

The Prophet's Poetic Woe OR

The Song of Woes

1 **A song of Woe**

Habakkuk 2:6-20

2 **Proposed timeline**3 **Fairness vs justice**

- God is just meaning that His ways are always right and always in line with His holiness
- But He is not fair because fairness means "what men think is equitable"

4 **Habakkuk waits for an answer**

- *I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, And will watch to see what he will say unto me, And what I shall answer when I am reproved.* (Habakkuk 2:1, KJV 1900)
- He positions himself to wait for God to show him the answer to his question. He has the attitude of expectation that God will answer him.
- The complaint to which Habakkuk referred could be his own complaint against God who seems to be operating in ways that Habakkuk cannot endorse. However, it is also likely that it is the complaint of the people against the prophet. He wants an answer when people complain to him about why God isn't doing anything about the evil around them or what they will say when God allows evil enemy to attack them.

5 **Q&A #1**

- Habakkuk's question -- *Why do I have to look at all this evil corruption around me? God, why are you not doing something about it?*
- God's answer – *I am bringing chastisement and judgment upon your nation by using the wicked Chaldeans*
 - The Chaldeans were a nomadic people – the *Kasdim* – a near-relative of Abraham. They intermarried with people around Babylon. When Nebopalassar (a Chaldean) became king and established a ruling dynasty, the term "Chaldeans" became synonymous with "Babylonians."

6 **Habakkuk's praise**7 **Confidence expressed in a rhetorical question (1:12)**

- *O Lord, are You not from everlasting?*
 - This is a declaration rather than an interrogation
 - The prophet had confidence in the living, eternal God, Yahweh, which contrasts strongly with the previous verse in which the Babylonians considered their own strength to be their god.
- Habakkuk refused to believe that Babylon would utterly destroy the people of Judah – even though they were capable of doing so. He based his conclusion on two truths:
 - the immutable and everlasting Lord who will not break his covenant with Israel
 - the holy and righteous God who will not allow sin to go unpunished in Israel or her foes
- He rightly concludes *My God, my Holy One, we will not die.*

8 **Our eternal and Holy God**

- *He stood and measured the earth; he looked and made the nations tremble. Then the mountains of old were shattered; the hills of old collapsed. The ways of old belong to Him.* (Habakkuk 3:6, LEB)
- *God came from Teman; the Holy One from Mount Paran. Selah His splendor covers the heavens, and his praise fills the earth.* (Habakkuk 3:3, LEB)

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10 **Q & A #2**

- Habakkuk's question – *How could you use the wicked Chaldeans (Babylonians) to judge Judah? Judah is wicked, but we look righteous next to the Chaldeans. I'm confused.*
- God's answer – Don't worry about the Chaldeans. I will judge them too in my own time and their judgment will astonish everyone.

11 **To the ever-relevant Word!**12 **Habakkuk 2:6-8**

Shall not all of these take up a taunt against him, with ridicule and riddles against him, saying, 'Woe to him who heaps up what is not his'? For how long? And, 'Woe to him who makes himself heavy with pledges'? Will not your creditors suddenly rise up and awaken those who make you tremble? Then you shall be as plunder for them. Because you plundered many nations, all the remaining nations will plunder you on account of the blood of humanity and violence against the land, and against cities and all who live in them.

13 **Habakkuk 2:9-14**

Woe to him who obtains profit from evil gain for his house, to set his nest on high, to be saved from the hand of misfortune! You have plotted shame for your house, cutting off many peoples and sinning against your life. For the stone will cry out from the wall, and the plaster from the wood will answer it. Woe to him who builds a city by bloodguilt, and who founds a city by wickedness! Look! Is it not from Yahweh of hosts that people labor for mere fire, and nations exhaust themselves for mere vanity? For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of Yahweh, like the waters covering the sea.

14 **Habakkuk 2:15-28**

Woe to him who gives a drink to his neighbors, pouring out your wrath and also making them drunk in order to see their nakedness! You will be sated with shame rather than glory. Drink also yourself, and expose yourself! The cup of the right hand of Yahweh will come around upon you and disgrace upon your glory. For the violence of Lebanon will cover you, and the destruction of wild animals will shatter them on account of the blood of humanity, and the violence against the land, against a city and all the inhabitants in it. What value is an idol when its carver has fashioned it, a molten idol, a teacher of lies? For he who fashioned his creation trusts in it, though making mute idols!

