forsaken the land, and the LORD does not see!’ 10 But as for Me, My eye will have no pity nor will I spare, but I will bring their conduct upon their heads.” Ezekiel 9:9-10 (NASB)

Notice the four reasons that Yahweh gave for the massive slaughter of Israel and Judah. First, their iniquity or wickedness was very great. This means their sin was excessive. Second, murder filled the land. Third, a perverted justice had filled the city. Justice had become injustice. Fourth, they lied about Yahweh by saying He did not care about the land and did not pay attention to them. That is, they slandered Yahweh’s character. Yahweh repeated again, “My eye will have no pity nor will I spare.” Then the same divine principle that was given in chapter 7 is repeated, “I will bring their conduct upon their heads.” What we sow, we reap.

Next, notice the word “remnant” back in verse 8. I think Ezekiel understood that the angelic scribe in linen was putting a mark on the men who sighed and groaned over the abomi-

nations in the land. These men were the righteous. They were greatly unhappy and disturbed by the abominations. That is a sign of a righteous person. They hated the abominations.

But I want us to notice the word “mark” used to describe what was placed on the forehead of the righteous individuals. In verse 4, the Hebrew word for “mark” is *taw*. In the seventh and sixth centuries B.C., the letter *taw* in Paleo-Hebrew script was written like an X or sloped cross.⁴ It looked like a cross. Is that why the early Christians adopted the cross? Here are five more interesting facts. First, *taw* is the last letter in the Hebrew alphabet. Second, it is the first letter in the word “torah.” Third, it is also the first letter in the word that means “you shall live.”⁵ That is, you will not die. Fourth, someone has said it referred to ownership. Fifth, A. C. Gaebelein states,

Ancient Jewish tradition gives the information that the blood sprinkled in Egypt on the doorpost (Exod. Xii:23) was in the form of a cross. All this is interesting.⁶

Most likely the prophet did not understand the significance the letter would later have for believers, but Yahweh understood. We understand. That was the mark placed on the forehead of the remnant by the angelic scribe. Just as God had a remnant after the worldwide flood, during the Exodus from Egypt, and at the time of Elijah, Yahweh had a remnant during the time of Ezekiel. He will rescue every Christian from the future tribulation with the rapture. But just as there have always been Christian martyrs, there will be martyrs during the tribulation.

God will always have a remnant. We might feel alone if persecution comes. But fellow saints will always be somewhere proclaiming the gospel, preaching the Word of God, and sighing and groaning because of the abominations. That will also be true during the tribulation. At the end of the bloody tribulation, there will be faithful, mortal saints who came to faith and will enter the earthly millennial kingdom.

CONCLUSION. The last verse of the chapter says,

Then behold, the man clothed in linen at whose loins was the writing case reported, saying, “I have done just as You have commanded me.” Ezekiel 9:11 (NASB)

The angelic scribe in linen said, “I have done just as You have commanded me.” This statement is wonderful because this means that after Yahweh had warned them to repent, He kept His promise when they did not. This is the character of God. He keeps His promises. Our holy God does not allow the wicked to flaunt their abominations forever. He was kind when He urged them to repent but they refused. They were foolish, wanting to worship gods and goddesses that were created by demons. But when they refused to repent, punishment had to occur. That is the primary message of the chapter.

The second message is that Yahweh does not forget the remnant—His faithful righteous. This chapter is encouraging because the angelic scribe protected the righteous men of the city from being slaughtered. This reveals that Yahweh and the angels are aware of every righteous person. They watch us and care for us. Even in difficult times, we are not alone. Yahweh has a faithful remnant and He will not disappoint them. This does not mean that the righteous will always escape physical harm or death. But it does mean our God will rescue the righteous when judgment is widespread and severe.

Third, just as the Shekinah glory of the Lord left the temple, we must remember that God is holy and He will distance Himself from sin. It am glad that He does. He is a holy and righteous God. That is why only those who have the righteousness of Christ will enter heaven. We will learn more of the significance of the departure of the Shekinah glory of the Lord in the next two chapters.

4. Ibid. p. 127.

5. Charles Lee Feinberg. The Prophecy of Ezekiel. Moody Press. 1969. p.. 56.

6. A. C. Gaebelein. Publication Office of “our Hope.” 1921. Vol. IV. p. 284.