

You're Not Listening, Lord

Expectations of Habakkuk

By Dennis Prutow

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Bible Text: Habakkuk 1:1-11

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Westminster Evangelistic Ministries

Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary

7418 Penn Avenue

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15208

Website: www.wordfortheweek.org

Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/rptsprof

Please turn in your Bibles to Habakkuk chapter one and verses one through 11. Hear God's Word.

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.

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. Their horses are swifter than leopards And keener than wolves in the evening. Their horsemen come galloping, Their horsemen come from afar; They fly like an eagle swooping down to devour. All of them come for violence. Their horde of faces moves forward. They collect captives like sand. They mock at kings And rulers are a laughing matter to them. They laugh at every fortress And heap up rubble to capture it. Then they will sweep through like the wind and pass on. But they will be held guilty, They whose strength is their god.¹

Let's pray together.

Father, we again thank you for your Word. We thank you for both the Old Testament and the New Testament. We thank you that we can learn from the Old Testament Church because you deal with us as you dealt with that Old Testament Church. And as we have occasion this morning, Father, to begin to look into this short prophecy, this vision of

¹ Habakkuk 1:1-11.

Habakkuk, we pray that you might enlighten our eyes and give us grace to understand your Word. We pray that we might have it applied to our hearts that we might better live for you, that we might understand our station in this life and have a divine perspective on the landscape of this nation as there are difficulties that face us. Give us grace and hope, therefore, Father, and bless us as we do now look into your Word. We pray in the good name of Jesus Christ the Lord. Amen.

The text is Habakkuk chapter one verses one through 11.

March madness is here. Have you filled out any brackets yet? We have brackets on our coffee table that we have been filling out. When you look at those brackets on those sheets of paper you see they are two dimensional. And yet you see opposing teams that are coming together in these brackets. But yet they are two dimensional.

When you look at the landscape of our nation today there are also forces at work and sometimes opposing forces. A couple of them are the economy on one hand and spiritual decline on the other hand. And we can look at these forces in a two dimensional way.

As Christians we tend to do this. We look at the forces that are at work in our nation, the economy on one hand and spiritual decline on the other in a two dimensional way just like we look at the basketball brackets. We want to know who is going to win out. And we hope that we will win out as the struggle ensues.

But I submit to you that we need to get up off of the printed page. We need to begin to have some perspective that comes from above the printed page. We need to have some divine perspective on what is taking place in the landscape of our culture. And I have mentioned specifically the economy and spiritual decline.

And, of course, in Habakkuk's day, Habakkuk was faced with the same kind of situation. There was tremendous spiritual decay and there were economic difficulties. Both of these things were very big in the minds of the people.

Habakkuk needed some divine perspective and God is giving Habakkuk this divine perspective. You see, Habakkuk was complaining a little bit. And I suppose you may be complaining a little bit about the economic situation and the cultural situation. So there are some similarities between us and Habakkuk here. You need some divine perspective and I need some divine perspective. God is going to give Habakkuk some divine perspective with regard to his complaint. He is impatient. And God in the end is saying to Habakkuk and he is saying to you and to me, "Yes, evil will be judged in my time and in my way. You need to pray and you need to be patient."

And this is the message we have this morning. Pray and be patient; God will judge evil in his way at his time. And we need to understand this is the case. This gives us, I think, a little divine perspective on our situation.

Judah, you see, was a very wicked people. And God seems to be silent with regard to this wickedness. Look, for example, at verse four in Habakkuk one. “Therefore the law is ignored.”² This is the New American Standard Version. The English Standard Version says, “paralyzed.” “And justice is never upheld. For the wicked surround the righteous; Therefore justice comes out perverted.”³

The people weren’t following the law; they ignored the law. They ignored the law of the land and they ignored the law of God. It seemed as though the law was paralyzed, that it could do nothing. And, of course, it was paralyzed because of the hearts of the people in Judah.

