

GOD IS IN CONTROL!

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[0 : 00] Well, it is the first month of the new year. So I know it's a bit late, but still I want to say Happy New Year.

Happy 2025 to you all. Now, if we think about the situation politically worldwide, I wonder whether we are going to have a happy 2025 year.

As you know in the news at the moment, the conflict in the East, there's some sort of a peace accord. And Netanyahu is happy to continue with that now that he has the names of the three people who are going to be returned to the Israelites.

But there's a lot of uncertainty how long this agreement will last. Very fragile, and I think we need to pray for that. But because of that conflict, in the reaction to the killing of 1,200 people, 48,000 people were killed.

Innocent people on both sides. And we have these power struggles. And then if we think about 2025, what is happening this coming week in the most powerful country in the world, Donald Trump is going to be taking office again for the second time.

[1 : 38] Whether you are a Trump fan or not, a supporter or not. The reality of it is the rest of the world is very concerned because of statements that Trump is making in terms of how he's going to deal with other countries' economies.

And so even here in the UK, there's a lot of tension. What will be the outcome of it? The majority of the people in the States voted for him because they are in financial difficulties.

And they believe Trump will improve that, change that. But nevertheless, it is a very powerful position. And people are not sure whether it's all going to be good or going to be positive.

Well, if you go to the other conflict situation between Russia and Ukraine, with Putin in control, after three years that war is going on, again, innocent people on both sides are dying.

And there is still no indication that that will come to an end. If you go to China, the other very powerful political willpower, where Jinping is making a lot of changes in his government as well.

[3 : 09] He is saying, claiming that he's getting rid of those who are full of corruption, while other people are saying what he's actually doing is just to get rid of those who are not with him and supporting him, so he's building up his own power base.

And then you have, among all these political powers struggling for power, you have those who have other platforms, like Elon Musk, interfering with political situations.

And then there are many countries where things are very challenging politically, and they don't even reach the BBC on the evening news.

All I can say, happy 2025 is a bit of a concern when you say that to one another. The political situation is dire.

And in the midst of all of this, what do we have? We have the church. Wow. When do you see anything about the church on the BBC news or any other news platform?

- [4 : 27] Only when there is a scandal. And the scandals are there. What makes it even more concerning is that the church is in a decline as we know it.
- And the voice of the church, among all these very influential voices, is rarely heard. And then we will say, okay, so how can we then in 2005, when is God coming into all of us?
- Is God still able, among all these powerful bases, able to do anything? If you go back to the biblical time, Old Testament, oh, that's fine.
- And it was a different era. There were not many of those type of things that we have today. But I think we make a mistake. Now I want to go back to Habakkuk's situation. Just to remind you about his political situation again.
- Quickly, just a broader context. The time that Habakkuk was operating as a prophet was in the time when Syria, or let me first say, there was already the divide between the northern kingdom, Israel, and the southern kingdom, Judah.
- [5 : 45] But the kingdom of the people of God were divided. But they were just a minor kingdom. Syria was the big power, political power at that stage.
- He was, Syria was a bit in decline, but he has a huge influence also in the country and the two kingdoms of God. But he was declining.
- And because of that decline, two other powers were aiming to fill that vacuum. The Egyptians under the Pharaohs and also Babylonians coming down.
- They want to step in here. And what was happening at a very specific time, just before Habakkuk was operating as a prophet, was the revival under the king of Joshua.
- Joshua was the king who discovered the book of law. And when he discovered the book of law, he brought a lot of changes. He said, we haven't done all of this for many years.
- [6 : 50] And he changed things. And the people started worshipping the God again. There was a spiritual revival. But during that time, the Egyptians were coming and want to take over where Syrians left off.
- And King Joshua resisted that. And as he was in his army fighting against the Egyptians, he was killed. And all of a sudden, the whole nation went back into disobedience.
- No spiritual revival. They were sacrificing even children, also horses to other gods. And a lot of injustice.
- And it was a difficult time in Judah, specifically the southern kingdom, where Habakkuk was operating. And what I'm going to do now is just to explain to you, in the midst of all of this, Habakkuk is going to wrestle with God.
- The interesting thing about Habakkuk's prophecy is, he is not like the other prophets, bringing God's message to the people and tell the people, you should stop doing this and that and start being obedient.
- [8 : 12] No. He is throwing a tantrum. That's what he's doing. He's like Job. He's talking to God. And there are two tantrums, two complaints that I just want to share with you.
- And after the first complaint, God responded. God gave him an answer. That may even work. So we throw another tantrum, second complaint, and God answered him again.
- And then we have chapter three, where Habakkuk is a complete, changed man. And he has a different response.
- No tantrum anymore, but a different response. And that is what I just want to go through the whole three chapters. It's very short, so this afternoon, if you don't want to listen to any news anymore, I'll have a quick read through the book of Habakkuk, just to remind you of the fall.

