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**C1216 – May 9, 2012 – Habakkuk 1:5-11**  
**God's Sovereignty & Man's Responsibility**

If you'll turn in your Bible to the prophet Habakkuk who wrote about 607BC, perhaps as early as 615BC, but near the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC without question. He writes as a very perplexed man. This was a man who saw from the human standpoint the corrupt nature of the leadership in Jerusalem, yet he was lifted up as a prophet to see from the divine standpoint all the more intensively and extensively the corruptness, vice, deceit and manipulation of the Judean government. And why O Lord, verse 3, "do You make me see iniquity, And cause me to look on wickedness..." Habakkuk was forced by the Lord to stare evil in the face and it was terribly distressing. It prompted him to cry out in prayer for a long time. Verse 2, "How long, O LORD, will I call for help, and YOU will not hear? I cry out to You, "Violence!" Yet You do not save." How long O LORD will you not deliver us from this evil. Habakkuk speaks, not only as an individual, but on behalf of the remnant of Israel, which must have been rather small at the time, but he speaks representatively of those who were righteously living among the wicked, wicked rulers, those who numbed the Law of Moses by ganging up against the common man and distorting justice for their own selfish gain. So how long says Habakkuk, O LORD, will I cry out in prayers and you will not save? Desperate cries from a righteous man, yet we saw from 1 Sam 8:18 that he can cry and cry and cry, but the Lord is not going to answer because the Lord already declared centuries ago, when you cry out to me in that day, because of the wicked ways of the king, I will not answer. So if you would turn to 1 Sam 8. There are certain parameters in which prayer is answered. God doesn't just answer any and every prayer. And there are Scriptural reasons God doesn't answer certain prayers. We listed some of the parameters. The parameter Habakkuk ran into was simply that God had already declared he would not answer this prayer.

The people in the time of Samuel the prophet, this is 400 years earlier, lived at the end of the Judges period; there was no human king, God was the king, He became King at Mt Sinai. They had judges raised up periodically to solve problems. At the time Samuel was the judge. And he was a good judge but he was getting older and his sons were corrupt. They took bribes and distorted justice. So in that situation the people cried out for what? For a king, we want a king so we can be like who? Like all the other nations. Now Samuel was very displeased with this and he took their plea to the Lord and the Lord said, they have not rejected you Samuel, they have rejected Me from being King over them. Now go and warn them of the procedures of the king, what the king will do. And yet after the people heard the oppressive procedures of the king the people said, no, but we will have a king like all the other nations. So God said, give them a king. And they were given Saul, a king that was a head taller than all the people of Israel and certainly appeared as a mighty warrior, someone who would go out and fight their battles for them and would judge difficult cases. But God said, I am answering this prayer for a king, but in the day when you cry out because of the ways of the king, and you are frustrated beyond measure, I will not answer your prayer. So the monarchy came into permanent existence in the context of a sinful situation.

Now this has led commentators to debate the rightness or wrongness of the monarchy in Israel. Let me show you the tension by turning to Deut 17:14. Here we're going back to the Law of Moses, this is 400 years before the people actually asked for a king. And what does the Lord say through Moses in verse 14? "When you enter the land which the LORD your God gives you, and you possess it and live in it, and you say, 'I will set a king over me like all the nations who are around me,' 15 you shall surely set a king over you whom the LORD your God chooses," do you see the tension? Moses prophesied what happened in 1 Sam 8. Moses prophesied that the people would say, give us a king like all the other nations. It was prophesied. But in 1 Sam 8 the people's desire for a king is clearly sinful, they were rejecting God as their king. So is the establishment of the monarchy according to God's plan or man's sin? How do we resolve this? Which is it? Is the monarchy predicted by prophecy? Yes. Did the monarchy come about by sinful desires? Yes. See, we have a bible difficulty here, there is tension here. And it makes people very uncomfortable. Did God actually plan for the people in Samuel's day to sin in order to bring about the monarchy? It seems very hard to say God didn't plan the monarchy to come into existence. It's the subject of prophecy. And it also

seems very hard to say that the monarchy did not come into existence through the sin of the people. So since God planned it does that make God the author of sin? How do we resolve this? Now what I'm trying to do is introduce you to the tension that we will see tonight in the Habakkuk passage and that we see over and over and over in Scripture, the issue of God's sovereignty and human responsibility in human affairs.

