

Habakkuk 2:2-20

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[0 : 00] Again, the passages of Habakkuk chapter 2, verses 2 through 20, on page 762. Would you please rise with me for the reading of God's Word? 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. 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 Sheol. 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 keeps up what is not his own for how long and loads himself with pledges?

Will not your debtors suddenly arise and those awake who will make you tremble? Then you will be spoiled for them. Because you have plundered many nations, all the remnant of the peoples shall plunder you.

[1 : 25] For the blood of man and violence to the earth, to cities and all who dwell in them. 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 founds 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.

[2 : 25] 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, 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 prophet 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 is overlaid with gold and silver, and there is no breath at all in it. But the Lord is in his holy temple.

Let all the earth keep silence before him. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. My grandfather, on my dad's side of the family, was named Harley C. Helm.

- [3 : 51] And, it was many years ago now, when I first suggested to Lisa that we might consider naming our firstborn son after him. She replied that we could, but, if we did, we'd better get ready for the response, Oh, that's Harley, David's son.
- And, thus, Noah David Helm was born. At the time of his appointment, Grandpa Helm was the youngest ever elected judge in the state of Illinois.
- He served in that capacity for Douglas County, Central Illinois. And, he did so from 1927 to 1950.
- The courthouse, over which my grandpa presided, still stands. And, in the courtroom, the wooden witness chair to his right and the recording secretary's chair to his left are yet in place.
- And, his own high-back, wooden-framed chair with Victorian-like scroll is behind the large table, bench of justice.
- [5 : 28] And, behind the chair on the wall is a mural. And, on the mural, there are two children who are holding signs with Latin inscriptions.
- The one on the left reads, Fiat Justitia, which translated could be, Justice will be done.
- The second one reads, Ruat Koilum. Koilum translated, in a sense, heaven, and Ruat from destroyed. Taken together, the mural could read, Justice will be done, or the heavens will be destroyed.
- Now, that scene, and that saying, are, for me, an apt summary of where we find ourselves with the end of Habakkuk's second complaint.
- He has spoken in chapter 1, verses 12 through 2, 1, and he is now finished. And, the sense is, from his own voice, surely, God, you will not allow the Babylonians' oncoming tyranny to go on forever.
- [6 : 47] Indeed, God, you are from everlasting. You are the Holy One. And, without your justice, the very heavens themselves would need to be destroyed.
- Now, it doesn't take much to envision Habakkuk in a courtroom, having taken his seat now among the onlookers, gazing up at the mural and waiting for God, the judge, to provide his professionally written response.
- In 2.1, we saw him nearly in that state where he had taken his stand, situated himself, to look out, to see what he will say to me concerning my complaint.
- Habakkuk has filed his brief. He's entered the room, and he waits. In one sense, when you look at chapter 2, verse 2, it almost is as if the door in the back of the courtroom has opened, and the judge has entered this incredible phrase, and the Lord answered me.
- The first time in the book of Habakkuk where there's such direct discourse on who the speaker is. It is as if Habakkuk wants us to know, all rise!
- [8 : 25] And he comes in. And he's seated. And he speaks. Now, there are a lot of verses to cover today, but you can easily separate them into two parts.
- Verses 2 through 5, God speaks in this way. You have his decision. Namely, justice will be done. Habakkuk.
- Babylonia, Babylon, Babylon's tyranny will be held accountable. Just as in chapter 1, Israel was held accountable for her own rebellion, so too, the ungodly nation will be held accountable for her.
- or his, or his, as the masculine pronouns run through the chapter. The second section, verses 6 to 20, provide the Lord's written argument for his justice.
- The five woes upon which his verdict rests. God's response. It's that simple. Justice will be done.

[9 : 41] That is my response, says God, chapter 2, verses 2 through 5. And the reasons for it, the five woes of 6 through 20.

Let's take a look. God's response to Habakkuk's questions, verses 2 and 3. And the Lord answered me, write the vision, make it plain on the tablet so that 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, it will surely come, it will not delay.

Habakkuk is told to write, but he is commanded in the text to make it plain. Now, the reason for the plainness could be taken grammatically in one of two ways.

So that he, being the herald of the vision, would clearly know what it is as he's running with it. Or, it could mean that it is to be so large and plain so that as he runs through the town with the words of God, all those who look to him can read it.

[10 : 56] But either way, it's clear, the vision is to be read. And indeed, it signifies that God's judgment will come.

Take a look at the first half of verse 3. God is affirming that justice will come. It does have an appointed time. Indeed, from God's vantage point, it is what he says, hastening on.

