

April 19th, 2020

# “I Am Doing a Work in Your Days”

Habakkuk 1:1-11

## The most difficult thing about trials

The most difficult thing about facing trials is never the trial itself, it's failing to see why the trial exists. No one would go in for surgery, to get cut open, and bleed, and suffer through recovery just because. No. You only go in for surgery for a purpose—to correct some wrong, to fix some problem, to bring about healthy end.

But the troubles we face in life are *rarely* so clear. God doesn't put a disclaimer at the onset of our trials and say “Child I'm appointing this for you so that \_\_\_\_\_.” No in fact, I would say that many of the difficulties we face in life seem so random, so meaningless, so unnecessary, that we don't even see God's hand in it at all.

## A vision of the whole world

Many Christians relegate the Bible to being “exclusively a text book of personal salvation.”<sup>1</sup> It tells us how to get saved. Period. No doubt that is the chief reason it was written. **John 20:31** says “...These are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” But as infinitely glorious as that is, the Bible give so much more. The Bible gives us a vision of the whole world. It reveals to us that God doesn't merely create us, or save us, but He is orchestrating every event in history for the sake of His kingdom. There is nothing else. That's what the book of Habakkuk is about.

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<sup>1</sup> Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *From Fear to Faith: Rejoicing in the Lord in Turbulent Times*, (Nottingham, England,: IVP, 1997), pg. 9

## *The Big Idea...*

God is the LORD of all history and He works in every age and in all nations in order to punish the wicked and purify His people

- ☆ The World in Which Habakkuk Lived
- ☆ The Perplexity That Habakkuk Faced
- ☆ The Answer the Lord Proclaimed

### I. The World in Which Habakkuk Lived

#### **God's plan in calling Abraham**

In order to understand the book of Habakkuk, we need to see how it fits into redemptive history. The nation of Israel was born when God called Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees in **Genesis 12:1-3** “the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country...and your father's house to the land that I will show you....And I will make of you a great nation...and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” What did this promised land represent? It represented God's redemptive purposes to restore the paradise that was lost through Adam's sin. It was to be a land flowing with milk and honey (**Exodus 3:8**) that would foreshadow the ultimate consummation at the end of the age (**Revelation 22:1-5**).

#### **The establishment of the covenant blessings and curses**

Fast forward several hundred years to the Exodus account where Abraham's offspring has increased to over a million. Through Moses God delivered Israel out Pharaoh's clutches by His mighty hand and outstretched arm. The nation of Israel was officially formed. And God entered into a

covenant with them. Now every covenant includes blessings for keeping the terms of the covenant and curses for disobeying the terms of the covenant. These blessings and curses are found in **Deuteronomy 28**. This will prove to be key as we open the book of Habakkuk. In Habakkuk God is bringing the curses to His people who have broken the covenant.

### **A king is given from Judah**

Fast forward several hundred more years to the establishment of the monarchy. Israel had rejected God from being their king. They wanted a king like the rest of the nations (**1 Samuel 8:4-9**). God answered first with King Saul giving them a wicked king they deserved, and then with King David, a man after his own heart. David was from the tribe of Judah, a tribe that was already promised to possess the right of rule. Jacob had prophesied over Judah in **Genesis 49:10** “The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.” The LORD reinforced this promise by entering into a covenant with David. In **2 Samuel 7:12-14** He said “I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.” This offspring the Lord speaks of is none other than the LORD Jesus Christ *Himself*. He is the seed of the woman that God promised Adam and Eve (**Genesis 3:15**), He is the true and better offspring of Abraham (**Galatians 3:16**). And now we discover that He is from David, from the tribe of Judah. So the tribe of Judah has *the central role* in all of redemptive history.

### **The divided kingdom**

Fast forward a few years. Solomon, David's son, introduces the worship of false gods into the land through his many wives. God told him in **1 Kings 11:11** “Since this has been your practice and you have not kept my covenant and my statutes that I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom from you and will give it to your servant.” When Solomon died, this was fulfilled. The

kingdom was divided: Israel and the majority of the tribes to the north, and the tribe of Judah to the south. The books of 1-2 Kings *focuses mainly* on the kings of Israel, while 1-2 Chronicles *focuses mainly* on the kings of Judah. What's fascinating is how these two different dynasties faired in history. O. Palmer Robertson notes "While ten different dynasties consumed one another in the approximately 200-year history of the northern kingdom, only the one dynasty of David reigned in Judah for almost 350 years."<sup>2</sup>

### **The fall of the northern kingdom**

Now the the northern tribe, Israel, had become so wicked that God finally handed them over to the Assyrians. In 722 B.C., the Assyrians swept in, besieged the city, and took Israel captive. You can find the account in **2 Kings 17**.

