

The Judgement that the Righteous Wait For

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[0 : 00] We're going to read now in the scriptures about that very thing in the prophet Habakkuk. Now Habakkuk, or Habakkuk, if you come from across the pond, is a tricky little chap who hides in between Nahum and Zephaniah.

But if you have a blue Bible, it's page 785, and you can pretend you knew where it was all the time. We're going to read from Habakkuk chapter 2.

We're looking really at the oracle that comes in verse 2 to 20. I'll read verse 1 because it just helps us set it up. The prophet says, I'll take my stand at my watch post and station myself on the tower and look to see what he will say to me and what I will answer concerning my complaint.

And the Lord answered me, write the vision, make it plain on tablets so he may run who reads it.

For still the vision awaits its appointed time. It hastens to the end. It will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it.

[1 : 14] It will surely come. It will not delay. Behold, his soul is puffed up. It is not upright within him. But the righteous shall live by his faith.

Moreover, wine is a traitor, an arrogant man who is never at rest. His greed is as wide as shell. His death is never enough. Like death, he has never enough.

He gathers for himself all nations and collects as his own, all peoples. Shall not all these take up their taunt against him with scoffing and riddles for him and say, Woe to him who heaps up what is not his own?

For how long? And loads himself with pledges. Will not your debtors suddenly arise and those who awake will make you tremble? Then you will be spoiled for them.

Because you have plundered many nations. All the remnant of the people shall plunder you. For the blood of man and violence to the earth, to cities and all who dwell in them.

[2 : 24] Woe to him who gets evil gain for his house. To set his nest on high. To be safe from the reach of harm. You have devised shame for your house by cutting off many peoples.

You have forfeited your life. For the stone will cry out from the wall and the beam from the woodwork respond. Woe to him who builds a town with blood and finds a city on iniquity.

Behold, is it not from the Lord of hosts that peoples labor merely for fire and nations weary themselves for nothing? For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

Woe to him who makes his neighbors drink. You pour out your wrath and make them drunk in order to gaze at their nakedness. You will have your fill of shame instead of glory. Drink yourself and show your uncircumcision.

The cup in the Lord's right hand will come around to you. And utter shame will come upon your glory. The violence done to Lebanon will overwhelm you.

- [3 : 34] As will the destruction of the beasts that terrified them. For the blood of man and violence to the earth, to cities and all who dwell in them. What profit is an idol when its maker has shaped it?
- A metal image. A teacher of lies. For its maker trusts in his own creation when he makes speechless idols. Woe to him who says to a wooden thing, awake, to a silent stone, arise.
- Can this teach? Behold, it's overlaid with gold and silver. There is no breath in it. But the Lord is in his holy temple.
- Let all the earth keep silence before him. Amen. May God bless to us his word.
- Well, good evening. And please do turn to the book of Habakkuk. Habakkuk chapter 2. And you'll find that on page 785.
- [4 : 41] If you've lost your place in the church Bibles. Habakkuk chapter 2. Habakkuk chapter 2. Which is really all about the judgment that the righteous wait for.
- The judgment that the righteous wait for. Before we come to God's word, let's pray together. The grass withers.
- The flower fades. But the word of our God will stand forever. Heavenly Father, we thank you that you've given us your most precious word. And we pray that this evening, by the power of your spirit, you would speak to our hearts.
- And that you would comfort us where we need to be comforted. And you would challenge us where we need challenging. We pray all this in Christ's precious name. Amen. There will be times in the Christian life when you are utterly perplexed about what God is doing.
- Times when what you know to be true about God will be at loggerheads with your current experience of him. We know that God is the sovereign ruler of the world.
- [5 : 53] And that he is holy and just. He is a shepherd, a shield, and a rock for all those who trust in him. We know that that is always true. All of the time. But friends, there will be times when we as a church will not experience our God this way.
- Times when the Lord's apparent inactivity will make us cry out to him in perplexing concern. You might be here this evening and that is exactly how you feel.
- You look at the world around. The world that the Lord controls. And see things that just shouldn't be. The wicked prosper and grow. And our nation is falling further and further.
- Into depravity. Away from the ways of the Lord. And it seems to be doing so scot-free. And those who obey Christ. The righteous. The real people of faith.
- Are blasted. Bullied. And belittled. By the proud and the haughty. Both from outside. And from inside the church. You look at Scotland and you think.
- [6 : 57] Well. I know the Lord's in control. But it looks as though the enemies of the gospel. Are calling the shots around us. And when you see things like that happening.
- Painful questions arise in your heart and mind. Oh Lord. Why do you seem so inactive? Why don't you do something about this? How long will things be this way?
- Why don't you say? Can I just say. That is not a new experience for the righteous. The people of faith. For that is precisely. The same painful perplexity. That pulsed.
- Through the prophet Habakkuk. You remember last week. That Habakkuk comes to the Lord in chapter one. With the first of two perplexing concerns. And he cries. Oh Lord.
- How long must I look upon the evil. That is being committed within Judah. Your Old Testament church. It is full of people. Who have spurned your grace. And utterly nullified your law.

