

# Five Woes

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] We're going to carry on looking at Habakkuk. Now, that's difficult. Okay, so can we recap the story so far? There was Habakkuk first complaint. Can anyone tell me what the first complaint of Habakkuk was? Yes, there was a lot of evil and there was a lot of sin in God's people, in Judah. And he was saying, how long is this injustice going on? What are you going to do about it, God? God's first answer, I am doing something. And what was it he was doing? There's this terrible injustice happening. There's no law keeping that there's idolatry in Judah. And you know, Habakkuk says, how long ago? What are you going to do about it? And God says, well, I am going to send the Babylonians. And I'm going to send the Babylonians to destroy and to take Judah into captivity. That's the answer.

So the second complaint comes in from Habakkuk. And what's that? The first answer from God is, I'm sending Babylon. Habakkuk's second complaint is Babylon, surely not. You can be using an evil nation like Babylon to work out justice and judgment on the people of God. So that was the second complaint. And then last week we looked at the first half of God's answer, which was really this recognition that Habakkuk had to be patient and also that God was going to do something amazing. He was eventually going to redeem the people.

And in the appointed time, there would be relief for both for Judah in terms of the Babylonian captivity being broken, but also a greater appointed time. And we looked at that briefly at being Jesus, the coming of Christ at exactly the right time. So that's where we are so far. Now we're coming to the second half of God's answer because what Habakkuk was worried about was that God didn't really care about justice and God was allowing evil things to happen. And so God brings his answer in the next section. So this is the five woes that God brings upon the Chaldeans or the Babylonians. In other words, he's using them to execute his justice, but that doesn't exempt them from judgment because they are not believing and following and loving God. So why don't we split up the reading and we'll have different people doing the different woes. So there's five woes. So who wants to read the first woes? It's verses 7 and 8. I'll start with verse 6. Shall not all these take up their taunt against him scoffing and riddles for him and say. So in other words, God is saying here, he's personifying Babylon as an individual he, an individual person. And all those that are referred to there is referring to the people of Judah who will eventually see God's judgment. Okay. So who wants to read the first section? Simon there, look at that. So I like to see hands up verses 7 and 8. Okay. That's woe number one. Second woe.

Nine to 11. Who's going to do that? Okay. Okay. Third woe is verses 12 to 14. Brian, do you want to read that? Your hand was up or Mary? Okay. Fourth woe. Mary. That's 15 to 17.

Holy Jesus makes his neighbour strength and forward a wrath and make him drunk in order to gain their nakedness. You will have your fellow shame instead of glory. Drink yourself and show your un-pity singing. The cup and the lords right hand with hand out to you and utter shame and power from your glory. The vial done to leaven and vote of the holy God for the blood of God and vial of Judah. Okay. And the last woe, the fifth woe is verses 18 to 20. What prophet is an idol when its mays have shaped it a method image, a teacher of lies, for its maker trusts in his own creation when he makes speechless idols? Woe to him he says to a wooden thing, awake, to a silent stone lies. Can this teach? Behold, it is overlaid with gold and silver and there is no breath in it at all. But the Lord is in his holy temple, let all the earth keep silence before him. Thank you. So that's the second half of God's second answer to Habakkuk's second complaint. Okay. And what basically we have these five judgment calls by God on Babylon and wider than Babylon, just on the kind of things that we see that God is unhappy with.

[ 6 : 23 ] Now biblically, a cry of woe. When you get woe, well, originally what happened was a woe was usually associated with a funeral. So people would cry out woe and would cry out the name of the person who had died. And a funeral was an expression of grief and loss.

You know, we're very unexpressive at our funerals and quiet. But in the ancient Ereist, it was very, you know, it was very expressive and there would be these cries of woe because of someone who had died. But the prophets in the Bible took that expression of grief and applied it to those who were alive. And it became synonymous with God's judgment, God's cry of justice. And when you have woe in the prophecies, it means it's a word coming from God of judgment for people who are as good as dead because they were rebelling against Him. And this five, series of five woes was given to Habakkuk personally, which we believe he went on then to tell the people of Judah to encourage them that God's judgment would come upon Babylon, even though Babylon was being used by God, and it's forth telling the coming doom of this great, powerful nation. And that's important. That's important in lots of different ways for us as well today to recognize God's hand in history and what happens. So I'm going to quickly go through these woes. The first woe that was read, woe to Him who heaps up what is not His own for how long and loads Himself up. It's actually,

