

As The Waters Cover The Sea

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[0 : 00] Last week we looked at Habakkuk chapter 1 and we saw that there's this guy named Habakkuk and he was a prophet. He was a unique prophet because he, instead of hearing God's words and telling God's words to God's people, he did that indirectly by writing down a conversation he had with God about some stuff he was really struggling with.

And that mostly had to do with the hard things that he was seeing all around him. He was seeing some stuff that just wasn't computing, hard, terrible stuff.

And it wasn't computing with what he knew about his good God. And so he was asking some hard questions. And God answered him by saying, Habakkuk, you're going to make it as you trust in me. Those who are righteous, those who are faithful, who put their faith in God, will survive the judgment that's coming on Israel because of their sin. And we found out that applies to us today as we seek to be faithful where we're at.

Put our trust in our good God that we will survive. We will make it through this hard time that we live in. And we will make it to journey's end as we trust in him by faith.

[1 : 20] But now we're going to take a closer look at what God's going to tell us in Habakkuk chapter 2. And he gave Habakkuk a fuller vision of what he's going to do about the evil that was all around Habakkuk.

So we'll see what that's going to lead us to. But first I've got to tell you a story. Raise your hand if you were ever in middle school. Okay, so you know what it's like.

Middle schoolers in the room, I apologize. I'm not saying anything bad about you. I'm just saying how dumb a middle schooler I was. Well, when I was in middle school, I did a really dumb thing. In fact, it wasn't just dumb.

It was heartless and it was unkind and it was very not good. But we expect dumb things from toddlers because they're toddlers and they haven't learned things yet.

And even elementary age children, we kind of, you know, we expect that to happen. But with middle schoolers, I feel like they take the cake sometimes. At least I did. So one Sunday at church, I was hanging out with my brother and a few friends.

[2 : 30] And we were talking about how cool we were and we were talking about how uncool this one high school girl was. And she was just an annoying girl.

And we just wanted to, you know, put her in her place. We felt like that was our job. Middle schoolers, I know. And so we decided, let's do something to put her in her place.

And so in a moment of inspired genius, I grabbed a chalk eraser and I sought her out and I threw it at her in church. It's astounding.

Well, chalk dust got all over her and she ran off crying actually. And needless to say, when my parents found out very quickly, they justly made me apologize to her in person, which was humiliating enough.

And then they had me work up some money to pay for a new sweater. So the unjust action was swiftly dealt with with satisfying justice.

[3 : 40] Not very satisfying to me, but satisfying to the girl and definitely to my parents. In contrast to my pride that was elevating me in disliking her and wanting her to put her in her place, I was shamed and humbled as I apologized to her in person.

And then my lighthearted eraser toss was met with a heavy price tag. Satisfying justice came about through this story.

And that's basically the essence of Habakkuk chapter 2. That God is going to bring about satisfying justice. It may take a while.

It may be in a way that Habakkuk doesn't expect. Or a way we don't expect. But God will bring about satisfying justice. He will make things right in a way that is to be visibly satisfying.

One day, God's justice will totally prevail against all pride and against all evil. So to help us get a handle on kind of where the text takes us, we're going to go through five W's.

[4 : 55] Okay, so it'll be a little easier to remember. Write. Wait. You don't have to write them down now. Wine. Woe. And wow. We'll get to each one in turn.

We're going to spend most of our time on the last two. Woe and wow. But let's get through write, wait, and wine. Just to kind of get a handle on what the text is doing this morning. To help us see how God's satisfying justice is going to come.

So let's start with write. Let's look at verse 2. Of Habakkuk chapter 2. Hopefully you're there. This is God's word. And the Lord answered me.

Write the vision. Make it plain on tablets so he may run who reads it. Write the vision.

So whatever this satisfying justice is, it's going to be written down on a tablet, usually of stone or clay. And it's going to be inscribed permanently so that it can be a witness that God told it would happen before it happens.

[6 : 03] This gives confidence to Habakkuk. He's grounded in something that is written. It is something that is inscribed permanently as a witness.

And the one who reads it is either the one who runs or the one who runs may read it. The Hebrew is difficult to translate there. Basically, the idea is that as there's a runner delivering a message, he's going to see this kind of billboard, permanent message of God's going to do something about this. And so the messenger going to God's people saying God is going to satisfy justice. He's going to make things right.

So that's the idea we get with right. This is something that is declared. It is written. We can have confidence in that. God will bring satisfying justice.

Let's look then at verse 3 and we'll see what the wait is all about. Once we did right, now we're on wait. Verse 3.

[7 : 14] 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. This satisfying justice is certainly coming. There's no doubt that it's on its way, but it may not be immediate. Sooner or later, justice will be served.

The Babylonians were going to inflict some terrible damage and violence upon God's people. God is bringing that to pass, and yet He is going to bring judgment at a certain time, and a time that we have to await.