[7 : 53] They are dragging your name through the mud. And they are persecuting. The remnant of faith. The real believers. And Lord. You don't seem to care. These were the people who are supposed to be.

A light to the Gentiles. Showing off your beauty and glory. Advancing your kingdom to the ends of the earth. And they seem to be doing the exact opposite. And they say. Won't you remember your covenant promises.

And won't you deal with this. Well the Lord does answer Habakkuk. But as you remember. He gives them a shocking answer. In chapter one verse five. The Lord says.

Habakkuk. I'm not blind. And I'm not being idle. I see exactly what's going on. And I am raising up. A war machine. Babylonian brutes.

Chaldean killers. Their ferocious army. Will sweep across the earth. Devastating and seizing nations. These immoral idolatrous pagans.

[8 : 52] Who know nothing of me. And know nothing of true mercy. Are my ordained instruments of judgment. I have raised them up. And I'm sending them straight for you.

Upon my rebellious people. They will seize the promised land of Judah. And my people will face exile. And you remember that this answer to prayer.

Makes things worse for Habakkuk. He does accept the Lord's plan by faith. In chapter one verse twelve. But it is still an utterly perplexed faith. Because again.

What he knows to be true about God. Is at loggerheads. With his current experience of God. He says. Lord you are so holy. So how then. Can you tolerate.

Let alone use these thugs. For your purposes. And Lord you are just. So how then. Can you use those who are extremely wicked. To punish those who are less wicked.

[9 : 48] Lord your cure. Seems worse than the disease. And in one verse seventeen. Habakkuk sums up his protest. He says. Lord. Are you going to let Babylon.

Do the things that they're going to do. Forever. Will you never hold them to account. For their atrocious war crimes. And holocausts. And by implication.

He's also asking. Lord. Is there any hope for your covenant people. For those of us who are still standing. By faith in your promises. What about us. The remnant.

In all of this. Well this is where we left Habakkuk last week. Eagerly waiting. For an answer from the Lord. And in our passage this afternoon. The Lord replies.

And once again. Just notice. That the Lord doesn't scold. His perplexed prophet. For boldly questioning him. Or for not having all the answers. Just as it was in chapter one.

[10 : 43] The Lord graciously meets. His perplexed prophet. And gives him an answer. To. His concerns. So the Lord says to Habakkuk.

Please look at two verse two. Write the vision. Make plain on tablets. So he may run. Who reads it. So the Lord is going to give Habakkuk a vision. And the Hebrew word used there.

Really just means. A message. And the prophet is to write down this message. Clearly. And plainly on tablets. So that he can take it. And run with it. And herald it.

Proclaim it. Around the people. That's what it means for the reader. To run with it. Jeremiah 23. Speaks about prophets in the same terms. Those who run with the Lord's message. To proclaim it.

So it's a message. That everyone must hear. And respond to. And it's a message. That the remnant of faith. Throughout the land. Will hear. And notice.

[11 : 37] That the events described. Within this message. Will only come to pass. At the Lord's timing. Please look at verse three. For still the vision awaits. Its appointed time.

