

# God's Judgments, God's Salvation

*Expositions of Habakkuk*

By Dennis Prutow

sermonaudio.com

**Bible Text:** Habakkuk 3:16-19

**Preached on:** Sunday, May 24, 2009

## **Westminster Evangelistic Ministries**

Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary

7418 Penn Avenue

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15208

**Website:** [www.wordfortheweek.org](http://www.wordfortheweek.org)

**Online Sermons:** [www.sermonaudio.com/rpts](http://www.sermonaudio.com/rpts)

Please turn in your Bibles to Habakkuk chapter three and the final verses of chapter three, verses 16, 17, 18 and 19, Habakkuk chapter three verses 16, 17, 18 and 19.

Hear God's Word.

I heard and my inward parts trembled,  
At the sound my lips quivered.  
Decay enters my bones,  
And in my place I tremble.  
Because I must wait quietly for the day of distress,  
For the people to arise who will invade us.  
Though the fig tree should not blossom  
And there be no fruit on the vines,  
Though the yield of the olive should fail  
And the fields produce no food,  
Though the flock should be cut off from the fold  
And there be no cattle in the stalls,  
Yet I will exult in the LORD,  
I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.  
The Lord GOD is my strength,  
And He has made my feet like hinds' feet,  
And makes me walk on my high places.<sup>1</sup>

Let's pray together.

*Father, thank you. Thank you for Habakkuk. Thank you for these words he speaks to us in this short book. And thank you, Father, that he recognizes your judgments and rejoices in your salvation. Thank you that he sees your hand brought against Judah and Jerusalem and your salvation brought to her and to others through Jesus Christ. We pray, Father, that we might stand with Habakkuk and recognize your judgments and rejoice in*

---

<sup>1</sup> Habakkuk 3:18-19.

*your salvation. Bless us to this end this morning, Father, as we look into this portion of your Word. Hear us we ask in the name of Jesus Christ the Lord, Amen.*

If you drive on South Braddock Avenue and go through the intersection of Braddock Avenue and Forbes Avenue on a Saturday at mid-day, you will see a group of demonstrators on that corner opposite Frick Park. I see some of you have seen these demonstrators. They are from a very liberal church that is on that same corner. They carry various anti-war signs. Among these signs is one that says, "War is not the answer."

I concur with this statement. War is not the answer. War is a symptom of a problem. And the problem is a sin filled world. As we begin to acknowledge this is the case and properly understand war from a biblical perspective, we will better understand God's salvation. In the end, war is the judgment hand of God against sin. And if you fail to understand this is the case, you fail to grasp the Bible. I doubt the protestors understand either the judgments of God or the salvation of God. And so my desire is that you grasp the war from this perspective. As you do, you will grasp your salvation in a deeper way.

And so the point is simply this. Recognize God's judgments; rejoice in God's salvation. This is the lesson Habakkuk has for us. This is the lesson Habakkuk learns. And this is the lesson that Habakkuk gives us in our text this morning in chapter three and in verses 16 and following. Recognize God's judgments; rejoice in God's salvation.

As we look at this text we once again need to get the context. God is judging Judah for her sin and using Babylon as the hand of his judgment. We have been over this more than once but we are going to review it once again. Look with me at chapter one and the first few verses, Habakkuk chapter one.

The oracle which Habakkuk the prophet saw.  
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.  
Why do You make me see iniquity,  
And cause me to look on wickedness?  
Yes, destruction and violence are before me;  
Strife exists and contention arises.  
Therefore the law is ignored  
And justice is never upheld.  
For the wicked surround the righteous;  
Therefore justice comes out perverted.<sup>2</sup>

Habakkuk, looking at Jerusalem and looking at Judea, sees the sin. He sees the violence. As we look out from our own perspective in this country and look at the culture and look

---

<sup>2</sup> Habakkuk 1:1-4.

at our society, we see the sin and we see the violence. And we may call out, “How Long, Oh Lord, will this persist?”

God comes to Habakkuk and says, “I am answering you.” Habakkuk chapter one verses five through seven.

Look among the nations! Observe!  
Be astonished! Wonder!  
Because I am doing something in your days—  
You would not believe if you were told.  
For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans,  
That fierce and impetuous people  
Who march throughout the earth  
To seize dwelling places which are not theirs.  
They are dreaded and feared;  
Their justice and authority originate with themselves.<sup>3</sup>

And so God says to Habakkuk, “I am going to send this other nation into Judah and Jerusalem. There will be a war which will come about. Babylon is the hand of my judgment against Judah and Jerusalem in this war. Understand that this is the case, Habakkuk.” Habakkuk is stunned. Habakkuk is astonished, as the text tells us.