### **The wickedness of the southern kingdom**

Meanwhile to the south, Judah was waxing worse and worse. The depths of it's depravity were seen under the rule of King Manasseh. Judah worshiped Ashtoreth the abomination of the Sidonians, Chemosh the abomination of Moab, Milcom (or Moloch) the abomination of the Ammonites (**2 Kings 23:13**). They gave themselves over to the cultic prostitution and *tragically* even human sacrifice. To give you an example, Moloch was this metal statue with outstretched hands, and they would heat up his hands until they were red hot, and they would place their infant sons and daughters in his hands hoping that Moloch would bless them. Judah came so wicked that God told them that Sodom and Gomorrah appeared righteous next to them (**Ezekiel 16:52**).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> O. Palmer Robertson, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), pg. 8

<sup>3</sup> They were so lost that even the book of the Law had been lost—2 Kings 22:8

### **Their chief sin and their demise**

But their chief sin was that they profaned the name of the Living God. **Ezekiel 36:18** “I poured out my wrath upon them for the blood that they shed... [because...v.21] I had concern for my holy name, which [*they*] among the nations to which they came.” Under King Manasseh, “Judah had gone beyond the point of no return.”<sup>4</sup> God tells them in **2 Kings 21:13-14** “I will wipe Jerusalem as one wipes a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down. And I will forsake the remnant of my heritage and give them into the hand of their enemies, and they shall become a prey and a spoil to all their enemies...” Judah broke the covenant and God was about to unleash hell on them.

### **A small delay**

It’s true that good King Josiah came after this and did much to reform Judah. They experienced a revival the likes of which they had never seen. Josiah removed all of the idolatry that Manasseh had established, he slew all the false prophets and priests of Baal, and he held a Passover which had never been so celebrated in all the days of Israel. But that only delayed the punishment (**2 Kings 22:16-20**).

### **The collapse of all things**

After King Josiah, there were four successive kings who all returned to the ways of Manasseh and walked in the sins of their fathers. Two disastrous consequences were about to be fulfilled **1)** They were going to be vomited out of the land that God had promised to Abraham and **2)** The throne of Judah was going to be vacated, which God had promised to David that his descendants would sit on it forever.<sup>5</sup> This truly looked like the collapse of all things.

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<sup>4</sup> Robertson’s Commentary, pg. 30

<sup>5</sup> cf. Roberson’s Commentary, pg. 16

## Enter Habakkuk

That's the darkness from which Habakkuk writes. *But* Habakkuk didn't have in mind the exile, he only had in mind the wickedness of Judah *herself*. So the book begins with Habakkuk questioning *when* God will act. That's the peculiar thing about this book: it consists of a dialog between the prophet and God. Habakkuk speaks, God answers, Habakkuk responds, God answers. Consider how this dialog unfolds.

### Habakkuk's first complaint

In 1:1-4 Habakkuk voices his first complaint. In essence, he is saying 'Lord how long before you judge the wickedness of *our nation*? The righteous are being swallowed up.'

### The Lord's first response

God then responds by giving "him far more than he had asked"<sup>6</sup> in 1:5-11: 'I'm going to send the Babylonians against you, and your whole nation will be swallowed up.'

### Habakkuk's second complaint

This shocks Habakkuk, he *only* wanted God to correct them, not send them into exile, especially by a wicked nation. So he responds in 1:12-2:1 'But Lord, they are more wicked than we, will you remain silent while the wicked swallow up your people?'

