

### Life Group Study Guide

Habakkuk—carefully, reverently, prayerfully considered-- will change our lives. Its opening verses are a waterfall of grace and blessing that leave us in awe of God’s work in bringing us salvation. This study is based on a sermon preached Sunday morning at Grace Point entitled: *Let All the Earth Be Silent* and reflects on **Habakkuk 2:6-2:20 (ESV)**.

**Before you begin:** *Pray* that God would be at work in your minds and hearts. There is a real difference between knowing and understanding something intellectually and having a heart that is deeply affected by the truth. Pray that the Holy Spirit will help you to *understand* God’s word, *welcome* it into your heart, and then *apply* it faithfully to your lives. **Read aloud:**

<sup>6</sup> *Shall not all these take up their taunt against him, with scoffing and riddles for him, and say,*

*“Woe to him who heaps up what is not his own—  
for how long?—  
and loads himself with pledges!”*

<sup>7</sup> *Will not your debtors suddenly arise,  
and those awake who will make you tremble?  
Then you will be spoil for them.*

<sup>8</sup> *Because you have plundered many nations,  
all the remnant of the peoples shall plunder you,  
for the blood of man and violence to the earth,  
to cities and all who dwell in them.*

<sup>9</sup> *Woe to him who gets evil gain for his house,  
to set his nest on high,  
to be safe from the reach of harm!*

<sup>10</sup> *You have devised shame for your house  
by cutting off many peoples;  
you have forfeited your life.*

<sup>11</sup> *For the stone will cry out from the wall,  
and the beam from the woodwork respond.*

<sup>12</sup> *Woe to him who builds a town with blood  
and founds a city on iniquity!*

<sup>13</sup> *Behold, is it not from the LORD of hosts  
that peoples labor merely for fire,  
and nations weary themselves for nothing?*

<sup>14</sup> *For the earth will be filled  
with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD  
as the waters cover the sea.*

<sup>15</sup> *Woe to him who makes his neighbors drink—  
you pour out your wrath and make them drunk,*

*in order to gaze at their nakedness!*

<sup>16</sup> *You will have your fill of shame instead of glory.*

*Drink, yourself, and show your  
uncircumcision!*

*The cup in the LORD’s right hand  
will come around to you,*

*and utter shame will come upon your glory!*

<sup>17</sup> *The violence done to Lebanon will overwhelm you,*

*as will the destruction of the beasts that  
terrified them,*

*for the blood of man and violence to the earth,  
to cities and all who dwell in them.*

<sup>18</sup> *“What profit is an idol  
when its maker has shaped it,  
a metal image, a teacher of lies?*

*For its maker trusts in his own creation  
when he makes speechless idols!*

<sup>19</sup> *Woe to him who says to a wooden thing,  
Awake;*

*to a silent stone, Arise!*

*Can this teach?*

*Behold, it is overlaid with gold and silver,  
and there is no breath at all in it.*

<sup>20</sup> *But the LORD is in his holy temple;  
let all the earth keep silence before him.”*

Last week we saw that the Chaldeans (Babylon) were like drunken men on a wild rampage, like murderous men who can never take enough life (v.5). Through Habakkuk, God prophesied that the Chaldeans would march across the ancient near east, gathering nations and collecting peoples as prized possessions. Even Judah (all that remains of Israel) will fall before Babylon's reign of terror.

Now, in **verse 6**, the tables have turned: *"6 Shall not all these take up their taunt against him, with scoffing and riddles for him, and say, 'Woe to him who heaps up what is not his own — for how long? — and loads himself with pledges!'"* Here the Lord is prophesying not the great conquering force of Babylon but what will happen to Babylon in judgment for their sins. *"Shall not all these,"* that is, the nations whom Babylon has conquered, *"Shall not these,"* gathered peoples, *"take up their taunt against him [Babylon], with scoffing and ridicule."* The Lord is announcing a day when the subjugated nations will join in catcalling, scoffing, ridicule, and a song of taunting over Babylon and its downfall. *"Naa naa naa naa, naa naa naa naa, hey, hey, hey [Babylon] goodbye!"*