Now look down at verses 12 and following.

Are You not from everlasting,  
O LORD, my God, my Holy One?  
We will not die.  
You, O LORD, have appointed them to judge;  
And You, O Rock, have established them to correct.”<sup>4</sup>

This war is taking place to extend judgment. Habakkuk recognizes this. We need to recognize this. You need to recognize this, friends. This is one of the ways that God works in the world. We rather recoil at this thought. But this is the biblical teaching.

Habakkuk complains about God’s actions. Look at verse 13.

Your eyes are too pure to approve evil,  
And You can not look on wickedness with favor.  
Why do You look with favor  
On those who deal treacherously?  
Why are You silent when the wicked swallow up  
Those more righteous than they?”<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Habakkuk 1:5-7.

<sup>4</sup> Habakkuk 1:12.

<sup>5</sup> Habakkuk 1:13.

Once again, you see Habakkuk's complaint.

I submit to you, it is quite important for you to understand God's procedure and not complain. God is using Babylon as the instrument of his justice. Babylon will get its due reward for its own injustices. The Persian Empire later comes and defeats Babylon. This is, again, a judgment of God.

I was at CMU two or three months ago at an InterVarsity Bible study. As is my custom, I asked the students, "What would you like to talk about?" And one of the students raised her hand and said, "What about war? What about this war?" I paused for a moment. I didn't go to Habakkuk. I went to Genesis. I explained to the students that God sent Israel into what is called the Promised Land after God kept Israel over 400 years in Egypt waiting for the people in that land to fill up the cup of their sin.<sup>6</sup> Then God sent Israel into that land as the hand of his judgment against the Amorites. This was and is God's procedure. He uses war as the hand of his judgment.

I don't think the students liked to hear that this is God's procedure. They are rather like those anti-war protesters who stand at Forbes and Braddock on Saturday afternoons. They don't understand the judgments of God. One of our objectives is to understand the judgments of God. It is imperative that we do so.

Now these judgments, you must also understand, are covenantal judgments. They are judgments that come as a result of the people violating the standards of God, God's covenant. Look again, if you would, at Habakkuk chapter three and verse 17.

Though the fig tree should not blossom  
And there be no fruit on the vines,  
Though the yield of the olive should fail  
And the fields produce no food,  
Though the flock should be cut off from the fold  
And there be no cattle in the stalls."<sup>7</sup>

This is the prospect, the outcome of war. This is the prospect, the outcome of judgment. The olive tree will not bear fruit. The vine will not produce her grapes and there will be no wine. The sheepfold will be empty and the cattle stall will be empty. The Babylonians will come. They will execute their scorched earth policy and the land will be left desolate. This is covenant judgment.

To validate this is the case, I would like you to turn back in your Bibles, if you would, to Deuteronomy. The word "Deuteronomy" means second law. It is the recitation of God's covenant as the people of God are at the end of their 40 years in the wilderness. They are at the verge of Jordan in the land of Moab. God gives the covenant to the people of Israel a second time. And here we find the blessings and the cursings that stand with the covenant.

---

<sup>6</sup> See Genesis 15:16.

<sup>7</sup> Habakkuk 3:17.

Look at Deuteronomy 28 now, the first few verses. Here is the positive side.

Now it shall be, if you diligently obey the LORD your God, being careful to do all His commandments which I command you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. All these blessings will come upon you and overtake you if you obey the LORD your God: Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the country. Blessed shall be the offspring of your body and the produce of your ground and the offspring of your beasts, the increase of your herd and the young of your flock.<sup>8</sup>

You see, this is just the opposite of what we have just read in Habakkuk chapter three and verse 17. Verse five.

Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out. The LORD shall cause your enemies who rise up against you to be defeated before you; they will come out against you one way and will flee before you seven ways.<sup>9</sup>

This is the blessing that is upon the people who manifest their love for God and walk in his ways. And then notice, in verse 15, the consequence of disobedience. “But it shall come about, if you do not obey the LORD your God, to observe to do all His commandments and His statutes with which I charge you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you.”<sup>10</sup>

And then drop down to verse 33. “A people whom you do not know shall eat up the produce of your ground and all your labors, and you will never be anything but oppressed and crushed continually.”<sup>11</sup> You see, this is a covenant curse. This is covenant justice and judgment. “You shall be driven mad by the sight of what you see.”<sup>12</sup> Houses and vineyards and farms will be decimated and destroyed. Verse 36. “The LORD will bring you and your king, whom you set over you, to a nation which neither you nor your fathers have known, and there you shall serve other gods, wood and stone.”<sup>13</sup> Captivity will come and surely it did.