15 **Habakkuk 2:19-20**

Woe to him who says to the wood, 'Wake up!' And to a lifeless stone, 'Arise!' Can he teach? Look, it is covered with gold and silver, and there is no breath within it. But Yahweh is in his holy temple. Let all the earth be silent before him." (Habakkuk 2:6–20, LEB)

16 **Poetic annotation**

- The destruction of Babylon intimated in God's comments to Habakkuk was announced in fuller detail in a song of woe in five stanzas of three verses each ("woe" occurs in vv. 6, 9, 12, 15, 19).
- All those nations conquered and plundered by the Babylonians would in due time witness the fall of their conqueror and join in a song of derision and denunciation. Habakkuk records a taunt song against the Babylonians.
- Verse 6a is literally, "Will not all of them take up against him a taunt-song?"
- Five woes follow.

17 **1. Woe for Intimidation**

Habakkuk 2:6-8 – The Babylonian's plunder

18 **Habakkuk 2:6-8**

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- *Shall not all of these take up a taunt against him, with ridicule and riddles against him, saying, 'Woe to him who heaps up what is not his'? For how long? And, 'Woe to him who makes himself heavy with pledges'? Will not your creditors suddenly rise up and awaken those who make you tremble? Then you shall be as plunder for them. Because you plundered many nations, all the remaining nations will plunder you on account of the blood of humanity and violence against the land, and against cities and all who live in them.* (Habakkuk 2:6–8, LEB)

19 **Whoa! What is a woe?**

- Woe is an interjection of distress pronounced in the face of disaster or in view of coming judgment (e.g., Isa. 3:11; 5:11) because of certain sins.
 - Woe to the wicked! It is bad! For what is done by his hands will be done to him. (Isaiah 3:11, LEB)
 - *Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink; That continue until night, till wine inflame them!* (Isaiah 5:11, KJV 1900)
- "Woe" was used frequently by the prophets (22 times by Isaiah, 10 times in Jer. and Lam., 7 times by Ezekiel, and 14 times in the Minor Prophets).

20 **Bad news for pawnbrokers**

- The first woe compares the Babylonians to an unscrupulous pawnbroker who lends on extortionate terms.
 - As spoil for their own gain they had been merciless in heaping up the wealth of the nations. It was, of course, sheer theft. The valuables taken were not the property of the invaders. How long must this go on? How long would these evil aggressors be permitted to retain their ill-gained plunder? (Cf. Habakkuk's "How long?" about Judah's violence, Hab. 1:2.)
- Why Dave Ramsey calls payday lenders "scum"
 - Payday lenders usually charge interest of \$15-\$20 for every \$100 borrowed. Calculated on an annual percentage rate basis (APR) – the same as is used for credit cards, mortgages, auto loans, etc. – that APR ranges from 391% to more than 521% for payday loans.

21 **The answer to the rhetorical question**

- In verse 6, the question is asked "Shall these victims not take up a taunt song against the Chaldeans?"
- Verse 7 says *Will your debtors suddenly arise?* The victimized nations would arise in revolt. They would get back their goods and give the Chaldeans a good shakedown too. (*Will they not wake up and make you tremble?*)
- Babylon would become the victim and be attacked and extorted.

22 **The extent of their judgment**

- *Because thou hast spoiled many nations, All the remnant of the people shall spoil thee; Because of men's blood, and for the violence of the land, Of the city, and of all that dwell therein.* (Habakkuk 2:8, KJV 1900)
 - Spoiler would be spoiled
 - Plunderer would be plundered
 - The people that were left of Babylon's victims would lead the attack.
 - Babylon had sown the wind; they would now reap the whirlwind.
 - *He that soweth iniquity shall reap vanity: And the rod of his anger shall fail.* (Proverbs 22:8, KJV 1900)
 - Their "bloods" (plural) would be spilt in both the lands and cities (rural and urban).
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23 **2. Woe for Intemperance**

Habakkuk 2:9-11 – The Babylonian's pride

24 **Habakkuk 2:9-11**

► *Woe to him who obtains profit from evil gain for his house, to set his nest on high, to be saved from the hand of misfortune! You have plotted shame for your house, cutting off many peoples and sinning against your life. For the stone will cry out from the wall, and the plaster from the wood will answer it.* (Habakkuk 2:9–11, LEB)

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25 **The mansion becomes a mausoleum**

- The Babylonians had used their unjust gain to exalt themselves.
 - Sought to build high cities with thick walls to protect them from all harm
 - Built the hanging gardens of Babylon
 - Built a towering empire on the ruins of other nations and peoples; their cruelty is about to be repaid.
- In the courtroom of heaven, the stones of the wall and the beams of the woodwork would cry out for justice against the Babylonians.
 - These materials were obtained through plunder and injustice.
 - The lofty nest (verse 9) would be knocked from its perch and the lavish palace would seal the death of its builders.