Yet, in the second half of verse 3, it almost invites the perspective of Habakkuk, that God's justice upon the ungodly, as it does seem so in our own day, seems to be slow in coming.

Unnecessarily slow. Even delayed. Indeed, this is instructive for us. we have trouble understanding why God would allow the persistence and the presence of evil in the world for another moment.

God's justice does not always appear. But we're puzzled by the lack of his just presence.

[12 : 17] I love the way Calvin put it. He said, but as God's justice does not always appear, the prophet has a struggle. What a phrase.

God's justice does not always appear. Why? I've been thinking about this this week. I was reminded that even in our own legal system, we have built in a delay for justice.

Justice does not always appear, at least immediately so, in our own system. Our legal system is built with an intended delay of justice and I think that there are at least three benefits from that.

First of all, we want to ensure that when we execute justice, we're not guilty of acting in an arbitrary way. Indeed, this is what made the death of Gaddafi so uninviting to the world war.

We want to know that someone apparently of their own in that moment executed justice with immediate immediacy.

[13 : 36] Those things are called war crimes. No one wants to execute justice in an arbitrary way. Think of it. If everyone executed justice in the very moment it was required, it would produce anarchy.

everyone would be carrying it out at all times for whatever reason they deemed necessary. And they, we, as fallen people, often get it wrong.

So we build in a delay. We also build in a delay for the victim, the one, I mean, for the perpetrator, the one accused.

We do not want them to be falsely accused. They have a right to a defense, thus a delay. And even for the victim, the delay is beneficial for it ensures that the proper penalty will be given.

But you might say, well, that's all well and good, but that's our legal system which is based on our fallenness. We're talking here about God who can never get it wrong.

[14 : 51] Why does God delay? That's a good question. Three thoughts. One, we should be careful what we wish for.

Suppose God were to rid the world in the next three minutes of all the injustices in the world. would he not also have to rid the world of the potential for injustice, evil, selfishness, and if he were to rid the world not only of all evil but the possibility for evil and injustice, at the count of three, one, two, three, where are we?

Where are you? where am I? Certainly we all possess not only the potential but in truth the actions of which God would need to end the world.

this entire human enterprise from the very sin at the beginning has been an exercise in delayed justice, put differently an exercise in mercy.

This thing we call history, the nations, the empires, the republic, century upon century, millennium upon millennium, decade upon decade, day upon day, is entirely an act of mercy.

[16 : 49] It's all a merciful weight for divine retribution. Be careful what you wish for.

secondly, remember what he waits for. God's justice, and I've hinted at it already, is merely a manifestation, the delay of justice is a manifestation of grace and mercy.

The apostle Peter put it this way, but do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years is one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient towards you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

repentance. This is what he waits for. Indeed, the psalmist concurs with this in Psalm, I believe it's 84 or 87, that indicates that even from Babylon there will be some who will call him by name.

Be careful what you wish for. Remember what he waits for, for indeed a delay in justice is the proving of his mercy.

[18 : 15] Third, know that this is what Christ both came and will come for. I think of Romans 3 21, but now the justice of God has been manifested or appeared.

The justice of God has appeared apart from the law in the death and resurrection of Christ. And indeed, he is the one who will come. So it isn't as if his justice delayed means that he has not fundamentally shifted the ground and put a ruler in the world who will execute according to his ways.

God answered. So in a sense, by the time you finish with verse 3 or certainly through 5, God has answered. And indeed, now God goes beyond answering to instructing Habakkuk.

He moves in verse 4 to telling Habakkuk what he's to do in the interim. He says, behold, his soul, namely that would be Babylon, his soul is puffed up, it is not upright within him, but the righteous shall live by his faith.

That's what Habakkuk is to do in the interim. Unjust Babylon is clueless about the coming day, but the righteous, knowing it, are to exercise enduring trust.

[19 : 47] They are to have faith in God, that all will be made right. And mind you, this was not a short wait for Habakkuk.

He's not going to see the end of this wait. This is decades upon decades upon decades. I mean, Babylon, when they do finally come, runs for another 70 years. This is a generational wait.

This means that there are those who are men and women in the world who will never in their life see justice. That doesn't mean that it isn't coming.

And that doesn't mean that you are to endure in faith yet not receiving the very things in which you hope. This is really the way the writer of Hebrews uses this.

I'm not going to go from here to Romans 1.16. We've been a year in Romans. I'm not doing that today. The writer of the Hebrews really situates well for us this verse.

[20 : 54] He quotes it as does Paul in Romans and he quotes it with the intention of telling God's people that they need to endure. That even though we are waiting for God to execute his righteous judgment, they are to endure in faith.