And good old USA is not unlike ancient Judah. All we have to do is look around just a little bit. And it is rather astounding. A lot of people just don’t pay their taxes. This is one thing. But when the chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, who is in charge of levying taxes, doesn’t pay his taxes, there is something amiss. And when the Secretary of Treasury, who hasn’t paid his taxes in the past and hasn’t paid them because... well, the statute of limitation has expired so he doesn’t have to go back and pick them up, something is amiss. And then when he gets before the American public and says, “I am going to come down hard on people who haven’t their taxes,” there is certainly something amiss. We recognize that this is the case.

Judah was not unlike this. The law was ignored. Not only the law of the land, but the law of God was ignored. Therefore justice wasn’t upheld. And it seemed like the wicked surrounded the righteous. And we might have that sense of things sometimes.

Look at verse 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.⁴

“Are you silent, Lord? Don’t you see what is going on. The wicked are having their way and violence exists is throughout the land?”

In certain parts of our own city, the greater Pittsburgh area, violent acts are perpetrated every day. “Do you not see, Lord? Do you not hear? Do you remain silent in the face of all of this?” Habakkuk was asking the same question. “How long, O LORD.”⁵

One of the interesting things about this little prophecy of Habakkuk is that it is different than some of the other prophets. Habakkuk is crying out in a personal way to God. Habakkuk is not so much indicting the culture and indicting the society, but he is calling out in a personal way to God. And it seems that Habakkuk is a little impatient with the

² Habakkuk 1:4.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Habakkuk 1:1-2.

⁵ Habakkuk 1:2.

situation as he sees it unfolding around him. We get a glimpse of this in verse three. “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.”⁶

The commentators recognize this impatience. They call these words Habakkuk’s first complaint. He has some other things to complain about too. But this is his first complaint. It resonates with you and me, does it not? I think about in this economic situation which has been brought about in large measure, as you know, by mortgages that were made to people who couldn’t pay. And now the government has said, “Ok, even if people lied on their applications and signed their applications saying ‘Everything I have said on the application is absolutely true,’” yes, the government has come along and said, “We will help these people even though they lied in order to get their loans.” Something is amiss when people perjure themselves in this way and they receive assistance anyway. You know this and I know this. And so we could complain just like Habakkuk. “Why do You make me see iniquity, And cause me to look on wickedness?”⁷

You see, it is not just wickedness in the common every day life with your neighbor, but it is wickedness in the highest places of government. Why do you cause me to look on wickedness? “Yes, destruction and violence are before me; Strife exists and contention arises.”⁸ You hear all this talk about bipartisanship. We laugh. Contention exists.

In Habakkuk’s day, while all of this is going on in Judah and Habakkuk is complaining, the Babylonian empire is beginning to rise from the dust and to become great. And if you think about a map of the Middle East with the Mediterranean to the west and modern Iraq to the east, ancient Babylon being in this same area, here comes Nabopolassar the father of Nebuchadnezzar and he conquers the city of Babylon. Then he goes north a little ways and he crushes the Assyrian army in Nineveh. Then he begins to chase the Assyrian army up the Euphrates Valley and across the Fertile Crescent. The Assyrian army takes refuge in a city called Carchemish.

At this point, the Egyptian army comes up from the south thinking, “We are going to help the Assyrians.” But the Babylonian hordes are coming. And at this fortress at Carchemish the Babylonians crush the Assyrian army and they also crush the Egyptian army. The Egyptian army flees back south into Egypt and the Assyrian empire is no more. Thus it is that Babylon comes into its own. And now Babylon can come south right into Jerusalem. And Nebuchadnezzar does so. He takes captives and he takes Daniel back to Babylon. It is 605 BC. All this is on the horizon and beginning to take place as Habakkuk utters this complaint.

One of the things that is happening in our world today is the rise of Islam. It is one of the fastest growing religions in the world. Almost 20% of the world’s population is Muslim. While we are aborting babies by the millions. You should realize the population in Europe is barely holding its own. At the same time, the Muslim world is propagating

⁶ Habakkuk 1:3.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

itself. Islam is on the move. Some sources say that in Europe the Muslim population may double by 2015. And, of course, you know that there are radicals involved with this religion. And they are very wicked people these radicals. So perhaps there is some similarity between Habakkuk and our time along this line.

