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Sermon Notes

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## **The Mysteries of God's Justice**

### **Habakkuk 1:1-11**

#### I. Modern Issues from an Ancient Scroll

##### A. One hundred years ago: All consuming issue... "The Question of Science"

Darwin's theory making significant inroads... deepest concern was "Is it possible to reconcile discoveries of science with Biblical faith?"

History seemed to be right on track for a golden age of humanity

The Twentieth-Century shattered that illusion completely

##### B. Fifty years ago: All consuming issue: "The Question of History"

World War II had left Europe and Asia in smoldering ruins

The truth of the Nazi concentration camps had been unveiled... a reign of horror unparalleled in human history for its scope

Deep questions about God's justice: How could an omnipotent, loving God permit these kinds of atrocities to occur

Even more troubling, was there any real purpose to history? WWI was supposed to be the "War to end all wars"... the war after that was much worse? So, what was the point of all that carnage in WWI? Had it all been for nothing?

Abiding questions: Does history mean anything? Is God truly a God of justice?

##### C. Lingering Questions Today: The Question of God's Holiness...

How can a holy God see all the wickedness of the modern age and do nothing about it? Why do the Emperors of modern culture always seem to prosper more and more, while God remains silent?

Abortion is still the law of the land, despite the earnest prayers of millions

The "Culture War" seems to be a losing proposition, as each year anti-Christian values are portrayed in living arrogant color on TV, in movies, in the print media, and in attitudes of our leaders

Does God really care about holiness anymore?

These are modern questions... and they are amazingly answered directly by an ancient scroll... the Book of Habakkuk, 26 centuries old!!

## II. Context: Habakkuk's Passionate Prayer Life

### A. Author

1. Habakkuk = "embracer", probably because of his love for God
2. Not much known personally
3. "Burden" he "saw"
  - a. burden = oracle... a weighty message given him through prophetic vision
  - b. "saw" ... many prophets received their messages through vision

***Genesis 15:1 After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision***

***Isaiah 1:1 The vision concerning Judah and Jerusalem that Isaiah son of Amoz saw during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.***

### B. Historical Context

1. Israel's history:
  - a. God's promise to Abraham
  - b. God's deliverance of Abraham's descendants... EXODUS
  - c. God's perfect law... the MOSAIC LAW
  - d. God's chastisement of Israel's unbelief... WANDERING in DESERT
  - e. God's mighty power in conquest... JOSHUA
  - f. cycle of sin and repentance... JUDGES, then KINGS
  - g. split of God's people... northern kingdom Israel wicked immediately, southern kingdom, JUDAH, sometimes godly leaders

- h. 722 B.C. mighty Assyrian empire destroyed northern kingdom of Israel, deported the remnant to Assyria
- i. southern kingdom saved miraculously as godly king Hezekiah prayed
- j. afterward, Hezekiah became ill, and life extended... ENVOYS FROM BABYLON
- k. Hezekiah's son Manasseh led Judah into great wickedness... MANASSEH
- l. Manasseh's son Josiah initiated great reforms... JOSIAH, age 8, 639 B.C.

- Repaired & purified the temple
- Discovered Book of the Law
- Tore his robes as the Book was read... instituted many other changes
- Destroyed the high places, Asherah poles, carved idols, cast images
- Destroyed altars of Baal, incense altars, all places of idolatrous worship
- Celebrated the Passover for the first time in centuries
- BUT died young at age 39

m. Joasiah's son Jehoiakim was wicked

n. people already reverted to old ways... very distressing to godly Habakkuk

At this time, God also raised up other prophets... especially Jeremiah!!

BUT the people of Judah and Jerusalem refused to listen... judgment was hanging over their heads

2. Babylonians not yet known... soon would be

***Habakkuk 1:5-6 "Look at the nations and watch--and be utterly amazed. For I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe, even if you were told. <sup>6</sup> I am raising up the Babylonians***

a. Assyria had been big enemy... now defeated

In 612 B.C., 3 years before Josiah died, Nineveh, capital city of Assyria was crushed by Babylonians

b. Babylon had been distant power, almost like an ally

King Hezekiah received envoys from Babylon and had shown them everything in his storehouses

c. now Babylon loomed as a possible foe with ambitions of world conquest

### C. Overview of the Book

1. Give and take between a bewildered prophet and a patient, holy, sovereign God
2. Habakkuk's Burden of Vision (vs. 1)
3. Habakkuk's First Complaint: (vs. 2-4)

Why are you silent and seem to do nothing when Judah is rebelling against your holy covenant?