### The Lord's second response

The Lord responds in 2:4, and here is the beating heart of the book 'The righteous *shall live* by faith.' In other words, "...those who have been justified by

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<sup>6</sup> O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Prophets: Abridged Edition*, (Phillipsburg, NJ.,: P & R Publishing, 2008), pg. 203

their trust in the God of the covenant shall live. They shall survive God's judgments that bring about the collapse of one nation after another."<sup>7</sup>

### **Habakkuk's prayer and praise**

Finally, in chapter three, Habakkuk now sees with full assurance how God has *always* worked throughout all of redemptive history for the good of His people and he celebrates in the God of his salvation. It's not a pie-in-the-sky type of celebration. It's not turning a blind eye to the hardships he will face. No he says in **3:16** "...my body trembles...yet I will quietly wait for the day of trouble." He's scared. But he can rejoice nonetheless, because though he loses all things—"though the fig tree should not blossom"<sup>8</sup>—he says "yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will take joy in the God of my salvation." That's the grand prize that Habakkuk celebrates. Not *merely* that his sins will be forgiven, not merely that God will justify Him by faith, but that He will possess God Himself.

### **God's promises can never fail**

Dear congregation, this is why Habakkuk is so helpful for the time we live in. "It is a message for the ages."<sup>9</sup> If when facing the darkest of circumstances God promises hold true for those who believe, then His promises can never fail. If "...the LORD knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment"<sup>10</sup> then does He not know how to rescue you? That's our **first point**: the world in which live is not any more full of trouble than the world in which Habakkuk lived. And yet Habakkuk could rejoice! Why? Not because Habakkuk was unstained by sin. But rather because Habakkuk entrusted himself to Him who promised "the righteous *shall live* by faith."

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<sup>7</sup> *ibid*, pg. 204

<sup>8</sup> v.17

<sup>9</sup> Roberson's Commentary, pg. 14

<sup>10</sup> 2 Peter 2:9

## II. The Perplexity That Habakkuk Faced

### Habakkuk the prophet

Let's turn now to the verses we are dealing with this morning. Please turn with me to **1:1**. "The oracle that Habakkuk the prophet saw." Now we don't know anything from anywhere else in the Bible about Habakkuk.<sup>11</sup> But from this verse we know he was a *prophet*. A prophet was one who didn't speak his own words, but only those which had divinely received.<sup>12</sup> He was a messenger of God sent to declare His Word to the people. There are two tests of a true prophet of the LORD: **The first test:** does the prophet's words confirm or contradict what God has already spoken (**Deuteronomy 13:1-5**)? On this point, Habakkuk is affirmed as a true prophet in two ways. First, Habakkuk simply foretells what God has already threatened in Deuteronomy 28 for breaking the covenant. Second, the central theme in Habakkuk—"the just shall live by faith"—is Paul's central theme in the book of Romans. So Habakkuk's words are perfectly consistent with the OT and the NT. **The second test of a prophet:** does his word *actually* come to pass (**Deuteronomy 18:21-22**)? Here again Habakkuk is proven true. The Babylonian captivity of Judah *just is* a fact of history, in three successive stages, 605 B.C., 597 B.C., and 587 B.C.. Just like

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<sup>11</sup> His name means embrace or ardent embrace, that is a wrestler, "for they that wrestle do embrace and hold fast one the other" (Edward Marbury 95, Source: <https://archive.org/stream/commentaryorexpo00marb#page/n111/mode/2up>). "His name, as Luther well puts it, speaks as one 'who took his nation to his heart, comforted it and held it up, as one embraces and presses to his bosom a poor weeping child, calming and consoling it with good hope-if God so will.'" Homer Hailey, *A Commentary on the Minor Prophets*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: Baker Book House, 1972), pg. 271

<sup>12</sup> Source: <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=H5030&t=KJV> Accessed April 18, 2020

the prophet Jeremiah, Habakkuk foretold these events before it came to pass.<sup>13</sup> It was why the prophets of Judah who held office immediately preceding the captivity were so loathed. While all the false prophets were preaching “peace, peace,”<sup>14</sup> they preached doom and destruction.

### The burden he saw

v.1 tells us Habakkuk saw an *oracle*. The word oracle, *massa'* in Hebrew, means a load or a burden. Moses used the same word in **Numbers 11:1** when he complained to the LORD for laying the burden [*massa'*] of all Israel on him. This oracle for Habakkuk was a *burden*<sup>15</sup> because though this book ends with rejoicing, it is in the context of total devastation.