This is just one case where the tension is seen. Turn to 1 Kgs 12 to see another case. Nobody wants to attribute sin to God and even the most ardent Hyper Calvinist denies that God is the author of sin. So how do we explain these passages? This is the chapter where Rehoboam, Solomon's son, is going to be coronated king over all 12 tribes. But a prophecy had been given to Solomon because of his turn toward idolatry in the later days that the kingdom would be ripped in half, not on his watch, but on his son's watch. So here comes Rehoboam, and in verse 3 the people are assembling, they have some requests. Verse 4, "Your father made our yoke hard; now therefore lighten the hard service of your father and his heavy yoke which he put on us, and we will serve you." So we have the problem of over-taxation because the government has to have assets to grow, so they say, give us a tax break. Verse 6, "King Rehoboam consulted with the elders who had served his father Solomon," these are the old guys, the old guard, the men who served Solomon, he says, "How do you counsel me to answer this people?" 7 Then they spoke to him and said, give them the tax break, and if you do they'll serve you forever, you have to win their hearts here Rehoboam, be smart, win the people, give them a break. Verse 8, and this is what young people are doing in churches all across our country today, kicking out the old fogies because they know so much, they've had so much life experience, they know better. "But he forsook the counsel of the elders which they had given him, and consulted with the young men who grew up with him and served him." These are his fraternity brothers, the kids he used to drink a few kegs of beer with, the riff raff, they're so brilliant, let's see what they think because I don't like what the old geezers said. So he asked them the same question, what do you guys think, you think we should give them a tax break? Verse 10 they respond, "Thus you shall say to this people who spoke to you, saying, 'Your father made our yoke heavy, now you make it lighter for us!' But you shall speak to them, 'My little finger is thicker than my father's loins!'" Now I don't have to spell out for you what they're saying. This is not only very obnoxious, like a teenage brat running off at the mouth, but it's disrespectful and

evidence that these guys were a bunch of spiritual morons. This is the way these guys would run the country. Well it's no surprise how the people respond. In v 16 the people reject the Davidic dynasty, they say we have no portion in David, they're separating, they split off and the nation divides in half. And verse 15, here's the prophetic analysis; he's the guy who really has eyes to see what's going on here. "So the king did not listen to the people," and then what does it say? There's a little phrase that says "for it was a turn of events from the LORD," literally, in other words, who is sovereign over this sinful action? It's just a little clause, but it's the prophetic analysis of what happened, "for it was a turn of events from the LORD, that He might establish His word, which the LORD spoke through Ahijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam the son of Nebat." So was God able to use a sinful action to bring about His plan? Who is ultimately in control? Even over a situation that is clearly sinful God brings His plan to pass through sinful acts? That doesn't sound right. Doesn't that make God sinful?

Well, I hope that's enough to show you this tension in the text, we could show many others and I will show you some others from the NT later on. But the point, as we go back to Habakkuk, is that every Christian needs to come to grips with these kinds of passages. On the one hand we can't say God is totally uninvolved and it's just humans doing this, it says this was a turn of events from who? The Lord. On the other hand we can't say God is sinful, that would contradict the passages that say God is holy.