I'm an old timer, okay? And you get set in your ways when you're an old timer. And I use the NIV UK version, okay? And for these kind of poetic parts of Scripture, the NIV is slightly more of a dynamic equivalent rather than a direct translation, but sometimes its poetry is easier to understand than the more literal ESV. So I'm going to kind of read from that as well from the NIV. So what he's saying in this first woe, he's talking about how much the Babylonians have gained strength by stealing, by extortion and by pillage, and the cry goes out, how long was this going to go on? And God is saying, yep, you've made your success that way, but very shortly debtors will arise. And we'll, sorry, I'm going to find it in my own. Yeah, will not your debtors suddenly arise? Will they not wake up and meet you tremble? Then you will become their victim because you have plundered many nations.

And God is saying that, really what he's saying to them is that in God's time, Babylon itself who has extorted and who has crushed this nation, will themselves be victims of extortion and being crushed. And that of course happened with the Medes and the Persians who destroyed and broke the Babylonian power. And in many ways there's kind of a New Testament parallel with the measure that you use is the measure you'll be judged by in Matthew 7. And it's saying if that's how you act to others, others will act like that to you. And that can be at a personal level, but it's also here obviously at a national level. And God is saying your sin will always be judged Babylon. Sometimes it will be through payback from another nation because of your injustice or sometimes it will be on the last day. Your sin will always be paid back. First of all, second woe. Woe to him who builds his realm by unjust gain, set his nest on high to escape the clutches of ruin. You have plotted the ruin of many shaming your own house and forfeited your life. The stones of the wall will cry out and the beams of the woodwork will echo it. And he's speaking here about building dynasties, trying to build them high up above opposition and security and doing it unjustly, aggressive expansionism, destroying the national identity of other nations in order to do so, dispossessing them, using their workforce in the wrong way. And there's a great reminder of this in Daniel chapter four. I think, I think Corrie might have mentioned this before, when God brings down Nebuchadnezzar who represents Babylon, who's the king. And he says that this, all this happened to King Nebuchadnezzar. 12 months later, as the king was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, he said, is not this great Babylon? I have built as the royal residence by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty. It's exactly what God's speaking about in that second woe. Some king representing a nation taking all the glory for himself away from God. And then we have these were even, even as the words put on his lips, a voice came from heaven. This is what is decreed for you, King Nebuchadnezzar, the royal authority has been taken away. You'll be driven away from people who will live like the wild animals. You will eat grass like the ox. And the judgment of this woe comes upon Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon as a result. Okay, second one. Well, actually, just one more thing about this second woe. It's interesting. God says in that second woe, the stones of the wall will cry out and the beams of the woodwork will echo it. It's a really interesting little phrase there where God is saying, look, even creation, even the inanimate creation will testify against the injustice, they will be used as witnesses. And just that kind of whole reminder that God is constantly watching, even when we think nobody's looking, even when we're only surrounded by inanimate objects, they will call out and cry out against injustice against the living God. So it's a really sweet kind of poetic word that we have there. So then we come to the third woe. Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed, establishes a town by crime, has not the Lord Almighty determined that the people's labor is only fuel for the fire, that the nations exhaust themselves for nothing. And it seems to be

that God is here condemning really the stripping back of nations of self-respect and of dignity by using them and forced labor and enslavement, debasing them. And just the city is becoming places of moral degeneracy and corruption. Jeremiah 31 speaks about it again with Babylon.

[13:54] This is what the Lord Almighty says, Babylon's thick wall will be levelled, our high gates set on fire, the people's exhaust themselves for nothing, the nations labor is only fuel for the flames. Very similar words. Is that the slavery is an abuse of humanity and is a waste of their creative gifts and of their dignity. And the buildings that they are building will not last, God says, because of God's glory. And God's glory will be something that can never be broken. Fourth woe, 15 to 17. Woe to him who gives drink to his neighbors, pouring it from the wine skin to their drunk so that he can gaze on their naked bodies. He will be filled with shame instead of glory and so on. And again is this judgment on Babylon for stripping nations of their respect, taking advantage of them, debasing them. I don't think there's anything literal about this. I don't think the Babylonians gave free drink to the nation of Judah and to get them drunk and so on.

