

Message #4

Habakkuk 2:2-4

One of the great chapters in the Bible that truly emphasizes the sovereignty of God is Proverbs 16. You cannot honestly read that chapter without concluding that all that happens in time and in history is permitted by God for the accomplishment of His purposes. This is true pertaining to that which is international, this is true pertaining to that which is national and this is true pertaining to that which is individual. Anything that has ever happened in our lives has come under the umbrella of the sovereignty of God. Either He did it specifically or He permitted specifically.

In fact, Proverbs 16 reveals that God actually is in sovereign control over people's lives including their thoughts, actions, speech and plans. The God of the Bible is sovereign over your life and over what path you actually took in your life. In fact, Proverbs teaches us that the steps of a man are sovereignly controlled by God. God reveals that "the mind of man plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps." So clearly everything that happens falls under the sovereign plan of a Sovereign God.

Now Habakkuk believed in the sovereignty of God. In Habakkuk 1:12-13, it is obvious that Habakkuk knew true theology. He knew about the everlasting sovereignty of God. He knew God was in control over all things in time; even over corrupt powers and He knew about the Holiness and purity of God.

But Habakkuk had been questioning God and debating with God about the fact that the evil people always seemed to have the upper hand. He could not figure out how God could actually permit unholy people to prosper and do horrible things to His people.

Now in **verse 2**, God decides to answer Habakkuk. If we are going to get answers to our questions we must 1) Take our problems to the Lord; 2) We should remain faithful and expect an answer; 3) We must have endurance to wait on the Lord; and 4) We must carefully study and analyze God's written Word.

Now as God answers Habakkuk, what he wants him to realize is this:

GOD WANTS HABAKKUK TO KNOW THAT HIS WORD REVEALS THAT HE IS SOVEREIGN AND HE WILL SEND HIS FEROCIOUS JUDGMENT AGAINST THE PROUD AND ARROGANT WHO ARE DOMINATING THE WORLD; AND IN THE MEANTIME, THE RIGHTEOUS PEOPLE WILL LIVE BY FAITH BELIEVING GOD AND HIS WORD.

This is the real heart of the book of Habakkuk and, as Dr. C. I. Scofield said, this is the "central theme of the Bible—the righteous will live by faith" (*Habakkuk 2:4, NASV*, p. 1260). This very thought is what led Martin Luther to realize he could not be saved by trusting in his works or religion because people who are righteous are saved by faith in Jesus Christ.

There are five divine responses that God gives to Habakkuk in these verses:

DIVINE RESPONSE #1 – God commands Habakkuk to write His Word. **2:2a**

Now Habakkuk has just gone to God with his complaints and the first thing God does is to get Habakkuk and us to focus on His written Word. Now why do you think God starts off this way?

The reason why God responds this way is because He is saying the first the way you will cope with what is going on is by focusing on My written Word. My Word is going to minister to My people while they are living in a world in which they do not understand things. People are to carefully study My written Word and communicate what it says and that will bring comfort to My people in a world that appears to be out of control.

God wants His inspired Word recorded in written form and He wanted Habakkuk to inscribe it on tablets. Now typically this was done by writing it and baking it on clay tablets. It is clear that the information was critical and God wanted His Word written down very carefully.

Now one question is why did God want His Word written down? So people could read it. So we could get answers to some of our questions.

DIVINE RESPONSE #2 – God wants the one who reads His Word to run and communicate it. **2:2b**

This may mean a couple of things. **First**, when any reads the Word of God, they should run to God with their questions. **Second**, when one reads the Word of God, they should run to others and tell them when they know the answers. Specifically this is true when you are reading of the pending judgment of God and the future program of God.

Now one thing we may observe in **the chronology of understanding the written Word of God, reading comes before running**. That is important because carefully and accurately understanding God's written Word comes before we start running our mouths and try to communicate God's Word.

I do a lot of reading and I read many things that people write pertaining to prophecy and I must say most people do not know what they are talking about. They do not know with precision the program of God with Israel, and they do not know with precision the program of God with the church and they are running around writing things and communicating things without accurate knowledge.

Now the moment we believe on Jesus Christ and experience salvation, we may and should testify of that great truth. We all should witness to people and say to them if you will believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, you will be saved. However, to understand the Bible to a point where we can actually teach it and communicate it accurately, especially when we get into subjects like the sovereignty of God and the eschatology of God, requires careful study, a lot of study.

This is why James said, “let not many of you become teachers, knowing we will incur a stricter judgment” (James 3:1).

J. Vernon McGee said something very wise on this point: “My friend, there are many folk today who are trying to preach and trying to teach God’s word without adequate preparation. They need to do more reading before they start running” (*Habakkuk*, p. 846).

Before we take the truth to others, we must read the truth and know the truth. I will tell you this right now—I think many of these home group Bible studies are ridiculous because you do not have someone who is leading those things who can carefully analyze what the text actually says or even know what true, sound doctrine really is. What we have at some of these studies is pooled ignorance.

I personally sat in one such study led by a college professor of physics. He had no clue as to what the text was even saying and yet the study was filled with people who thought it was great. In any field of work, you need a careful understanding of your field before you can do your job. The same is true with the Word of God—careful reading and understanding comes before running.

DIVINE RESPONSE #3 – God has appointed a time of judgment and God’s people need to wait for Him to send it. **2:3**

God wanted the truth about His coming judgment communicated to His people. He wanted them to realize that they were to wait for it; but God’s judgment is coming. We learn a great deal here about the judgment of God and how it works against God-mocking nations and politicians.