26 **3. Woe for Iniquity**

Habakkuk 2:12-14

INIQUITY IS DOING THINGS OUR OWN WAY INSTEAD OF GOD'S WAY

The Babylonian's perversity

27 **Habakkuk 2:12-14**

Woe to him who builds a city by bloodguilt, and who founds a city by wickedness! Look! Is it not from Yahweh of hosts that people labor for mere fire, and nations exhaust themselves for mere vanity? For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of Yahweh, like the waters covering the sea. (Habakkuk 2:12–14, LEB)

28 **Buildings built by bloodshed (2:12)**

- Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed and establishes a town by crime!
- The cities of the Babylonian Empire were built by the blood and sweat of enslaved peoples. Murder, bloodshed, oppression, and tyranny were the tools employed in this building project.
 - The word trans. "bloodshed" is the pl. of the Heb. noun "blood" and always signifies the guilt of murder; cf. the Heb. "bloods" in vv. 8, 17.

29 **A change in focus**

- In the previous 2 stanzas, the woe is declared in the first verse and then further exposed in the following verses.
- In this stanza, the first verse introduces the "woe" but then the attention is diverted to the Lord Almighty (verse 13).
 - This is the center of the five stanzas. The Lord is in the MIDDLE of the judgment against the Babylonians.
 - He declares the works of the Babylonians to only be fuel for the fire. *Thus says Yahweh of hosts:*

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"The broad walls of Babylon will be utterly demolished, and her high gates will burn with fire, and the peoples will labor for nothing, and the nations for fire, and they will grow weary." (Jeremiah 51:58, LEB)

- The works of any nation are for nothing if they are built on bloodshed, crime, and fraud.

30 **The one thing that lasts**

- *For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of Yahweh, like the waters covering the sea. (Habakkuk 2:14, LEB)*
 - *They will not injure and they will not destroy on all of my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of Yahweh, as the waters cover the sea. (Isaiah 11:9, LEB)*
 - *And blessed be his glorious name forever, and may the whole earth be filled with his glory. Amen and Amen. (Psalm 72:19, LEB)*
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31 **The coming reign of Christ**

- God will overthrow and judge future Babylon (Rev. 17–18) and all ungodly powers (Rev. 19:19) represented by Babylon.
- The Lord's glory (Matt. 24:30) and majesty (2 Thes. 1:9) will be made evident in the Millennium and thereby acknowledged throughout the earth.
 - When the Messiah rules in His kingdom, knowledge of the Lord will be worldwide.
 - Everyone will know of Him (cf. Jer. 31:34). So extensive and abundant will be that knowledge that it will be like water covering the sea.

32 **4. Woe for Indignity**

Habakkuk 2:15-17 – The Babylonian's cruelty

33 **The mixed drink of hate and passion (2:15)**

- Babylonians are pictured as a drunkard giving wine to neighbors to intoxicate them so that he can indulge in robbery and evil wantonness to expose his victims to shame. They added lust to their violence and drunkenness.
- "Pouring it from the wineskin" is "joining to it your wrath."
- The nations that fell prey to this "mixed drink" remained in their shame and subjugation.

34 **Their glory turned to shame (2:16)**

- The revelry of Babylon over its victims would be turned to shame.
 - The Babylonian glory was corrupt and fleeting
 - God's glory is preeminent and eternal.
- The Babylonians are pictured as lying drunk and exposed, ashamed, and scorned by all.
- The Babylonians would drink from God's cup of wrath in God's right hand.
- On drinking God's judgment, Babylon would be covered with disgrace.
 - "Shame" in the first line of Habakkuk 2:16 and "disgrace" in the last line translate similar Hebrew words, but the second of these is in an emphatic form in Hebrew (used only here in the OT).
 - It signifies extreme contempt. The once-glorious Babylon was pictured as a disgraceful, contemptible drunk.