But I think it's a picture of humiliation. It's a picture of just stripping them of anything of that. You know, being stripped naked, you know, Jesus being stripped naked is that whole picture of humiliation and exposure and a lack of dignity. And he says in verse 16, woe to him who makes his neighbor drunk, you pour out your wrath and make them drunk in order to gaze on their nakedness. You will have your fill of shame instead of glory.

Drink yourself and show your answer. The cup in the Lord's right hand will come round to you. And that's just what's often used of God in judgment is a cup of wrath that the nations have to drink. They will not be exempt, even though they're being used by the Lord, they'll not be exempt from judgment. Now I want to step out of the passage just for a moment quickly to let you just dwell for a moment on this cup of wrath and the astonishing reality that God the Son drank that cup of wrath to its dregs. John 18 and verse 11, Jesus commanded Peter, put your sword away, shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me. And so there's this parallel between the judgment that God places on all who are sinners and the nations and the Babylonians and the individuals, but also the cup that he takes upon himself, the person of Jesus as he drinks that cup of judgment and that cup of wrath.

The wrath due to me and due to you is poured out as drunk by another. You don't drink the cup of God's wrath as a believer. Jesus drank that cup of wrath to the fool on our behalf. And there's this reality that without judgment, there can be no redemption for us.

And even without the judgment that is meted out here on Judah, there's no remnant that comes back. There's no hope for them because God is working out his justice. But in God's judgment, we therefore recognize that there's redemption and our cup is empty because it's been drunk. And I want you to meditate on that and think about that. It's very easy for us, so easy for us to be complacent and to think what Jesus has done is no big deal all the time. I find that for myself. And yet we have this astonishing reality. You've got a short straw just now because I'm doing both sermons on Sunday as well. I've done this sermon so what you'll probably find is there's lots of things that are intertwining and fusing and I'll repeat things. But I hope they'll be repeated because the themes are quite similar. But let's remember that we don't deserve the great grace and love of

[ 18 : 21 ] God but it's irresistible grace is ours because of what has happened on the cross. The cross speaks of the unquestionable reality of judgment of every single sin. And that's in many ways what has been spoken of here by God. So the fifth will, the last will here, and we're really only scanning it very quickly. The fifth will is really all about idolatry. You know, what values an idol since a man has carved it or an image that teaches lies for he who makes it trust in its own creation. He makes idols that cannot speak woe to him who says to would come to life. And the word for idols there is kind of godlets, little gods, tiny gods, dead gods. And it speaks of these gods here as those who cannot speak and who cannot bring guidance. And yet this is who the Babylonians were worshiping and this is who the Babylonians would be judged over. They were focusing on created things and had no relationship with the living God. They worshiped idols because it was easier because it gave them what they want because they could live any way they wanted as a result.

And I think the opposite for us as believers and the opposite for what it should have been for Judah was they had a relationship with the living God. And we have that through Jesus Christ. We have a God who guides us. So you know, that whole thing about guidance is so important, isn't it? That we have a God who is able to show us and lead us is not silent but is one who shows and who we can reciprocate love and relationship with. And so there's this reality of recognising that when we replace God with anything in our lives, we can't know relationship with the divine and we can't know guidance from him and help and redemption.

And so the greatest mistake we can make is leaving God out of our lives. And yet it's the deepest temptation. That's the paradox of our lives is that it's the daftest thing to do but it's the thing we're tempted most to do. And that's the paradox into the human condition. But it comes under God's judgment when we replace him with idols as it was the case here. So whether it's idolatry or whether it's injustice or whether it's slavery or whether it's stealing or whether it's setting dynasties up and setting power in our own place, God is saying to Habakkuk an answer to his complaint and also to us that every single sin will be judged and will be dealt with. So I think as we close, there's two perspectives. One is the way we look at the world in the light of quite a difficult and slightly passage that we don't feel touches our day to day lives in many ways. The way we look at the world and also the way we look at our own lives in the light of the fact every single sin will be judged and in the light that God is absolutely just either in punishing sin on the last day or in punishing sin and his own son Jesus Christ. So the way we look at the world then, we begin to see it the way God sees it here because this is a national, international focus that God has here on Babylon and on Judah and on what's happening. We can see what God hates at a global national level, things that we may be seen powerless over and the world which we live seems to relentlessly mock the reality of God and what we see as we've seen before seems incompatible with who he is, the world that he has created, the stealing, the extortion, the corruption, the destructive power building, the modern slavery, the injustice, the debasing of others, the cheapening of life, idolatry.