I want to start with the first tantrum, the first complaint. The first complaint is Habakkuk is saying, listen, Lord, you have opened my eyes as a prophet, and all I see is my people, your people, and they are sinning.

[9 : 37] They are worshipping other gods. They sacrifice their own children. How can you allow me to see it? And how are you looking at it, and you are not doing anything about it?

So that was his first complaint. I'm just going to read two verses. I don't think I put it on the screen, so I will come back to the last hymn, back to the screen.

So, in chapter 1, verse 3, Why do you make me see iniquity? And why do you idly look at wrong?

Destruction and violence are before me. Strife and contention arise. Verse 4, So the Lord is paralyzed, and justice never goes forward.

So, that is his complaint. Lord, you let me see this, and you are the holy God, and you are just looking idly down at this, and you are not doing anything.

[10 : 42] He's throwing a tantrum. He's complaining. How is that possible? And then, God responded to that. God said, to have a good. I'm not idly watching you out.

I'm going to do something. I'm going to bring in the Babylonians. In this specific verse, it's referred to the Chaldeans, but it is actually the same people, the Babylonians, that he's going to bring in to punish his people.

They are not believers. They are not the nation of God, but he's going to use them as an instrument. So this is what God is answering in chapter 1, verse 5. Look among the nations, and see, wonder, see, wonder, and be astounded, for I am doing a work in your days that you would not believe if told.

Verse 6. For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, who march through their breath of the earth, to cease dwellings, not their own.

Excuse me. So, that was God's answer. I'm going to bring another nation. And they are, they have, because at that stage, the Syrians was quite a vicious nation, but they were in, in, in kind of a decline.

[12 : 12] The Egyptians was there, and they have all these rumors of the Babylonians slowly taking nations after nations. They are a vicious bunch of people.

So now, Habakkuk is even more upset, because, now he's saying, God, how can you allow, even, people who are even less righteous, than your own people, and use them, as a way to deal with us?

So, in chapter 1, verse 13, Habakkuk is saying, you who are of purer eyes, than to see evil, and cannot look at the wrong, why do you, I, look at traitors, and remain silent, when the wicked swallows up, the man, more righteous than he?

So, Habakkuk, is not happy with, with God's, second answer, to this whole, complaint that he has.

But then God, is, going to answer him again, the second complaint. And what God is going, to tell him is, to open his eyes, to enable him to see, excuse me, to help him to see, that, these Babylonians, who are, on their way, to come and, bring destruction, they might think, they are in control, they are blinded, and think, they are in control, but actually, they are, instruments, in my hand.

[13 : 56] That's the first thing, God wants to, help, Habakkuk to realize. So, in chapter 2, that is what, God is telling them, in verse 4, he's saying, God is saying, see the enemy, is puffed up.

They think, they are in control. You see, the enemy, Babylonians, and the other people, are thinking, they are, sovereign. They are, puffed up. Verse 5, indeed, wine, betrays them.

You are not, the influence of wine, you think, you are in control. He is arrogant, and never at the rest, because he is, greedy as the grave, and like death, is never satisfied.

He gathers to himself, all the nations, and takes captive, of all the people. So, God is saying, I'm going to bring them in, and they are going to be, because they, and they think, they are in control, but they are not.

The rest of chapter 2, God is actually telling, saying to Habakkuk, a series of woes, to these Babylonians.

[15 : 11] They think, they are in control, but I'm just using them, as an instrument, because I'm going to, eventually, punish them, as well. Woe to them.