So when we come to verse 5, it doesn't say the Lord is the One saying this, but clearly the speaker changes, now the Lord is saying something to Habakkuk. And in a way God is responding to Habakkuk's prayer, but He's not answering his prayer. Habakkuk's prayer is for deliverance from the evil of his own nation- get me and the remnant out of here, we want the kingdom, take us into the kingdom, or correct our people's heart, but somehow rescue us. God says in effect, I'm not going to rescue you, I'm not answering that prayer, but I am doing something about it, I'm not sitting on a perch in heaven totally unconcerned. Verse 5, **Look among the nations! Observe! Be astonished! Wonder! Because I am doing something in your days—You would not believe if you were told. 6For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans.** Question: Who is raising up the Chaldeans? The Lord is. Why is He raising them up? To be a disciplinary rod in His hand. He's going to use the Chaldeans to discipline the Judeans. So who's doing the

discipline? God is. Who is the rod? The Chaldeans. Yet look at verse 11, **Then they will sweep through like the wind and pass on. But they will be held guilty.** Well, how can you hold them guilty God, if you are the one raising them up? If you are the one sending them against your people? But obviously the Bible doesn't have a problem talking this way. It was a turn of events from the Lord in Rehoboam's day. The monarchy was established through sinful actions in Samuel's day. Now the Chaldeans are raised up by God yet they are held responsible for their actions, not God.

Now what this gets us into is the question of freedom, human freedom. And briefly I want to review two or three views of freedom. The first view of freedom is called *libertarian freedom* or *the power of contrary choice*, what most people call free will, by which is meant a man can choose contrary to his character and desires, that he could have done other than he did.

"Libertarians emphasize that our choices are not determined in advance by God. On their view, God may be the first cause of the universe in general, but in the spirit of human decisions, we are the first cause of our actions.

Libertarians maintain that only if we have this kind of radical freedom can we be held responsible for our actions. Their principle is simple enough: if our decisions are caused by anything or anyone (including our own desires), they are not properly our decisions, and we cannot be held responsible for them." Put another way, "if our actions are caused by anything other than our free will, we are not able to do otherwise, we are therefore not responsible."

Now if this were true then can you see any problems that would create with this text? First of all, who raised the Chaldeans up? God did. But the libertarian view would require that the Chaldeans raised themselves up, otherwise they could not be held responsible. Secondly, if the Chaldeans had the power of contrary choice then they could choose not to invade Judea. But if they could choose not to invade Judea then this prophecy would not be fulfilled. Maybe someone says, well, God knew what they would do but God did not plan what they would do. But how could God know something in the future without Him having planned it? In other words, if the Chaldeans could do otherwise then how could God know that they wouldn't do otherwise, since the choice was still open? I hope your antennas are going off with respect to the idea of libertarian freedom or the power of contrary choice, what most people call free will, because there are many problems.

Let me cite some. First of all, Scripture does not teach anywhere the existence of free will. Why then do most Christians believe in free will? It's simple. God commands us in the Bible to do certain things. Therefore a command implies the ability to obey it. So the argument is that it is implied. As Pelagius famously put it in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, "If we ought, we can." The belief in human ability. However, is that what the Bible teaches elsewhere? For example, God says, "believe and you will be saved." Does that imply that humans have the ability to believe? Not according to Jesus. Jesus says in John 6:44, "No one can come to Me unless the Father draws him" And He says in John 6:37, "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me." So then just because the offer of the gospel is universal it does not imply that ability to believe it is universal. So libertarian freedom fails exegetically.

Second, Scripture never grounds human responsibility in our ability to do otherwise, it grounds our responsibility in the fact that God made us, owns us and has authority over us. Take Adam: was Adam responsible to God because he could choose to eat the fruit or not eat the fruit? In other words, must Adam have had a choice to obey or disobey in order to be responsible? If so, what do you do with the new heavens and new earth? Certainly there we will not have the ability to obey or disobey. There is no ability to disobey and fall into sin. And yet if human responsibility is grounded in our ability to do otherwise then we must be able to fall into sin in the new heaven and new earth. Yet that is not an ability we will have. Scripture grounds our responsibility simply in the fact that God is the Creator, He is the authority, we are His creatures and thereby responsible to glorify Him.

