

Habakkuk

Learning to Trust in God

Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Given 02-Oct-97; Sermon #309A

As you may recall from a few months back I promised a sermon on the book of Habakkuk. As I studied it more and more, I began to see that it really *fit* the Day of Trumpets to a "T," so I saved it for today. I think you will see as we go that it not only fits Trumpets, but it has a lot to do with our own circumstances today, and I think that is significant because we have been finding more and more that the whole Bible has been written for us today. We are seeing just more and more application of even such "obscure" things, such as the book of Habakkuk, apply to us. I say "obscure" with quotation marks around it, because it is not obscure at all. When you get into it, you find that Habakkuk was going through something that you and I can really relate to.

On this feast day, the Feast of Trumpets, we learn about the return of Christ, and we learn about the end of this age. We hear sermons about the Tribulation and the Day of the Lord, as well as the wonderful time of peace and prosperity and security that we will have once Jesus Christ returns and sets up His Father's Kingdom on this earth. We hear about how trumpets themselves were set up by God to sound a warning. We hear about how the prophecies of the Bible focus on the day when Christ will put down all resistance to His rule and establish the Kingdom of God on this earth.

Habakkuk touches some of these themes too, but mainly he is not concerned with the how's and when's of the circumstances that will bring this about, he is concerned about the why's—Why does God do it this way? The whole book is devoted to two questions that Habakkuk asks of God, and then of course the answers that God gives him to those two questions. The third chapter is a prayer of praise of a response, a reaction to what God had told him.

So let us get right into the book of Habakkuk and find out what God did to answer his questions and to soothe his mind about what was going on in his particular case, and hopefully will soothe our minds in our particular circumstances.

Habakkuk 1:1 The burden which the prophet Habakkuk saw.

This is a very simple introduction. He does not say, *In the tenth year, in the tenth month of this particular king, Habakkuk the prophet, from this particular town, who was a Levite and a priest, saw a vision, and this is what he is going to tell you.* He does not go through all that. He just says, *This is what the prophet Habakkuk saw.*

That is very interesting because we begin to see immediately some of Habakkuk's character. He removes himself almost entirely from the book. He is not worried about who he was, what his pedigree is. It is just that he is explaining his conversation that he has with God. All we know about Habakkuk is that he was the prophet at the time. He does not appear anywhere else in Scripture either. He is an obscure man. Commentators pull their hair out about him, because there is nothing to learn except from what he says. There are no extraneous details about him. He is "average Joe."

We can maybe extrapolate a few things about him. He may have been a Levite, one of the singers of the musicians in the temple, because he writes a very good song in the third chapter. So he may have been one of the sons of Asaph, or might have been part of the musicians and singers in the temple, but we do not know. We cannot say for sure.

Even his name is uncertain. It shows how obscure this man is. It seems to be a foreign word. Not even Hebrew. As a matter of fact, I believe they say it is an Acadian word, which was a Semitic group I believe to the north of Israel. Even that meaning is disputed. The best guess is that Habakkuk means "*embracer*," almost like *hugger*—one who wrestles. That kind of a hug, embrace, because that is what he does throughout the whole book. He embraces God, he hugs Him, he wrestles Him for an answer, very similar to what Jacob did, and he does not let go because he wants God to answer his questions because they were troubling him.

The date of the book is also uncertain. It just gets more uncertain and more uncertain as we go. We do know a general time, and that is that it was probably written within about twenty-five years of Jerusalem's fall, in Judah. So the best guess is somewhere between 610 BC and 600 BC, in the reign of Jehoiakim. This was right after Nineveh fell to the Babylonians in 612. It was about the time that Nebuchadnezzar was putting his siege up against Tyre, and it was before he came up against Jerusalem. The first time he came up against Jerusalem was about 604, so the general consensus is that it was probably written sometime during the time that Nebuchadnezzar was fighting Tyre.

The Babylonians were just one country away, so you get kind of an idea what was going on. Babylon's fame and its might had begun to really impress itself upon the Judeans, and Judah itself was sinking further and further into sin. Josiah, one of the best kings that Judah had, had died, and his sons had come on the throne, and they could not hold the country together morally, especially, and Judah was sinking further and further into sin. Judah was beginning to fear that they were going to be **next** in the domino of nations that were falling, and they were terrified because they had heard of what the Chaldeans, the Babylonians, do to people that they conquer. Judah's day of reckoning was near, and so Habakkuk's cry to God is only a natural response for a man who loved his people and loved his nation.

We can see that this book fits our circumstances quite closely. The fall of Israel is not too far off. This land is sinking further and further into sin, and no one seems to want to stand up to stop it. We see that it could quickly go, even though we are the world's super power. There are so many ways to tie our hands. Just one terrorist who says he has a briefcase-size nuclear bomb could hold this country hostage, because no president would want to give up Houston or Denver or Seattle or Chicago, or any city in the United States in order to call the bluff of some terrorist group or some nation who decides that America needs to be cut down to size.