He's going to bring it when it is going to happen. So this is helpful to us to know that there's going to be no Babylonian James Bond. It's going to come in, cut the wires where the clock stops at 007.

No, the clock is ticking all the way to zero. It is going to come slowly but steadily. The wrongs will be righted. Second.

[8 : 22] Sorry. Third W. So we had right. We have wait. Now wine. This one's a little bit trickier, but I think we're going to get it. Let's look at verse 4 and 5.

It starts to tell us about the Babylonian, the Babylonian king, and the kind of guy who's puffed up, and something is going to happen to him. So let's look at verses 4 and 5.

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 shale. Like death, he has never enough. He gathers for himself all nations and collects as his own all peoples.

If you're a movie watcher, you probably like to watch previews or trailers to movies that kind of give you a sneak peek as to what the full feature is going to be about.

[9 : 29] Well, verse 5 particularly is kind of a sneak peek. It's a preview to the woes that are coming upon the Babylonian that we're going to read about in the next couple of verses.

But this gives us a little snapshot. So what's going on here? Who is this Babylonian guy? What's he characterized by? And why is this satisfying justice coming to him?

Well, he uses the image of wine to describe the Babylonian. It says that wine is basically poetic imagery for his pride.

It's a symbol for his self-obsession, his greed for conquering. We see that. His greed is as wide as shale. Like death, he never has enough. He has a lust for power and wealth.

He delights in intoxicating pleasure. He has ruthless pride. And this imagery of a cup of wine kind of gathers that image all into one place.

[10:30] The wine is a symbol of this self-worshipping individual. If we remember back in verse 11 of chapter 1, it talks about how these Babylonians, they were guilty men whose own might is their God.

They worshipped their own strength. They worshipped their own confidence. And this wine is a symbol of them toasting to their achievements and drinking down their self-made glory. Getting drunk on himself, basically. But notice what it says about wine. It says that wine is a traitor. It acts treacherously. It may delight the heart of the drunkard, but it will betray him in the end. If you've ever known an alcoholic or been one, you don't have to be around too many to realize how it can rob you of your resources or your relationships or your respect. Pride acts in the same way. It tastes good going down. You can even get drunk on it. It kind of feels nice to feel your head swell a little bit.

[11:37] But it will betray you in the end. It's a sneak peek. Pride is the issue. That's why God's satisfying justice is going to come on the Babylonians.

So let's see where that brings us. Let's get to the fourth W. We had right. We had weight. We had wine. And now we have woe.

W-O-E. Woe. We're going to see that all the way through verse 6, all the way to verse 19. Let's just check them out. There's one in verse 6.

Woe. Then we have down here verse 9. Woe. Verse 12. Woe. Verse 15. And then verse 19. Five woes that are pronounced on the Babylonians.

We're just going to read them all straight through. And I'm just going to highlight each one. See how does this pride manifest itself in this guy? How does this root of pride bear fruit in this Babylonian?

[12:41] And how is that going to bring God's satisfying justice? All right. Let's read from verse 6 to verse 19. Here we go. Shall not all these take up their taunt against him?

Him being the Babylonian. And all these being the nations he's devoured. Shall not all these nations 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 awake who 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.

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 devised shame for your house by cutting off many peoples.

[13:48] 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 people labor merely for fire and nations weary themselves for nothing? Skip to verse 15. 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, 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.

[15:00] Woe to him who says to a wooden thing, awake, and to a silent stone, arise. Can this teach? Behold, it is overlaid with gold and silver, and there is no breath in it at all.

So, it's cool because we see in verse 5 that this Babylonian guy is just gobbling up the nations in his greed, his quest for power and material wealth.

But then, all of a sudden, that gets flipped on him here in Habakkuk chapter 2. God's saying that this is, the tables are going to turn on this guy who's drunk on himself.

And the tables are going to turn in the mouth of those that he's conquered. So, it's irony. It's dripping with sarcasm. And so, those who have been conquered are now going to say to the one who conquered them, woe, ha, look at you.

The tables are going to be flipped. But what exactly is going on here? Well, let's take these woes one at a time. We'll look at them quickly. The first woe was on their unquenchable greed.

[16:13] These are greedy people. In their greed for material goods, the Babylonians went out conquering people like crazy, carting the booty back home. We know that happened because Nebuchadnezzar went and sacked Jerusalem and he carved off all the treasures of the temple to be in his own massive palace.

He heaped up what was not his own, verse 6. But notice that his arrogant greed comes at a price. Those whom he had put into his debt are now going to be his debtors.

It's going to be flipped on him. Verse 7. Will not your debtors suddenly arise? And those awake who will make you tremble. And then he says, those whom you plundered, now they're going to plunder you.