And third, Scripture presents God's knowledge of all future events as due to His planning of all future events. This is inconsistent with the power of contrary choice. If God knew in 615BC that the Chaldeans would attack Judea in 605BC then the Chaldeans were not free to avoid attacking Judea in 605BC. However, if they had the power of contrary choice then God could not have known that. Their claim is that God can know future events without causing them. But on what basis can He know future events without causing them. As far as I can tell from Scripture God knows future events because He put them in His plan. Isaiah says He plans the end from the beginning, from ancient times things which have not been done, saying, "My purpose will be established and I will accomplish all my good pleasure. Ephesians says "God works all things after the counsel of His will," yet humans are held fully

responsible for their choices. In fact, we are even held responsible for our unconscious choice of eating the fruit in Adam. So if we are held responsible for that sin, then libertarian freedom must not be a good model of God's sovereignty and man's freedom.

So what is the Scriptural view of freedom? As we go into this, let me just say, that the Scriptural authors, who were all Jews, never had the problem we have; we're Greeks and it's our Greek heritage in Aristotle and his law of non-contradiction that you are struggling with. It has nothing to do with the Bible; our struggle is with Greek thinking patterns that persist. Jews didn't follow Aristotle where the law of non-contradiction in human rationalism was ultimate; they followed the Bible where God's law in divine revelation was ultimate. And they thought of man's freedom and God's sovereignty as compatible; that is, there is no contradiction. God is the author of the entire plan and man is responsible for his choices within the plan. They never had a problem with that and you shouldn't either, if you are following the Scriptures. Simply put compatibilism says that every man does what he wants to do all the time. You always do what you want to do, yet what you do is in the plan of God. Every Scriptural example fits perfectly with this. For example, were the people in Samuel's day who asked for a king, were they doing what they wanted to do? Yeah, nobody twisted their arm. They said, we want a king like all the other nations. Yet was the establishment of the king a part of God's prophetic plan? Indeed it was. No problem. Another example, did Rehoboam want to reject the desires of the people? Of course, he was doing exactly what he wanted to do. Was this a part of God's plan? Yes, it was a turn of events from the Lord, totally compatible with what Rehoboam wanted to do. What about Acts 2:23? In Acts 2:23 the crucifixion of Christ is said to be a part of the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, but the responsibility for crucifying Christ fell on the hands of godless men. Now did the fact that it was a part of the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God remove their responsibility for putting him to death? No, they were doing exactly what they wanted to do, Crucify Him! Crucify Him! What about Acts 4:27-28? It says that Herod, Pontius Pilate, the Gentiles and the people of Israel crucified Jesus, but in the very next verse it says they did what God's hand and God's purpose predestined to occur. Did that remove their responsibility for crucifying Jesus, even though it was written before hand that they would crucify Jesus? Not at all. They were doing exactly what they wanted to do. What about Luke 22:22 and the betrayal of Judas? "For indeed,

the Son of Man is going as it has been determined; but woe to that man by whom He is betrayed!” Did the fact that the betrayal was determined to take place remove the responsibility for Judas betraying Him? By no means. Judas did exactly what he wanted to do. We could give example after example after example of men doing exactly what they want to do, yet God is sovereign over it. Scripture makes clear that our choices are governed by God's eternal plan, even though we are fully responsible for them. They are completely compatible. We always do what we most want to do even when our choices are narrow and we are always held responsible for them.

So we have exactly the same thing here in Habakkuk. God is raising up the Chaldeans to militarily invade Judea, but does that alleviate the Chaldean's responsibility for invading Judea? No. Why not? Because they were doing exactly what they wanted to do. As far as they were concerned, Judea was the next stop on their military conquest to take over the world. So notice how God breaks into the discussion in verse 5, **Look among the nations** Habakkuk! **Observe! Be astonished! Wonder!** Four words of alert. First of all, **Look among the nations!** Don't have tunnel vision Habakkuk. God is not just sovereign over Judea, God is sovereign over all **the nations**. And God is working something **among the nations!** Isaiah 40:15-17, “Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket, And are regarded as a speck of dust on the scales; Behold, He lifts up the islands like fine dust. <sup>16</sup>Even Lebanon is not enough to burn, Nor its beasts enough for a burnt offering. <sup>17</sup>All the nations are as nothing before Him, They are regarded by Him as less than nothing and meaningless.” God is sovereign over all the earth. You must realize the minuteness and insignificance of the nations in the eyes of God. **Observe!** God says, take a look at the state of international affairs. And **Be astonished!** What you will see is something that has never happened in the history of the world, something astonishing. **Wonder** Habakkuk! Certainly you must **wonder** what is going on when you see something happening that has never happened before in history. A novelty. **Because I am doing something in your days**—it was occurring in Habakkuk's own days and I suggest it was something happening perhaps earlier than I suggested last week. Most commentators date the book around 605-606, but from these words I would suggest they are more likely around 615BC. God says, **You would not believe it** Habakkuk, **if you were told.** If it had already happened it would be believable. So clearly it had not happened yet, but it was in the workings. And I suggest this something was a new kingdom rising