The Babylonians committed horrific war crimes, though it was complete justice for his people's idolatry from God's cosmic perspective. Still, amid that cosmic discipline, Babylon behaved brutally, wreaking havoc upon the world. People suffered, lives were lost, cities were destroyed, crops burned, women were raped, and little ones dashed. And so, in the wake of such exquisite pain, to then see your oppressors cast down, to see justice finally meted out, is bound to elicit from these nations a great cry of rejoicing. There is something right in the conquered nations of the world rejoicing over Babylon's downfall. It's the feeling that good stories and movies often tap into. People love to see the wicked get what they deserve.

We ought not to be hard on these nations rising for taunting wicked Babylon. The thing for us to consider is whether we will be singing the song of justice on the day of God's judgment. (Think of **Exodus 15**, right after the Red Sea drowning of Pharaoh and his army. *"Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the LORD: 'I will sing to the LORD, for he is highly exalted. Both horse and driver he has hurled into the sea.'"*) Will we be singing the song of justice like that? Or will we be facing the music of God's judgment? See, our text for this study is hope for the oppressed but a clear warning for the wicked.

We see in this text **Five Woes**, five reasons that God judges the nations. Five reasons He would judge us, our country, or any country. And in each of these five woes, you'll see this same pattern: A description of the sin, followed by a revelation of what they'll receive in return for their sin.

## 1) Woe to the Greedy

In the **first woe**, we see the sin is taking what does not belong to him. *“He heaps up,” verse 6, “what is not his own. He loads himself with pledges.”*

These are not like pledges you collect for a fundraiser. These are pledges obtained through oppression by making the nations their debtors. They owe them tribute and taxes and their very livelihoods. *“They have plundered many nations,”* it says in **verse 8**. Babylon’s sin is that they are greedy people.

In each section of our passage, the punishment fits the crime. There’s an in-kind punishment. The sin they have meted out will now be the judgment they receive. *“An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth” (Ex. 21:24)*. Of course, *we know* and believe strongly that that sort of standard of justice requires mercy. Jesus taught us to turn the other cheek. But before we’re too critical and say, *“well, that’s just an Old Testament, sort of barbaric form of justice,”* you have to realize that part of the *“eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth”* type of law was to prevent any one from exacting more vengeance than was necessary. You knock out a tooth, and you only get a tooth taken. It’s not *“you knocked out my tooth, I burn down your whole village and kill your family.”* It was a law that limited retribution, and it’s a reflection of how a fair justice system works.

At the heart of justice, payment needs to be made for sin. The guilty person must be punished. Sin has been committed and must be paid for in kind? And so, we see this in the judgement that will come upon Babylon, that the people they made their debtors become then the creditors. The plundered become the plunderers.

**Verse 7-8:** *“<sup>7</sup>Will not your debtors suddenly arise, and those awake who will make you tremble? Then you will be spoil for them.” <sup>8</sup>Because you have plundered many nations, all the remnant of the peoples shall plunder you, for the blood of man and violence to the earth, to cities and all who dwell in them.*

You see, it’s a warning to the powerful. What would happen when, and if, the tables were turned on you? That’s the basic theme of so many of these judgments, or Mary’s Magnificat in the New Testament. There will be a great reversal, and those who have proven to be wicked, who have lined their pockets by oppressing those weaker than them, will one day face their oppressors. There will be a public vindication for the righteous and public shaming of the greedy.