Well, back to Habakkuk now. Habakkuk does note that the Babylonians are very wicked. Look with me at verses seven and following in Habakkuk one. “They are dreaded and feared,”⁹ these Babylonians. “Their justice and authority originate with themselves.”¹⁰ They are a law to themselves and they pride themselves in this. It is like this, “My way or the highway. You get out of my way.” And the Babylonians had the muscle to back up their words. “Their horses are swifter than leopards And keener than wolves in the evening. Their horsemen come galloping, Their horsemen come from afar; They fly like an eagle swooping down to devour.”¹¹

Here come the Babylonian hordes, the armies. And in modern warfare you can think of the armored vehicles coming, coming, coming, coming, coming so that in the dust you couldn’t see the end of them. Their very presence evokes great fear because of what they have already done. They decimated the Assyrians. They sent the Egyptians fleeing. And now they are coming against Judah and Jerusalem.

“All of them come for violence. Their horde of faces moves forward. They collect captives like sand.”¹²

They throw out the dragnet and they pull in their captives. They haul them away to another nations. This was the tactic of the Babylonians. They would deport massive numbers of people from one area to another to demoralize populations so that they would not rise up against them.

“They mock at kings And rulers are a laughing matter to them.”¹³ “You think you are going to stand up against us? Come out and give it a try.” This was the manner of their approach to the rulers of other nations. “They laugh at every fortress And heap up rubble to capture it.”¹⁴ Do you think Jerusalem is going to stand? They laugh. They heap up their battering rams and their inclines and go against the city. It is of no consequence to them. This is what the text is telling us. “Then they will sweep through like the wind and pass on.”¹⁵ And then there is a note, just a short note at this point in Habakkuk. “But they will be held guilty, They whose strength is their god.”¹⁶ God is up to something. God is up to something big.

⁹ Habakkuk 1:7.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Habakkuk 1:8.

¹² Habakkuk 1:9.

¹³ Habakkuk 1:10.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Habakkuk 1:11.

¹⁶ Ibid.

As the Babylonians were very wicked in their day, let's go back to radical Islam. Radical Islam is very wicked. You may remember the name Masab Abu al-Zarqawi. Do you remember this name? He was killed in Iraq in a bombing raid. He was a wicked man, without compunction, cutting off the heads of innocent people and laughing about it, making videos about it, and disbursing the videos. This was wickedness on display. And, of course, most of us remember Saddam Hussein. He was equally wicked. When mass graves were exhumed in Iraq, there were pictures taken of mothers clutching their infants as they were killed and then thrown into these graves. These were not pretty pictures, but they record a gruesome reality.

And astonishingly, astonishingly God says to Habakkuk, "You have been complaining about the evil and the violence and the wickedness of Judah. I am going to send the wicked Babylonians against Judah.

Verse five.

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.¹⁷

God says, "These Babylonians that have just come into power, I have raised them up. And I have raised them up for this purpose, Habakkuk, to send them as my hand of judgment against the wickedness about which you are complaining. I have raised them up for this purpose."

You can imagine Habakkuk staggering back at the thought of this, that this was God's plan, that this was God's purpose. And this is why the text says, "Look among the nations! Observe! Be astonished! Wonder! Because I am doing something in your days— You would not believe if you were told."¹⁸

And it is a staggering thought. Habakkuk comes back later—we will be looking at this— Habakkuk comes back later and says, "Lord, why in the world are you sending a more wicked people against Judah, to judge Judah, a people which is much more wicked?"¹⁹ This is Habakkuk's second complaint. Beware of that for which you you ask.

And so we too need to take heed. You see, this is where we come to the lesson for us today. We need to take heed. We need to be patient. We need to pray. You need to be patient. I need to be patient. I need to pray. You need to pray. God will judge evil. He is not blind. He will judge evil in his time and in his way.

¹⁷ Habakkuk 1:5-6.

¹⁸ Habakkuk 1:5.

¹⁹ See Habakkuk 1:13.