Not only that, things are happening in the church itself that make people ask a lot of questions. Makes people ask a lot of questions about God Himself. "Why are you doing this, God? Why did the church break up into little pieces? Why did it fall so quickly? Who are these people that came in and destroyed the doctrines of this church? Why did You allow it?" We have all asked questions like that. Hopefully we have gotten some answers.

But this is what Habakkuk was thinking about. He did not know what to think, because this did not seem like God. Why would God work this way? So like Habakkuk, we want to reconcile what we know of God with what is going on, because we understand that He is Sovereign. But sometimes

with God, it seems that two and two do not equal four. I say "it seems," because with God two and two always make four. It is just our perspective of it. That is why we can go to God and get answers when things do not seem to be the way we expect them to be. So that is really the real value of this little obscure book, because it helps to answer some of our questions.

Now back into the book here. Let us first notice that he calls it a "burden." His prophecy *is* a "burden." That is a very important word. Sometimes people, ministers, especially the prophets, had to deliver something that people really did not want to hear. That is why speaking God's words is often a burden, because God's words are not always sweetness and light. As a matter of fact sweetness and light seem to only come in at the end, almost sometimes as a quick conclusion to the matter.

The main thing that bothers us now is the heavy depressing terrible things that are going on, and you know about the messenger who brings bad news. Sometimes he gets his head cut off, because the people who hear the bad news take their wrath, their disappointment, their frustration out on the messenger. So no wonder Habakkuk says this is a **burden**. "This is a heavy load, because I've got to come and tell my people something that they are going to despise, and because I say it, they're going to despise **me**, and that's it." So right away Habakkuk says, "All right, here goes. You're not going to like what I'm going to say here." But read on. It was a burden.

Habakkuk 1:2-4 O LORD, how long shall I cry, and You will not hear? Even cry out to You, Violence! And You will not save. Why do You show me iniquity, and cause me to see trouble? For plundering and violence are before me; there is strife, and contention arises. Therefore the law is powerless, and justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous; therefore perverse judgment proceeds.

Can you just hear the anguish in his voice? "God, I've been crying out to You **day and night**, and *still* violence and perversity and all these terrible things are happening in the land. How long is this evil going to last? How much longer must we endure this constant wickedness, this corruption? When are you going to act, God? It's been going on for decades. We don't see any break in sight." Have we not prayed something similar to that before? "God, How long must we endure all this separation amongst ourselves? How long must people who believe false things have the upper hand? How long will people ignore Your law, and seem to get away with **murder**? Won't You please do something soon? Won't You bring your Kingdom? We need You, God. How long, O Lord?" We have been saying the same things.

Let us go to Ezekiel 9. Ezekiel was a slightly later contemporary of Habakkuk. He may have been about the same age. I do not know. Ezekiel 9 is a prophecy, a vision that Ezekiel saw when he was in Babylon. This is after the fact, after what Habakkuk went through.

Ezekiel 9:1-6 Then He called out in my hearing with a loud voice, saying, Let those who have charge over the city draw near, each with a deadly weapon in his hand. And suddenly six men came from the direction of the upper gate, which faces north, each with his battle-ax in his hand. One man among them was clothed with linen and had a writer's inkhorn at his side. They went in and stood beside the bronze altar. Now the glory of the God of Israel had gone up from the cherub, where it had been, to the threshold of the temple. And He called to the man clothed with linen, who had the writer's inkhorn at his side; and the LORD said to him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and cry over all the abominations that are done within it. To the others He said in my

hearing, Go after him through the city and kill; do not let your eye spare, nor have any pity. Utterly slay old and young men, maidens and little children and women; but do not come near anyone on whom is the mark; and begin at My sanctuary. So they began with the elders who were before the temple.

That is about all we need to go through there. Ezekiel had a vision of what God was doing while Ezekiel was crying out. This section answers, at least in part, what Habakkuk's question was. "Why haven't You judged all this evil, Father?" And He says in Ezekiel, "I'm going throughout the land, particularly My chosen people, and I'm marking each one that sees this, and sighs and cries that it's happening. I'm seeing those who are righteous. I'm seeing and searching out those who have character, and I'm marking also those whom I want to destroy."

He marks them by not marking them, if you understand what I mean. He does not have anything to do with them. It is good that we sigh and cry over all the corruption and wickedness and abominations that are happening in this land. That tells God something about our heart and about our character. He is seeking out those who are concerned, who are distressed, who are **repulsed** by what is going on around them, and He is setting them apart for deliverance. All the while, we have to go through it and endure it, but that is necessary, because it takes God to evaluate our character, to see what we will do over the long haul, and so He makes His people endure. "In your patience possess you your souls."

So we must ask ourselves, How do we react to the Marv Albert fiasco? How do we react to teen pregnancy being so high? How do we react to AIDS not being stopped? It keeps continuing to infect more and more people, because people are not changing what they need to—their lifestyle, their morals. How do we react to sex and violence on television, movies, and magazines, in books, on billboards, and in just about anything that we see? Even on the radio, on the Internet?

How do we react to President Clinton's sexcapades, to his lying, to his cheating, to his stealing, maybe even his murder? Vince Foster's case is still open, in my mind. We do not know. It is pretty unusual for a man in that position to get murdered. We do not know, but corruption is in the highest offices of our land.