4. God's first answer: I am raising up the Babylonians (vs. 5-11)
5. Habakkuk's Second Complaint: How can you use a godless pagan nation to judge your own people? (1:12-2:1)
6. God's Second Answer: (Chapter 2)

- a. I will judge the Babylonians, too, in good time
- b. Nations will rise and fall, all seeking to build lasting glory for themselves, but they are wasting their time

***Habakkuk 2:12-14 "Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed and establishes a town by crime! <sup>13</sup> Has not the LORD Almighty determined that the people's labor is only fuel for the fire, that the nations exhaust themselves for nothing? <sup>14</sup> For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.***

- c. Individuals will be saved through personal faith

***Habakkuk 2:4 "The righteous will live by faith."***

7. Habakkuk's final prayer: Praise in a sovereign God (Chapter 3)

### III. Habakkuk's First Complaint: Why Does a Just God Tolerate Injustice? (vs. 2-4)

#### A. Israel's Righteous Heritage

1. God's Holy Law
  - a. protection from wickedness

***Leviticus 11:45 I am the LORD who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore be holy, because I am holy.***

- b. protection from idolatrous worship
- c. protection from corrupt leaders and judges
- d. protection from corrupt merchants
- e. protection for the poor and needy
  - i) protection in court
  - ii) protection from starvation
  - iii) protection from unscrupulous business practices
  - iv) protection through love and generosity

2. Godly Leaders and Prophets... like Josiah... SHOWED IT COULD BE DONE

B. Judah's Present Sin (vs. 2-4)

**vs. 2-3 *How long, O LORD, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, "Violence!" but you do not save? <sup>3</sup> Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict abounds.***

1. National Wickedness

- a. idolatry & wicked worship

***2 Chronicles 33:6-7 Manasseh sacrificed his sons in the fire in the Valley of Ben Hinnom, practiced sorcery, divination and witchcraft, and consulted mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the eyes of the LORD, provoking him to anger. He took the carved image he had made and put it in God's temple, of which God had said to David and to his son Solomon, "In this temple and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, I will put my Name forever.***

- b. violence

***Jeremiah 6:7-8 As a well pours out its water, so she pours out her wickedness. Violence and destruction resound in her; her sickness and wounds are ever before me. <sup>8</sup> Take warning, O Jerusalem, or I will turn away from you and make your land desolate so no one can live in it."***

- c. treachery

***Jeremiah 5:26-29 "Among my people are wicked men who lie in wait like men who snare birds and like those who set traps to catch men. <sup>27</sup> Like cages full of birds, their houses are full of deceit; they have become rich and powerful <sup>28</sup> and have grown fat and sleek. Their evil deeds have no limit; they do not plead the case of the fatherless to win it, they do not defend the rights of the poor. <sup>29</sup> Should I not punish them for this?" declares the LORD. "Should I not avenge myself on such a nation as this?"***

- d. social injustice
- e. immorality
- f. social conflicts... arguments, strife, conflicts

***vs. 3 there is strife, and conflict abounds.***

Lawsuits, arguments, fights, quarrels, anger, plots, revenge

Jerusalem a seething pot of carnal attitudes and behaviors

## 2. Corrupt Leadership

- a. Jehoiakim, son of Josiah... KING

***Jeremiah 22:13-17 "Woe to him who builds his palace by unrighteousness, his upper rooms by injustice, making his countrymen work for nothing, not paying them for their labor. <sup>14</sup> He says, 'I will build myself a great palace with spacious upper rooms.' So he makes large windows in it, panels it with cedar and decorates it in red. <sup>15</sup> "Does it make you a king to have more and more cedar? Did not your father have food and drink? He did what was right and just, so all went well with him. <sup>16</sup> He defended the cause of the poor and needy, and so all went well. Is that not what it means to know me?" declares the LORD. <sup>17</sup> "But your eyes and your heart are set only on dishonest gain, on shedding innocent blood and on oppression and extortion."***

- b. judges and officials:

***Ezekiel 22:27-29 Her officials within her are like wolves tearing their prey; they shed blood and kill people to make unjust gain.***

Extortion    violence    luxury    bribery

## 3. Paralyzed Justice

**vs. 4 *Therefore the law is paralyzed, and justice never prevails. The wicked hem in the righteous, so that justice is perverted.***

- a. “paralyzed”
- b. legal system had no recourse

Because the judges, officials, leaders (from the king down) were corrupt and on the take, the perfect law of God was paralyzed... because no one ever enforced it

C. Habakkuk’s Patient Prayer

**vs. 2 *“How long, O Lord, must I cry out to you...???”***

- 1. “How long...”
- 2. Patient Watching
- 3. Constant Entreaty

D. God’s Apparent Silence

- 1. Events Flow by With No Word from Heaven
- 2. God Seems to Condone
- 3. God’s Silence Misunderstood
  - a. misunderstanding His existence
  - b. misunderstanding His nature
  - c. misunderstanding His purposes

E. Habakkuk’s Passionate Complaint

- a. not irreverent to pour out your heart to God
- b. prayer designed for true feelings, as long as done respectfully

## IV. God’s First Response: The Babylonians Are Coming!

A. An Astonishing Look at the Nations

**vs. 5** *"Look at the nations and watch--and be utterly amazed. For I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe, even if you were told. ' I am raising up the Babylonians*