### Who are the wicked?<sup>16</sup>

In v.2-4 Habakkuk starts to complain to the Lord about this wicked group of people. v.4 says “...the *wicked* surround the righteous...” But who are they? He doesn't specify. There are really only three possibilities: the Babylonians, the Assyrians or Judah herself. They can't be the Babylonians because they are the very ones the Lord raises up in v.6 to be the instrument of their punishment. They can't be the Assyrians because in v.13 Habakkuk characterizes *them* as more righteous than those who are swallowing them up. But the Assyrians were in no way more righteous than the Babylonians. This group in v.2-4 must be Judah herself. This makes sense of v.4. It says “So the *law* is paralyzed, and

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<sup>13</sup> On the dating of this prophecy, most scholars date it between 609 B.C. and 605 B.C. Robertson says here “Apparently at the time of Habakkuk's prophecy Babylon had not yet reached its zenith of power, since the prophet anticipates the Lord's raising up this fierce nation (Hab. 1:6)...It would not seem likely that this suffering of injustice without relief by the people of Israel [v.2-4] would characterized the days of good King Josiah's righteous right. The troubles Habakkuk describes would fit much better in the days of Josiah's son Jehoiakim, somewhere between the death of Josiah in 609 B.C. and the establishment of Babylon's dominance over Syro-Palestine at the battle of Carchemish in 605 B.C.” Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, pg. 203. Even if someone wanted to argue that Habakkuk preached during the reign of Manasseh (M. Henry), the point would stand. Habakkuk is dated before the Babylonian captivity.

<sup>14</sup> Jeremiah 6:14

<sup>15</sup> KJV

<sup>16</sup> Much help here from Robertson's Commentary, pg. 139

justice never goes forth.” The *law* here is *torah*. This was the Mosaic Law, Israel’s constitution—the first five books of the OT. It was paralyzed, meaning it had lost its pulse, it was no longer working on the hearts of the people. “The abuse of *torah* points to God’s own people [Judah] oppressing one another.”<sup>17</sup>

### Habakkuk’s perplexity

So Habakkuk has two main questions for the LORD that perplex him. The **first question** is in v.2. “O Lord, *how long* shall I cry for help, and you will not hear? Or cry to you “Violence!” and you will not save?” Apparently the prophet had been crying out to the LORD in prayer for a long time, and God has not answered his prayer. “God *violence* has overtaken your people.” That word *violence* is the same description that God gave of the world before the flood in Noah’s day. **Genesis 6:11** “Now the earth was corrupt in God’s sight, and the earth was filled with *violence*.” Judah became just like the world with its cultic prostitution and human sacrifice.

The second question that perplexed Habakkuk is in v.3. “*Why* do you make me see iniquity, and *why* do you idly look at wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise.” In other words, ‘God why are you doing anything about this? The righteous are being surrounded by the wicked, and there is no longer any justice in the land.’

### Three maxims

I want to connect this to three maxims or three truths.

#### **Maxim 1:** *Sin is the troubler of mankind.*

Sin is *the chief evil* that any people face. As the Puritan Ralph Venning once said sin is worse than death, worse than the Devil, and worse than hell itself.<sup>18</sup> It is the cause of all of mankind’s suffering. Sin is worse than death and the devil because they cannot damn you but sin can. And sin is worse than hell

<sup>17</sup> Roberson’s Commentary, pg. 139

<sup>18</sup> Ralph Venning, *The Sinfulness of Sin*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2008), pg. 184-188

*because* the crime is a greater evil than the punishment. Hell is everlasting because it can never catch up to the evil that sin is. Dear congregation, here is the frightening thing. America is just as entrenched in sin as Judah was. Like Judah we engage in cultic prostitution. This nation is on it's knees worshipping at the altar of LGBT. And like Judah, we engage in human sacrifice. We have killed more babies to the god of convenience than Judah ever did to Molech. The reason Judah was in trouble in her day, and the reason why we are in trouble in our day is because of sin.

**Maxim #2:** *The greatest trouble cannot convert the soul.*

Judah saw the northern kingdom—Israel—slaughtered by the Assyrians only one hundred years earlier. The prophets had made the connection clear: 'Israel you sinned, you broke the covenant, and here is your punishment.' And yet this didn't stop Judah from running into the same exact error. Common sense would tell us that Judah should have turned, they should have repented. But sin is an enslaving principle. It is a dungeon of the deepest darkest that cannot be overcome by mere *will* or by a display of danger. Look for yourselves, in the book of Revelation, when the wrath of the Lamb is being poured out on the nations, that doesn't drive them to repentance. **Revelation 9:20** "The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, *did not repent* of the works of their hands nor give up worshiping demons and idols of gold and silver...." Christians today are praying for a revival in light of COVID-19, and we ought to. *But* we should never think that COVID-19 itself is enough to bring repentance. Trouble and danger and distress cannot bring about repentance.