How do we react to gang violence? How do we react to drug smuggling? How do we react to drug use? How do we react to O.J. Simpson's acquittal? How do we react to our court system, period, that allows so many things to go on unabated? How do we react to racial inequalities? Have you become numb and hardened to all of these things, or do you still sigh and cry over the depths that this land has sunk to? You have to ask yourself that question.

Habakkuk certainly did. Habakkuk was one of those who was sighing and crying. It was not that they were just unhappy about it, they were taking it to God—"How long O Lord will you let this go on? These are your people. Save us from it!" Have we come to the point that we just accept them as normal, or do they drive us to a closer relationship with God? Are we eager for Christ's return? Do we want Him to clean up this mess, or are we living an okay life? We have to ask ourselves these questions.

But Habakkuk was among those who cried and sighed, "God, Why aren't you doing anything right now? The sin of this land has come to be almost intolerable. We are surrounded by wickedness, violence, strife, injustice at every turn. Very few pay any attention to the law, and when they do, they use it for their own advantage. The judicial system is a joke. Liberal judges, activist judges are

having their way with the court system. We see no escape, except by your help, Father.” That is what Habakkuk is saying. *Save us!*

But then God replies, and His reply is very interesting.

Habakkuk 1:5-11 Look among the nations and watch. Be utterly astounded! For I will work a work in your days which you would not believe, though it were told you. For indeed I am raising up the Chaldeans, a bitter and hasty nation which marches through the breadth of the earth, to possess dwelling places that are not theirs. They are terrible and dreadful; their judgment and their dignity proceed from themselves. Their horses also are swifter than leopards, and more fierce than evening wolves. Their chargers charge ahead; their cavalry comes from afar; they fly as the eagle that hastens to eat. They all come for violence; their faces are set like the east wind. They gather captives like sand. They scoff at kings, and princes are scorned by them. They deride every stronghold, for they heap up mounds of earth and seize it. Then his mind changes, and he transgresses; he commits offense, imputing this power to his god.

God says, “You're not going to believe what I'm going to tell you, Habakkuk, but I'm already at work to deliver you, and punish the sinners around you.” So what does He do? He tells Habakkuk He is going to send the ferocious and bloody terrifying Chaldeans to conquer Judah. Oh! The prophet must have been stunned! This was not the answer he expected in the least. What kind of deliverance is humiliating defeat at the hand of these utterly godless people that were striking terror into the rest of the Middle East? They were Gentiles, and God was going to take the side of the *Gentile* and punish His own people **cruelly**.

This was not the answer Habakkuk wanted to hear. It must have shaken his faith to hear God tell him, “So you've been sighing and crying, but I'm going to come and **spank** this nation with the worst of the heathen.” And just like God said, he did not want to believe it. That is not what he wanted to hear. The deliverance was worse than the original corruption, in his eyes. He would rather have the corruption than the deliverance. At least that is what he thought at first. From what he understood of God, this did not make sense. How could a loving God punish His own special people with a club like the Chaldeans? It did not make sense.

But to understand God's answer we have to understand what God's work is. Remember Psalm 74:12; “God is working out salvation.” Remember Genesis 1:26. It tells us that God is making man in His own image. He is building character in us so that we can live eternally like He does. That is not the astounding part. We know that God's work is salvation. What is astounding is **how** He chooses to do it, because He does not choose to do it in the same way **we** would do it. You know that old saying, “God works in mysterious ways His wonders to perform”? They, to a man's way of thinking, are truly mysterious. We do not have a clue sometimes how God works.

Isaiah 55:8-11 For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your way My ways, says the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and do not return there, but water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void [empty, without results, without fruit], but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.

You see, God does things sometimes in a very round-about way. It seems like He is going way out in left field. But you know, it has a boomerang effect. It comes right back and smacks us right along the side of the head where we need it. I am mixing my metaphors there a little bit—boomerangs and left field—but I think you get what I mean. God seems to go in this direction sometime, off the beaten path. But that is only our perspective of it, because we find out that He has been going straight along His plan all along. It is we who are the ones who have not kept up.

There is a lot to do with perspective in this book of Habakkuk. Man's perspective versus God's perspective. God always gets His job done, as we saw there in Isaiah 55. If He sends His Word forth to accomplish a work, it will always come back to Him with the result that He intended. That is just the way God is. It does not seem to make much sense to us, but it surely works, because God is behind it, and it is the best way.

An example that is a little more current is, have we not all questioned how God has worked in the church these past ten years or so? Have we not all questioned why it had to be destroyed so utterly? We are a pale shadow of the church that we once were. How many people have we heard—30 thousand, 40 thousand people—who have just melted into the woodwork, are staying at home, or are going to some Sunday-keeping church? Is that the figure I heard? Forty thousand out of a church of 120-150 thousand people? The Feast list, when you combine them all, only adds up to about 60, 70, 80 thousand people?