Just retribution. Satisfying justice is going to come on this proud Babylonian. The second woe, verse 9 through 11, is on his perceived sense of security.

He was constantly politically scheming and empire building. And it led him to think that he had finally established a house that was a nest that was set high and above anything that could possibly touch him.

[17:29] In fact, the city of Babylon had a wall around it, speaking of his nest. It had a wall around it that a four-horse chariot, four horses side by side, a chariot behind it, could run along the width of the wall.

This is massive. Practically unconquerable. It had a moat. It had eight gates. And within this, within this wall, was the palace structure.

And the palace structure had a wall surrounding it. Inside the massive wall, the palace structure had a wall that was 136 feet thick.

If there was a nest that was high and above any nest in the ancient world, it was Babylon. Massive. But all this security in wealth and power doesn't impress God in the least.

He says, you have devised shame for your house. Your house is coming down. Your secure nest is going to fall apart at the seams.

[18:37] The building materials themselves that you've used to build this nest with, the stone in the wall, the beam from the woodwork, they're going to cry out against you and your house is going to implode.

Your perceived sense of security is not going to last for long. The satisfying justice is going to come on this proud man. The third one, verse 12 and 13, was on the Babylonians' violent and vain labor. His violent and vain labor. Nebuchadnezzar in particular, the Babylonians in general, they had a penchant for building projects, as the wall might tell you.

He managed to turn the city of Babylon into one of the seven wonders of the world. It had the famous hanging gardens of Babylon that he had basically turned his city, part of his city, into a lush representation of one of his wives' mountainous homelands.

But notice that the foundation of these building projects were blood and iniquity.

[19:49] In verse 12, he builds a town with blood and founds a city on iniquity. In building a name for himself, in working hard to build himself up, God is going to ensure that this man is going to receive satisfying justice for his violent, vain labor.

All of it's going to be for fire and for nothing. Verse 13, So this satisfying justice is coming on his violent and vain labor.

Let's do the next one. Verses 15 through 17. This is talking about the Babylonians' shameful depravity. The pride represents itself in shameful depravity.

We're not exactly sure what's going on in these verses, but we get some hints. There's nasty kind of sexual overtones in the reference to gazing at the nakedness of their drunk neighbors.

There's perversion going on here. There's a malicious desire to cause harm to the nations around them. You see that in verse 15. One thing is really clear.

[21:06] Not only does Babylon use evil to build up their own name, but it loves to do evil. That's when you know something has become depraved.

It doesn't just use evil, but it loves to do it. Verse 17 kind of gets at that. There's this reference to Lebanon. Lebanon was this beautiful country full of natural resources.

And it's recorded in history that Nebuchadnezzar, as well as other Babylonian kings, would just come in and basically just take the countryside by storm, rape it of its natural resources, and cart it

off to use it for their own building projects.

And so God is calling out judgment not only on his violence to human beings, but also to violence to creation. It seems that he just loves to do it. The great pride of the Babylonians had doomed the works of their hands from the outset.

Satisfying justice is on its way. Next. And last. The last woe is in verse 18 and 19.

[22 : 21] And this is on the Babylonians' futile idolatry. Futile idolatry. This is the source of the Babylonians' arrogant wickedness.

The core issue here is ultimately a matter of worship. Instead of trusting in the living God, the God who is there outside of themselves, the Babylonians then entrust in something that comes from them.

A counterfeit, self-produced God. Verse 18 gets at it. It's beautiful in its irony. Finally, God asks the Chaldeans a simple, thoughtful question.

What profit, what good is an idol when its maker has shaped it? He's saying, idols don't get you anywhere, Mr. Babylonian.

They may look like gods. They look flashy. They look nice. Overlaid with gold and silver. But they're just stones. They're just made of wood. They're lifeless.

[23 : 22] There's no breath in them. The Babylonians will have their idols exposed as futile, empty, and powerless compared to the real history-shaping power of the Word of the Living God.

Woe. Woe. Woe. On the proud. The wine of self-obsession is going to become a cup of woe.

On their greed, their perceived security apart from God, their empty, vain works, their shameful depravity, and their empty idols.

We have one more W left. And my notice, we skipped two really big verses. Not big in length, but big in meaning.

These are the two wows of this chapter. And we're going to see, we're going to be wowed by what God is saying about himself in contrast to this proud Babylonian.

[24 : 31] Verse 14 and verse 20. Let's get to verse 14 first. The first wow. Let me just read it for us. Let me get a running start.

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

I got a running start because there's a great contrast here. He's contrasting the building up of the name of the Babylonians. It's going to result only in fire and nothing, and there's a reason for that. For God wants to do something about his name. God ensures that all attempts to build on the foundation of pride will collapse.

Why? Why? Because there will be no room when the knowledge of the glory of the Lord fills the entire earth.