They are to live with faith. So he says therefore do not throw away your confidence which has reward. For you have need of endurance so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised.

For yet in a little while and the coming one will come and will not delay but my righteous one shall live by faith and if he shrinks back my soul has no pleasure in him but we are not those who shrink back and are destroyed but of those who have faith and persevere or preserve their souls.

That's what we are to do to abide by faith that God is just and he will be the justifier and he will bring judgment upon all the world. Faith is the only place in which you and I are to live which is waiting pleading persevering believing not giving hold to a lie that would say God is unconcerned.

Habakkuk have faith Babylon will get theirs the nations and peoples notice those terms in verse 5 the nations and peoples that they have gathered unto themselves will by verse 6 become the same peoples that take up their taunts against them and then he gives five supporting arguments verses 6 through 20 God's reasoning the heavens will not be mocked.

[22 : 49] I'm not going to do an extended discourse on the five but I do want you to see that they are not all the same. There is a particularization to the reasons for God's verdict.

Look at the first woe. 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 awake who make you tremble.

Then you will be spoiled for them. The verdict of God will come against Babylon because the rules that they put in place for financial lending and borrowing were particularly in favor of their own interest and at the expense of any that did business with them.

That's why God's justice comes. The financial rules of the regulating institutions of Babylon always put the lender in the impoverished state to the one who let the money out.

The second woe is right there in verses 9 through 11. And he moves from the financial lending and borrowing to almost what looks like the building up of privatized wealth for the purpose of self preservation and self protection.

[24 : 13] Woe to him who gets evil gained from his house. Notice the housing imagery is there. That is personal homes. To set his nest on high. To be safe from the reach of them.

You've devised shame for your house by cutting off many people's. You have forfeited your life. And then notice the very stone which would have formed the outer wall will speak against the one who accumulated wealth for their own self preservation and self protection to put themselves away from the people behind the fence and the gates and the walls and the beams which provide the internal structure of the home.

Well they will indeed respond. Woe to those who build financial rules on lending and borrowing that are unjust.

Woe to those in privatized wealth who live in a way for self preservation and self protection. Third woe. Not the private individual anymore but the public servants the civic leaders who are bent on urbanizing the world.

third woe. Verse 12 Woe to him who builds a town with blood and founds a city on iniquity probably reminiscent of what the Assyrians did.

[25 : 37] They continued to expand their footprint in the world by those whom they conquered. Behold it is not from the Lord of hosts that peoples should labor merely for fire that is to die for destruction.

That's not the way it was to be. Nations were not to weary themselves for nothing. For indeed the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

The whole movement here is directed toward the public servants the civic leaders who are building the cities. The terms are there. The ones who are building. The ones who are erecting.

And they are doing all of this for their own glory. And isn't that indeed the downfall of architecture outside of God that we raise for ourselves an edifice that would go on and on beyond our lives that people would always know that we were here and we made a difference?

This is going on all over the world. He says woe to that when you build that kind of city and I no longer have entrance.

[26 : 48] God says it was not to be that we would have cities and I wouldn't have the ability to live there. It's as if he almost is saying to the city planners I am not for your city.

I'm for my city. I'm not for your festivals where you can create a united front in which all the world comes but God cannot exist.

I am for my family where I bring them together. I am not for your vacations where you travel to the great destinations of the world for your own pleasure. I am for traveling that takes my name to the very ends of the earth.

Woe to a world who comes to love the city without any knowledge of God.

For that reason the cities will fall. God. Notice the phrase there striking at the end.

[27 : 53] For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. I've always thought that that verse was supposed to sound differently. That it was supposed to be kind of situated in a nice place in the Bible. It just sounds nice when you hear it by itself.

The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of God as the waters cover the sea. It's actually embedded in this movement of judgment. God's like no!

The earth is supposed to be filled with a knowledge of who I am. Isaiah picks up on this in chapter 11 and he actually weds it to the root of Jesse and the imagery is of the wolf or the lion and the lamb lying down together.

This very phrase and it's almost as if he's moving out of the Tower of Babel world, out of the Assyrian and Babylonian world and trying to say you have forgotten that from the seed of Jesse, knowledge of who I am is going to return and it's going to bring you back to this garden like Edenic state.

That's what God wants in a sense. He wants to be known. And know this, it wasn't just applying to Habakkuk.

[29 : 12] Think about this. I mean to Babylon. There comes a day where John writes his apocalypse and by that time Babylon became a metaphor for the world in total.

So you have in Revelation 18 this fall of the city of Babylon signifying the whole world is going to get shut down.

