

God is at Work

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[0 : 00] Be seated. Again, my name is Sebastian Biannigord. It's a joy and delight to be with you. I was mentioning earlier before the service that I first visited Buclue in 2014 when I first visited Edinburgh.

And I remember the visit and the warmth and kindness of this congregation. So I'm glad to be here with you again as we look at God's Word.

Now, if you have your Bibles with you, if you would open to the book of Habakkuk, Habakkuk chapter 1. I will be with you, Lord willing, tonight and the following two Sunday evenings as we look at this book.

So we'll take one chapter each time. Now, as we get started today, I want to orient ourselves in the history of God's people. The beginnings of God's people can be traced back all the way back to Abraham, to the promise that was given to him by God.

To have this promise that they would be given a land, that they would be given a people to possess that land. And as we move on, we find the promise given that there are going to be kings that come from that line.

[1 : 17] And with David, we see the beginning of that promise being fulfilled. You know, people united in the promised land. But following the rule of his son Solomon, the kingdom is divided, split into two.

Israel in the north, with Samaria as its capital. And then we have Judea or Judah in the south, where we have Jerusalem as the capital.

And these two exist, you know, side by side until 722, when we see Samaria fall at the hands of the Assyrians.

And it seems that Jerusalem is going to fall as well. As the Assyrians are standing outside of Jerusalem. And it's at that time that the king of Judah, as Hezekiah, prays to God, asks him to deliver them.

That God actually does do just that. He delivers the people from the Assyrians. But after the reign of Hezekiah, came his son, Manasseh.

[2 : 21] You know, a man who rebelled against God. Who worshipped the pagan gods. Who even sacrificed his own son to the pagan gods.

You know, his son followed and was no better. And then after him came Josiah. And there came the time where we see the temple being restored.

Where we see the law of God being found and being proclaimed among the people. We see all the altars to the pagan gods being removed.

It seems like things are going in the right trajectory. Things are finally turning for the better. And then Josiah dies in battle as we just read.

And this brings us to the time of Habakkuk. With Josiah the king being dead. His one son reigning for three months. Until the Egyptians come and they remove him.

[3 : 21] And place his brother on the throne instead. The man Jehoiakim. As he is mentioned. And his history we see in 2 Kings. 2 Chronicles.

And in the book of Jeremiah. Who is a contemporary of Habakkuk. And Jehoiakim. Was not like Josiah. But as we saw in the text.

This evening. He did what was evil. In the sight of the Lord. Now you may wonder. Why this history lesson? Well to understand the book of Habakkuk.

And to understand the complaints. That we are going to see him bring against God. We need to understand first. The centrality of God's promises. You know God has promised to them a land.

And a people. So we can see the confusion of Habakkuk. In relation to this promise. And then second we see. The state of the nation. You know we've seen.

[4 : 17] How Josiah. Who seemed to be the great promise. False. And instead. We see more and more. Wickedness. And idolatry. Spreading throughout the land.

And. You know there's this saying. As the king goes. So goes the people. And that is what we see over and over again. In first. In first.

And in second kings. And with this. You know let us read. Habakkuk chapter 1. Beginning in verse 1. And this is the word. Of God.

The oracle that Habakkuk the prophet saw. Oh Lord. How long shall I cry for help. And you will not hear.

Or cry to you violence. And you will not save. Why do you make me see iniquity? Why do you idly look at wrong?

[5 : 11] Destruction and violence are before me. Strife and contention arise. So the law is paralyzed. And justice never goes forth.

For the wicked they surround the righteous. So justice goes forth perverted. Look. Among the nations. And see.

Wonder. And be astounded. For I'm doing a work. In your days. That you would not believe. If told. For behold.

I am. Raising up the Chaldeans. That bitter and hasty nation. Who marched through. The breath of the earth. To seize dwellings. Not their own.

They are dreaded and fearsome. Their justice and dignity. Go forth from themselves. Their horses are swifter than leopards. More fierce than the evening wolves. Their horsemen press proudly on.

[6 : 09] And their horsemen come from afar. They fly like an eagle. Swift to devour. They all come for violence. All their faces forward.

They gather captives like sand. At kings. They scoff. And at rulers. They laugh. They laugh. At every fortress. Where they pile up earth.

