
An Enduring Faith in Judgment

Habakkuk 2:6-20⁴

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Why have we seen the rise and spread of Islam as a religion and the establishment of an Islamic Caliphate in our day? There are all kinds of social, economic, political and religious causes. Make no mistake, all of these are ensnared with jealousy, greed, covetousness, ethnic and religious bigotry, hatred, self-loathing, sexual perversions and love for violence, conquest and power. In other words, Islamic fascism no matter what its national boundaries, its internal sectarian divisions and diverse languages and peoples, is much like the ancient nations we find in the Bible. Each of them was allowed to rise to power and preeminence in the purposes and plans of God. One after the other they rose, degenerated in moral decay and were conquered by others, more wicked and more powerful.

Is it possible that Habakkuk's explanation of what was about to happen to Israel can also explain what looks like is about to happen to the west?

If so, then what is the message of this text to God's righteous people in this day?

The Deliverance through Judgment

(v. 1-4)

Righteous people will wait in full trust in God who will deliver them.

²And the Lord answered me:

“Write the vision;
make it plain on tablets,
so he may run who reads it.

³ 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.

⁴ “Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him,
but the righteous shall live by his faith.

The Enabling Power of God's Word

(v. 1-3)

God gives His Word to the prophet who is to write it down. The Word given is a vision of coming judgments on Babylon and on the wicked. These judgments will be our focus in this study. The prophecies of these judgments were to be permanently inscribed on tablets of clay.

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They were needed by God's people so that they would be enabled to endure, to wait for the long years and centuries until the judgments come in their full reality.

The Enduring Faith of the Righteous

(v. 4)

In contrast to the pride of the wicked, the just live by faith. They have humble and upright souls. The result is that they believe God's Word and will live their lives with patience and endurance while being sinned against and suffering in the fallout of God's judgments. Righteous people believe God's promises that the wicked will be judged. Justice will prevail. God and His people will be vindicated. They understand that the righteous One, the Lord Jesus, lived by faith even though sinned against and going through the wrath of God. So God's people will persevere in faith and obedience. They will not shrink back waiting until the coming One returns to judge the wicked and vindicate His people.

The Denouncement until Judgment

(v. 4-5)

God denounces the wicked in their sinful heart attitudes and pursuits.

The Pride of the Wicked

(v. 4)

⁴ "Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him,
but the righteous shall live by his faith.

Habakkuk is speaking first of Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon. But he is also speaking of the wicked generally. The evil of the wicked is rooted in the pride and perversity of their hearts.

The Greed of the Wicked

(v. 5)

⁵ "Moreover, wine is a traitor,
an arrogant man who is never at rest.
His greed is as wide as Sheol;
like death he has never enough.
He gathers for himself all nations
and collects as his own all peoples."

Habakkuk denounces the greed of Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon. They have an insatiable appetite for more. Their destructive path of conquest is the result of seeking more and more wealth and power. The craving for money, wealth and power drives people to all kinds of sin. It may range from simple manipulative lying to dreadful acts of violence. Greed and power turn people and nations into ravening beasts.

Destruction by Judgment

(v. 6-20)

Wicked people will suffer the woes and wrath of God who will destroy them.

⁶ Shall not all these take up their taunt against him, with scoffing and riddles for him, and say,

All through this text, there is a description of the wicked in their evil followed by how God will bring about judgment. In some cases the judgment is near. But in some cases, the judgment is at the end of days.

This is a parody of a funeral dirge. Instead of “Woe is us for the death of...” this is “Woe to you for the practice of...” Habakkuk mocks and taunts the Babylonians for their ill-gotten wealth. He also warns them that they in their will also be plundered by another. (Carson, 844) But do not think that these woes are just pronounced upon a nation that is long gone. They were also to be heard and felt by the Israelites Habakkuk was prophesying to. They must also be heard by us as well.

The Prosperity of the Wicked

(v. 6-14)

God denounces their extravagant cravings which have sought extraordinary wealth.

Woe to the Selfish

(v. 6-8)

“Woe to him who heaps up what is not his own—
for how long?—
and loads himself with pledges!”

⁷ Will not your debtors suddenly arise,
and those awake who will make you tremble?
Then you will be spoil for them.

⁸ Because you have plundered many nations,
all the remnant of the peoples shall plunder you,
for the blood of man and violence to the earth,
to cities and all who dwell in them.

God taunts the wealthy bankers and loan brokers who have subverted the system to serve their greed. Foolish people and nations have piled up debt. Now it is time to pay. The debt is due. The loan is called in. But the people have no money. The nations have nothing to pay. With no system of bankruptcy, the debtors will simply rise up and takes up arms and violence against their tormentors.

So the people and the nations went into debt because of their own greed and foolishness. But those who loaned them money are just as greedy. They weigh down the debtors with impossible terms and begin to confiscate the collateral. The result is that debt destroys both those who lend and those who borrow.

Woe to the Covetous**(v. 9-11)**

⁹ “Woe to him who gets evil gain for his house,
to set his nest on high,
to be safe from the reach of harm!
¹⁰ You have devised shame for your house
by cutting off many peoples;
you have forfeited your life.
¹¹ For the stone will cry out from the wall,
and the beam from the woodwork respond.

God taunts those who have used evil means to raise their standard of living (if I may use modern parlance). There are moral and wise ways for people and nations to have income and increase. But those normally require a certain level of contentment. Evil financial gain is normally pursued by those who are consumed by covetousness. The evil gain here is through injustice, taking by force and immoral means. The fierce gaze of God is turning now more on Israel. This woe is similar in language to Habakkuk’s complaint. In a turn of irony, the perpetrators try to remodel the house, but the house itself cries out for justice. God pronounces His judgment on those whose craving for wealth and power is fulfilled by injustice, kidnapping, extortion and terrorism.

