

# Regaining Our Prophetic Voice

*Expositions of Habakkuk*

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**Bible Text:** Habakkuk 2:6-20; Revelation 18:1-19:6

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Please turn in your Bibles, if you would, to the little book of Habakkuk chapter two and we will be reading verses six through 20. Habakkuk chapter two verses six through 20.

This is a song given by the Lord to Habakkuk indicting Babylon.

Will not all of these take up a taunt-song against him,  
Even mockery and insinuations against him  
And say, “Woe to him who increases what is not his—  
For how long—  
And makes himself rich with loans?”  
Will not your creditors rise up suddenly,  
And those who collect from you awaken?  
Indeed, you will become plunder for them.  
Because you have looted many nations,  
All the remainder of the peoples will loot you—  
Because of human bloodshed and violence done to the land,  
To the town and all its inhabitants.  
Woe to him who gets evil gain for his house  
To put his nest on high,  
To be delivered from the hand of calamity!  
You have devised a shameful thing for your house  
By cutting off many peoples;  
So you are sinning against yourself.  
Surely the stone will cry out from the wall,  
And the rafter will answer it from the framework.  
Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed  
And founds a town with violence!  
Is it not indeed from the LORD of hosts  
That peoples toil for fire,  
And nations grow weary for nothing?  
For the earth will be filled  
With the knowledge of the glory of the LORD,  
As the waters cover the sea.

Woe to you who make your neighbors drink,  
Who mix in your venom even to make them drunk  
So as to look on their nakedness!  
You will be filled with disgrace rather than honor.  
Now you yourself drink and expose your own nakedness.  
The cup in the LORD'S right hand will come around to you,  
And utter disgrace will come upon your glory.  
For the violence done to Lebanon will overwhelm you,  
And the devastation of its beasts by which you terrified them,  
Because of human bloodshed and violence done to the land,  
To the town and all its inhabitants.  
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.  
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.  
But the LORD is in His holy temple.  
Let all the earth be silent before Him.<sup>1</sup>

Let's pray together.

*Father, thank you for your Word. Thank you for this hard word that comes to us through the prophet Habakkuk. Thank you, Father, that in it you condemn evil and you exalt yourself and your Son Jesus Christ. We pray that as we look into this, your Word, that we might have this same posture to condemn evil and to exalt Jesus Christ. May it be that you will give us in the Church a voice to do so that the clarion call will go out, not only in the midst of your people in this place, but throughout this land and throughout the world that evil is indeed condemned and Jesus Christ is indeed Lord of all. So bless us to this end as we take time this morning to look into this your Word we pray in the name of Jesus Christ who is the only Lord and Savior. Amen.*

The Church of Jesus Christ, in many ways, has lost her prophetic voice. This is a criticism we can level with regard to the Church at large. But we can narrow the scope of this criticism a little bit and say the same thing about Presbyterian and Reformed Churches. The Church in many ways has lost her prophetic voice.

Habakkuk is charging us to renew our prophetic voice, for the Church of Jesus Christ to renew her prophetic voice. You need to pray that God will cause the Church to once again rise up prophetically and declare that evil is evil and that Jesus Christ is, indeed, the Lord of all.

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<sup>1</sup> Habakkuk 2:6-20.

This is Habakkuk's message with regard to Babylon, consummate evil. And this is a message that we ought to take up as the Church. And so my injunction for you this morning is to pray, to pray that God will cause his Church, this church and other churches, this denomination and other denominations, to be renewed in its prophetic voice, to declare that evil is evil and God condemns it and that Jesus Christ is the only Lord of all. Pray that God will renew the church's prophetic voice to condemn evil and exalt Christ.

As we come to Habakkuk this morning, Habakkuk, you remember, has been in a quandary. There was much evil in Judah and Jerusalem. He wonders about God's withholding his hand and he laments this fact. God reminds Habakkuk that he will judge this evil. He will bring Babylon against Jerusalem and against Judea as the hand of his judgment. Habakkuk wavers. He questions God's judgment here and he asks, "Is it just for you to send a much more evil nation against Judah and Jerusalem as the hand of your judgment? Is it just for you to send those who are less righteous against us?" And now in our text this morning, God affirms the fact that Babylon will be judged. She will not escape the hand of God's judgment.