And take it. Then they sweep by like the wind. And go on. Guilty men. Whose own might. Is their God. Are you not from everlasting?

O Lord my God. My Holy One. We shall not die. O Lord. You have ordained them as a judgment. And you O Rock. Have established them for reproof.

You. Who are of pure eyes. And to see evil. And cannot look at wrong. Why do you idly look at traitors? And remain silent. When the wicked swallows up.

[7 : 08] The man more righteous than he. You make mankind. Like the fish of the sea. Like crawling things. That have no ruler. He brings all of them up.

With a hook. He drags them out. With his net. He gathers them. In his dragnet. So he rejoices. And is glad. Therefore he sacrifices. To his net.

Makes offerings. To his dragnet. For by them. He lives. In luxury. And his food is rich. Is he then. To keep on emptying his net.

And mercilessly killing nations. Forever. Amen. And thus marks the reading of God's holy. In the errant word. Let us pray.

Father God. We thank you. That you speak to us in your word. Lord. We pray this evening. That you may speak. To your servants. That you may.

[8 : 08] Enlighten us. By your Holy Spirit. And father. We pray this. In Jesus name. Amen.

Last month. On May 12th. There's a Christian student. In Nigeria. Deborah. Yakubu. Who posted. In a WhatsApp group.

Jesus Christ. Is the greatest. He helped me. Pass my exams. And because of this. She was then. Stoned. To death. By a mob.

And her body. Was burned. All because of her faith. In Christ. About a month later. Forty Christians. Were murdered. During a worship service. In Nigeria.

And there have already. This year. Been 23 attacks. You know. Near the church. At churches. This year. In Nigeria. And the words. That we see.

[9 : 07] In this passage. Of violence. Of iniquity. Of destruction. Of injustice. Of the wicked. Swallowing up.

The righteous. Are. Perhaps the first. Words. That we may think of. As we think of. What has been happening. In Nigeria. And the words. Of the prophet. Of how long.

Probably echoes. In the churches. Of our brothers and sisters. In Nigeria. And as years go on. With rampant. Injustice. You know.

Where the wicked. Devoured the righteous. And when it seems. That God is. Entirely passive. We're instead. Reminded this evening.

From this chapter. That God is at work. That God. Is at work. So the three things. We will look at. [10:02] This evening. Is first. The cry of lament. We'll see the cry of lament. And then second. The. The unexpected answer. The unexpected answer.

And then finally. And thirdly. The call to act. Call to act. So first. If you would. Look at verses. Two and four. With me. At the cry of lament.

You know. This opening. Is. Something that we see. In several of the psalms. Like in Psalm 13. Where we. We find David. Say. How long. Oh Lord. How long. Will you forget me forever? How long. Will you hide your face. From me? Now this experience. Of feeling. As if God. Can not hear us. Or does not.

Hear us. Is it not limited. To Habakkuk? Not limited. To David. Because in this cry. For God. To hear. And to listen.

[11:01] You each. Christian. Can identify. The times. In their own lives. Where you face. Inner struggles. Outer. Challenges. Adversaries.

And yet. Despite. Countless. Of times. In prayer. Numerous. Tears. Wondering. If God. Is really. Listening. For Habakkuk. The prayers. Have been. Concerned. The injustices. That surrounded him. Remember. At this time. We have. Jehoiakim.

On the throne. And the righteousness. You know. Was rampant. Throughout. The nation. Fellow Israelites. Sinning. Against one another. Taking advantage.

Of the poor. And the needy. And the righteous. Those who truly. Believed in God. And who followed him. They're the ones. Who are suffering. And the prophet.

[11:56] Jeremiah. Gives us an account. Of another prophet. Who was prophesying. In that day. And. And. He was prophesying. Against. Jerusalem.

Because of the sins. That they were committing. King. And as a result. The king. Jehoiakim. Had him captured. And executed. Those who spoke the truth.

They were slandered. Silenced. Killed. While those who spread lies. And unbelief. Were instead. Elevated. And we see.

In this. Words themselves. How long. I mean. There's a sense. In there. That Habakkuk. Has been praying. For a while. But he's been consistently.

Racing up. His appeals. To God. As these acts. Of injustices. Have persisted. And at the heart. Of Habakkuk's lament. Is not the injustice.