[25 : 42] No room for any project of self-obsession, any project of pride that's going to be making a name for man.

It will be torn down so that the name of the Lord will be exalted. So that the knowledge of the glory of the Lord will be completely present in every part of creation.

The image that God uses to get this across is total coverage. Did you catch that? As the waters cover the sea. Think about it. Atlantic Ocean.

The continental shelf off the eastern coast of the United States, it gets down, and then it goes even further, and it goes back up to Europe. Right? Wherever there is seabed, wherever there is ocean floor, does water cover it?

Yes. Yes. How does it cover it? Completely. As the waters cover the sea. Where does the water not cover the sea?

[26 : 49] It covers it completely. Totally. Everything is soaked. So one day, the whole earth, the universe itself, will be sloshing wet with the knowledge of the glory of God.

God's justice will be satisfying, and it will be visible. It will totally, without exception, prevail over all human pride and all human lifting up of itself.

Total justice. Total justice. Every wrong made right. Every act of injustice. Every sin. Every transgression against God's perfect righteousness and against God's people will be fully met.

God's glory will be completely and publicly on display. That's the first wow. Wow. The second wow is in verse 20. Let me give a running start just so we can see the context.

Woe to him who says to a wooden thing, awake, and to a silent stone, arise. Can this teach? Behold, it is overlaid with gold and silver, and there is no breath in it at all.

[28 : 06] But the Lord is in his holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before him. In contrast to the impressive looking but lifeless idols of the Babylonians, the living God, the God who is there, the God who created galaxies with a word, this God who is in his holy dwelling place, his temple, sitting on his throne, from which he rules and reigns over the whole earth.

Nothing is untouched by his authority. And notice that he commands silence. He tells the shifting, restless, arrogant, self-promoting, violent, idolatrous peoples of the earth, Hush!

Be silent! Listen to the judgment that is pronounced against you. The whole earth will be accountable before this living God, including his own people.

No one can stand before the presence of this holy God to contest his authority, to answer back to his judgments, not even the vicious, conquering Babylonians.

All the earth must keep silence before him and await his word of satisfying justice. One day, God's perfect justice will totally prevail over all pride, over all the earth.

[29 : 54] And all the earth must keep silence before his terrifying holiness, awaiting his satisfying justice. That's the second wow.

That brings us to the end of our passage. And it's kind of hard being in the Old Testament sometimes, because we're like, okay, sounds good. I think I can maybe sift some things that are about me.

Okay, I get that. But what does this have to do with us? 2016. What does this have to do with me? What is it saying to us? And I think it's saying very much this.

Same thing. God's satisfying justice is real. God's satisfying justice is written.

It's certain. It's coming, though we may have to wait for it. And it's coming on those who drink the wine of pride. However, that manifests itself in different fruits of pride, but the core sin that the judgment is poured out on is elevating ourselves up against the living God and saying, no, no, no, no, my way, not your way.

[31 : 08] And this does have to do with us, doesn't it? God's satisfying justice comes upon the proud. None of us can say, I have not myself against God.

We can't escape the realities that us lifting ourselves up against God manifest themselves in, right? Like greed. False security in our wealth, in our position, or in our power.

Vain labors built on pride, not built on trust in the living God. Secret or open, shameful depravity. False gods.

That we trust in. Our pride for all of us has manifested itself in ways like these. And we are silent before the living God.

The God who's jealous for the knowledge of His glory to soak the universe. We can't say anything.

[32 : 13] But the beautiful thing is that God has said something. We are silent before God. We cannot answer in protest. But there is one who is silent on our behalf.

There was one who, like a lamb before the shearers is silent, He opened not His mouth. There was one who said, there is one who said, Father, if it be Your will, let this cup pass from me.

But, nevertheless, not what I will, but Your will be done. He drank the cup of God's wrath down for us. So God's satisfying justice would come, not on us, but on Him.

Talking about Jesus. Those who trust in Christ, we can stand before God in His holy temple and keep silence.

But not because we're guilty, but because our guilt has been taken away. We can face no woe of judgment if we put our trust in the One who has drained the cup of God's wrath dry.

[33 : 31] And instead of saying, woe, we can say, wow, look at God's massively unfair grace. Paul in 2 Corinthians 2.4 might have had Habakkuk 2.14 in his mind when he wrote, God who said, let light shine out of darkness has shown into our hearts, not all the earth, but in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, where?

In the face of Jesus Christ. One day, the fullness of God's perfect justice in Jesus Christ will flood every corner of creation.

And for those of us who have trusted in Him already, and we know already at least a little bit of the knowledge of His glory through Jesus, by faith, in our hearts, we can rejoice in that.

We can desire that. We can long for it. Instead of saying, whoa, I'm under the burden of God's wrath. Instead, we can say, yes, wow, I want the knowledge of the glory of this gracious God to