And you will note that in this text we have a song. Look, if you would, at verse six once again. "Will not all of these take up a taunt-song against him, Even mockery and insinuations against him?"<sup>2</sup> Will not all the nations taunt Babylon and raise a song against her? This song is actually a dirge, a funeral song. It comes to us in this form. You will notice that there are five woes given in this text. There are *three woes* given and then light emerges. Verse 14. "For the earth will be filled With the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, As the waters cover the sea."<sup>3</sup> And then there are *two more woes* given and more light emerges. Verse 20. "But the LORD is in His holy temple. Let all the earth be silent before Him."<sup>4</sup>

And so the song is divided, three stanzas and two stanzas. Structure betrays meaning. The normal rhythm or cadence in Hebrew poetry is three-three. But our stanzas are an odd number specifically divided in this rhythm, three and two. The reason the song is divided in this way is that it is a funeral dirge. And this rhythm, three-two, three-two is the rhythm of the lament. It is the rhythm of the funeral dirge, the funeral song. Habakkuk is singing the song of Babylon's demise. Long before she is ready to fall, he sings this dirge confirming the fact that Babylon's doom is sure.

And so we have, then, these woes that come against the Babylonian empire.

Will not all of these take up a taunt-song against him,  
Even mockery and insinuations against him  
And say, "Woe to him who increases what is not his—  
For how long—  
And makes himself rich with loans?"

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<sup>2</sup> Habakkuk 2:6.

<sup>3</sup> Habakkuk 2:14.

<sup>4</sup> Habakkuk 2:20.

Will not your creditors rise up suddenly,  
And those who collect from you awaken?  
Indeed, you will become plunder for them.<sup>5</sup>

The translations here are various. But the idea is that the work of Babylon is likened to that of an unscrupulous banker who says, “I am going to take all that you have.”

There are those in our own country who are suffering because of entering into loan relationships that have come back to bite them. And this is the language in the text. Babylon will bite. And the way the biting comes is that the loan papers have been signed. The value of the property has decreased so that more is owed to the bank than the value of the property. And when the homeowner defaults, the banker comes in and takes it all.

And this is exactly what Babylon was doing, acting like a banker who is out to grab everything in an unscrupulous way. And it will all come back to bite them, says Habakkuk.

Will not your creditors rise up suddenly,  
And those who collect from you awaken?  
Indeed, you will become plunder for them.  
Because you have looted many nations,  
All the remainder of the peoples will loot you—  
Because of human bloodshed and violence done to the land,  
To the town and all its inhabitants.<sup>6</sup>

The Babylonians will come in and say, “We are going to take your property and we are going to make you slaves. If you are not willing to come with us and to give us your property, you will die.” But now the looters, promises Habakkuk, will be looted. “Woe to them,” says Habakkuk.

And then the second woe.

Woe to him who gets evil gain for his house  
To put his nest on high,  
To be delivered from the hand of calamity!<sup>7</sup>

Why do individuals seek evil gain? They want to feather their own nests and to put themselves on high so that they can escape calamity? This is the idea within the text. Verse 10. “You have devised a shameful thing for your house By cutting off many peoples.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Habakkuk 2:6-7.

<sup>6</sup> Habakkuk 2:7-8.

<sup>7</sup> Habakkuk 2:9.

<sup>8</sup> Habakkuk 2:10.

How do these evil doers raise their stature? By cutting others down low. This is how they raise their stature. This is tyranny. And this is how tyranny works. Tyranny involves lowering the standard of everyone in the community so that the individual who is exercising control gathers power to himself or herself. Are we in danger of seeing this sort of thing occur in our own land?

Now look again at verse 11. “Surely the stone will cry out from the wall, And the rafter will answer it from the framework.”<sup>9</sup> Judgment will come. The houses built and the families built with tyranny will be exposed even if it is through the outcry of the very stones in the walls of these houses. You remember the words of Jesus when he entered Jerusalem in his triumphal entry. There were those who cried out, “Hosanna, Hosanna, blessed be the one who comes in the name of the Lord.”<sup>10</sup> The Jewish leaders said to Jesus, “Tell them to be quiet. Tell them to be quiet.”<sup>11</sup> Jesus responded, “If they are quiet, the very stones will cry out.”<sup>12</sup> This is the same picture that we have here.

Then there is third woe. “Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed And founds a town with violence!”<sup>13</sup> We have rehearsed some of the activities of the Babylonians in our previous studies of Habakkuk. They were a very violent and cruel people. They would rape and pillage. And so this third woe, “Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed And founds a town with violence!”<sup>14</sup>

Let’s go on to the fourth woe.