Verse 38.

You shall bring out much seed to the field but you will gather in little, for the locust will consume it. You shall plant and cultivate vineyards, but you will neither drink of the wine nor gather the grapes, for the worm will

---

<sup>8</sup> Deuteronomy 28:1-4.

<sup>9</sup> Deuteronomy 28:5-7.

<sup>10</sup> Deuteronomy 28:15.

<sup>11</sup> Deuteronomy 28:33.

<sup>12</sup> Deuteronomy 28:34.

<sup>13</sup> Deuteronomy 28:36.

devour them. You shall have olive trees throughout your territory but you will not anoint yourself with the oil, for your olives will drop off.<sup>14</sup>

This is judgment that comes, covenant judgment; retribution for sin is the picture.

And then if you drop down to verses 49 and following, “The LORD will bring a nation against you from afar, from the end of the earth, as the eagle swoops down, a nation whose language you shall not understand.”<sup>15</sup> Hearing a foreign tongue in the land is a sign of judgment. It is a curious thing that people desire to speak in tongues and do not understand that hearing such foreign languages is a sign of judgment. Verse 50 continues, “A nation of fierce countenance who will have no respect for the old, nor show favor to the young.”<sup>16</sup> The Babylonians are the forerunners of the enemy that we face today. They have no respect for young or old, for woman or child.

Referring to Babylon, verse 51 says, “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>17</sup> You see, this is exactly what Habakkuk is speaking about.

Go back now to Habakkuk chapter three. Habakkuk understands. He understands the sin of Judah and Jerusalem. He understands the covenant and he understands the curses that come upon those who violate the standards of God, who stand up and say, Yes, we are believers. We commit ourselves to follow the living God. And yet they live contrary to the standards of the Bible, contrary to the 10 Commandments, contrary to the will of God.

And so verse 17 again,

Though the fig tree should not blossom  
And there be no fruit on the vines,  
Though the yield of the olive should fail  
And the fields produce no food,  
Though the flock should be cut off from the fold  
And there be no cattle in the stalls...”<sup>18</sup>

This is what Habakkuk sees is coming.

And as Habakkuk looks at the Horizon, he knows on one hand the sin of Israel. He remembers the demise of the Northern Kingdom. He sees how Judah and Jerusalem have followed in the steps of the Northern Kingdom. He sees Babylon on the horizon. He is in utter fear and trembling. And you can understand why this would be the case.

---

<sup>14</sup> Deuteronomy 28:38-40.

<sup>15</sup> Deuteronomy 28:49.

<sup>16</sup> Deuteronomy 28:50.

<sup>17</sup> Deuteronomy 28:51.

<sup>18</sup> Habakkuk 3:17.

Look at verse 16. “I heard,” Habakkuk says, “and my inward parts trembled.”<sup>19</sup> My guts and my intestines and my belly shook. They trembled with fear because I have heard. I complained to God about the sins of the people. And he has answered and I have heard what his answer is and I am aghast. I tremble. “At the sound my lips quivered.”<sup>20</sup> This isn’t just the quiver of a new teacher standing before a class. This isn’t the quiver of a seminary student who stands for the first time to preach. This is a deep fear of what will take place under the judgment hand of God. “Decay enters my bones.”<sup>21</sup> Habakkuk is essentially saying, I am undone. “And in my place I tremble.”<sup>22</sup> Why? “Because I must wait quietly.”<sup>23</sup> I must take my rest knowing what is coming, that the war is on the horizon. I must wait quietly “For the people to arise who will invade us.”<sup>24</sup>

To help you get a grip on Habakkuk’s fear let me give you some statistics. This is Memorial Day weekend and so we think about those who have perished in the time of war. In the Korean War 54,000 Americans perished. Now for some of us this is too distant to grasp. For others of us it is an actual memory that we can get our minds around. In Vietnam 58,000 American military perished. Have any of you been to the Vietnam Memorial in Washington and walked down that wall to examine the list of names?

Well, let’s go back a little bit further in the history of our country. In World War I 116,500 American military perished. The total number of military personnel that were killed in World War I was 5,142,631, over five million. But this doesn’t hold a candle to what took place in World War II. In World War II over 400,000 American military personnel perished. And the total military personnel that were killed in World War II from all countries was over 20,200,000. And there were civilians killed, 27,400,000 civilians. This is a staggering number. Almost 50 million people perished in World War II, 50 million people. In his day, Habakkuk is aghast at what could take place. And we, too, stand in awe of these figures from our own time.