**Maxim #3:** *God must intervene to stop sin.*

The reason why Habakuk cries out to God, is because God is the only one who can help. The world preaches a false gospel today—that *if* we just have access to the right education, or we can just foster enough self-esteem, or we can just enter a utopian age where the government can right the wrongs of financial inequity through re-distribution of goods, *then* all will be well, then justice will be

wrought. Those are lies. Nothing and no one can stop the evil on planet earth except God alone. Sin is a monster of iniquity. It is not just a sickness. It is death itself. Spiritual death. And only God can break its unbreakable chains. It is simply unbelievable that humanity has not come to this conclusion yet. Thousands of years, hundreds of civilizations, millions of laws—all have not been able to stop human injustice. Israel couldn't stop it even from their privileged position. The Greeks couldn't put an end to it with their philosophers. The Roman empire couldn't stop it with its civilized law and order. And the great American experiment has never been able to put an end to the injustice of sin in spite of its being the greatest democracy the world has ever seen. Only God can put an end to wickedness.

### **Is this our perplexity?**

This is the prophet's perplexity: "God you alone can stop this injustice. Why haven't you?" Dear congregation, let me speak boldly: If the evil in the world doesn't trouble us, if the injustice we see doesn't drive us to cry out to God like Habakkuk, perhaps we have become seduced by the spirit of the age. Perhaps we have grown lukewarm. Are we perplexed like Habakkuk that God is not acting more swiftly for the evil we see in the world? Oh may God give us the spirit of this man. That's our **second point**: Habakkuk was perplexed that God had not yet judged the evil that he saw among his own people.

## III. The Answer the LORD Proclaimed

### **Preface: 'you would not believe if told'**

Please look at v.5. The LORD responds "Look among the nations, and see; wonder and be astounded. For I am doing a work in your days that you would not believe if told." Four imperative verbs here: look...see...wonder...be astonished. As one author said, "God is not an alarmist"<sup>19</sup> but He is certainly

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<sup>19</sup> Robertson's Commentary, pg. 146

sounding an alarm here by this four-fold alert. In fact, what He is about to say, is so shocking that He says “I am doing a work in your days that you would not believe if told.” It is unbelievable for three reasons:<sup>20</sup>

### 1. It is unbelievable because it involves international politics

The beginning of v.5 says “Look among *the nations*.” In other words, ‘Habakkuk look beyond the borders of Judah. Look on the international scene. All the destinies of every nation are in my hand.’ **Daniel 2:21** “He changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings.” **Proverbs 21:1** “The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord.”<sup>21</sup>

### 2. It is unbelievable because God is behind all of it

Halfway through v.5 the Lord says “*I am doing...*” v.6 “For behold, *I am raising up...*” The God of the Bible is *not* the God of Deism—a god who creates but then stands back and lets things unwind as they may. Nor is He the god of Open Theism—a god who doesn't know the future because man's will is so free that it is beyond even his own knowledge or control. No the God of the Bible is He who has pre-arranged everything that has ever come to pass. As the WCF says “God from all eternity did, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass...”<sup>22</sup> Now we may not be able to understand that. We may come into perplexing difficulties

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<sup>20</sup> I originally had five.

2. It is unbelievable because it will happen so fast

In v.5 he says “...I am doing a work *in your days*.” In other words, “this will come to pass *not* in the next generation, but in *your* generation. In fact it is coming so quickly, it can be characterized as *days*.’ Most Biblical scholars believe that Habakkuk wrote this somewhere between 609 - 605 B.C. The first stage of the Babylonian captivity took place in 605 B.C. At best Judah had 4-5 years, at worst just a few months or weeks.

3. It is unbelievable because Judah will be judged by Gentiles who are more wicked than they

You have to understand how unfathomable this must have been. The Jews were told by God Himself in **Deuteronomy 7:6** “The Lord your God has chosen *you* to be a people for his treasured possession, *out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth*.” Habakkuk simply can't fathom this answer and it's seen in his next response. Halfway through v.13 “...why do you idly look at traitors and remain silent when the wicked swallows up the man more righteous than he?”