It hastens to the end. It will not lie. The appointed time. Would have been familiar. To Habakkuk. Because it was a phrase. That was used back. In Genesis 18.

Where the Lord. Graciously promised. To Abraham and Sarah. That the covenant community. Would survive. Despite. The way. In which things. Currently appeared. I wonder if you remember.

When the Lord promised. That they would have a child. In their old age. So that the covenant line. The covenant family. Would survive. But of course. Sarah doubted. And she laughs.

At the prospect. Of the Lord's message. Coming to pass. It just seems so. Unlikely. Given her current circumstances. And what does the Lord say? He says. Don't laugh. You will have a child.

[12 : 33] But at the appointed time. On my time. Not your time. You have to wait. It's the same phrase. That's used here. And it's the same point. That's being made.

In Habakkuk. The Lord has his own diary. And so if it seems. As though the message. Is taking a long time. To come to fruition. God's people. Must wait. That's what the verse says.

Wait. And remember. That it's not taking a long time. From God's perspective. That's always the nature. With true biblical faith. Isn't it? True faith. Takes the Lord.

At his word. No matter how unlikely. His promises seem. Not walking. By how things appear. But by what he has said. And trusting in them. Staking everything. Upon what he's promised.

And submitting to his timing. Well what exactly. Is this message. That will happen. At the appointed time. What is it. That the Lord's people. Need to wait for.

[13 : 27] And keep trusting in. And keep living for. Well. It's contained in verse 4. To verse 20. And let me just sum it up for you. The message is this. That one day.

The Lord will fill the earth. With the knowledge of his glory. And on that day. The Lord will. Punish. And utterly destroy. The proud. But the righteous.

That is all those. Who have clung on. To the Lord's promises. All those. Who've carried on. Obediently trusting him. They shall live. So the message is bursting.

With hope and assurance. And it actually answers. Habakkuk's perplexing concern. One day. At the divinely appointed time. The Lord is going to give the proud. Their comeuppance.

Which of course. In Habakkuk's day. Was Babylon. And as the Lord does that. He at the same time. Will deliver. And vindicate. His needy people. Wiping out the oppressor.

[14 : 25] Yes. They will face. The terrors. Of the exiled. Now. They will face. The oppression. Of Babylon. But even in their darkest hour. They can rejoice. And carry on.

Living for the Lord. Because he will establish his kingdom. And his justice in the end. And all those who trust in this message. Will go on living with the Lord.

And his glory. Well let's spend the rest of our time. Unpacking this message. Please look at verse 4. Behold. His.

That's Babylon's. Babylon's soul is puffed up. It's not upright within him. But the righteous shall live by faith. The Hebrew for puffed up.

Can also be translated as tumor. It's very. Very powerful language. Literally it reads. His soul is bloated with tumors. The Lord is saying that when it comes to the proud.

[15 : 19] The enemies of the gospel. They might look strong and boisterous. But really they have within themselves. The seed of their own destruction. By their own self-righteousness.

They will fall. Palmer Robertson says this. The Babylonians have set themselves up. As the source of their own life. And goodness. And so they exclude themselves.

From the possibility of receiving life. And righteousness from the Lord. So they're a total contrast. To the people of faith. The people of faith are those. Who have humbled themselves.

And who have completely built their lives. Upon the Lord and his word. They know that he is the only source of life. And so they look to him daily. Just like their father Abraham did. In Genesis 15.

He believed. Walked by the obedience of faith. In God's word. And not by how things appeared. And because he did this. It was credited to him as righteousness. The New Testament teaches exactly the same thing.

[16:17] Doesn't it? That's why the apostle Paul. Uses Habakkuk chapter 2 verse 4. As the entire foundation. Of his whole argument. In the book of Romans. Listen to how Paul begins the book of Romans.

Romans 1 verse 16 to 17. Paul says. I'm not ashamed of the gospel. For it's the power of salvation to all who believe. For in it. The righteousness of God is revealed. From faith.

For faith. As it is written. In the prophet Habakkuk. The righteous. Shall live by faith. So the whole Bible teaches plainly.

