

Kings and Prophets 15-12-10

This is Thursday, the 10th of December, 2015. We continue our study of Kings and Prophets. We're looking at the book of Habakkuk, the prophet Habakkuk ministered during the closing days of the Kingdom of Judah.

And those circumstances seem in many ways to be very much like our own, where a formerly righteous people that had been deeply influenced by the teaching of the Word of God and had been something of a beacon and a lighthouse for the Word of God and the glory of God have declined into apostasy, into self-interest, into those distractions and options that have brought them in line for judgment. They have had periodic episodes of return and recovery, but they have not been sufficient to reverse the momentum. And much as we've seen in the career of the individual kings, such as Hezekiah, the kingdom itself is going to follow much the same pattern, a sentence of judgment, a superficial repentance, but ultimately the judgment comes because it is the same sort of change of mind that Jesus illustrated in the parable of the soils, where a seed falls in a shallow ground and springs up, but it has no durability.

And so Habakkuk has a dialogue with God that is set in poetic form, and that's what we began looking at last time and will continue tonight. Let's take a moment to go to the Lord in prayer and we'll resume our study. Father, we thank You for this opportunity to gather and spend time together in fellowship around the study of Your Word.

We pray that God the Holy Spirit will teach us and take these timeless truths as they are found here and minister them to each heart in a way that will be meaningful and helpful and encouraging to us in the days ahead so that we can live in a way that is pleasing in Your sight, that reflects Your glory and accomplishes Your purpose. We pray these things in Jesus' name, Amen. Habakkuk, you remember what his name means? It means to hug.

It's a hug. You look around and see everything going into the handbasket on its way to the hot place, and as a believer you say, Lord, Lord, what happened to the good old days? How should we then function as we seem to be so in line as a nation for judgment? And God sends us a hug. He sends us the message of Habakkuk.

It means to embrace, to express affection and comfort with this meaningful message. It's a beautiful gesture. And as I mentioned last time, it is very elegant.

It's elegantly written. It's a classy piece of Hebrew prose and poetry. It is to the Hebrew Bible what Shakespeare is to English literature.

It's just very beautiful to look upon in the original. And we lose a lot in terms of appreciation for that in translation. But thankfully, we don't lose the message in translation.

I will digress just momentarily to make a point, which if I've made it before, I haven't made it lately. Did you ever think about what the Word of God actually is? What is it actually? You have

in your hands or on your screen and hopefully hidden away in your heart verses, chapters, books of the Bible in English. King James, New King James, New American Standard, NIV, whatever they are.

And they differ. No two English translations are the same. Some of them are wildly different.

Some of them vary somewhat. Some of them are very close. King James and New King James, pretty close.

But that's not obviously what they used before the 1600s. English Bible translations didn't begin until just a few hundred years ago. And before that, people spoke different languages.

We say, well, but it's the original Hebrew and it's the original Greek. And we work very hard to recover the original text. We can't get at the manuscripts.

Most of our copies are many generations after the autograph. And we say, well, but something could be amiss. It's been changed.

A scribe made a mistake. There's been a loss or an alteration or an addition. Bible scholars spend their lives trying to sort these out.

And it's a wonderful endeavor and well worth doing. But the Word of God is not in the words of the text per se. What if you've got a French Bible? What if you've got the Reina Valera Spanish translation? What if you've got Latin? What if you've got the Vulgate? What if you've got the Septuagint in Greek for the Old Testament? There's just all different languages.

So the text and its pristine quality can't be the issue or the only way to access the truth of God would be to learn Hebrew, learn Greek, and get back to an exact autograph. So the words on the page are not the Word of God. It is the ideas.

It is the truth. It is the thought expressed. I can express that truth in English.

Dr. Eddie can express it in Indonesian. A Spanish pastor can express it in Spanish. Anybody in any language can express the truth.

And that is God's Word for people in that language. But don't get hung up on the words. In the same way that we can't really access the Hebrew elegant wording of Habakkuk directly to any great extent, that doesn't mean that we've suffered an irretrievable loss.

When the Bible talks about inspiration, all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and that's been pushed. And in seminary, they talk about what's the difference between inerrancy and infallibility, and one thing and another. Just remember, if you garble the words of your memory verse a little bit, but the meaning is there, it's okay.

John 1.12, he came unto his own, but his own received him not, but as many as received him, to them gave he authority to become the sons of God, to them gave he power to become the sons

of God. What is the power to become the son of God? It's the right, the authority, the ability, whatever it is. And it translates into meaning.

It is the meaning that counts. And if you're going to express meaning accurately, you want to be precise in the use of your terms. If you want to be precise, you want to be accurate in the use of your terms.

There's actually a difference between precision and accuracy. Those of you that have any kind of engineering training know this. But you get my meaning, right? So just remember this as we go through the book of Habakkuk.

The word of God is truth. Thy word is truth. And it's the truth that counts.

It's understanding the concepts, the ideas that count. The idea here is set in the historical context of decline and eventual destruction of the Southern Kingdom. The beautiful Shekinah glory temple of Solomon is going to be destroyed, raised, ruined, never to be seen again.

It's gone. That temple is never coming back. People that saw the replacement cried because it was so short.