We can see these woes almost perfectly describing the world we live in, whether it's Ukraine or Civil War in Yemen or economic corruption that we see around us or the abusive power or modern slavery or the relegation of God at almost every level and the philosophy of secular humanism we see all around us just as Judah saw it with Babylon and maybe we asked the same question, how long? That question of verse 6, for how long? How long? Someone very close to me and my family this week was opening the fridge, I was hearing about and we were just talking about the raging fires in Europe and everything, I said, I think the end's close. Might not be wrong. Of course that might not be the case but nonetheless there's this recognition that this world will not go on forever in its rebellious state against God. How long? And yet we remember just as it seemed miserable for Judah here to be enslaved by Babylon, we remember that Babylon was destroyed and we remember that nations since then great nations have been destroyed and the kingdom of evil was defeated on the cross and will be ultimately destroyed when Jesus returns. And it's interesting that Revelation 18, speaking about the end time when Jesus comes back and the kingdom of darkness calls it Babylon. It calls it Babylon so there's this connection between what is spoken of here and what happened to Judah with the whole of the realm of evil and the kingdom of darkness and it's spoken of, so you know, the great prostitute Babylon as it's spoken of in Revelation 18 and 17. So there is, we look to a future end and we all look forward to that weird and that place between Christ first and the second coming.

And there will be their day as verse 14 says, when the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. And the great revelation of the glory of the Lord is Jesus Christ, Hebrews 1 through the sun is the radiance of God's glory, the exact representation of his being. And so one day God's glory will cover all of the world and that is what we look forward to, a fundamental change, a revolution of goodness like no other. So we need to, I think, help, we need to encourage ourselves by trying to look at the world in which we live in the same way as God was encouraging Habakkuk to look at the world he was in, recognizing there is evil, mystery, difficulty, bewilderment on our part, but to trust God and to say, I have a perfect plan, I know exactly what

[ 26 : 01 ] I'm doing and we trust in him, maybe at a micro level, but also the way, secondly, the way we look at the world also the way we look at our lives.

So a passage like this I think, it helps us pray because we begin to know the kind of things to pray for, we need to pray for patience, we need to pray for a perspective, for humility, for a sense of forgiveness and for the glory of God. So we pray in the light of a passage like this to the sovereign, great sovereign God, but also how we live, because 2 Peter 3, 11 and 12, speaking about the return of Jesus, because he's coming back, how then should we live to holy and godly lives? So because Jesus is coming back, it matters that we don't cheat on our wives or husbands, it matters that we don't steal, it matters that we're not bitter, it matters that we work on our own heart with the power of the Holy Spirit to be holy and godly, exactly where God has placed us, whether it's something like the banishment to Babylon that the people were placed in or in our own very ordinary lives. We live with humility and hope that every single act of evil will be held to account and it will be destroyed and we will live in a new place where righteousness dwells and we'll plant our feet on the ground of Edinburgh or of any other place where it'll become righteous. So how we pray, how we live and also how we share our faith, just remembering that these metatruths affect the way we witness, it's important that people know they're made in God's image, that they've broken that image, that image is broken both by nature and by choice and that there's only one way back for people. And it's important to do that because otherwise people would just think your faith is just a personal thing that works for you. We need somehow to draw people into that place where they see that everyone is under this holy God who will bring every sin to account either on the person of Jesus or in spiritual death on the individual. So that changes I think maybe sometimes how we share our faith. So, spun through that very quickly, it's a difficult passage. I would encourage you even to read it in an even more parafrastic version of the Bible than the SVA. It sometimes helps, it makes it slightly easier. But also pray through it and pull out the gems of truth that are in each of these woes and don't be discouraged. And I'm absolutely gutted that

Corey gets to do the last chapter because it's the best one and it's Habakkuk's prayer.