There are only those who humble themselves. And stake their all. And believe everything. In the gospel of God. Will be justified. And saved from the wrath to come. But that is precisely what the people of pride won't do.

They refuse to bow the knee to the Lord in obedience. And they reject his word. Because their soul is so puffed up. With self-reliance. And so they can never be upright. And as a consequence.

[17:17] They will never live. But again. What an encouragement that must have been. For Habakkuk and the rest of the remnant in Judah. Who were about to be blasted. By this war machine. The Lord is saying.

The very fact that Babylon takes pride in its own power. It's a sure sign that it's headed for judgment and destruction. And the same goes for any enemy of Christ and his people today.

I think this is a strange concept for us to get our heads around. The Lord has said to his people. You can actually take comfort in the strength, arrogance and boisterousness of your enemies.

Because it's a sure sign that they will fall in the end. They may look strong and stable. But in reality. They're as stable as a drunkard. And that's the image that's used in verse 5.

The Lord says. Babylon is just like a greedy, greedy drunk. And his booze. The thing that he drinks to get intoxicated. Is his own arrogance and success.

[18:15] And the image in the Hebrew there is. The more and more people that Babylon consumes. The more and more they get intoxicated. And they become unstable. By their arrogance. Their own success will go to their heads.

And in the end. They will fall over in a drunken stupor. And when that happens. They're going to get a total kicking. An absolute kicking.

And that's what's described in verse 6 to verse 20. Where the Lord gives Habakkuk five songs of woe. Five songs that begin with the word woe. Just run your eye through.

Look at verse 6. Woe to him. Verse 9. Woe to him. Verse 12. Woe to him. Verse 15. Woe to him.

And verse 19. Woe to him. Five songs of woe. Now the Hebrew in each song is punchy. And it would have been really easy to remember.

[19 : 12] I wonder if you've ever listened to a song on the radio. And it's a really cheesy song. And it's just so catchy. And you find yourself after the song is finished. You can't get it out of your head. It's stuck in there.

I'm not going to sing to you any cheesy songs. So don't worry. They're designed to get a hook that will hook into your brain and get under your skin and stay there.

Well that's what the Hebrew of these songs were like. They're designed to get in there. I wonder when was the last time you were at a football match. Has anyone put your hand up if you've been to a football match in the last two weeks? Anyone been to a football match?

Yeah. You have. Okay. I've not been to a football match for years. The last football match I went to see was the mighty Partick Thistle. Why are you laughing? Now I can tell you, sorry Thistle fans, but the standard of football was so bad that I actually found the fans' chants more entertaining than what was going on on the pitch.

But the fans' chants, they were all easy to remember in the stadiums. And they were all designed to be so easily remembered and to wind up the opposition.

[20 : 17] And that's what these five songs of woe are. They're like chants to be chanted by Habakkuk and the remnant of faith. And they're designed to utterly torment their opponents.

Now what's the key message in all five of these songs? Well, it is this, that the Lord one day will deliver public retributive justice upon the proud and their crimes.

In other words, the Lord is going to inflict just punishments upon Babylon and all the those who've lived by the same spirit and heart attitude as Babylon. These punishments will be utterly humiliating.

But they will be fair. They will befit the crimes that have been carried out. So what I want us to do now is let's just have an overview of these songs. I'm not going to go through every detail. We don't have time to do that.

But I want you to just get a grasp of what is being said. In Taunt Song 1, verses 6 to 8, we are told that those who have plundered nations shall themselves be plundered.

[21 : 25] The victims of extortion will rise up suddenly and ransack their oppressors, making a spoil of them. Just look at verse 8. Because you have plundered many nations, all the remnant of the people shall plunder you for the blood of man and violence to the earth, to cities and all who dwell in them.

You see, what you've done will come back on your own head. Retributive justice. Taunt Song 2, which is in verse 9 to 11. We are told that the pursuer of evil gain shall be publicly exposed for what they have done.

Their security, the very fruit of their greed, will be wiped out. The image there is of like an army who set their nest up in a mountainside, as though to try and be out of the reach of all the rest of their enemies.