## 2) Woe to the Tyrants

**The second woe, verse 9:** *“Woe to him who gets evil gain for his house, to set his nest on high, to be safe from the reach of harm. That’s the sin: Babylon is feathering his nest with straw from other men’s homes. He thinks of himself as a mighty eagle, far out of the reach of harm or violence. So he believes himself invincible, untouchable, not subject to ruin or judgment or the everyday disasters of life.*

Might we ever fall into that temptation; of getting ahead at someone else’s expense? Especially if we happen to have employees who work for us. Can we be tempted to think that we have our portion of land, and we have our home, and we have things the way we like, and we have our savings, and we have our retirement, and we are untouchable, unable to be genuinely harmed by the things that affect other people in the world. Nonsense! Of course, it’s not wrong to have a nice house or things. The problem is they built their livelihood upon the backs of their conquered enemies. <sup>10</sup> *You have devised shame for your house, verse 10, by cutting off many peoples; you have forfeited your life.* God says to them, “What goes around comes around, and all the people you’ve defrauded, stolen from, and oppressed will collapse upon you in *your* day of woe.

**Verse 11:** <sup>11</sup> *For the stone will cry out from the wall, and the beam from the woodwork respond.* See, these are stolen stones from conquered people. The Chaldeans have razed cities and brought back to Babylon plundered gold, silver, and precious jewels to build themselves impressive homes and palaces. They say, “look upon this great edifice that I have built,” but the Lord says, “No, that home you think is your glory is your shame. The stones cry out, and the beams cry out; the bricks, mortar, jewels, gold, and silver were ill-gotten.

Have you read Yertle the Turtle by Dr. Seuss? King Yertle made the other turtles stack themselves beneath him so that he could see farther and farther and thereby expand his kingdom. Soon, he was not just king of the pond; he also ruled a cow, a mule, a house, etc. But his subjects, the turtles stacked beneath him, were in pain. And poor Mack at the bottom of the pile starts to “sigh” and eventually complain until he can’t take any more pressure and burps, causing Yertle’s turtle throne to collapse. The king falls, leaving him “King of the Mud” and allowing all the others to swim away free, “as turtles, and maybe all creatures should be.”

So it was with the glory of Babylon. God is not mocked. What you sow, you will also reap. “Woe to the nation that commits greed, woe to the nation that acts tyrannically.”

### 3) Woe to the Violent

**Verse 12,** <sup>12</sup> *“Woe to him who builds a town with blood and founds a city on iniquity!*

Babylon was rushing in, killing people, enslaving them, shipping them off, or murdering them in the streets. The foundation of the city of Babylon was greed, injustice, and violence.

You won't find a country or civilization on the earth that at some point did not build their cities and some of their great accomplishments at the expense of other human beings—pyramids in Egypt, the Roman Empire with a vast system of slavery. If you know world history, you see how the Japanese at times treated the Chinese or the Koreans. The Han Chinese may look down upon those who are Uyghur (wee-gr) Chinese, or Arabs to the Jews, or the English over the Irish, or Australians over aboriginal people, or white Americans over black Americans, or black Africans killing in genocide other black African tribes, or white Canadians over Indigenous peoples, or Indigenous tribes warring one another in pre-confederation times. It is a universal sin, building our human accomplishments upon injustice done to others.

And you see the recompense from the Lord? **Verse 13:** <sup>13</sup> *Behold, is it not from the LORD of hosts that peoples labor merely for fire, and nations weary themselves for nothing? Or, to put it another way: Is it not from the Lord that all your enslaved people labour for what will soon burn up? The nations will weary themselves for nothing. The Babylonian empire will not last.*

Babylon has built monuments upon blood and injustice and violence. It has feathered its nest and created great civilizations. And God says, “You want to know what will last? At the end of the age, you want to know what will cover the entire planet?” It will not be the Babylon Empire. It will not be the British Empire. It was once said, “The sun never set on the British Empire,” until it did. American might won't last either. No, **verse 14** says, *“For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.”* It will be the glory of the Lord which will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. That's what will last forever. Whatever exalts man apart from God will not survive! Why spend your life labouring for that which fades and withers?

There are certainly reasons to be patriotic and to care about our country. And yet all of it must be relativized in this sense: We don't panic and throw tantrums when our country starts to unravel or grow corrupt. Sure, we vote and live in a way that we believe will bless our country. But Christian, we labour primarily for the glory of the Lord. The only glory that will last; the only glory that will spread from sea to sea to sea.