Babylon. This applies to you, me, our country, all countries, all empires, all nations, all republics, all towns, all cities, all citizens.

The day will come when those who live without God will fall in a moment, in a flash, quickening, with no relief. So Revelation 18, even called there, Babylon.

Babylon. The fourth and fifth woe I'm going to join together for indeed they come together at the judgment against Babylon historically.

[30 : 16] The fourth woe, a spirit of drunken sensual gratification. Woe to him who makes his neighbors drink.

You pour out your wrath and get them drunk in order to gaze at their nakedness. It just looks like a big frat party here. We all know the intention of the alcohol.

You'll have your fill of shame instead of glory and then a command, an imperatible force in the Hebrew, drink, you drink, says God.

You show your uncircumcision. I mean, even the terminology is of the sexual member. I'll make, I'll make, I'll disclose who you are.

Indeed, the cup in the Lord's right hand is going to come your way and you're going to get utter shame instead of glory. Sexual satisfaction for these reasons.

[31 : 17] The judgment of God is coming. And it's joined with the fifth woe on vain idolatry. woe to him who says to a wooden thing awake to a silent stone arrive.

Can this teach? Indeed, these two, sexual perversion and vain idolatry, came together at the final day when Babylon gave way to the Medo-Persian empire.

A much later prophet, Daniel, was there. And it might be worth taking a look at how Babylon actually ends. Take a look.

It's recorded for you in Daniel, chapter 5. Babylon's end. King Belshazzar made a great feast for a thousand of his lords and drank wine in front of the thousand.

I mean, it was a big party. 5.1 Belshazzar, when he had tasted the wine, commanded the vessels of gold and silver that Nebuchadnezzar, his father, had taken out of the temple in Jerusalem be brought, that the king and his lords and his wives and his concubines might drink from them.

[32 : 35] Hey, he's letting it all out. We're going to have a great time tonight. Then they brought in the golden vessels that had been taken out of the temple, the house of God in Jerusalem and the king and his lord and his wives and his concubines drank from them.

They drank wine and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone. There's the idolatry right with it. Immediately the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace opposite the lampstand and the king saw the hand as it wrote and his color changed and his thoughts alarmed him in a sense that word alarm is just like the sexual perversion moment in Habakkuk where the things that you terrified others with, they will terrify you.

Verses 22 in Daniel 5 tells you what happened. And you, his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, though you knew all this, but you have lifted up yourself against the Lord of heaven.

And the vessels of his house, you have brought in before you, you and your Lord, your wives and your concubines have drunk wine from them, and you have praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood, and stone, which do not see or hear or know, but the God in whose hand is your breath, and whose are all your ways, you have not honored.

Then from his presence the hand was sent, and this writing was inscribed, and this is the writing that was inscribed, mene, mene, tekel, parson. This is the interpretation of the matter.

[34 : 11] God has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end. Verse 30, that very night, Belshazzar, the Chaldean king, was killed, and Darius the Mede received the kingdom.

God, will the taunts of Babylon go on forever?

God's response, justice will be done. God's reasoning, the heavens will not be mocked.

The conclusion of the matter, verse 20, but the Lord is in his holy temple, let all the earth keep silence before him.

Psalms Joseph says what you have is God in a sense is the end of the matter. Your questions move from a wrong premise.

[35 : 19] There are none righteous, no not one. It does almost sound like Romans 1-3 where Paul argues with the interlocutor, even those of you who think you are just and can adjudicate justice for others and think that thereby you will escape God's wrath, no, even you are subject to it as was Israel of old.

And those of you who don't follow God at all, even you are subject. The whole world is without voice. The end of chapter 3 in Romans, he builds by throwing psalms at you, one after another, body part by body part, he constructs from the entire human race, one man of which he says, every mouth is stopped and no one can speak before God.

In like manner here, let all the earth keep silent. I can almost hear the eerie echo of the gospel writer when he determines to pen words to the effect from that point on, no one dare ask him any more questions.

in the very real sense, God is saying here, enough. The gavel in the courtroom has fallen, dismissed.

Justice will be done. Heaven will not be mocked. your argument, oh, Habakkuk, has run from the wrong premise.

[37 : 12] Live in faith and wait the day of the Lord. And so you can only envision Habakkuk gets up and he walks out and thank God we move from the bench to the table for in one seamless interpretive center for all things historical.

the death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth demonstrate to us that God is both just and the justifier.

Behold the emblems of your salvation salvation and without them we are not prepared for the final day.

Our Heavenly Father, strengthen us in faith. May we move from faith to faith. May it be from first to last.

May it be the beginning of our life with you and the end of our life in you. In Christ's name, Amen.