The fact is, there's no place that's out of the reach of the Lord of creation. And any gain that they have built up for themselves will be replaced by utter shame. When I read these verses, I couldn't help but think of the eagle's nest that the Nazis built for Hitler.

Do you remember they put it up in the German mountains? Built as a haven at the expense of the slaughtered masses. Well, now it's a symbol of utter shame, isn't it? That's what the song is trying to portray to us.

[22 : 43] In Taunt Song 3, which happens in verse 12 to verse 14, we're told that the promoter of violence, who's built a city through bloodshed, shall also be publicly ridiculed and displayed as a fool.

Because all of their toil was for nothing. They've wasted their time. And most terrifying of all, look at verse 14. Verse 14 says this, The Lord is going to come.

The knowledge of the glory of the Lord is a personal encounter with the living God. His glory will be everywhere. And this verse seems to suggest that for some, the appearing of the glory of the Lord will be beautiful.

Because it means freedom from the oppressors. And at the same time, for others, it will be utter torment. Tonks on 4, which is verse 15 to 17, where the song says, Woe to the perverted poorer of wrath.

This is a chilling image. It's very chilling. Commentators reckon that this one was specifically aimed for the king of Babylon himself. He's described as the one who poured out wine in order to get his neighbors drunk so that he can strip them naked and parade them round and abuse them sexually.

[24 : 08] He's a pervert who publicly takes glory in the fact that he can do this. Look at the power I have over these other people. Well, the Lord says to the pervert, It will be your turn soon.

You gave your cup to your neighbor. Well, now I'm going to give you my cup. My cup that is full of wrath. You will drink it down and you will be utterly intoxicated.

And then you will be the one who's stripped naked. And you'll be paraded around and the whole world will see you for what you are. An uncircumcised pagan. All of the destruction that you've inflicted upon my created order, it will overwhelm you.

And finally, taunt song 5, which is verse 18 to 20. The pagan idolater, the one who has spent his whole life worshipping false gods that he's made by his own hand, will meet the true living God.

And remember, what was the specific idol that the Babylonians worshipped? Well, 1 verse 11 tells us that their idol was their own strength. Their own strength is their God.

[25 : 16] They love it. They worship it. Well, what will happen to them? Taunt song 5 says that they will soon stand in total silence before the throne of the living God with no excuse and no defense for their suppression of the truth.

A day is coming when God will be God and Babylon will know it. So we've just scratched the surface there, but that gives you the gist of these five taunt songs of woe written to taunt the proud and terrify them of the judgment that will come upon them from the hand of the Lord.

Again, I just say, as I said last week, if you're sitting here thinking these are horrendous, then you've understood them because they are. They are horrendous. But don't miss the surprise of the text.

The surprise of the text is that the Lord has given these songs to the true believers within Judah so that they can sing them with joy and with thankfulness.

These are the songs that the people of faith could remember and sing whilst under Babylonian oppression and exile so that when they look around them at their grim circumstances and feel like the Lord has abandoned them and feel like they should give up living for him, they can be filled with joy by these songs that one day soon at the appointed time, the Lord will fill the earth with the knowledge of his glory.

[26 : 41] And his people will have justice and they will be vindicated by the smashing of their enemies. These songs had the dual purpose of taunting the wicked and fueling the faith of the remnant of believers.

Habakkuk was concerned that the Lord would let the wicked get away with their crimes, but the Lord's answer must have filled him with great hope. The Lord is saying, Habakkuk, the oppression will only be for a season I will put a stop to the evil.

In fact, the day is coming while I will punish all those who proudly set themselves against me and my people. And you know, we know from the history books that the Lord did as he said he would to Babylon.

It got its comeuppance in 539 BC. You can read about it in Daniel chapter 5. In fact, I think it has half a verse in Daniel chapter 5. The Lord wiped away Babylon from the face of the earth.

But you know, it's clear that the message given to Habakkuk wasn't completely fulfilled then. In fact, the Lord's promise to ultimately judge the proud and deliver the righteous, it still hasn't met its great end in appointed time.

[27 : 54] But what was promised to Habakkuk will only find its complete fulfillment when the Lord Jesus Christ returns to earth and brings in the final consummation of the kingdom of God.