[12:54] Itself. Even though. Of how terrible it is. No. At the heart. Of the lament. Is God's. Passivity. His.

Inaction. The. Unanswered. Prayers. Of Habakkuk. The law. Habakkuk says. Is paralyzed. People break. God's law.

Over and over again. And yet. Nothing happens. The wicked. Suffer. No consequences. While. The righteous. Are devoured.

But God. Is not passive. He is not. Ignoring. Their cries. No. He hears. And he is. Working. Each day. And every hour.

In accordance. With his plan. So next. We go on. To see. The unexpected. Answer. That God. Will give. In verses. Five. To eleven. And the first thing.

[13:51] We note here. Is that God. Responds. In. The plural. Y'all. Or. I don't know. If you say that. Here in Scotland. But. You all.

You know. Look. You all. See. You all. Wonder. You all. Be astounded. You know. This tells us. That as Habakkuk. Spoke.

To God. He did so. Not merely. As an individual. But he was speaking. On behalf. Of God's people. So God. Is telling the people. Of God. To look. To see.

To wonder. And to be. Astounded. You know. We can tell. Even from. You know. That of the magnitude. That is coming. That there is a terrible judgment. That is coming.

And the whole people. Should be astonished by it. See. God is saying. That he is not passive. He is actively. Working. And his work. Is such. That Habakkuk.

[14:46] And the rest of the people. They would not believe it. See. One commentator. O. Palmer Robertson. Points out. That the event. That would astonish.

Israel. Was not. Ultimately. The action. Of the Chaldeans. The Babylonians. But of. The great. Work. Of God. That God.

Is the one. Who is raising up. This terrible. Instrument. The Chaldeans. As an instrument. Of judgment. Upon. Israel. But Israel.

Did not expect this. But in reality. They should expect it. For they had been warned. That when Israel. Entered into. The covenant.

With God. In. Deuteronomy. The people promised. To love God. To listen to him. And to follow him. And God. Gave them a list. Of the many blessings.

[15:39] That they would enjoy. If they listened. But then he proceeded. To give them a list. Of the curses. That would come upon them. If they did not. Listen. If they would. Turn. And reject him.

And what these curses are. That you shall. You shall serve. Your enemies. Whom the Lord. Will send against you. In hunger. And thirst. And nakedness. And lacking. Everything.

And he will put a yoke. Of iron. On your neck. Until he has destroyed you. Because of Israel's. Great sin. They should. Expect curses. And not blessings.

Even Israelites. Like Habakkuk. Who sought to live righteously. To honor God. In their actions. Speech. And thoughts. Could not imagine.

That God would use. A Gentile nation. Who was far worse than them. As an instrument. Of judgment. Now. Chaldean.

[16:36] It's just a different word here. For Babylonians. Around this time. Babylon. Is rather quickly. Gaining power. Growing stronger and stronger. Under their king.

Nebuchadnezzar. So the Assyrians. And the Egyptians. Are both. Going to. Wither and fall. Before. Babylon's might. And they will come. For Israel as well.

Within. Within only a year or two. Of Habakkuk's prophecy. People will be deported. Be taken away. From their homes. And within 20 years. Jerusalem.

Will have fallen. And its inhabitants. Largely. In Babylon. Now the prophet. Habakkuk. He had prayed. For God. To respond.

To the injustice. Committed in Israel. Between fellow Israelites. But he had not imagined. That the solution. To this injustice. Would be captivity. And in the fall.

[17:31] Of Jerusalem. But God says. That he. Is raising up. The Babylonians. That God is the one. Who is in control. Of all things. That there is nothing. That happens.

In the world. Outside of his plan. Of how the rise. And the fall. Of empires. And kingdoms. Are in accordance. With his great plan. And he has chosen. Babylon.

As his instrument. And you see. Verses six onward. God's own description. Of them. Of how they seize. Dwellings. Not their own. You know.

One commentator. Points out. That this sounds. Similar. To the promise. That Israel was given. Before they came. To the promised land. As God. And Deuteronomy. Promised.

That they would receive. Great. And good cities. That they did not build. Houses. Full. Of all good things. That they did not fill. Cisterns.