Woe to you who make your neighbors drink,  
Who mix in your venom even to make them drunk  
So as to look on their nakedness!<sup>15</sup>

Strong drink and illicit sexual activities have always gone together. As you ply the pages of the Bible you understand this is the case. And young people and older people who providing alcohol in their relationships in order to enter into illicit sex is not uncommon.

Woe to you who make your neighbors drink,  
Who mix in your venom even to make them drunk  
So as to look on their nakedness!<sup>16</sup>

But the text may be taken in a different way. The idea of nakedness here may be the exposing of sin, of judgment, and of bringing disgrace. David sent messages of consolation to Hanun, an Ammonite king, because of the loss of his father. The Ammonites cut off the beards of those emissaries and they also cut off their clothing at

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<sup>9</sup> Habakkuk 2:11.

<sup>10</sup> See Mark 11:9; John 2:13.

<sup>11</sup> See Luke 19:39.

<sup>12</sup> See Luke 19:40.

<sup>13</sup> Habakkuk 2:12.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Habakkuk 2:15.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

the hips and sent them away half naked in disgrace.<sup>17</sup> And this is what it was. It was meant to disgrace the emissaries of David who were attempting to carry out a good deed.

Read the text again.

Woe to you who make your neighbors drink,  
Who mix in your venom even to make them drunk  
So as to look on their nakedness!  
You will be filled with disgrace rather than honor.  
Now you yourself drink and expose your own nakedness.  
The cup in the LORD'S right hand will come around to you,  
And utter disgrace will come upon your glory.<sup>18</sup>

You will be disgraced, Babylon. God's judgment will come upon you and your nakedness and your sin will be revealed.

Verse 17 continues.

For the violence done to Lebanon will overwhelm you,  
And the devastation of its beasts by which you terrified them,  
Because of human bloodshed and violence done to the land,  
To the town and all its inhabitants.<sup>19</sup>

Lebanon was known as a garden and the cedars of Lebanon were legendary. Even in Moses' times the cedars of Lebanon were known and were legendary. And it was to the cedars of Lebanon that David and Solomon turned in the building of the temple in Jerusalem.

But the Babylonians had a scorched earth policy. They would come and they would utterly destroy the cities so that the smoke of their burning could be seen on the horizons. And they would cut down the trees and burn the fields so that any inhabitants left in the land would be unable to make a living. It was their scorched earth policy. Not even the beasts that lived in the forests would be able to remain there, but would be scattered. And so the prophet weighs in against Babylon on this count.

And then there is a final woe. Why would the people of Babylon come in and destroy great cities? Why would they enter into debauchery and disgrace other peoples? Because they thought of themselves as powerful and their god was their own strength and their own might.<sup>20</sup> And so they would craft gods for themselves. You see, they were the great ones and so they could create gods for themselves.

Look at verses 18 and 19. "What profit is the idol when its maker has carved it,

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<sup>17</sup> See 2 Samuel 10; 1 Chronicles 19.

<sup>18</sup> Habakkuk 2:15-16.

<sup>19</sup> Habakkuk 2:17.

<sup>20</sup> See Habakkuk 1:11.

Or an image, a teacher of falsehood [or of lies]?”<sup>21</sup> What profit is the idol when carved? It is of no profit at all. “For its maker trusts in his own handiwork When he fashions speechless idols.”<sup>22</sup>

And this was the course of the Babylonians. They were trusting in their own ingenuity. They were trusting in their own intellectual capabilities. They were trusting in their own technology and trusting in their governmental power to take care of all they needed. Does this sound familiar. We may be following a similar course and heading down a similar path?

Verse 19 continues. “Woe to him who says to a piece of wood, ‘Awake!’ To a mute stone, ‘Arise!’”<sup>23</sup> How foolish to say to a piece of wood, “Get up and walk.” How foolish to say to a stone, “Speak to me,” when it cannot answer. Again, verse 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.<sup>24</sup>

And then these great words: “But the LORD is in His holy temple. Let all the earth be silent before Him.”<sup>25</sup> Is there not a twist of irony here? The dumb and silent idol is called to awaken. But God is in heaven and he calls all of creation to be silent before him. This is the funeral dirge sung with regard to Babylon.