That is what Habakkuk actually is alluding to in verse 14, the verse that we read together a moment ago. It's a straight quotation from an earlier prophecy in the Bible from Isaiah 11, where the Lord promises to bring his kingdom and establish justice through his ultimate Davidic king.

It's the one that we heard about preached through our carol services at Christmas from Isaiah 11. Only when he, the Christ, appears shall the earth be completely full of the glory of God as the waters cover the sea.

And so friends, you here today and me in this hall, we are just like the people of the Lord in Habakkuk's time in the sense that we too are waiting for the same message to reach this appointed time.

For the message that Habakkuk was to run with was none other than the gospel of the Lord Jesus, his ultimate reign and his coming kingdom. And so until then, in this age, you and I will always be surrounded by those who live by the spirit and the attitude of Babylon.

[29 : 13] And so we should not be surprised that we are greatly opposed and oppressed because we are the righteous through the people of faith today. And the next time you are perplexed and concerned because you are part of a church that has been overrun by the enemies of the gospel, you can take great comfort from these taunt songs in Habakkuk.

We should all, I think, rightly have a fear of God's judgment. Even as Christians, I think it's still healthy and good to have a fear of the judgment to come. But I think it's also true that those who are in Christ should also find great comfort in the judgment to come because it means that we will be finally delivered from all of our enemies.

Remember, that's why the Lord gave Habakkuk this message in the first place, so that his suffering people who are about to be overrun would have hope and assured of final vindication.

But you might be sitting there thinking, oh, that's not very Christian. I'd never wish for the things mentioned in Habakkuk chapter 2 to come upon anyone. Well, just think for a moment about our brothers and sisters in Christ who live in parts of the world where they daily face authentic Babylonian treatment at the hands of the wicked.

Just recently, I read about more churches in Syria and Iraq being burned to ashes. New converts to Christianity in Pakistan have had their whole livelihoods stripped from them.

[30 : 38] They've been cut off from their society and received death threats. The Open Doors website reports that Christians are being killed in more countries now than ever before.

Believers have been made to watch their loved ones being executed in front of their eyes simply because they will not denounce Jesus as Lord. And those of you who have been reading the newspapers and are on the Christian Institute website you'll see that a church in China called the Golden Lampstand a big massive evangelical church in China was exploded this week by the government simply because they hated the message that was being preached in the church.

So can you see how these taunt songs are actually a great source of comfort for those who've suffered at the hands of those who live by the spirit of Babylon. Our brothers and sisters have been made to look like utter fools for trusting in Jesus and for living for his glorious kingdom.

Well what a glorious source of strength it must be for them to know. The Lord is on his throne in the heavenly temple high above the creation and despite how things appear he's not inactive he will give justice to his elect who cry to him day and night.

He will delay he will not delay long over them he will give them justice and speedily at his appointed time. You might be embarrassed by Habakkuk chapter 2 but the persecuted church isn't embarrassed.

[32 : 13] The persecuted church is delighted by Habakkuk chapter 2 because it is the judgment that the righteous wait for. We'll come back next week to hear about Habakkuk's response to the Lord but let's be quiet for a moment maybe take time in your own heart to respond to the word of God and then I'll pray for us.

Heavenly Father we humbly confess that all of us are deserving of your wrath and punishment for the way that we've rebelled against you.

We know that by nature we too would live by the spirit of Babylon of pride and self-righteousness and so we praise you for reaching out to us in your grace for bringing us to faith in your son the one who drunk down the cup of your wrath on the cross so that we could live and be credited as righteous before you.

Help us to keep persevering by faith in these last days as we're surrounded by the enemies of the gospel. Help us to take real strength from knowing that you are the one who's seated in the heavenly temple and you will bring vindication and justice for your needy people.

Help us to trust in your word of promise and to take great strength from knowing this. Forgive us for the times when we've become complacent in our own lives or think that somehow your judgment is bad news.

[33 : 54] Correct us where we need to be corrected on this and help us to pray for our brothers and sisters throughout the world for whom the news of Habakkuk chapter 2 is great news.

We pray this in Jesus' precious name. Amen.