Maybe, there's at least, five woes, that God is, sharing, with Habakkuk. I'm just going to, look at two of them. The second one, is where, God is saying, to Habakkuk, they are coming in, they are going to, take over, cities, and homes, and houses, and they are going to, use that material, to build their own, palaces, but, they will not, have peace.

Their conscience, will be challenged. In chapter 2, verse 9, woe to him, who built his house, by unjust gain, setting his nest, on high, to escape, the clutches, of ruin.

You have plotted, the ruin of many peoples, shaming your own house, and forfeiting your life. And here, the verse is saying, the stones, of the wall, will cry out, and the beams, of the woodwork, will echo.

So you will, you will take other people's homes, and you will rebuild, from that material, your own buildings, but if you sit there, the walls, the walls, will cry out, the beams, will echo, and you will be challenged, and you will be challenged, and you will not have, the peace that you thought, you will have, when you are, using other people's, possessions.

[16 : 51] The second, or the third, woe, is, that, the Lord, is just saying, they are taking these, the, possessions, of other people, and, they are burning it up, the buildings, but, eventually, I will use them, as fuel, for their own fire.

And I'm just going to read, verse 12, in chapter 2, woe to him, who builds a city, with bloodshed, and establishes a town, by injustice, has not the Lord, almighty determined, that the people's labor, is only, fuel, for the fire, that the nations, exhaust themselves, for nothing.

God will punish them, use them, use them, as an instrument, that is what he's telling, Job, Habakkuk, he's using them, but, ultimately, they are not in control, God is in control.

And then, it is as if, God is helping, Habakkuk, to take a step back, from all of this, to understand, the purpose of it all, why is this going, to happen?

And this is the verse, in verse 14, chapter 2, where Habakkuk is saying, or, where it's written there, in Habakkuk, for the earth, will be filled, with the knowledge, of the glory, of the Lord, as the waters, cover the sea.

[18 : 23] Ultimately, God is working, towards a plan, where all of these, destructions, of even, the Babylonians, will be finished, there, the earth, will be filled, with the knowledge, of the glory, of the Lord.

And then, there is in chapter 2, one very specific, verse. Because, what has happened, up to this point, is God has revealed, to Habakkuk, after he complained, so much, what is going, to happen?

He is just going, to use these nations, to punish these people, but ultimately, things will be restored, peace will come. But all of this, is still to come, this is just a vision, and what, does Habakkuk need?

And all those, who are, obedient, as people of God, they need, faith, they need to believe. And that is why, in chapter 2, verse 4, the main, lens, through which, you have to read, the whole chapter 2, but the righteous, shall live, by faith.

They don't see, all of this, already happening, that God is, bringing in this change, bringing in these nations, but ultimately, the peace will come.

[19 : 45] The righteous, will live, by faith, alone. And then, we are finished, with chapter 1 and 2, and we go to chapter 3. Some people are saying, chapter 3, actually, has nothing to do, with the first two chapters.

It all depends. I think, chapter 3, is just, a further, a step, taking, away from, the immediate, context, of, that turmoil, that Habakkuk, is observing, in his own country, in the southern kingdom.

Just a, a further step. Because God, has already answered him. Live by faith. I'm going to do, all of these things. I am controlled. These Babylonians, they think they are, but they are not.

So, when you take a step back, and you look, back to the whole, history of God's, engagement, with, his people, going back to, Egypt, the exodus, the time, in the desert, all, the history, up to this point.

And this is what, the first part, of chapter 3, is all about. It's a kind of, theophany, a, a, a, a, a new, understanding, a new, review, of, the history.

[21 : 03] I'm just going to read, one or two verses there. In chapter 3, verse 3, God came from, Timon, the Holy One, from Mount Paran. Now, Timon and Mount Paran, is exactly, mountains, that reminds, Habakkuk, of the time, when God was, taking, his people out of, Egypt, and into the desert.

His glory, covered the heavens, and his praise, filled the earth. So, Habakkuk is, getting a kind of, a, a, understanding of, of, God's, interaction, not only now, the vision that he, he gave, that he, that he, enabled, Habakkuk to see for now, going back, is looking at the whole history.

And those, first few verses, of chapter 3, is, different ways, just to explain, how the mountains, how the rivers, how the sea, opens up, the earthquakes, because God, is in control, of, his creation, and is, in control, of history.