Where did they all go? What is happening here? Why did God have to do that in order to bring us into His Kingdom? Why does He have to destroy in order to make well? Have we not shaken our heads to the swiftness and the brutality of it all? Well, now you know what Habakkuk felt like with the Chaldeans breathing down the Judeans' necks, with the corruption in the land. If God had told you fifteen or twenty years ago that the Worldwide Church of God would lose, let us say, about two-thirds of its members, or more, over about a seven to eight-year period, would you have believed Him? Would you have even considered that a work of God? "Look, and watch, and be utterly astounded, for I will work a work in your days which you would not believe, though it were told you." Now you know how Habakkuk felt. He had prior warning, and he questioned God's very nature.

Let us go to his next question.

Habakkuk 1:12 Are You not from everlasting, O LORD my God, my Holy One?

That next line should be, "You shall not die." It is an emendation by the Jews, because they did not think that God should ever be linked with death.

Habakkuk 1:12 Are You not from everlasting, O LORD my God, My Holy One? We [You] shall not die.

It is like the genie on Aladdin. "Hello! Am I talking to the right person? Do you know who this is?" That is what Habakkuk is saying. "Is this really God? Am I talking to the very God of the universe, the One who lives forever, the One who doesn't die?" That shows you how much his faith was shaken. *Is this really God who will punish His own people by the hands of these terrible Chaldeans?*

Habakkuk 1:12-13 ...O LORD, You have appointed them for judgment; O Rock, You have marked them for correction. You are of purer eyes than to behold evil....

How can you do this evil thing to Your people? You are purer than that. I do not understand. This is not the God whose character I understood before. Something is different here.

Habakkuk 1:13 And cannot look on wickedness. Why do You look on those who deal treacherously, and hold Your tongue when the wicked devours one more righteous than he?

How can You restrain Yourself from just simply annihilating these Chaldeans? Look how wicked they are. You can read there, Habakkuk 1:6-11 of all the things they do. They take what is not theirs, they march through the breadth of the earth and they just gobble up town after town after town. They eat what they want. They take the jewelry that they want, the gold, the silver, the people themselves, and they transport them somewhere else. “This is a terrible people God, and You're letting them punish Your **own special people**. This isn't the God I remember from childhood.”

Habakkuk 1:14 Why do You make men like fish of the sea, like creeping things that have no ruler over them?

If you want to understand this, he is saying, “Why have You put all the people of Judea in a barrel like fish?”

Habakkuk 1:15 They take up all of them with a hook. ...

They [the Chaldeans] “*can* just put a hook right in the barrel and get a fish anytime they want, because You're letting them, God.”

Habakkuk 1:15 ...They catch them in their net. ...

Dip a net in, get a fish. It is as easy as that.

Habakkuk 1:15 ...And gather them in their dragnet. ...

Get a whole bunch with their dragnet.

Habakkuk 1:15 ...Therefore they rejoice and are glad.

Yeah. The Chaldeans are pretty happy. It is like shooting fish in a barrel, because You have allowed this, God. This does not make a whole lot of sense to me.

Habakkuk 1:16 Therefore they sacrifice to their net...

Their net, their weapons of warfare, the way that they conquer people. Remember it says in Daniel that the god of the Beast will be one of fortifications and munitions. Very similar thought here.

Habakkuk 1:16 ...They burn incense to their dragnet; because by them their share is sumptuous and their food plentiful.

They have got it all, God, because You are not punishing their wickedness. You are letting them get away with murder.

Habakkuk 1:17 Shall they therefore empty their net, and continue to slay nations without pity?

Are You going to continue to allow them to do this? And then he says something very smart, very Christian, very wise. He says:

Habakkuk 2:1 I will stand my watch and set myself on the rampart, and watch to see what He will say to me, and what I will answer when I am corrected.

See what he said? “God, I’ve yelled at You [for five verses here]. I don’t understand. I think You’re doing wrong. But unlike some people, I’m not going to jump to any conclusions. There must be something I don’t understand, so I’m going to do what You said. You told me to look and watch, ‘Look among the nations and watch,’ and I’m going to do what You said for me to do. You told me to look and watch, and I’m going to look, and I’m going to watch, because I want to know from You **why** this is happening. And when You tell me why this is happening and correct my thinking on this, then I’ll figure out how I should respond to You.”

That is what chapter 2, verse 1 says. “I’m going to do what You say. I’m going to be patient. I’m going to wait for Your answer, and then once You answer, I’ll respond, maybe with another question, maybe with understanding”. That is the smart thing to do. When you do not know what is going on, and you have these deep questions about how God is handling things, **look, watch, wait** . And once you see what God’s answer is, **then** you can respond. Do not jump to any conclusions with God, because God’s character is perfect. He knows what He is doing. Remember Isaiah 55. Even though something seems round about, it is going to come back and do the work that He intends.

God then answers, but it is not the answer that Habakkuk wanted. He wanted a straightforward answer. “God, why are You doing this? Why are You allowing the Chaldeans to conquer my people, even though the Chaldeans are multiple, multiple, multiple times more wicked than the Judeans?” That was his question. God does not answer it like that.