and the unbelievable thing is the rapidity with which it is rising. The Babylonian kingdom was rising to superpower status at a rate never before equaled in the history of the world. The kingdom began with Nabopolassar in 626BC and by 605BC, just 20 years, it will crush Assyria, Egypt and will reign supreme. In just 20 years the Babylonian kingdom will go from nothing among the nations to the greatest superpower on earth. And never before has anything like this occurred. It usually takes a kingdom 100 or more years to rise to superpower status. So God says, Habakkuk, **I am doing something in your days**—something unbelievable. You'd laugh if someone told you. It would be like someone telling you Mexico was rising to be the world superpower, what a joke, you're kidding me right? No. And this was indeed what demonstrated clearly that God Himself was involved in it. God Himself as verse 6 says, was raising up the Babylonians at this time. Now the Chaldeans came from Abraham's brother Nahor, so they are a Semitic people. Remember, after the Flood you have the three sons of Noah, Shem, Ham and Japheth. So you have three basic people group that divide after the Flood, in particular after the tower of Babel, those who are Shemites, those who are Hamites and those who are Japhethites. We're Japhethites, but the Chaldeans descended from Shem through Abraham's brother Nahor. But they were a nobody until Nabopolassar came along in 626BC and that's when God began to raise them up. In 614 they attacked and defeated Khorsabad, the earlier capital of Assyria, in 612 they attacked and defeated Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, in 610BC they defeated Haran, where the Assyrians tried to set up another capital. In 609 they defeated the last attempt of the Assyrians to regain their lost foothold. And in 605BC they defeated Egypt at the famous battle of Carchemish, a very rapid rise to power.

Now they are going to sweep through the stage of world history, verse 11 says, "like wind and pass on." That is, they won't be on the world stage very long, Jeremiah predicted just 70 years and so it is that beginning in 609BC with the final defeat of Assyria, the Babylonians will reign as the greatest superpower until 539BC when Cyrus the Persian will enter Babylon through the watering system and take the city with ease. Babylon will then pass on. So Babylon will only sweep across the world stage like the wind, like a storm passing whose purpose is to rain down the disciplinary wrath of God against Judah for her rebellion.