<sup>21</sup> also cf. Proverbs 8:15-16; Acts 13:21-22

<sup>22</sup> WCF 3.1

when we are trying to work out God's sovereignty with man's responsibility. We may not be able comprehend how God can ordain evil things to happen, and yet do in so such that He remains holy and without sin. But in spite of what we can't understand, what the Scripture says on this point is very understandable.

**Amos 3:6** "Does disaster come to a city, unless the Lord has done it?"

**Isaiah 14:24** "The Lord of hosts has sworn: "As I have planned, so shall it be, and as I have purposed, so shall it stand..."

**Romans 9:20-21** "Will what is molded say to its molder, "Why have you made me like this?" Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use?"

"Things do not just happen. Events are not just accidental...Every nation on earth is under the hand of God, for there is no power in this world that is not ultimately controlled by Him."<sup>23</sup> Dear congregation, has that truth yet sunk into the depth of your soul? Is it in your bones? Does it rise to the surface when something doesn't go your way? Are you able to say no matter what you face "It is the Lord's doing, let him do what seems good?"<sup>24</sup>

### **3. It is unbelievable because God has a purpose in all of it**

Again in v.5 He says "I am doing a *work*..." This is not an aimless *work*, or a random *work*, but it is a work that has purpose, it has meaning to it. But that is *precisely* why it is so unbelievable. God's work involves one of the most evil empires ever to walk the earth. v.6 "For behold, I am raising up the *Chaldeans*..." Who were the Chaldeans? The Babylonians.<sup>25</sup> Why is that so strange that

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<sup>23</sup> Lloyd-Jones, pg. 20

<sup>24</sup> paraphrase of 1 Samuel 3:18

<sup>25</sup> 2 Kings 2:13, 24

God's work would include them? Because of their characteristics, their calamities, and their condemnation.

### **The characteristics of the Chaldeans**

Consider the *characteristics* of these Chaldeans. **v.6** says they were a "... bitter and hasty nation." This perfectly characterized King Nebuchadnezzar of the Babylonians. He was the one who impetuously threw the 3 Hebrew boys into the furnace, and then quickly decreed when they were delivered that "any people, nation, or language that speaks anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shall be torn from limb from limb and their house laid in ruins..." (**Daniel 3:29**). He was unstable. But He was also a global power the likes of which the world has never seen. **v.6** continues saying "...who march through the breadth of the earth, to seize dwellings not their own." In **Daniel 2**, God gave Nebuchadnezzar a dream of a statue representing all the nations of the earth. Babylon was the head of gold. Meaning, to it God had given rule and power over all the nations. Every nation after it has been a lesser nation (**Daniel 2:36-38**). Is this not an unbelievable work of God? That He would take this bitter and hasty global power and put them over His own covenant people.

### **The calamities of the Chaldeans**

Next consider the *calamities* of these Chaldeans. Look at **v.8** "Their horses are swifter than leopards, more fierce than the evening wolves; their horsemen press proudly on. Their horsemen come from afar; they fly like an eagle swift to devour." Three animals graphically describe how terrifying this nation is. They are faster than leopards; more fierce than wolves at evening—signifying when their appetites were most ravenous; swift like an eagle meaning escape from them would be futile. King Zedekiah discovered this. When Babylon finally broke through Judah's walls, **Jeremiah 39:4** says he and his men left the city at night by way of the king's garden. "But the army of the Chaldeans pursued them and overtook Zedekiah...And when they had taken him, they brought him up to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon...and he passed

sentence on him” (v.5). The end of this story is terrifying. They slaughtered his sons, and plucked out his eyes, and threw him bound in chains in a Babylonian prison. Is this not an unbelievable work of God? That He would ordain such calamities?<sup>26</sup>

### The condemnation of the Chaldeans

Finally consider the *condemnation* of these Chaldeans. v.10 “At kings they scoff, and at rulers they laugh...[end of v.11] guilty men, whose own might is their god!” Not only did Babylon’s arrogance cause here to mock the kings and rulers they conquered, but she exalted herself the the level of deity. Remember what Nebuchadnezzar said on his roof in **Daniel 4:30**? “Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power...and for the glory of my majesty?” Babylonian gave no credit to the LORD of Heaven for it’s victories. And this is the most shocking thing about God’s work. That He used a self-worshipping people to accomplish His work.