Habakkuk 2:2-4 Then the LORD answered me and said: Write the vision and make it plain on tablets, that he may run who reads it. For the vision is yet for an appointed time; but at the end it will speak, and it will not lie. Though it tarries, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry. Behold the proud, his soul is not upright in him; but the just shall live by his faith.

Very interesting section here. These three verses are the key verses to the whole book of Habakkuk. In a way, they could be key verses to the entire Bible, at least our part in what is going on.

Go back to verse 2, and we are going to take these apart a little bit more fully. First of all God says, “Write down what you see, what the revelation is, and make it understandable so that whoever reads it will be encouraged and strengthened in their run.” It was not a vision of doom and despair that God showed Habakkuk. Not necessarily. It may have seemed that way in parts, but in reality the vision was of encouragement and hope and glory, and so He said, “Habakkuk, write this down plainly so people will understand it and be encouraged by it.” Not discouraged, not down in the dumps like Habakkuk was, but **encouraged** so that they can run.

Let us go to Hebrews 12. We will see this metaphor of running. It actually goes through the whole chapter in bits and pieces. I really think that Paul may have had Habakkuk in mind when he wrote

this, because he quotes Habakkuk in chapter 10. We will get to that a little bit later. Right at the end of chapter 10 he quotes Habakkuk, and then he takes just a slight detour to explain faith in chapter 11, and all those heroes of faith. Then in the first verse of chapter 12 he gets right back to the idea that Habakkuk had.

Hebrews 12:1 Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.

Now listen to this. This is where the encouragement comes in.

Hebrews 12:2 Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

See, the race that we are running is our very Christian lives, and we can take the words of Habakkuk and **run**, because we know that it all works out right in the end. Our Savior has already done His work. So if we finish our race, we will be saved. There is no doubt about that. He is not only the **beginner** of our faith; He is also the **finisher** of our faith. So we can run with patience, just like God told Habakkuk, that even though it will tarry, "Wait for it, because it will come, and it will be finished, just like I promised, and though things seem to be out of kilter, nevertheless, My will be done."

We can skip through here. He goes through a section on discipline, chastening, correction. Is that not what Habakkuk had just heard, that God was going to discipline, chasten, correct His people? And how did He do it? Through the wicked hand of Babylon. But Paul says here in Hebrews, if God does not chasten you, you are *bastard* children. So you had better like the chastening. I do not necessarily mean "like" as though we enjoy it in any masochistic thing, but it is for our good. We can like it from the standpoint that it will do us good. It might not be nice, like it says in verse 11:

Hebrews 12:11 Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but grievous; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

We know, God says, that you do not like the idea of being humiliated at the hands of the Babylonians, Habakkuk, but it is for your good in the end, and because of that you can wait it through. You can be patient. You can know that this is for the best. So He says in verse 12:

Hebrews 12:12-13 Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed.

This is a time not to lag, not to worry about the injuries. This is a time to **strengthen** oneself through God, and move forward, because it is important that we endure and finish. So when things get rough, the tough get going. That is what this verse says. Even though this chastening seems to be upon you, this is when the real cream rises to the top, and you can do it. Do not be like Esau, He says a little bit later, who had this great promise, this great reward, and he threw it all away for some temporary

relief. Do not take temporary relief if it is going to knock you off the road, off the path. It is not worth it, because you will end in bitterness and tears, as it did with Esau. Then He goes on to say in verse 18:

Hebrews 12:18 For you have not come to the mountain that may be touched and that burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness and tempest.

But what have we come to? We have come to a much more **glorious** and **spiritual** mount. We are not back there in the physical. We have come to something that is truly spiritual and **wonderful**. So do not even *think* about giving up.

Hebrews 12:25 See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven.

Even though it does not seem like what God would do, you do not turn away from God, because this is just when you need to be strong.

Hebrews 12:28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.

That is how you approach God, even when things do not seem to be going the right way. You serve Him acceptably, with reverence and godly fear, just like Habakkuk did. He questioned Him, but he said, "You are God, and You know something that I don't understand, and so I'm going to wait. I'm going to be patient, and I'm going to see this through, and then I will respond."

Hebrews 12:29 For our God is a consuming fire.

There is another edge on this sword here. Because if we do not, we go down with the ship in a bad way. We get caught under the heel of the Chaldean.

Just one more thing. Let me go back to Habakkuk 2:2, "That he may run who reads it." The idea here suggests a herald, like a medieval herald who went from place to place with a message from one person to another. The idea here is, *Write clearly what I reveal to you, Habakkuk, so that someone in the future can take what I said and deliver it into the right hands.* Anybody in the end time who is speaking God's Words fits this. Make it plain, Habakkuk. Make it understandable so that someone down the road may give this message to those who need it. Like us.

Habakkuk 2:3 For the vision is yet for an appointed time; but at the end it will speak, and it will not lie. Though it tarries, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry.