Look again at verse six. “Will not all of these take up a taunt-song against him, Even mockery and insinuations?”<sup>26</sup> We may translate the text this way. Will not all of these take up a *parable* or a *proverb* against him. Will they not *taunt* and *ridicule*. Will they not *taunt* and propound a *riddle*? The song, in other words, shows Babylon as proverbial. And, in a way, what God is saying through Habakkuk is that Babylon will become a proverb and a byword. Babylon will become a symbol among the nations for great evil and debauchery. She was known for her cruelty. She was known for her blasphemy. She was known for her debauchery. And she will be well known for her fall. Babylon will be judged. Babylon will become a byword and a proverb for centuries to come.

And this, friends, is exactly what we see in the book of Revelation. Babylon has become a symbol of evil. Babylon has become a symbol of debauchery. Babylon has become a symbol of what can take place when men and women and young people and children enter into the debauchery and evil of ancient Babylon.

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<sup>21</sup> Habakkuk 2:18.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Habakkuk 2:19.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Habakkuk 2:20.

<sup>26</sup> Habakkuk 2:6.

Look back with me now at Revelation chapter 18 and 19. I think this is exactly what the apostle John is telling us. The apostle John is indicating to us that Babylon is a symbol of all evil. And as we look at evil and as men and women are consumed with evil, we must be reminded and others must be reminded that God condemns evil and will judge evil.

Listen, again, to the picturesque language. Revelation 18. Let's begin with verse one.

After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illumined with his glory. And he cried out with a mighty voice, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has become a dwelling place of demons and a prison of every unclean spirit, and a prison of every unclean and hateful bird. For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the passion of her immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed acts of immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich by the wealth of her sensuality."

I heard another voice from heaven, saying, "Come out of her, my people, so that you will not participate in her sins and receive of her plagues; for her sins have piled up as high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities. Pay her back even as she has paid, and give back to her double according to her deeds; in the cup which she has mixed, mix twice as much for her. To the degree that she glorified herself and lived sensuously, to the same degree give her torment and mourning; for she says in her heart, 'I SIT as A QUEEN AND I AM NOT A WIDOW, and will never see mourning.' For this reason in one day her plagues will come, pestilence and mourning and famine, and she will be burned up with fire; for the Lord God who judges her is strong."<sup>27</sup>

You can hear the echoes of Habakkuk in the background. Those who have looted will be looted themselves. Those who have disgraced will be disgraced themselves. They will be paid back double for all of their sins. The cup of God's wrath will come upon them.

Read on. "And the kings of the earth, who committed acts of immorality and lived sensuously with her, will weep and lament over her when they see the smoke of her burning."<sup>28</sup> As the Babylonian hordes left cities in rubble and you could see the smoke of their burning on the horizon, so it will be with evil, with consummate evil. The smoke of its burning will be seen forever and ever.

Verse 10. "...standing at a distance because of the fear of her torment, saying, 'Woe, woe, the great city, Babylon, the strong city! For in one hour your judgment has come.'"<sup>29</sup>

Jump down to verse 15 in chapter 18.

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<sup>27</sup> Revelation 18:1-8.

<sup>28</sup> Revelation 18:9.

<sup>29</sup> Revelation 18:10.



The merchants of these things, who became rich from her, will stand at a distance because of the fear of her torment, weeping and mourning, saying, “Woe, woe, the great city, she who was clothed in fine linen and purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls; for in one hour such great wealth has been laid waste!” And every shipmaster and every passenger and sailor, and as many as make their living by the sea, stood at a distance, and were crying out as they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, “What city is like the great city?” And they threw dust on their heads and were crying out, weeping and mourning, saying, “Woe, woe, the great city, in which all who had ships at sea became rich by her wealth, for in one hour she has been laid waste!” Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, because God has pronounced judgment for you against her.<sup>30</sup>

And then chapter 19.

After these things I heard something like a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, “Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God; BECAUSE HIS JUDGMENTS ARE TRUE AND RIGHTEOUS; for He has judged the great harlot who was corrupting the earth with her immorality, and HE HAS AVENGED THE BLOOD OF HIS BOND-SERVANTS ON HER.” And a second time they said, “Hallelujah! HER SMOKE RISES UP FOREVER AND EVER.” And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who sits on the throne saying, “Amen. Hallelujah!” And a voice came from the throne, saying, “Give praise to our God, all you His bond-servants, you who fear Him, the small and the great.” Then I heard something like the voice of a great multitude and like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, saying, “Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns.”<sup>31</sup>

This is the message in the end. “Hallelujah! For the Lord God, the Almighty, reigns!”<sup>32</sup> His judgments are true. Evil will be condemned. Evil will be condemned and Jesus Christ the Lord of Lords and the king of Kings will be exalted.