There are six realities about this judgment:

Reality #1 - God’s judgment has been appointed. **2:3a**

The Hebrew word “appointed” (moed) is one that means God has a specific set moment of time that He has established for judgment (William Gesenius, *Hebrew Lexicon*, p. 457). God’s judgment is coming on His sovereign time clock. It has been appointed in several dimensions—individually each person has an appointed moment of pending judgment; nationally every nation has an appointed moment of judgment. Judgment is appointed by God and it will come.

Reality #2 - God’s judgment is rapidly approaching. **2:3b**

God’s people may know beyond any doubt that God’s judgment is hastening toward the goal of judgment. The word “hasten” is one that refers to a runner gasping for breath as he nears the finish line. Now notice the prophetic vision of judgment hastens toward the goal.

Time is moving toward judgment. This is true for individuals, this is true for nations, and this is true for Israel.

So when you look around at a world that seems to be out of control politically, morally and spiritually, the just live by faith knowing we are rapidly approaching the judgment of God.

Reality #3 - God's judgment will not fail. **2:3c**

The word "fail" (kazab) is rare in Hebrew and it carries with it the idea that God is saying there is nothing false or deceitful about this reality—My judgment is coming (*Ibid.*, p. 389). God's people can live their lives with the absolute certain knowledge that God's judgment is on the way.

Reality #4 - God's judgment tarries and God's people need to wait. **2:3d**

I find the word "tarry" (achar) intriguing. Because what this means is that even though the judgment of God seems to be delayed or in the background, it is on the way and God's people need to wait for it (*Ibid.*, pp. 32-33). This word carries with it the idea that judgment is behind the godless behavior. It is coming.

Reality #5 - God's judgment is certain. **2:3e**

God is reinforcing that His judgment will certainly come. It will come to the United States and it will come to Israel.

Reality #6 - God's judgment will not be delayed. **2:3f**

The timing of God cannot be delayed one second. The moment he has appointed for judgment will not be a moment delayed for one second. When the appointed moment comes, His judgment will come.

DIVINE RESPONSE #4 – God will judge the proud one. **2:4a**

Judgment is on the way and it will be aimed at proud nations and proud individuals who will not turn to the Lord and His Word.

There are two ways spelled out in this verse that a nation, a church and a soul may exist before God. 1) It may exist in a state of puffed up pride that is not right with God; 2) It may exist in a humble justified state of faith that is right with God.

Now I didn't do too well at geometry. It was my downfall in math. However, I do remember one of the principles we learned was that the shortest distance between two points is a straight line. There are certain undeniable principles that are like that in the Word of God and one of those principles is that **a proud person is not and cannot ever be right with God**. It is impossible.

Proud people are puffed up and filled with themselves. They are proud and live their lives their own way, which of course, is contrary to God. Proud people rely on self, power, position, success and accomplishment. But a righteous person relies on the Lord.

Now according to Proverbs 14:12 “There is a way which seems right to a man but its end is the way of death.”

Those who are proud are pleased with themselves and their accomplishments and their success and they just figure their way of thinking about God is just fine. They don't realize that they are heading to eternal death and condemnation.

There is no possible way that a proud and arrogant person can ever be right with God. His soul is not right with God. No proud person is right in their soul because when any person sees the truth about their own spiritual condition, there is nothing in ourselves for which we may be proud. If you are a proud and arrogant person, you need to know you are heading to guaranteed judgment.

Years ago, there was a proud man who boasted that he was right with God because he tried to live up to the standards of the Sermon on the Mount. One wise person asked, “Well how is that going?” The man proudly said, “Well it is going great.” So the wise man said, “Do you mind if I ask you a couple of questions.” The man said, “No.” “Have you ever been angry with a brother? Have you ever looked on a woman to lust after her? Have you ever not followed through on what you promised to do?” He said, “Well I may have not always done everything perfect.” The wise man said, “Well according to Matt. 5:19 you cannot miss the mark one time or else you aren't good enough.” Then he said, “If I were you, I would try to find another way to be right with God, because your way isn't working.”

DIVINE RESPONSE #5 – God wants people to know that the just live by faith. **2:4b**

This is the key verse of Habakkuk and it is a key verse quoted in the book of Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews and it is the theme of Scripture. People right with God in any dispensation realize it is by humble faith, not by proud reliance on themselves, their works or their achievements or their politicians. People right with God live by faith that God will do what He says concerning salvation and judgment.

This has application to being saved from sin and this has application to having sanity in a sinful world.

In the book of Romans, Paul uses this very verse to show that we are justified by faith in Jesus Christ.

In the book of Galatians, Paul uses this very verse to show that we are not justified by works of the law or by our works.

In the book of Hebrews, the writer uses it to show that God's people did not quit under pressure but by faith did some amazing things for God, many of which are recorded in Hebrews 11.

Here in Habakkuk, God uses this statement to show how those right with Him live their lives in a world filled with evil things—the just live by faith.

Keep in mind that when God said this to Habakkuk, both the people of God and the Babylonians did not trust in God and neither were living for God. Both were unfaithful groups. They continued to trust in themselves.

But one right with God does not operate that way. As the righteous person lives in an evil world dominated by arrogant and evil people, who do not care about God or His Word, the just person will live his life by faith. In other words, the righteous person will live his or her life believing that God is in sovereign control and that He will send His judgment against the arrogant God-mockers.

A righteous person will govern his or her life by the Word of God regardless of what the world is doing. The righteous person will not be a proud person, but will humbly submit himself to God and His Word.

As one commentator said, the righteous person will live by a philosophy of faith that sparkles like a diamond in a pile of soot.