This verse comes in two parts. The first two lines are parallel to each other, and the last two lines are parallel to each other. When he says "an appointed time," and when he says, "at the end," he means the same thing. "At the end" **is** the "appointed time." You might remember Daniel 12:4, where He says, "You go your way, Daniel. Seal the book for the time of the end. You might not be able to understand it now Daniel. This is not for your time." That is what God is telling Habakkuk. "This

message that I'm giving you, Habakkuk, is not necessarily for you. It's for that herald and those people he's delivering it to. It's going to be sealed up to the appointed time. And when that appointed time comes, it will be revealed."

You can also jot down Daniel 8:17 and Daniel 10:14. They all say basically the same thing. This is not for now; this is for later. And that is the idea here.

So what it means then is that this is a vision, a revelation for our time today, and really He has to give Habakkuk a bad answer in a way, because He says, "You may not understand this in your lifetime, Habakkuk. Trust Me on this one. It's for the best." Also it says in Habakkuk 2:3, "At the end it will speak." That is an interesting image too. It means it will pant, like a runner. It is the heraldry image again. He is a runner who has come from miles away and he has got a message for you, and he is out of breath. He is panting . . . "*Uh huh! huh!* I've just run a marathon! *Uh huh! huh!* But I've got a message for you. *Uh huh! huh!* And here it is!" And he spills it all out before he has recovered his breath.

That shows you how *urgent* the message is. It will **pant** before it can get its breath. It will tell what it needs to tell at the right time, because things are going to happen one right after another, and you have got to be ready, and so . . . *Here is the message!* It will pant! It is excitement mixed with fatigue, mixed with urgency, rushing to get the words out because of shortness of time and shortness of breath.

God reassures us then right after this that the message is *truth*. It will not lie. It is going to be coming to you. It will come to you breathlessly and fast and urgent. It is going to happen right away. But it is true, so you had better believe it.

The next two lines parallel each other—the final two lines there in Habakkuk 2:3. "Though it tarries, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry." He is saying, "Be patient. If things seems to be delayed, it's only your perspective, because it will come right on time. I do things in order when I say they'll happen."

Now what is the vision that He gave? Let us go back to Hebrews 10, because Paul not only quotes this verse, but he interprets it for us.

Hebrews 10:35-36 Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise.

Yes, the reward. What He had promised you is His *rest*. Remember what He said back there in chapters 3 and 4, that the Israelites did not enter into His rest because of their unbelief. They did not have endurance. They could not see it all the way through to the end. So he says we have need of endurance, so that after we have done the will of God, after we have completed our course, then we will get our reward.

Hebrews 10:37 For yet a little while, and He who is coming will come and will not tarry.

Do you see the difference between that and what it says back in Habakkuk 2:3? "Though it tarries, wait for it." Paul says, "For yet a little while, and He who is coming will come and will not tarry." What did God tell Habakkuk? ***Christ is coming! That is the vision!*** That is the urgent message that

you have to understand, and not just that He is coming, but all the things that are happening around His coming—the judgment, the terror, the Tribulation, the Day of the Lord, the scattering of the church, and the establishment of His Kingdom forever and ever.

Bad things and good things accompany His coming. So which side are you going to be on? The side that gets the bad things? Or the side that gets the good things? That is the revelation, the vision that Habakkuk received from God, that Jesus Christ, the Messiah, would come and He would solve these problems that Habakkuk was so worried about.

Now how does this answer Habakkuk's question—"Why do You use the wicked to punish us, who are the righteous?"

Revelation 11:15-18 Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever! And the twenty-four elders who sat before God on their thrones fell on their faces and worshipped God, saying: We give You thanks, O Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was and who is to come, because You have taken Your great power and reigned. The nations were angry, and Your wrath has come, and the time of the nations, that they should be judged. [That is very important!]

Revelation 11:18 And that You should reward Your servants the prophets, [sounds like Habakkuk], and the saints, and those who fear Your name, small and great, and should destroy those who destroy the earth.

That is how God answers Habakkuk's question, "Why do You use the wicked to punish the righteous?" Answer? Because it is all going to be squared at the end. "I will do My will. I will bring about My Kingdom. I will punish the wicked. I will reward the just. Don't you worry, Habakkuk. All the wash will come out fine in the end." That is how He soothed Habakkuk's troubled mind. He gave him reality. This was still going to occur, but it is His will, His plan. This is how it has got to be in order to produce the right fruit in the end.

All this will be sorted out. "Don't you worry, Habakkuk. I've marked every one of their evil deeds. They're not going to get away with one of them. Though the righteous may suffer, don't worry. They'll get their reward. Trust Me. Trust Me." That is what He says in Habakkuk 2:4. He defines these two sides of the issue. Remember my sermon the week before last about Matthew 12 where I talked about Jesus defined the one side, Satan's side, and the other side, **His** side, and He said you have either got to be on one side or the other. So what does He do in Habakkuk 2:4?

Habakkuk 2:4 Behold the proud.

That is the one side. Their deeds are not upright. And then on the other side, in the other corner in this bout are the just—those who live by faith. Two sides of the issue. "Habakkuk, which side are you going to be on? The proud, who will be destroyed, or the just, the faithful, who will be rewarded? Choose your side."