[18:25] That they did not dig. And vineyards. That they did not plan. So Israel was told. That they would receive. The promised land. Because of God's promise.

But also. Because of the sins. The many sins. Of the Canaanites. Of the people. That have been living. In the land. But here in Habakkuk. We see. A reversal of this.

Of how in the promise. Of judgment. That God delivers. To Habakkuk. Israel is the one. Who is like. The Canaanite nation. Whose land. Will be taken away.

From them. Because of their sins. We see in verse 7. That their justice. The Babylonians. Go forth. From themselves.

They set their own. Standard. Of justice. No one else. Can set. Their definitions. Of right. And wrong. They're swift. They move quickly. Conquering everyone. Before them.

[19:22] Verse 8. That horsemen. They come from afar. It doesn't matter. That Babylon. Is far away. From Israel. They're coming. You know.

We're not as concerned. When an enemy. Is far away. But the distance. Will not matter. And they come. Verse 9 says. But for what purpose? They come for violence.

We see a similarity here. With many of the Israelites. That Habakkuk. Described to us. In the first few verses. Of being. You know. People of violence. The judgment. That Israel. Is receiving here. It's a just judgment. Of similarity. As people in Israel. Spread violence. All around them. Israel.

Will be overcome. By violence. And further. The Babylonians. Will gather. The captives. Like sand. And even this picture. Is interesting. Using a sand.

[20 : 18] Because in Genesis 22. We see God. Promising Abraham. Descendants. So many. You know. Like the sand. As numerous as the sand. Is how many descendants.

That he will have. That they have been warned. That if they break the covenant. They reject God. They shall be gathered up. And taken. Into captivity. And there's nothing.

That scares the Babylonians. Verse 10. They laugh at kings. And rulers. Nothing fears them. As they go. And they conquer. And they go on. They are.

God says. In verse 11. And guilty men. Whose own might. Is their God. To their strength. And their prowess. Are the very things. That they worship.

You know. And this. Entire description. That God gives us. Gives us. A picture. Of the severity. Of the judgment. That is coming upon.

[21 : 13] Israel. Now God's answer here. The answer of judgment. Is unexpected. But it should not be. See Habakkuk figured out.

Figured out. That. All that was needed. Was just a little bit. Of reproof. A little bit. Of discipline. But no. It is full scale. Judgment.

That is needed. But can't we relate. Of how. Before. Knowing Christ. Before he. By his spirit. Had shown us. Our depravity. The depth. Of our sinfulness. We may say. Sure. I'm not perfect. I'm a work in progress.

But I can fix it. I just need. A little bit of help. But then Jesus comes. And he says. No. You don't need. Self-improvement. You need to die.

[22 : 08] And be born again. You need a new heart. You need. The Holy Spirit. And we need Jesus. To wipe us clean.

From our sins. And that new heart. In order. To be able to love God. And the judgment. That we deserve. For our sins. Is.

The Babylonians. It is. Destruction. It is. This part. That Habakkuk. Did not understand. So. Responds Habakkuk.

In the third point. In his call. For God. To act. If you would look at verses. 12. Through 17. We see Habakkuk.

Beginning here. By acknowledging. Who God is. He approaches God. To challenge him. But he does so. With. What one commentator.

[23 : 05] Calls. Not a weak faith. But a perplexed faith. You know. He knows God. Who he is. And what he can do. But he still struggles. To understand.

God's answers. To these circumstances. Because if God. Goes through. With this judgment. Then. What will happen. To God's covenant people. Will they become.

You know. Like. The northern. Kingdom. Will Jerusalem. Become. Samaria. What then. Of God's promises. Reproof. Is one thing.

But destruction. Surely not. And in the first. In the first instance. We see Habakkuk's agreement. With God. In verse 12.

You know. He asks. You know. God. Are you not. From everlasting. Well. Of course. The answer is. Yes. God has existed. Forever. And he will exist. Forever. And then.

[24 : 02] He immediately says. But. We shall not die. But. How does that. Follow. Habakkuk. We see. Is closely. Connecting.

God. And his people. Because God. Is everlasting. His people. Will continue. To exist. As well. Because God. Will never die. We will never die. Either. In a sense.

What is true. Of God. Is true. Of his people. See. Habakkuk. Admits here. That the Babylonians. Yes. They are. An instrument.