You see, friends, when we look at the world, when you look at the world, you need to understand and I need to understand “the wages of sin is death.”<sup>25</sup> It doesn’t matter how the death occurs. The wages of sin is death. Go back to the garden. God said to Adam and Eve, You see that tree in the garden? You are not to eat of this tree, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. “For in the day that you eat it you will surely die.”<sup>26</sup>

God put Adam and Eve under obligation. He put Adam and Eve under covenant obligation. And when they ate of the tree, when they ate of the fruit that came from that tree, they died spiritually and they later died physically. Death came into the world. This

---

<sup>19</sup> Habakkuk 3:16.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Romans 6:23.

<sup>26</sup> See Genesis 2:17.

was death because of sin, death because of sin which is violation of the law of God, death which is violation of God's covenant. And when you get the biblical perspective you realize that death, no matter how it comes, is the result of sin. It is the result of the violation of God's covenant. This is exactly what Habakkuk saw. And death came upon many who were in Jerusalem and many who were in Judea as a result of God's bringing the Babylonians as the hand of his judgment against Judah and Jerusalem. This was death because of sin. It came through the means of war, but it doesn't matter how it comes. It is still the result of sin.

Now I want to back up just a moment. This doesn't mean that all war is wrong. You say, "Pastor, are you headed toward an oxymoron here?" No. What we are saying doesn't mean that all war is wrong. In the end there are times when war is necessary, paradoxically, in order to preserve peace. I think you can understand that this is the case. But this does not obviate the fact that when you draw back and begin to get the big picture, all death is the result of sin. Sin is violation of God's covenant standards. And so war, in the end, comes to us as the result of sin. We all have to understand that this is the case.

But in the midst of this turmoil and the midst of this judgment what do we find in the book of Habakkuk? We find that Habakkuk trusts in the God of heaven as his strength. Habakkuk rides the tide of judgment in the strength of God. Look again at our text, verse 19. "The Lord GOD is my strength, And He has made my feet like hinds' feet, And makes me walk on my high places."<sup>27</sup>

Habakkuk understands his situation. He is caught up in this judgment of God. But he also trusts God. He leans on the strength of God. And this is your posture. It ought to be your posture. It ought to be my posture. You see, we are all caught up in this world. We are not spectators. And when wars come, we are caught up in these wars. We are caught up in these cataclysms. We are caught up in the judgments of God. And in the midst of these judgments you have to trust the God of heaven. You have to lean on the God of heaven. You have to find your strength in the God of heaven, not rebel against him.

"The Lord GOD is my strength, And He has made my feet like hinds' feet, And makes me walk on my high places."<sup>28</sup> He makes me, Habakkuk says, like that deer which nimbly prances up the mountain side to the highest place, where that deer, that doe or buck, can survey the surrounding terrain and get a God's eye view of what is taking place. Habakkuk says, You have made me like that deer climbing up so that I can go to my high places.

In the Old Testament, the high places were places of worship. In the various communities in old Israel, the synagogues would be placed on the highest point, the highest ground in the community, just like this church building is placed on a knoll so that people in the surrounding area can see it. And it is of no small consequence as you drive around the city you can often spy out the steeples of the various churches because

---

<sup>27</sup> Habakkuk 3:19.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.



they are on very prominent terrain. This is what Habakkuk is talking about. I can go up on my high places. I can meet with my God. I can be with him. I can know, “The LORD is in his holy temple.”<sup>29</sup> Habakkuk therefore confesses, “We will not die.”<sup>30</sup> In fact, I will live. This is Habakkuk’s confession and he trusts the God of his strength.

“The Lord GOD is my strength.”<sup>31</sup> We like words like this. Those of you who have been in combat situations know very well you pray, Oh, God, give me the strength. Give me the protection. Give me your grace in this situation and bring me through. And this is what Habakkuk is sensing. He is not avoiding the war. He is not avoiding that which is taking place in Judah and Jerusalem. He is going to be carried through it. And the One who carries him through it is his Savior, his Lord. And this is the way it is with you and me.

Put it this way. We have had a pretty dramatic economic downturn in our country. You haven’t been a third party in this. You have not just been looking at it “over there” as though the folks “over there” are affected but you are not affected. No, this is not the case. You are all caught in it. We are all caught in the vortex of this downturn. It can’t be avoided. And this is how it is in the culture, in war, in every other circumstance.