And then, it's been reminded, to Habakkuk, that God, is doing all of this, why? Verse 13, you went out, for the salvation, of your people, for the salvation, of your anointed.

The whole history, is for that one purpose. God, is doing that, for his own people. And it's after, that kind of, reflection, of the whole history, not this immediate one, that Habakkuk, wrote the following verse, in chapter 2, chapter 3, verse 2, Lord, I have heard, of your fame, I stand, in awe, of your deeds, Lord, so he, he looks back, and he's, he's in awe, of all these past, engagements, and interactions, and actions.

[23 : 10] I stand, in awe, of him, and then he prays, Lord, repeat them, in our day, in our time, make them known, act again, but, in wrath, remember mercy.

And so, because of that, Habakkuk responds, obviously, in chapter 16, chapter 3, verse 16, onwards, now it's a complete change, Habakkuk, he's not throwing a tantrum anymore, his eyes have been opened, he realized, God is in control, he lives by faith, he can't see yet, that these things, are changing, in his time, but he lives by faith, and that is that, well, famous verses, 17 and 18, even though the fig tree, does not blossom, and there are no grapes, on the vines, and even if the olive harvest, fails, and the fields, produce nothing edible, even if the flock, is snatched, from the sheepfold, and there is no hurt, in the stalls, as for me, I will rejoice, in the Lord, I will find my joy, in God, who delivers me, even if there's nothing, that he can see, he lives by faith, alone, and that is the important thing, and therefore, verse 19, the Lord, is my strength, you will make my feet, like those of a deer, equipping me, to tread, on the heights, so just to summarize, what we can take, with us today, a few things, one thing is clear, from Habakkuk, it's been revealed to him, he was complaining, through the tent, about the one thing, was made clear,

God is the sovereign God, he is in control, of his creation, and what is more important, he is in control, of history, that includes, the history, of his own people, but all the other, political parties as well, including the Syrians, and the Babylonians, and the Egyptians, is in control, you look into your life, today, you remind it, we are, children of the sovereign God, the second thing, I want to remind you, is the fact that, he is faithful, to his covenant, it's all about, that covenant, with his people, in the Old Testament, it's said there, it's, it's been done, for the salvation, of his people, and we are his people, in the New Testament, he is faithful, he's still working out, his plan, we are in a church, in decline, in the Western world, but, live by faith,

God is still working out, his plan, he will fulfill his plan, his plan of salvation, so what is our response, that's the third thing, we have to live by faith, that is what we must do, respond in this world, by faith, and then I just want to say, there is, obvious, a Christological, interpretation, as well, because, when Jesus came, was just, the next, step, if, where God is, unfolding, his history, of salvation, in Habakkuk's time, it was part of it, but ultimately, the aim was, Jesus was sent, he died on the cross, and after that, the Holy Spirit, was sent to us, so we have to, know that, the servant, the salvation, of his people, and the servant, includes, also, us, but our salvation, in Jesus Christ, and finally, then we can, have a look, into the future, what they call, an eschatological hope, because, ultimately,

God is working out, his plan, towards, Revelation chapter, 21, when the new earth, and the new heaven, will come, and this will be, the fulfillment of, Habakkuk chapter, 3 verse, 14, for the earth, will be filled, with the knowledge, of the glory, of the Lord, as the water, covers the sea, that is, when we believe, when we throw, a tantrum, God, because we know, God is in control, so I want to end, by saying, happy, 2025, a different, kind of happiness, if you live, by faith, in spite of things, that we, see with the eyes, are not working out, the way we want it, to work out, we can say, happy, 2025, 2025, because God, is in control, he's working out, his plan, even in the decline, of the church, even in the misuse, of power, he is in control, and therefore, let's, just spend, a few minutes, to pray, and then we will sing, let's pray together,

[28 : 25] Father, thank you again, for just this, reminder of, who you are, that you are, the sovereign God, who are in control, and Father, we, thank you for the Holy Spirit, that dwells within us, and we ask, Spirit, that you will, give us, these spiritual eyes, that in the midst of, the many uncertainties, we have here, in 2025, that we will, see with spiritual eyes, and trust in you, and believe, Father, you are still, working out, your plan, we ask this, in Jesus name, Amen.