#### 4) Woe to the Depraved

**Verse 15:** *“Woe to him who makes his neighbours drink—you pour out your wrath and make them drunk, in order to gaze at their nakedness! What we see here is a depiction of brutal, drunken revelry and sexual perversion. Verse 16 says, <sup>16</sup>You will have your fill of shame instead of glory. Drink, yourself, and show your uncircumcision! The cup in the LORD’s right hand will come around to you, and utter shame will come upon your glory! The recompense is to trade shame for shame. Instead of drinking the cup of alcohol, leading you to a stupor and an orgy of revelry, God says, “You like to drink? Do you like to drink yourself drunk? I’ll give you a cup, the cup in my right hand. I’ll empty it on you, and utter shame will come upon your glory.” (cf. Matt. 26:39; Rev. 14:10; 16:19, 18:3-6; Ps. 75:8; Lam. 4:21; Jer. 25:15-16, 49:12; 51:7; Zech. 12:2-3).*

The Day of Wrath that Habakkuk foresaw has come and gone in history. Babylon rose, and Babylon fell over 2500 years ago. Still, the principles he discovered in his conversation with God continue to be in force, and, in fact, a great deal of the content and theology from Habakkuk is repeated and recast in the New Testament. The Book of Revelation explains that everywhere we still find greed, tyranny, violence, sensuality, and idolatry, we find Babylon alive and well in the world today. And so, the fall of ancient Babylon becomes the dominant interpretive lens for anticipating the fall of ultimate Babylon in the Great and Final Day of Wrath. **Revelation 14:8** says: *“Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who made all nations drink the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality.”* God doesn’t change; He is today who he was in the time of Habakkuk.

Babylon’s sin was also the wanton destruction of God’s good creation. **Verse 17:** *“The violence done to Lebanon will overwhelm you,”* Lebanon was the place of the great forests. In the Bible, we read of the trees of Lebanon. Elsewhere we see David and Solomon used the cedars of Lebanon for their building projects, and there was no shame in that. This isn’t a rebuke for cutting down trees but a denunciation for their senseless destruction. You don’t have to be a hard-core environmentalist to mourn the destruction of old trees. My family biked to Kildonan Park Saturday and saw some beautiful trees along the river, certainly over a hundred years old. If someone were to come in, and chop them all down for no good purpose, it would be an act of wanton destruction. And the Lord notices, the Lord cares. He cares even about the beasts, **verse 17b:** *“as will the destruction of the beasts that terrified them, for the blood of man and violence to the earth, to cities and all who dwell in them”* (animals included). I’m not saying we can’t eat animals, or hunt, or fish, but this is senseless slaughter and cruelty to God’s creatures. God cares ( cf. **Prov. 12:10; Jonah 4:11**).

## 1) Woe to the Idolaters

**Verses 18-19:** <sup>18</sup> *“What profit is an idol when its maker has shaped it, a metal image, a teacher of lies? For its maker trusts in his own creation when he makes speechless idols! <sup>19</sup> Woe to him who says to a wooden thing, Awake; to a silent stone, Arise! Can this teach? Behold, it is overlaid with gold and silver, and there is no breath at all in it.*

This is the pinnacle of their rebellion. Building from greed to tyranny to violence to debauchery, and now the very height of their rejection of God is that they make gods for themselves. They trust in their own creation. They make a wooden thing or a silent stone and say, *“Awake, arise.”* You see this kind of explicit idolatry in paganism, occultism, and animism today—the worshiping of created things rather than the Creator who is blessed forever. God says your creation is silent before you. *“Can this teach?”* **verse 19**, *“it’s overlaid with gold and silver, there’s no breath in it.”* You see the contrast that He’s making between their false gods and the true God? God’s words are more to be desired than gold (**Psalm 19:10**), the law of the Lord more precious than thousands of pieces of silver (**Psalm 119:72**). Ever wondered why the psalmist puts it that way? Because they had statues overlaid with gold, but those statues had no words. The God of Israel was invisible, there was no statue for Him, but His Word from heaven is more precious than gold or silver.