And what do you have to do and what do I have to do? You have to lean on the strength of your Savior and of your God in the midst of these circumstances. Look at it this way. Death is a consequence of sin. “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”<sup>32</sup> We have all sinned in Adam. And we have all sinned independently of Adam. And what is the penalty? The penalty is death.

Praise be to God. Jesus Christ goes through death and takes the awful wrath of God on behalf of people like you and me. He does this so that you will not have to bear the eternal wrath of God. You will suffer temporal death. Each one of us will. But you will be taken through death into victory. Habakkuk makes the same confession as Job made. Job testified that he would see his Savior with his own eyes in his own flesh. He would see his Savior standing upon the earth.<sup>33</sup> And so it will be with each one of you who trusts Jesus Christ, the One who takes the awful wrath of God for sin in your place.

And so Habakkuk not only trusts God for strength, he trusts in the Savior. Look at verse 18. “Yet I will exult in the LORD, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.”<sup>34</sup> You see, in the midst of this judgment that is coming, this impending judgment, Habakkuk waits with fear and trembling and trepidation. And as he waits what does he do? He looks up to his God and he looks up to his Savior. “Yet I will exult in the LORD.”<sup>35</sup> The word “LORD” makes its way into the New Testament with reference to Christ. It is Christ who is the Lord and Habakkuk trusts in him.

---

<sup>29</sup> Habakkuk 2:20.

<sup>30</sup> Habakkuk 1:12.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Romans 3:23.

<sup>33</sup> See Job 19:25-27.

<sup>34</sup> Habakkuk 3:18.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

Look back again at verse four in chapter two. “Behold, as for the proud one, His soul is not right within him; But the righteous will live by his faith.”<sup>36</sup> Habakkuk has faith in the Savior. He confesses, “I will not die, but live to tell Jehovah’s power to save.”<sup>37</sup> He trusts in the Savior who is to come. He trusts in Jesus Christ who is to come.

And so what is the posture of Habakkuk? He recognizes God’s judgments and he rejoices in God’s salvation. He recognizes God’s judgments and he rejoices in God’s salvation.

John Murray was a prominent theologian at Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia. He wrote an article which appears in his collected writings called “God and the War.” It is an article about the Second World War. Murray says, “This war is a divine retribution for sin.”<sup>38</sup> And the reason he says this is that a huge number of people had perished as a result of the war. Murray is also very clear that although war is not always wrong, because, as he says, paradoxically, war may be necessary to bring about peace. But in the end, “it is always the consequence of sin.”<sup>39</sup> And so war isn’t the answer. Jesus Christ is the answer. Salvation in Jesus Christ is the answer. This is what you need to understand and what I need to understand. You need to understand God’s judgments and you need to rejoice in God’s salvation.

Look at Habakkuk three once again.

I heard and my inward parts trembled,  
At the sound my lips quivered.  
Decay enters my bones,  
And in my place I tremble.  
Because I must wait quietly for the day of distress,  
For the people to arise who will invade us.  
Though the fig tree should not blossom  
And there be no fruit on the vines,  
Though the yield of the olive should fail  
And the fields produce no food,  
Though the flock should be cut off from the fold  
And there be no cattle in the stalls,  
Yet I will exult in the LORD,  
I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.  
The Lord GOD is my strength,  
And He has made my feet like hinds’ feet,  
And makes me walk on my high places.<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup> Habakkuk 2:4.

<sup>37</sup> Psalm 118:10, *Book of Psalms for Singing*.

<sup>38</sup> John Murray, *Collected Writings* (Carlisle: Banner of Truth, 1976), 1:348.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 344.

<sup>40</sup> Habakkuk 3:16-19.

When you go out to the cemetery tomorrow and you decorate those graves and you put flags next to those tombstones remember Habakkuk. Recognize God's judgments and rejoice in God's salvation. Recognize God's judgments; rejoice in God's salvation.

Let's pray together.

*Father, we are struck with awe with regard to your greatness. We are feeble. We lack understanding. We have but a shallow grasp of your Word and of your ways. Forgive us that this is the case. Cause us to go back and reread this little book of Habakkuk. Help us to get a God's eye view of how you work in your world. Help us to understand our place. Help us to grasp your judgments and rejoice in your salvation. Help us to see those judgments as they come along and thereby to see more clearly, we trust, the salvation that you give us in Christ Jesus. And we will, Father, rejoice. Thank you in the good name of Jesus Christ the Lord. Amen.*