This text came alive to me this week. As you all know, it seems that the country is starting to turn the corner, and flatten the curve when it comes to COVID-19. A very famous governor called a press conference this week to respond about how his state is beating it. He said this:

“The number [that is the number of new cases] is down *because we brought the number down,*” he told the press. “God did not do that. Faith did not do that. Destiny did not do that. A lot of pain and suffering did that...That's how it works. It's math.”<sup>27</sup>

Now imagine God appointing this God-hating governor to bring His church under discipline. Multiply that times 1,000 and you have Babylon.

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<sup>26</sup> For a fuller but more veiled list of Babylon’s calamities, see Deuteronomy 28:49ff

<sup>27</sup> Source: <https://disrn.com/opinion/opinion-gov-cuomo-denies-god-credit-for-improving-situation>  
Accessed April 18, 2020

### The wicked scalpel of Babylon

But it's precisely at this point, we can start to see hope in God's work. Why would God reveal this point to Habakkuk? Why would God reveal that in Babylon's heart, she thought her own might was god? Well consider, what happened when God sent the Assyrians against the northern tribe to punish her. In **Isaiah 10:6** the Lord said "Against a godless nation *I send him*, and against the people of my wrath *I command him*." The scenario is exactly the same. God by His own power sent the Assyrians. But in that same passage, he says "Woe to Assyria" (v.5). Woe—as in accursed. Why would God curse Assyria? Because they boasted in their hearts that they conquered because of their own might. **Isaiah 10:13** For he says: "By the strength of my hand I have done it." Therefore God wiped out Assyria. By whom? The Babylonians. Will Babylon escape? No. Don't you see? God is going to use the scalpel of the Babylonians to cut the cancer out of Judah. Then He is going to punish the scalpel for thinking that it wielded itself.

### The purpose of history

Dear congregation, though Habakkuk may have not seen it at this point in his dialog, this is what the whole book of Habakkuk is about. God was not aiming at destroying His true people in Judah, He was aiming at cutting out the poison in order to preserve His loved ones.

This is the reason why God does what He does on planet earth.

What the purpose of history? What is God's grand design in everything that He does throughout human history?

"To purify *for himself* a people *that are his very own*." (**Titus 2:14**)<sup>28</sup>

**Acts 15:14** "God *first concerned Himself* about taking...a people *for His name*."

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<sup>28</sup> NIV

Don't you see beloved? God's aim in human history has always been the church? Breathtakingly He wanted us for his own. **Isaiah 43:21** "The people *whom I formed for myself*, that they might declare my praise."

Here's the problem. The church is always in danger of getting swallowed up in wickedness. The church in Noah's day was nearly engulfed by the violence that surrounded her. She was reduced to only 8 people (**1 Peter 3:20**). God rescued her through the judgment of the flood. The church in Moses' day was nearly destroyed by the tyranny of Egypt. God rescued her through the Red Sea, but killed all the Egyptians. That's what's happening here. God is bringing his whole people Judah through the fires of Babylon in order to preserve His people and punish the wicked.<sup>29</sup> That's our **third point**. The answer the Lord gave Habakkuk was that in punish the wicked, He was preserving His people.

## Application

### 1. What kind of a world do we live in?<sup>30</sup>

We live in a world where all of history is only relevant as it bears upon the the church. Beloved feel the weight of that statement. What is history? Webster defines it this way: "History is an account of facts...a narration of events in the order in which they happened, with their causes and effects."<sup>31</sup> And there are different histories. "There is political history, ecclesiastical history, military history; *history* of law; *history* of commerce etc."<sup>32</sup> But the Bible claims that all for its own ends. History is His story. There is no other story.

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<sup>29</sup> This is seen so clearly in Jeremiah 24 where God gives Jeremiah the vision of the two baskets of figs, one good and the other bad. The good figs, His remnant, He will preserve in Babylon; while the bad figs, the wicked He will destroy.