This verse is quoted three times in the New Testament, and they are all by the apostle Paul. In Romans 1:16-17, he shows there that the gospel Christ brought reveals God's righteousness, the way we are to live. And the way we are to live is by faith in Jesus Christ. And so he says, "The just shall

live by faith." That is the faith we have to live. What is the gospel? That is what we are living. We are living the gospel—the way that Christ brought. We trust God and we do what He says, and that is what God wants. We live confidently according to God's Word, because we have faith in it. We can do it. Jesus said we could.

The other place is Galatians 3:11. He uses it slightly differently this time as a proof that God does not justify us by the law, but by faith. If you want to paraphrase what he says, he says, *God has granted us eternal life because of our faith in Christ, not by our adherence to the law*. So he takes that, *The just shall live [eternal life] by faith*. It is by our faith in Christ that we will have eternal life, and that is why we will live.

Let us go to Hebrews 10:38. Here he uses it very much like its meaning in Habakkuk. Remember I talked about the *rest*.

Hebrews 10:38-39 Now the just shall live by faith; But if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him. But we are not of those who draw back to perdition [or to destruction], but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.

Remember I said the *rest* that the Israelites did not get because of unbelief? Well, now He is talking about that if we want to enter into His Kingdom and live eternally, we must **believe** God, and live our lives accordingly, because we are **not** among the proud who draw back. They draw back, and they get destruction. That is what Paul says. We are not of those who draw back to perdition. If we live by faith, we are the ones who go **forward** to salvation, not to destruction. Remember II Corinthians 5:7. "We walk by faith, not by sight."

The reason I said that Paul uses it here like Habakkuk, is that he shows the two sides here more clearly. The *just* on the one hand, who go forward to reward, and you have on the other side the proud, those who draw back, who are to be destroyed. So whatever the circumstances, we must obey God, and let the chips fall where they may. Always be faithful, because then you will be counted among the just.

Back to Habakkuk 2. I am not going to read verses 5 through 20. This is part of God's answer, and it was mostly directed I think at the particular circumstances that happened in Habakkuk's day, particularly about the Chaldeans. Obviously from that we can get symbolic spiritual meaning for ourselves now, and the modern-day Babylonians.

The rest of the chapter here, verses 5 through 20, is a series of five woes that God pronounces on the Chaldeans for their particular sins. These five woes are five particular breakings of the commandments that God said that He will punish them for, and this is what in the end made Habakkuk plead, or, at least answer his question, because when God told him that these were the things that the Chaldeans do, and they are going to be punished for them, that kind of reassured him that this was indeed the God that he understood, and that God was not going to let them get away with it, but that He would punish, and they would get what was coming to them. So I will just list these five.

The First Woe: Dishonest gain by oppression

This breaks the Eighth Commandment particularly. They were stealing. They were oppressing people and taking what was theirs.

Habakkuk 2:6-8 Shall not all these take up a proverb against him, and a taunting riddle against him, and say, Woe to him who increases what is not his—how long? And to him who loads himself with many pledges? Will not your creditors rise up suddenly? Will they not awaken who oppress you? And you will become their booty. Because you have plundered many nations, all the remnant of the people shall plunder you, because of men's blood and the violence of the land and the city, and of all who dwell in it.

The Second Woe: Coveting and plotting to gain

This breaks obviously the Tenth Commandment. "You shall not covet."

Habakkuk 2:9-11 Woe to him who covets evil gain for his house that he may set his nest on high, that he may be delivered from the power of disaster! You gave shameful counsel to your house, cutting off many peoples, and sinned against your soul. For the stone will cry out from the wall, and the beam from the timbers will answer it.

The Third Woe: Using violence to gain

This breaks of course the Sixth Commandment. "You shall not murder."

Habakkuk 2:12-14 Woe to him who builds a town with bloodshed, who establishes a city by iniquity! Behold, is it not of the LORD of hosts that the peoples labor to feed the fire, and nations weary themselves in vain? For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.

The Fourth Woe: Promoting debauchery [shameful acts]

This of course breaks the Seventh Commandment. It speaks mostly of sex sins.

Habakkuk 2:15-17 Woe to him who gives drink to his neighbor, pressing him to your bottle, even to make him drunk, that you may look on his nakedness! You are filled with shame instead of glory. You also—drink! And be exposed as uncircumcised! The cup of the LORD's right hand will be turned against you, and utter shame will be on your glory. For the violence done to Lebanon will cover you, and the plunder of beasts which made them afraid, because of men's blood and the violence of the land and the city, and of all who dwell in it.

The Fifth Woe: Idolatry

This is particularly the Second Commandment. He speaks mainly about graven images there, so I just specified the Second Commandment here. Obviously the First Commandment applies as well.

Habakkuk 2:18-20 What profit is the image, that its maker should carve it, the molded image, a teacher of lies, that the maker of its mold should trust in it to make mute idols? Woe to him who says to wood, Awake! To silent stone, Arise! It shall teach! Behold, it is overlaid with gold and silver, and in it there is no breath at all. But the LORD is in His holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before Him.