**Verse 20:** <sup>20</sup> *But the LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him.”*

There’s a Hebrew word here that’s a kind of onomatopoeia (words that are what they sound like). So, when it says, *“Let all the earth keep silence,”* the Hebrew word is “has” and almost sounds like our English word “hush.” Babylon is to become like their so-called gods, silent. And that, of course, is exactly what happened. Babylon arose in history like a bat out of hell. She conquered and plundered nations, crediting speechless idols before the Lord, and then in a moment, she fell to her enemies and receded into history with a whimper.

This is also a perfect end to this cycle of complaints. Habakkuk has dared to speak to the LORD who *“sits enthroned in His holy temple.”* The LORD who speaks has denounced Babylon with five woes, and now He says, *“Hush, Habakkuk. Now is the time to be silent.”* Much like Job, who puts a hand over his mouth. *“Babylon has gods that cannot speak. Well, I have spoken, and now you will be silent.”* Sometimes shutting your mouth is the truest form of worship you can offer. *“Silence,”* the Lord says, *“I’m God, you’re not. My glory will last; all other glories will not.”*

This is a hard passage for us. It's hard on the very inner workings of it. This sense of reciprocal justice does not appeal to us today. But it's essential if we are to understand the character of God and the moral world that He has made. It's also essential if we are to understand the Gospel. Now you might say, as we close, I don't see a lot of Gospel in this passage; I see a bunch of woes. What could **Habakkuk 2** teach us about the Gospel?

For starters, it answers our question: *Who runs a world like this?* A holy, just, and sovereign God does. He's a God that ensures sin gets what it deserves. Sin deserves ridicule, public shaming, mockery, punishment, and death. And if you disagree with that, you don't understand what happened to Jesus. When they sang a taunting song, struck Him on the cheek, and said: "*prophecy to us.*" They mocked Him, spat upon Him, and shamed him like a *greedy* person. They twisted a crown of thorns upon His head, put a robe on him, and hung him from a tree. In **Joshua 8:29**, they hung the evil King of Ai on a tree, the OT punishment for a guilty *tyrant*. **Deut. 21:23**: says, "*cursed is any man hung from a tree.*" He cried out, "*My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?*" enduring a flood of judgement from God, as the *violent* received in Babylon and Noah's days. On the cross, he was made to drink wine (**John 19:38**), and his nakedness was completely exposed. The punishment for *drunken sexual depravity*. He uttered a loud cry and then breathed his last. God silenced him like an evil *idolater*. What do you think people were thinking who stood there staring at him? What did they think as the Father made him drink down to the dregs the cup of his right hand, the cup of wrath that he begged might be taken from him? I'll tell you what they thought. Guilty, Guilty, Guilty!

Jesus looked as guilty as anyone could look. He had to die this way. He could not have died like a firefighter trying to save people from a burning building (what he was actually doing)! He couldn't die looking like a hero. He had to face what we deserved in His body and soul, the woes that should have been upon us for our sin. We see them in the Lord Jesus, taking what our sin deserves. It deserves punishment, it deserves shame, it deserves to be exposed, to be ridiculed, to be mocked, to be taunted, and Jesus took it all upon Himself. Have you been greedy, unjust, violent, idolatrous, or sexually depraved? There is a cup in God's right hand reserved for you unless you are in Christ. Jesus is an ark for people of faith. He shelters us through the flood of God's wrath into the new creation. All who trust in him will not be put to shame.

People sometimes think that our world is awash in relativism. I think we live in an age extremely certain of right and wrong and what sin deserves. Just go hang out on Twitter sometime and observe the cancel culture. The world understands that sin deserves mockery, shame, and punishment. They don't know what Jesus accomplished.