<sup>30</sup> Much help here from the good doctor, Lloyd-Jones, pg.21-22

<sup>31</sup> Source: <http://webstersdictionary1828.com/Dictionary/history> accessed April 19, 2020

<sup>32</sup> *ibid*

As Lloyd Jones said “The key to the history of the world is the kingdom of God.”<sup>33</sup> In other words, all history in the OT, the nations, the wars, the development of civilization only matters in relation to God’s OT kingdom—Israel. All the history since the cross, every tribe and tongue, every economy and ethos, every plague and pestilence, every famine and feast is only matters in relation to God’s NT kingdom—the church. Apart from that, the world has no meaning. Take God’s kingdom out of the world, and the world has no reason to exist. Dear congregation, the Kingdom you belong to is at the very center of God’s plan for the cosmos. Oh what a blessed thought! Take that to heart. God appointed this particular season for the world, *with His kingdom in mind*—a kingdom you belong to. Everything happening in international politics, every dark scheme concocted in smoke-filled rooms, every seemingly mundane detail, God is orchestrating to preserve and purify your citizenship in that kingdom.<sup>34</sup>

## 2. What kind of a church should we want?

We should want the kind of church that is *keenly* aware of this. If every event is only relevant as it pertains to God’s kingdom, then the question we should be asking all the time is this: “What is the relevance of this event to the kingdom of God?”<sup>35</sup>

No doubt some of us are struggling to find the relevance of this pandemic to the kingdom of God. Especially since the church can’t even be together right now. But let me ask you something: Has this quarantine revealed how righteous and holy you are, or has it shown you how much sin still remains? What has this drawn out of the hidden depths of your soul? Worry? Anxiety? Indifference? Pride? Callousness? I know that it has revealed to me how self-willed and selfish I still am. I feel like Isaiah when he cried out “Woe is me!

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<sup>33</sup> Lloyd-Jones, pg. 21

<sup>34</sup> Like a symphonic masterpiece God has arranged every note on the page. He laid out the staff and established the clef. He assigned the key signature, the timing, the tempo, and where the rests go. And every part serves only one purpose

<sup>35</sup> Lloyd-Jones pg. 22

...for I am undone.”<sup>36</sup> It is a frustrating season to me, and I feel like anyone or any small thing that rattles my cage, invites the monster to come out. It has humbled me. Have you asked: ‘Lord what needs to be corrected in me? Where have I gone wrong?’<sup>37</sup> Have you asked: Lord how can I take this and learn more about the gospel? How can I use this event to share in the sufferings of Christ? How can I use this event to know Him better who loved me and gave himself for me? Beloved that is the type of church we should want. One that is keenly aware that every event is aimed at purifying us for Him.<sup>38</sup>

### 3. What kind of Savior do we need?<sup>39</sup>

One of the peculiar distinctive of Habakkuk is the *seemingly* absence of Christ. Read it for yourself this week, it is difficult to find any semblance of the Messiah. The other prophets spoke very explicit about Him. Why is He *seemingly* absent here? To emphasize something very important. What needed to be established in the hearts of Judah is that no human king could save them. The line of David not only failed, but King Manasseh had so filled Judah with abominations that no human invention could bring about repentance. Habakkuk’s emphasis therefore is not on the human nature of Christ, but on His Divine nature. Israel didn’t need a merely human king to sit on the throne of David, they needed a Divine King.

Who but God alone could punish sin and bring purification from that sin?

Who but God alone had the power to overcome His people’s greatest enemies?

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<sup>36</sup> Isaiah 6:5

<sup>37</sup> It’s the prayer of the Psalmist “Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me...” What is a grievous way? Any God belittling thought word or deed. A grievous way is any kingdom-seeking that is not Christ’s kingdom.

<sup>38</sup> From the Reformation Heritage Study Bible on Hebrews 12: “The author turns the argument believers often make regarding suffering on its head. When undergoing suffering, they often imagine that if God loved them, they would not be going through suffering. He shows how the suffering they endure is precisely proof of God’s love, provided they are instructed by the chastisement. What are some ways in which believers might ensure that the suffering, though grievous, will profit them (v. 11)?

<sup>39</sup> These three questions are from Christopher Ash, *Job: The Wisdom of the Cross, Preaching the Word Series*, (Wheaton, IL.: Crossway, 2014), pg. 17-23

That's why Habbakuk ends this prophecy by saying "I will take joy in *the God* of my salvation." Only God can fulfill the role of your Savior. You don't need a *mere* king from line of David, you need the Lord Himself.

Dear congregation, that's who Jesus Christ is. He's not just a man. He's the God-man.

He's the only One able to love you in your rebellion.

He's the only One able to purify you from your sins.

Don't forget whom you belong to in this season. Jesus did not merely suffer and die as a man for you. But He was He was declared to be *the Son of God*...by his resurrection from the dead for you.<sup>40</sup> Your Savior is no mere man. He is God almighty.

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<sup>40</sup> Romans 1:4