Of judgment. For reproof. But that is all. They may be. How can they be allowed. To be more than that. Judgment. Yes. Destruction.

No way. But in verse 13. He moves on. To describe God's purity. To describe his holiness. And.

[24 : 55] And this is good theology. Because God is pure. He is holy. In the Old Testament. When God. You know. Came up with the tabernacle. He had the place.

In which he dwelled. The holy of holies. And the only time. Anyone could come in. There was once a year. You know. The high priest. Just one time a year. After he had done. You know. Rituals and sacrifices. Because of God's holiness. So Habakkuk is right. In recognizing this. But you will see. That he. How he goes on. To ask.

Well. How can you then. Look at traitors. How can you be silent. Then. When the wicked. Swallow up. The one. That is more righteous. Than him.

Meaning. How can God. Allow the Babylonians. The ones. Who are more wicked. To destroy the ones. Who. Even though they're sinful. They're less so.

[25 : 49] The Israelites. You know. So far. In Israel's history. It is. The enemies. Of God's people. That have been swallowed up. Like the Egyptians. Were swallowed up. At the Red Sea.

And then he moves on. To describe. The actions. Of the Babylonians. So far. Using the imagery. Of fish. Saying. God has made mankind. Like the fish.

With no ruler. Here he's accusing God. Of having made him. Humanity. Like a. Like a lower. Life form. Rather than being human. With order. And structure.

And justice. What they're experiencing. Instead. Is. Is violence. It is the opposite. Of order. There is wickedness.

Abounding. And then. Verse 15. When Habakkuk says. Here he. He refers to the Babylonians. And we see the. Fish imagery. Continuing here. With words like.

[26 : 45] Hook. And net. See. A practice. The Babylonians. That they had picked up. From. Previously. Was his practice. Of when they conquered. A city. They would take.

Their new. People. That they had conquered. They would take literal hooks. And put it through their lip. And then parade them through the city. All the way back.

To their own city. As a way to. Humiliate them. As a way to demonstrate. You know. Who was the. Superior people.

And we see the Babylonians. Rejoicing. In these. Acts of torture. And malice. See. For the Babylonians. To capture slaves. And torture. Becomes like. Like a worship practice.

We see in verse 16. With the words of sacrifices. And offerings. Again. Their God. Is their might. And their strength.

[27 : 43] So for them. To conquer. To humble. And inflict. This sort of. Of injury. And humiliation. And death. Is their. Worship practice. And because of the ones.

That they may. Made slaves. They can now live. In luxury. With rich foods. And now Habakkuk. Asks. Haven't described. This gruesome image.

Of this people. Who are murderers. Thieves. And idolaters. Who reject God. And despise. The image of God.

Of despising. You know. You know. Humans. That have been made. In God's image. He asks God. Shall they continue. Shall they continue. To do this.

God. Will you. Let them. Continue. To go about this. As he says. If they will go on. Killing. And enslaving. The nations. Where is the Lord.

[28 : 42] Who is a God. Merciful. And gracious. Slow to anger. And abounding. And steadfast love. And faithfulness. Where is he. To stop.

This injustice. Now. Barring the. Return of Jesus. In our own lifetime. Which we yearn.

And pray for. We will all die. And. We live. Our life. In this time. Of the already. And the not yet. Of this time.

Where in Christ. We have been born again. We have a new heart. We are no longer. Under the dominion. Of sin. Yet.

At the same time. We are in. In this fallen world. We still struggle. With sin. We. Have bodies.

[29 : 39] That fail us. And. We are in the midst. Of this tension. While we wait. For the return. Of Christ. And the. Restoration. Of all things.

And we see this struggle. In Habakkuk's mind. As well. For the people of God. Have been given. These great promises. Yet.

The promises. Have not been fulfilled yet. So we can relate. Don't we. Of asking God. In the midst of suffering.

The why question. Now Habakkuk is. To an extent. Given an answer. But we aren't. We do not know.

Why. The many terrible things. Go on in the world. And in our lives. We don't know. Why the killings. Are happening. In Nigeria. We don't know.

[30 : 32] Why the war. Is happening. In Ukraine. We don't know. Why our. Our family member. Is suffering. These ailments. Or why our friend. Has suddenly died.