Woe to the Violent**(v. 12)**

¹² “Woe to him who builds a town with blood
and founds a city on iniquity

God now taunts those who seek to establish a town or city or territorial area by violence and crime. Israel had those who were carving areas of control within cities, taking over villages and towns using criminal and violent means to gain power, control and governance. Babylon is condemned as just a national version of this. Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon used cruelty, bloodshed, threats and intimidation to take over control of vast areas of the middle east of Habakkuk’s day.

God pronounces woe on any person, peoples or nations that do this. Western civilization is not exempt from these charges. We have the mob, political cabals and neo-tribalism (gangs) all growing in power, influence and territory. Now, we see the same tactics in brutal and YouTube visibility in the Middle East. Regardless of whether it was Israel or Babylon, God pronounces judgment on those who build their hood, their town, their state, their nation or their caliphate with blood, with violence and evil.

The Future Judgment**(v. 13-14)**

¹³ Behold, is it not from the Lord of hosts
that peoples labor merely for fire,
and nations weary themselves for nothing?
¹⁴ For the earth will be filled
with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord
as the waters cover the sea.

There is coming a day when judgment will come.

It will as a day of fire to destroy all that the wicked and the nations have sought to build and acquire. Yes, that happens when one nation overruns or destroys another in warfare and conquest. But this is ultimately talking about the fire at the end of days that God will use to consume all the consequences of sin and the curse. It is the day spoken of by Peter in **2 Peter 3:1–13**.

¹ This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, ² that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles, ³ knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. ⁴ They will say, “Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.” ⁵ For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, ⁶ and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. ⁷ But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.

⁸ But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. ⁹ The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. ¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.

¹¹ Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, ¹² waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! ¹³ But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

All that has been built as civilization, science, art, culture, territory, nation, powers, beauty, technology will one day all be destroyed. Yes, all of these things have their place in our world where we live as image bearers of God. But we must understand that God will one day reduce all of this to ash so that out of the ruins of the old, He will bring forth the greatness of the new. So our focus as Christians in the light of the coming judgment on this world is to live by faith so that we are holy and good. When will this happen? In the day when the knowledge of God’s supremacy and glory covers the earth like the waters cover the sea. That knowledge will come in the last day when new heavens and new earth will be filled with righteousness, that is, with God’s righteous people.

The Perversity of the Wicked**(v. 15-17)**

The last two woes are pronounced on the perversity of the wicked. God deals with the wicked through His sovereign rule.

Woe to the Degenerates**(v. 15-17)**

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!
¹⁶ 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!

¹⁷ 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.

Notice carefully that this is not just a pronouncement against drunkards. This is a condemnation of date rapists. No, that is nothing new. In Israel, people would get others drunk in order to lower their resistance to sexual advances. This is live porn in Israel. The Babylonians were known for having elevated this to an art form that the Romans and Greeks simply practiced as normal. For the sake of our young ones I won’t go into more detail. The powerful, the elite, the violent, the leaders have often been addicted to sexual sin and perversions. From the bar to the White House, from the place of religious worship to the place of violence and war, God condemns any and all who take advantage of their position or power to seduce others. The long history of warfare is also the long history of pillage and rape.

God will turn all of this on those who practice such. God will judge them. If you have been a victim of this kind of sin against you, God will vindicate you and will judge those who sinned against you. God has a cup of wrath that He will pour out. God will turn what they gloried in into their shame.

Woe to the Idolatrous**(v. 18-19)**

Now we come to the last taunt. God mocks their idols.

¹⁸ “What profit 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!
¹⁹ Woe to him who says to a wooden thing, Awake;
to a silent stone, Arise!
Can this teach?

Behold, it is overlaid with gold and silver,
and there is no breath at all in it.

Israel's idolatry by this time in her history was systemic and endemic. The bright spots of revival and restoration of Biblical worship had grown distant and dim. The vilest practices of idol worship had plunged the nation into darkness. Babylon was a culture and a civilization built on idolatry. They worshipped power and the gods of power. Habakkuk also shows how false religions are infused with lies, deceits and delusions.

The Present Sovereign

(v. 20)

Amidst all the cacophony and chaos, God has the final word. Submit. Be Silent.

²⁰But the Lord is in his holy temple;
let all the earth keep silence before him."

While we wait for a future judgment by God, we now have the present rule by God. He was in His holy temple in that day. HE is now in His holy temple, the church. He was, is and ever will be the sovereign King on His throne. He has ascended. He has been seated. He does sit in kingly session. Nothing now is outside of His rule. So let all the earth keep silent. Cease your words of complaint. Cease your words of rebellion. Bow the knee now to King Jesus while you may believe the gospel. Or you will join with all of the wicked who will bow one day before being cast into the eternal fire of the wrath of God.

Thinking it through...

Brothers and sisters, Israel in Habakkuk's day were unjust and greedy. God was bringing an even more wicked nation to effect God's judgment. It was a punishment in kind – greed for greed, plunder for plunder, violence for violence. While the West and America are not the national equivalent of Israel, God, throughout history deals with wicked nations in much the same way. We may well be seeing God's coming judgment on the West for all our horrific sins in the rise of the Islamic Caliphate.

Take comfort, beloved. The wicked will not last. Their schemes will fail. Their sin will be judged. God will both in history and at the end of time glorify His glorious name, vindicate His beloved people and judge the world.

How will the righteous live by faith in hardship, suffering and being sinned against? By believing the words God gave Habakkuk that are recorded for us. This is what will mark God's true people. Are you among their number?