What these five woes do is very succinctly describe modern society. You can go back there and look at it if you want and see the specifics that we even call modern society. In the church we call it Babylon. These are particular sins of Babylon that God says He will punish them for. Did you notice that a primary theme that ran through those woes was "gain"—filthy lucre? Did you notice what our society is built on? "Filthy lucre"—gain. Everybody wants to get his however he can. They do it by oppressing others. They do it by plotting and coveting. They do it by promoting violence. They do it by promoting debauchery and getting other people in trouble and making them ashamed, and therefore losing their status, and so somebody else takes their place. And of course their idol is "*the gain*." So what we have here is a very succinct portrait of modern society.

Let us take verses 13 and 14 very quickly here together. I want to go through the famous verses here.

Habakkuk 2:13-14 Behold, is it not of the LORD of hosts that the peoples labor to feed the fire, and nations weary themselves in vain? For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.

I took these two together because they really form one thought, and that is, God allows man to labor in futility, in vain, to prove a greater point and to show the tremendous contrast between man's way and God's way. And then verse 14 is the reason then, and a promise. It is the reason why God allows evil to go seemingly unpunished, because He is showing this contrast between man's way and God's way, and it is a promise that one day He will make things right by absolutely **flooding** this world with the knowledge of His way.

This next scripture is very interesting. He concludes this judgment with:

Habakkuk 2:20 But the LORD is in His holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before Him.

Very interesting way to conclude these judgments. It shows the proper attitude that we should have when God speaks. In a way it was maybe a little correction to Habakkuk. "Look. You got a little excited Habakkuk, there at the first, and you doubted Me. But the Lord is in His temple. Be silent when He speaks. God is the judge of all nations. He is Sovereign. Everyone will submit to Him. Deal with it. Know who butters your bread, and know who can take your bread away from you. So keep silent when God speaks."

Then we have chapter 3: Habakkuk's prayer. I purposely did not leave myself much time for this, because you can go through it on your own. Maybe the greatest thing about this is that Habakkuk "got it" and this prayer that he gave that goes through chapter 3 is his response that he promised God in chapter 2, verse 1. He said, "I'm going to sit on the wall here and I'm going to wait, and then I'll figure out how I'll respond to you after I hear your answer."

Well, he is greatly chastened, and it shows in this prayer here that he "got it." He understood what God was saying. In fact one commentator called this "the greatest expression of faith in all the Bible." He did what God said. He waited patiently, and he "got it." He then expressed his faith in this chapter. In a way you could almost compare it with Job, at the end of chapter 42 of Job. Habakkuk finally saw God as He really was, and he expresses his joy and his faith, that God is on his side, and was on Judah's side. Now we could say "on the church's side," because we **see**.

He goes through here in most of the intervening verses between verse 2 and verse 17, all the way that God has worked on behalf of His people, especially the Exodus, and he said, "I've forgotten all these things. Look how You worked. Though it didn't seem to be something that we would understand at the time, all these acts of God worked to bring about what He had planned. They brought us into the Promised Land. They made us a nation. God is wonderful, even though we don't understand." So he tells God," Look at all your power, God. I'm sorry that I forgot that, that I let my fears get in the way."

In Habakkuk 3:2 he says, "Revive Your work in the midst of the years!" That is very interesting. Remember, God's work is salvation, that we believe Him, it says. God's work is that we believe in His Son whom He has sent (John 6:29). "In the midst of the years" is a Hebraic phrase that means *between now and the end; somewhere between now and the end*. So what he is saying then, means, *Save us before all these things happen*. We have another way to say it now. *Cut Your work short*. It is a plea for mercy and salvation.

Let us go to Matthew 24, and we will see how Jesus answered this.

Matthew 24:22 And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened.

He answered Habakkuk's prayer. Habakkuk said, "O LORD, I have heard your speech and was afraid." Cut Your work short, God. *Please*. And Jesus did.

You could also read Romans 9:28, another scripture that says *I have cut the work short in righteousness*.

Habakkuk 3:17 Though the fig tree may not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines; though the labor of the olive may fail, and the fields yield no food; though the flock be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stalls—

What is He talking about? Famine. *Though there is a famine in the land that takes everything. . .*

Habakkuk 3:18 Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation.

Does that ring a bell for today? Though there is a famine in the land that takes both trees and grain and cattle, **everything** seems to be gone, "Yet I will rejoice in the LORD." Though circumstances reach their lowest ebb, and things seem to be so out of kilter to the way that we think they should go, we can rejoice in God, because He has promised to save us—and He will. He has told us many times; *Just endure this period of trial. Trust in God.*

Habakkuk 3:19 The LORD God is my strength; He will make my feet like deer's feet, and He will make me walk on my high hills.

Do you know what that says? That goes back to imagery of the herald, the runner. What is a deer known for? Its fleetness of foot, and its ability to jump and climb over any obstacle that comes in his way. The LORD God is my strength. **He** enables me to overcome these things. **He** enables me to get on my high hills. Do you know what that is an image of? Our reward in the Kingdom of God. God is our strength. **He** enables us to run. **He** enables us to leap up over our obstacles, and **He** is the one that will bring us our reward.