Now we find it interesting that God says, I am doing this. I am raising the Chaldeans up. But this should be no surprise to the Judeans. Turn to Deut 28:49. We want to recall that Lev 26 and Deut 28 sketch the blessings and cursings for obedience and disobedience to the word of God. And if you go into this period, Jeremiah has two chapters that deal with the reigns of Jehoiakim who was the king at this time in Jerusalem. He's the one that when Jeremiah wrote the word of God to the king and it was taken in to the king and read to the king, the king grabbed the word of God and threw it in the fire. So that's the kind of respect the king in Jerusalem had for the word of God. In his day they burned the word of God. And because of that man's rebellion God said when he dies nobody's going to cry, they're going to drag his body off behind a horse till it's unrecognizable and just leave it for the scavengers. That's the picture of what God sometimes does to His enemies to remind us, don't worry, I know there's evil out there, but I'm going to take care of it, every once in a while he takes somebody really wicked like Jezebel or Jehoiakim or Herod and just has them pass off the scene in the most gory of ways. And it's a picture of final punishment, you don't want to go to the lake of fire because that's everlasting torment. Well, Jehoiakim was one of those people God made an example of because of his hatred for the word of God. Verse 49, here are the cursings if they hate the word of God. And prophetically it is referring to Babylon. "The LORD will bring a nation against you [Judah] from afar, from the end of the earth, as the eagle swoops down, a nation whose language you shall not understand," remember, the Babylonians had their own language called Aramaic and when they go into Exile to Babylon they're going to change everyone's name: Daniel, Azariah, Hananiah and Mishael, are all going to be re-named. They gave Daniel the name Belteshassar, to Hananiah, Shadrach, to Mishael, Meshach and to Azariah, Abednego, "a nation," verse 50, "of fierce countenance who will have no respect for the old, nor show favor to the young. <sup>51</sup>"Moreover, it shall eat the offspring of your herd and the produce of your ground until you are destroyed, who also leaves you no grain, new wine, or oil, nor the increase of your herd or the young of your flock until they have caused you to perish. <sup>52</sup>"It shall besiege you in all your towns until your high and fortified walls in which you trusted come down throughout your land, and it shall besiege you in all your towns throughout your land which the LORD your God has given you. <sup>53</sup>"Then you shall eat" . Now Josephus recounts this happened three times in Jewish history, 721, 586 and 70AD, and it shows you the terrible insanity that can come from the psychological effects of God's judgment "you shall eat the

offspring of your own body, the flesh of your sons and of your daughters whom the LORD your God has given you, during the siege and the distress by which your enemy will oppress you. <sup>54</sup>“The man who is refined and very delicate among you shall be hostile toward his brother and toward the wife he cherishes and toward the rest of his children who remain, <sup>55</sup>so that he will not give *even* one of them any of the flesh of his children which he will eat, since he has nothing *else* left, during the siege and the distress by which your enemy will oppress you in all your towns. <sup>56</sup>“The refined and delicate woman among you, who would not venture to set the sole of her foot on the ground for delicateness and refinement, shall be hostile toward the husband she cherishes and toward her son and daughter, <sup>57</sup>and toward her afterbirth which issues from between her legs and toward her children whom she bears; for she will eat them secretly for lack of anything *else*, during the siege and the distress by which your enemy will oppress you in your towns.” Oh, so you want to burn the word of God, fine, have at it. Just know, says Moses, the horror that is coming for you. I gave you as shepherds among the people and you scattered My flock, you did not attend to them and so the Lord was about to attend to them by sending the Babylonian army.

Now as we go back to Hab 1:6 we're going to see the character of this army. But understand that divine discipline can be very severe. Divine discipline of course, is designed to get a response to the word of God, to stimulate repentance. That's one of the reasons the prophets were sent, to declare discipline on the horizon so the nation would be convicted of their sin and repent. Always God is wanting the people to respond positively to Him. But if the warnings go unheeded then God increases the discipline and this goes, according to Lev 26, through five stages. It starts off simple but firm, when that is rejected then God increases the severity and this goes on and on until you reach the fifth degree of divine discipline which is what we just read in Deut 28, eating your own children, chomping on your placenta; that is the severe, severe discipline of God. But God did it, and this may surprise you, but God did it because He loved them and He has plans for them, plans to prosper them. Because the other option is worse and that is the complete annihilation of Israel, total destruction. But because of God's word in the covenant to them, because He loved the nation Israel He will never destroy them, they have eternal security, but they do come under severe discipline. And you as a Christian, are eternally secure, but don't let that fool you into thinking that therefore you can run around and raise hell with no

consequences, that life is going to be all roses. If you rebel against the Lord He can make your life a disaster. He can even take you out and He has taken believers out, but He'll never cast you off, even if we are faithless, He is faithful.