35 **The reasons for Babylon's shame (2:17)**

- The reason for Babylon's abject shame was her violence (cf. 1:9) done to Lebanon.
 - Lebanon, a nation north of Israel, was known for its abundance of cedar trees and wild animals.

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It had suffered the ruthless removal of timber for Babylonian buildings and the destructive slaughter of beasts that lived in the forests. The violence done to the forests would weigh on Babylon and its senseless hunting and killing of the fauna would terrify it.

- The worst charge, however, was that of human bloodshed, already leveled against the Babylonians twice (2:8, 12).
 - They had not only wrecked the forests and ravaged the hillsides, but had also ruined lands and cities (cf. v. 8) and everyone in them.
 - The indignities on God's creation and His creatures would bring Babylon from apparent world glory to everlasting shame. God's great judgment would overwhelm her.

36 **5. Woe for Idolatry**

Habakkuk 2:18-20

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44 **Habakkuk 2:18-20**

► *What value is an idol when its carver has fashioned it, a molten idol, a teacher of lies? For he who fashioned his creation trusts in it, though making mute idols! Woe to him who says to the wood, 'Wake up!' And to a lifeless stone, 'Arise!' Can he teach? Look, it is covered with gold and silver, and there is no breath within it. But Yahweh is in his holy temple. Let all the earth be silent before him.* (Habakkuk 2:18–20, LEB)

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45 **False gods cannot help**

- The final stanza does not open with the hollow and ominous "Woe!" (That comes in v. 19.) Rather it begins with the penetrating question, Of what value is an idol? The answer is obvious.
 - Idol is carved out of wood
 - Image is made from molten metal cast into a shape.
 - Neither is of any benefit to the worshiper.
- But idols and images were lifeless. Since they were the worshipers' own creations, idols could not aid them (cf. v. 19).
 - The oracles attributed to them were obvious lies, for idols cannot speak.

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47 **A dead god cannot answer prayers of the living**

- God expressed His condemnation of the insidious sin of idolatry. *Woe to him who says to wood, Come to life! Or to lifeless stone, Wake up! How absurd it is to stand before a piece of wood or some cold stone and cry out, "Arise! Awake!"*
 - The scene is like the prophets of Baal when they were taunted by Elijah (1 Kings 18:26–29) – *The Dancing Dummies and the Dynamic Duo*

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- Anyone who worships something he created rather than his Creator stands condemned under God's woe.

48 **A change in ending**

- The first 4 stanzas all begin with "woe" and end with "for"
- But verse 18 begins with a question and ends in verse 20 with a "but" for a marked and marvelous climax.
 - *But the Lord is in His holy temple!*
 - From dumb, man-carved idols, attention shifts to the living Lord, the self-existent, eternal (cf. 1:12; 3:6), holy (cf. 1:12; 3:3) Sovereign who rules the universe from His holy temple, that is, heaven (cf. Pss. 11:4; 18:6, 9; Micah 1:2-3).
 - Instead of shouting, "Arise! Awake," the whole earth must stand in silent awe and worship before Him.
 - The Hebrew word *hāsâh*, rendered "be silent," means "hush" (also used in Zeph. 1:7, "Be silent," and Zech. 2:13, "Be still").
- *Ye shall not need to fight in this battle: set yourselves, stand ye still, and see the salvation of the LORD with you, O Judah and Jerusalem: fear not, nor be dismayed; to morrow go out against them: for the LORD will be with you. (2 Chronicles 20:17, KJV 1900)*

49 **What we have learned**

- God's judgment comes upon the Babylonians and upon lost men for:
 - Intimidation (taking advantage of others)
 - Intemperance (lack of self-control; self-exultation)
 - Iniquity (doing things our own way; bloodshed and violence)
 - Indignity (showing disrespect to others; yielding to lusts)
 - Idolatry (putting anything in the place of the eternal God in our lives)

50 **We need a change in focus**

- At the center of these 5 woes is the glory of the Lord (verse 14).
 - God's judgment is in perfect accord with His glory
 - Whatever is for God's glory is also for our best good!
- Like Habakkuk, we need to remember at the end of every chastisement and punishment is a Lord who is in His holy Temple.
 - He remains on His throne
 - He remains in sovereign control over the universe
 - We need to quiet ourselves and worship Him! He alone is worthy! (... And this is where we will begin next week.)