But we do know. From the text. That God. Is listening. He's listening. And he is caring. And he is. At work. So then. What is God's work? See. Paul quotes. The response. By God. That we've seen here. In Habakkuk.

In. In the book of Acts. And Paul. Says to the crowd. But he. Whom God. Raised up. Speaking of Jesus.

Did not see corruption. Let it be known. To you. Therefore. Brothers. That. Through this man. Forgiveness of sins. Is proclaimed. To you.

[31 : 29] And by him. Everyone who believes. Is freed. From everything. Everything. From which. You could not be freed. By the law. Of Moses. Beware. Therefore.

Lest what is said. In the prophets. Should come about. Look. You scoffers. Be astounded. And perish. For I am doing. A work.

In your days. A work. That you will not believe. Even if one. Tells it to you. So what is the work. That God is doing.

What is the work. Of. Jesus Christ. See. Jesus Christ. Is the one. Who on the cross. Cried out. In agony. My God.

My God. Why have you forsaken me? And yet God. Did not respond. Jesus is the one.

[32 : 23] Who was. Unjustly condemned. Even though he had committed. No crime. Even though Jesus. Jesus. Was the one.

Who was from everlasting. He did die. The holy. And pure one. Who. Who did cast his eye. Even at his murderers.

And he cried out. Oh father. Forgive them. They know not. What they do. He is the most. Righteous one. Who was swallowed up.

By great. Wickedness. See. This is the work. The work. Of. The death. Of the son. Of God. And the life. And the forgiveness.

Of sins. That we have. Through him. So through this work. What is it. That God desires. Most of all. What is he.

[33 : 21] Hoping to achieve. By this great work. Well elsewhere. We see God say. For I desire. Steadfast love. And not sacrifice.

The knowledge of God. Rather. Than burnt offerings. See what God wants. Most of all. Is you. All that you are.

For you. To love him. See. Even in the destruction. Prophesied here. In Habakkuk. The purpose. Was not merely.

Utter. Destruction. And annihilation. But it was. To drive. God's people. From their sin. From their idolatry.

Back to him. To drive him. Back into the arms. Of their heavenly father. So yes.

[34 : 20] There is. There is. In a sense. Punishment. For their sin. But it's not punishment. To be cast away. But it is to drive them back. So when Habakkuk asks.

How long? And when he asks. Why? God points. To the judgment. That is coming. He's pointing them. To the Babylonians. Now when we ask.

Why? God points. To the judgment. That should have been ours. Judgment. Like the Babylonians. And indeed. Even greater.

But of how that judgment. Was placed. Elsewhere. Having been placed. And laid. And indeed. Even poured. On the son of God.

God. Now there's no way. To live. The Christian life. In the neutral. Just. Coasting. You know.

[35 : 17] Coasting along. We either move. Closer to God. Or we move. Away from him. So you may ask yourself. This evening. In the past few months. Have you found yourself.

Growing closer to God. Or further from him. You know. Have. You in. Your sufferings. Open up your heart.

Like we see Habakkuk. Do here. Opening up your heart. To the Lord. And have you set your eyes. On the mightiest.

Of God's work. Of the work. Of. The son of God. Jesus Christ. To save you. Because if you are here today.

And you lean on. And you rest. On Jesus Christ. Alone. For salvation. That he is yours. Now. And forever.

[36 : 16] So. Do not wait. Until tomorrow. But pray. You know. This evening. To your heavenly father. You know. Confessing your sins. By encouraging yourself.

By the promises. That we find. In the scriptures. For as we see. Text say elsewhere. For he who calls you. Is faithful.

He will surely do it. Let us pray. Father God.

We. Pray this evening. That you. May hear us. May we. May we. May hear our prayers. That you. May hear our tears.

And father. That in the. Times. And moments. When. We doubt. Your love. When we ask. Yourself.

[37 : 16] Does. God. Really. Care. Father. May we. Simply. Look at the cross. May we. May we see the great.

Sacrifice. Of your son. And may we. In that. See. The love of. You. And Jesus. And.

The Holy Spirit. altar. And father. We pray this. In Jesus name. Amen. Now if you would.

Please. Stand. As we will sing. My soul finds rest. In God alone.