Now verse 6 he begins to characterize the Chaldean armies by a series of couplets, words linked together in pairs and there are more than 20 characteristics Habakkuk gives in graphic detail. **That fierce and impetuous people**, this is describing their disposition, they are bitter and rough in their disposition, the kind of people that when you look at them it induces fear. He says **who march throughout the earth**, signifying they were taking over the entire region, they took Assyria to the North, they took Phoenicia to the West, they defeated Egypt to the south and of course Judah, they extended the breadth of their kingdom, God says they **march To seize dwelling places which are not theirs**. And here God hints at the boundaries of nations which Paul says in Acts 17 God established, but the Babylonians are violating because of their selfish greed to conquer more and more. God calls this theft and this implies that God has not called nations to conquer other nations for the simple purpose of expanding their own empire, but God has put boundaries between people so that men might seek God, though it's very rare if ever something someone will do, so it's not a very hopeful outlook Paul says, but he does say that the purpose of God establishing the boundaries of our habitations, the borders between nations, is that men might seek God. The Babylonians were being raised up by God to seize dwelling places not given to them by God. And evidently they are being held guilty for doing this because they are doing exactly what they want to do, it is consistent with their freedom.

Verse 7, **They are dreaded and feared**; these are the effects on the peoples they are conquering. **Their justice and authority originate with themselves**. That is, they are autonomous, they don't recognize that God is the source of justice and authority. This plagued the Babylonian mentality, if you'll turn to Daniel 4:29 we see King Nebuchadnezzar manifest this attitude of autonomy. Verse 30, "The king reflected and said, 'Is this not Babylon the great, which I myself have built as a royal residence by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?' 31" While the word was in the king's mouth, a voice came from heaven, saying, 'King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is declared: sovereignty has been removed from you, 32 and you will be driven

away from mankind, and your dwelling place *will be* with the beasts of the field. You will be given grass to eat like cattle, and seven periods of time will pass over you until you recognize that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind and bestows it on whomever He wishes.’<sup>33</sup>“Immediately the word concerning Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled; and he was driven away from mankind and began eating grass like cattle, and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair had grown like eagles’ *feathers* and his nails like birds’ *claws*.<sup>34</sup>“But at the end of that period, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever; For His dominion is an everlasting dominion, And His kingdom *endures* from generation to generation.<sup>35</sup>“All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, But He does according to His will in the host of heaven And *among* the inhabitants of earth; And no one can ward off His hand Or say to Him, ‘What have You done?’ . So there we have the recognition God was looking for and I think Nebuchadnezzar became a believer. Verse 36, “At that time my reason returned to me. And my majesty and splendor were restored to me for the glory of my kingdom, and my counselors and my nobles began seeking me out; so I was reestablished in my sovereignty, and surpassing greatness was added to me.<sup>37</sup>“Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, exalt and honor the King of heaven, for all His works are true and His ways just, and He is able to humble those who walk in pride.” But the point is that arrogance that was entrenched in Babylon, they were deeply autonomous, they made themselves out to be the standard.

Habakkuk goes on to describe the manner of the Babylonian army conquering but the point is they will be held guilty for it all because God is the authority and they are a very autonomous people doing exactly what they want to do. There is no arm twisting here, God is raising them up very rapidly to discipline Judea and send them in to Exile under the most horrific of conditions, but Babylon will be held guilty, they whose own strength is their god, they will sweep on the stage like a mighty storm and pass away just as quickly. That’s the picture the Lord paints for us and it’s a picture we ought to all remember as far as the rise and fall of nations is concerned. But it’s this picture that causes Habakkuk to become even more perplexed because now he wonders how God can use those less righteous than Judah to judge Judah? What is going on when those who are more evil overcome those who are less evil? And we all struggle with this problem. Why do bad things

happen to so called good people and why do good things happen to so called bad people. “Why do the wicked prosper,” the psalmist asks. So we’ll pick up with those issues next week in verse 12 and how God responds to that. The bottom line is that we have to learn to trust God that even though we may be perplexed, He has a purpose for what He is doing in history even though it may not make sense to us. And He doesn’t promise to show us the entire picture, He shows us who He is and He says, trust Me. Trust, trust, trust, that’s the response He’s looking for. He’s shown Himself time and again since time immemorial, so trust Him in every situation, no matter how perplexed you may be. He has a plan and a purpose for all things.

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