

Habakkuk 2:18-20

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/hab/hab-2/habakkuk-218-20/>

The LORD condemns those who make idols and worship them as their gods.

God completes His answer to Habakkuk's question, how a righteous God could judge the wickedness of Judah through the Babylonians/Chaldeans, who were even more wicked than Judah (Habakkuk 1:12-15). In Habakkuk 2:6-20, God is making clear that He will judge the Chaldeans in due time.

The last woe in the oracle of Habakkuk 2:6-20 speaks against the practice of idolatry in Chaldea/Babylonia. It begins with a rhetorical question that requires a negative answer: *What profit is the idol when its maker has carved it or an image, a teacher of falsehood?* The answer is "Absolutely nothing." There is no profit in an *idol*.

The term for *idol* refers to graven *images* usually carved from stone or wood, while the term for *image* refers to molten images made with metal (Deuteronomy 27:15; Nahum 1:14). The *LORD* used the terms together in this passage to refer to all kinds of *images*. The Chaldeans trusted in their *idols* and worshiped them as their gods. But such objects are powerless and lifeless because they are "the work of man's hands" (Psalm 115:4). They had no value at all. In short, *idols* are completely useless.

The psalmist, contrasting the true God with these false gods, boldly stated, "They have mouth, but they cannot speak. They have eyes, but they cannot see. They have ears, but they cannot hear; they have nose, but they cannot smell" (Psalm 115:5-6). In short, there is no profit in any *idol*. It is merely a *teacher of falsehood*, meaning that it teaches lies. Anyone who trusts in an *idol* will be deceived by it. *For its maker trusts in his own handiwork when he fashions speechless idols.*

An *idol* cannot tell someone what to do nor can it protect him from danger. Those *idols* which the Chaldeans worshipped could not do anything for them. They could not protect the people from the wrath of God. Thus, the Chaldeans deceived themselves by acknowledging carved images as their gods and rejecting the true and living God. As a result, they were on the verge of death. These idols merely served to provide a false moral authority for the exploitation of the Babylonians. It was a part of their pride.

The *LORD* denounced the Chaldean practice of idolatry and said, *Woe to him who says to a piece of wood, 'Awake!' To a mute stone, 'Arise!'* It is absurd for a man to stand before a *piece of wood* or a *mute stone* and say, *Awake! And that is your teacher?* An *idol* cannot reveal anything to his worshiper since it is only a *piece of wood* or a *mute stone*. Such an object does not have any life or power in it. It is thus a waste of time for someone to seek counsel before an *idol*. It is a form of rationalization. Babylon was exploiting others, and pointing to their gods to rationalize their behavior.

The *LORD* concludes the chapter with a powerful contrast: *But the LORD is in His holy temple.* The term *LORD* is “Yahweh” in Hebrew. It emphasizes the self-existence and eternity of God. Moreover, the term *temple* refers to the LORD’s throne in heaven (Psalm 11:4). His *temple* is *holy* because He is *holy*, set apart to Himself (Leviticus 19:2). From His *temple*, He reigns and governs the whole world. In the New Earth, there will be no temple, for God will reign on the earth with His people (Revelation 21:3).

In contrast to the powerless and lifeless *idols* of the Chaldeans, *the LORD* is all-powerful, “He is clothed with majesty. The LORD has clothed and girded Himself with strength” (Psalm 93:1). Therefore, *let all the earth be silent before Him!* In other words, since the *LORD* is all-powerful, the *earth* and its inhabitants must submit to His will. The whole *earth* must stand in awe to worship the true God instead of crying out to false gods that have no life in them. God will demonstrate His power through the orchestration of nations to bend to His will. Babylon will chastise Judah for its wickedness, then in turn be judged by falling to the Medes and Persians.

The revelation that God provided to Habakkuk served to comfort him and strengthen his faith. It reminded the prophet that God was in control. The destiny of Judah was in His hands, and He would intervene at the proper time to judge the wicked Chaldeans and restore the honor and dignity of Judah.

This message can comfort believers today as well. God chastises those whom He loves. As we read in Hebrews:

“and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons,
‘MY SON, DO NOT REGARD LIGHTLY THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD,
NOR FAINT WHEN YOU ARE REPROVED BY HIM;
FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES,
AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES.’

It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline?”

(Hebrews 12:5-7)

Further, we read in Revelation:

“Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent.”

(Revelation 3:19)

We can always know that any difficulties we encounter are opportunities to learn, grow, and be transformed. We can also know that sometimes God chastises us, and provides us the opportunity to repent, which is an essential part of being transformed (Romans 12:1-2). New Testament era believers can rest in the promise that God works all things to our benefit, to conform us to the image of Christ (Romans 8:28-29).

It is also encouraging to know that our God listens to our prayers. Even though Habakkuk was discouraged, God heard his prayer. God always hears our prayers. But God answers in His own time, and for our best interest.

While we cannot answer every question in life, there are some steps we can take to cast our cares upon God, knowing that He cares for us (1 Peter 5:7):

- Take our burdens to God in prayer.
- Rest assured that He hears us when we pray.
- Understand that God's timing is not ours.
- Serve God faithfully while waiting for His deliverance.
- Thank Him in advance for His provisions and deliverance.

Biblical Text

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.

¹⁹ **“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.

²⁰ **“But the Lord is in His holy temple.**

Let all the earth be silent before Him.”