1. Habakkuk hoping for revival
2. God sending judgment instead
3. God knew the answer would be astonishing to Habakkuk

B. God's Sovereign Response

***"I am going to do something..." "I am raising up the Babylonians..."***

1. God is sovereign over every nation
2. He raises one up, lowers another
3. Even pagan nations totally under His power

C. The Babylonians Are Coming

D. Babylonians Described

1. Descriptions of ferocious character

**vs. 7-11** *I am raising up the Babylonians, that ruthless and impetuous people, who sweep across the whole earth to seize dwelling places not their own. <sup>7</sup> They are a feared and dreaded people; they are a law to themselves and promote their own honor. <sup>8</sup> Their horses are swifter than leopards, fiercer than wolves at dusk. Their cavalry gallops headlong; their horsemen come from afar. They fly like a vulture swooping to devour; <sup>9</sup> they all come bent on violence. Their hordes advance like a desert wind and gather prisoners like sand.*

- Fierce: ferocious like wolves that haven't eaten enough
- Impetuous: they are unpredictable, seizing initiative on the battlefield; moving rapidly so you can never tell where the next attack will come from
- Dreaded/Feared: all who hear about them are terrified, writhing in anguish like a woman in labor
- Violent: "They all come bent on violence"... they delight to destroy

- Swift: like leopard, or eagles, swooping to devour prey... suddenly, they appear on the horizon and sweep past you like a devastating storm

## 2. Descriptions of sweeping power

- Originating from afar
- Self-originating justice, zeal for their own glory

*vs. 7 they are a law to themselves and promote their own honor.*

- Swift, sweeping success

Illus. Scirocco... hot east desert wind... gathering prisoners like wind gathers dust

## 3. Descriptions of arrogant attitudes

*vs. 10-11 They deride kings and scoff at rulers. They laugh at all fortified cities; they build earthen ramps and capture them. " Then they sweep past like the wind and go on-- guilty men, whose own strength is their god."*

- Their foes are like chaff
- They laugh at human opposition
- No obstacle too difficult

Fortified cities crumble before their technology, might, power, and determination

Illus. Alexander the Great filled in harbor of Tyre to besiege it

- Their strength is their god

Most significant statement of all... they do not acknowledge that God Himself rules heaven and earth... they give no thought to God at all... they merely believe their own power and strength gives them all the success of their military conquest

- Their guilt is established

**"Guilty men..."**

**Message of Habakkuk: all guilty are punished eventually... except the righteous who live by faith**

## V. Five Lessons on History

### A. History is Under God's Control

1. God sovereignly rules history
2. All nations are as nothing to Him
3. Kingdoms rise and fall at His command

***Daniel 4:17 the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowliest of men.'***

***Daniel 4:34-35 His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation. <sup>35</sup> All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?"***

### B. History Follows a Divine Plan

***Revelation 22:13 I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.***

1. God has worked every detail out
2. History is not ultimately subject to the whims of man
3. God's plan is perfect, though we cannot always follow it

### C. History Follows a Divine Timetable

***Daniel 2:20-21 "Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever; wisdom and power are his. <sup>21</sup> He changes times and seasons; he sets up kings and deposes them.***

***Acts 17:26 From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live.***

3. BUT God's plan follows God's timetable, not our own
4. The "Times of the Gentiles" began with Babylonian Invasion... and lasts as long as GOD says

### D. History is Bound Up with the Kingdom of God

1. Everything must be seen in light of God's eternal purpose to establish His Kingdom to the ends of the earth
2. Every event of history a gear to turn in God's perfect plan for His Kingdom
3. History is united by one theme: the eternal Kingdom of God

***Habakkuk 2:12-14 "Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed and establishes a town by crime! <sup>13</sup> Has not the LORD Almighty determined that the people's labor is only fuel for the fire, that the nations exhaust themselves for nothing? <sup>14</sup> For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.***

E. Justice is Always Done in the End

1. Habakkuk was frustrated by God's silence
2. God seemed to wait too long to judge sinners
3. Judah's wicked oppressors got their in due time
4. Babylon will get theirs in due time

***"Guilty men, whose own strength is their god..."***

***Habakkuk 2:12-13 "Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed and establishes a town by crime! <sup>13</sup> Has not the LORD Almighty determined that the people's labor is only fuel for the fire, that the nations exhaust themselves for nothing?"***

## VI. Application

A. Enraged at Wickedness and Injustice

1. Habakkuk displayed his faith by constant prayer against the wickedness of his people
2. Josiah displayed his reaction by tearing his robes and getting to work when he heard the word of God
3. Ezekiel went with an angel to mark those who grieved over Judah's sin

***Habakkuk 2:4 "The righteous will live by faith"***

B. Praying with Passion

C. Trusting an Inscrutable God

***Isaiah 55:8-9 "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. 9 "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.***

***Romans 11:33-34 Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! 34 "Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?"***

D. All Roads Lead to the Cross of Christ!!!

1. History HAS a purpose... the glory of God in the salvation of His people in Christ
2. In the fullness of time, God sent His Son
3. He lived a perfect life
4. Died a substitutionary death
5. Rose from the dead... we celebrate NEXT WEEK
6. COME TO CHRIST

***Habakkuk 2:4 "The righteous will live by faith"***