This is the message from the book of Revelation. And as you turn back to Habakkuk, friends, as you turn back to Habakkuk, do you not see the same message? Look again at Habakkuk chapter two and verse 14. Let’s read verses 13 and 14.

“Is it not indeed from the LORD of hosts That peoples toil for fire, And nations grow weary for nothing?”<sup>33</sup> Is it not the plan of God that people should—unbelievers, infidels—should toil and do so in order to be judged? Is this not part of the plan of God?

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<sup>30</sup> Revelation 18:15-20

<sup>31</sup> Revelation 19:1-6.

<sup>32</sup> Revelation 19:6.

Do you remember Pharaoh? Exodus says God hardened Pharaoh's heart. And how did he harden Pharaoh's heart? He did so by stepping back and doing nothing, by stepping back and refusing to apply saving grace, by stepping back and letting Pharaoh act in accordance with the inclinations of his hardened heart. And his heart therefore became ever harder. And so it is with the infidel. This is part of God's plan.

But then the light comes. Verse 14. "For the earth will be filled With the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, As the waters cover the sea."<sup>34</sup> Evil will be condemned. And when evil doers are removed, what will happen? The glory of God will shine forth in his creation. This is what will happen. Righteousness will seep into every crevice of creation as water from a flood seeps into every crevice of a house or a city. The greatness of the glory of God will be on full display when evil is condemned and the evil doer is cast out.

And what does all of this indicate? Verse 20. "But the LORD is in His holy temple. Let all the earth be silent before Him."<sup>35</sup> And who is this Lord? He is spoken of in verse 14 also. "For the earth will be filled With the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, As the waters cover the sea."<sup>36</sup> Who is this Lord? I submit to you, friends, he is none other than Jesus Christ who is the Lord. He is the one who sits at the right hand of the throne of the majesty on high. And the testimony of the Bible is, as we have already said, that he is Lord of all other lords. He is King over all other kings. There is not a president or a prime minister or a minister in a cabinet or a congressman or a congresswoman or a senator who is not bound in the end to bow his or her knee to Jesus Christ who is the Lord of all lords. It is time in the halls of congress, it is time in the White House, it is time at Number 10 Downing Street, it is time in Iran for men like Ahmadinejad, it is time for all in political power to bow the knee to the Lord of lords who is Jesus Christ.

This is the message, you see. Evil will be condemned and Jesus Christ will be glorified. It is time, friends, it is time for the Church to take her stand and to declare the verities of the Word of God that all evil, Babylon, will be destroyed. Young people who huddle in the back seats of cars and commit unseemly acts join themselves with Babylon. Legislators who blatantly do not pay their taxes and charge others to do their duty and pay their taxes are snuggling up to Babylon. But all evil will be destroyed. And my charge to you this morning is to pray, to pray that the Church of Jesus Christ will awaken. Pray that the Church of Jesus Christ will awaken to her prophetic ministry. Pray that the church will join Habakkuk and proclaim that evil, all evil, will be condemned and destroyed and that Jesus Christ, the only King of kings and the only Lord of lords, will be exalted. Pray that God will renew the church's prophetic voice to condemn evil and exalt Christ.

Let's pray together now.

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<sup>33</sup> Habakkuk 2:13.

<sup>34</sup> Habakkuk 2:14.

<sup>35</sup> Habakkuk 2:20.

<sup>36</sup> Habakkuk 2:14.

*Father, thank you for your Word. Grant to us, Father, that as we have explored these things, albeit briefly, may your Spirit come and pierce our hearts. May we shed evil. May we shed the Babylonian impulse and, on the other hand, may we be silent before you our God. May the Church of Jesus Christ regain her prophetic voice, speak against evil, show it is condemned, and at the same time lift up Jesus Christ as the Lord of all. We plead with you, Father, that you would do your work to this end and renew the prophetic voice in your Church. Grant this we pray in the exalted, lofty, and great name of Jesus the only Lord of all. Amen.*