When we look at the rise of Islam in the world today, we see a very wicked movement. Islam is not at all interested in Christianity. Islam would like to wipe Christianity off the face of the earth. Muslims are all part of a movement. They represent a movement that is opposed to Christ, opposed to the exalted Jesus Christ who died on a cross to pay the penalty for the sins of people like them. And They are opposed to the Christ who rose again from the grave and ascended on high and sits as king of kings and Lord of lords. I need to remember and you need to remember that God will judge evil. He is not blind. He will judge evil in his time and in his way. And this is what Habakkuk needs to understand. He needs to be patient. He needs to pray.

You see, God answers Habakkuk's question, "How long?" And God answers this question for you and me. Earlier we sang Psalm 13. Please go back to Psalm 13 and look at it in your Bibles. "How long, O LORD? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me?"²⁰ Here David cries out. It seems as though God does not see his difficulties. But then at the end of the psalm, we read: "But I have trusted in Your lovingkindness; My heart shall rejoice in Your salvation. I will sing to the LORD, Because He has dealt bountifully with me."²¹ Even in the midst of economic and spiritual turmoil David makes the confession, "I will trust you. I do have a complaint, but I have to step back and say, 'I trust you, Lord.'" I need to pray. You need to pray. I need to be patient. You need to be patient. God will judge in his time and in his way.

Look at our New Testament Scripture reading in Revelation, chapter six. Verse nine says, "When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained."²² The book of Revelation is a vision. You may remember that I have explained this. Visions are pictures of reality, not the reality itself. And so this is a picture of people who have a testimony for Jesus Christ who are covered by the blood of Christ. These are the souls under the altar. They are people like you and me.

"And they cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?'"²³ How long will it be before judgment comes? And verse 11 says, "And there was given to each of them a white robe; and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, would be completed also."²⁴ In other words, "Be patient. Take your rest until all the elect have been brought in. Then judgment will come. Then God will send his Son Jesus Christ into the world for a second time and the judgment will come. But be patient. Take your rest. Pray. God will judge in his time and in his way." This is the lesson which is before us this morning.

²⁰ Psalm 13:1.

²¹ Psalm 13:5-6.

²² Revelation 6:9.

²³ Revelation 6:10.

²⁴ Revelation 6:11.

In 1857 there was a very great economic downturn in this country. In that year in New York City 30,000 people were unemployed. This was quite a while ago so the population wasn't nearly what it is today. Thirty thousand were unemployed.

A man by the name of Jeremy Lamphier, who was a business man in New York said, "This is an opportunity to pray." And so he decided on the first of July of that same year to have a prayer meeting. Only a couple of men came, but they prayed. But this prayer meeting grew. And tens of thousands of people came to Christ as a result of this prayer meeting in the midst of that particular economic downturn.

As an article about this suggests, perhaps the economic situation in our country today is an opportunity to pray, to be patient and to pray, to understand that God will judge evil and wickedness in his time and in his way. Perhaps today is the day to pray, to be patient, and not to complain like Habakkuk did. Perhaps it is time, not to complain as we are too often prone to complain, but... Maybe it is a time, friends, to be patient and to pray and to recognize God will judge in his way and his time.

And so as we look together at the landscape of our land and this economic situation and, yes, spiritual difficulty that is in the land, spiritual decline, we can, you can, be like Habakkuk and complain. But Habakkuk learns from God as he wrestles through his situation. He learns to pray and to be patient and to understand that God will judge evil in his time and in his way.

So this is my encouragement for you this morning. Be patient. Pray. And have divine perspective on our land and our world. God will take care of evil. Our place is to be patient and to pray. God will judge evil in his time and in his way. Be patient and pray; God will judge evil in his way at his time.

Let's pray together now.

Lord, thanks for this little book of Habakkuk and the difficult words that come through the prophet. We often find ourselves in his shoes and so as we look at this Words may we learn from him and may we have perspective on our world and on our land? Yes, we do complain, Father. Forgive us where we do so and do you an injustice and do others an injustice. Help us to have a divine perspective on things, to get up off the printed page and to be able to look at what you are up to and give you thanks for this. And at this time may it be that we will be patient and pray and understand that you will judge evil in your time and in your way.

Thank you for this perspective, Father, and grant us your grace in understanding it and living by it we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.