You know, all have sinned and come short of the glory. Well, that's kind of what they were thinking about the people that built the second temple. Herod worked to refurbish it.

It never achieved the grandeur of Solomon's temple. Well, does that mean you can't worship God anymore? No. It is the meaning of the temple, not the precise form and appearance of the temple that counts.

Do you think Simeon and Anna had any less an experience of relationship with God because they went to Herod's temple instead of Solomon's temple? They look for a city whose founder and builder is God. So we don't want to get while we strive for accurate recital, accurate memory, I'm as big a fiend as anybody for language and getting the words right. But keep in mind that is balanced by the truth that the Word of God is the ideas, the propositional truths, and however you manage to express those.

That's why you don't have to immediately grab garlic and silver crosses and stuff if you find a paraphrase or have to use something besides the New King James. What we're looking for is accurate expression of the truth. So when we come to Habakkuk, we saw that this is basically a three-part book expressed in its three chapters.

And in this we see it as part of a set of three, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah. We're focusing for the moment on Habakkuk. Nahum is a very interesting means by which God communicates to his people by prophesying against Nineveh.

And Zephaniah we will come to shortly. We're looking at Habakkuk. And so in chapter 1 we saw last time that Habakkuk has a question.

And it is, O Lord, why do you tolerate this degeneration, this apostasy, this departure and evil that permeates the place of your dwelling, the place of your people? O Lord, how long shall I cry and you will not hear? There's violence you don't deliver. Why do you show me iniquity and cause me to see trouble? Plundering and violence are before me. Strife and contention arise.

That's the theme. We looked at this in some detail last time. And what's wonderful about this is not only does it apply now to our historical circumstance as it has to many people in the past.

You think about believers in France just before the guillotines went up. There's many, many places in history, even our own American history in the past, where there's been great corruption and great disintegration of values and Christian faith. It has ever been thus.

And really not only does it reflect what we see now, but why are we still here in this human life? Lord, why do I have to stay here as a believer, ready to go to glory, ready to move on in the forward progress of God's plan and purpose? Why do you leave me here to look on iniquity, to see and experience violence, and to suffer the plundering and strife and contention and the injustices? The law is powerless. There's crime. We're, you know, it's the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.

Why do you leave us here embroiled in this? And, of course, that's the world. We also have the flesh. We struggle against our own fallen nature and our perversity and our just intransigent, inherent sinfulness.

And then, of course, there is the active opposition and prosecution of the devil, the world, the flesh, and the devil. It's a three-dimensional battlefield. We're attacked from within and without.

We've got, you know, traitorous nature in ourselves. We've got attackers on the outside, both of our fellow human beings and the unseen principalities and powers and rulers of darkness. So why does God let this seemingly intolerable situation go on? Is he powerless to change it? Is he busy elsewhere? What's up? This is Habakkuk's question.

So isn't this a great place to see a direct witness God's first-person response to such a question? So God speaks, beginning in verse 5, Look among the nations and watch, and be utterly astounded. Now, when he says, look among the nations, the goyim, that's everybody but Israel, right? That's the non-people of God. And he says, look, which do you want to be? My people or not my people? Remember the children of Isaiah, Lo-Ami, Lo-Ruhamah, Lo-Ami, not my people.

Is that what you want to be? Is that the choice? Then, of course, you have Maher, Shalal, Hash, Baz, hurry the booty, hasten the spoil. All of that tends to pertain. You remember the situation in Isaiah's day.

So, look among those who are not my people. Watch, be amazed, be astounded. And remember, it's not really the goyim at all, is it? Who is it that you look among? How does Paul quote this verse? You remember? And we looked in the New Testament because it's quoted.

How does Paul translate this out of the Hebrew? Look among the transgressors. So, it's a double-edged sword here. You can look at all those who are not God's people, and you can see that God is accomplishing a work.

He says to Pharaoh, for this reason I have lifted you up, that I can show my glory. All will know that God is the Lord. But here, Paul understands the secondary reflection here and quotes it that way in the New Testament.

And that is, look at the transgressors. Watch what is going to happen to them. And this is a Romans 1, Romans 2 type of thing.

You look at those who suppress the truth in unrighteousness and who exchange the glory of God for vain things and who are turned over to and become enslaved to the things that they choose in lieu of the truth of God. What may be known of God is manifest to them. It's visible in creation.

God's put eternity in their hearts, but they suppress it. And God turns them over. And you say, ah, see those goyim, those nations, they get their just desserts.

They're worshiping four-footed things and images and doing what ought not to be done and so on. Romans chapter 1, last half. Then in chapter 2, he says, and you, O man, you who are the people of God, you who ought to know better, are doing the same thing.

The same truths apply in the same way that the judgments God promised on the Canaanites, the plagues that he was going to bring upon them would fall on Israel. If Israel started acting like them, you act like the Canaanites. I will treat you like the Canaanites.

So all of that reaches this intersection point here in verse 5. Look among the nations, i.e., look among the transgressors. And by the way, look among the transgressors in and among God's people. Be astounded, for I will work a work in your days, which you would not believe, though it were told you.

You're going to have to see it to believe it, because somebody just telling you about it, you'll say, that can't be right. That can't be true. Now, if, in fact, there's, there was a guy on one of the British comedies, and he has, his little catchphrase is, unbelievable, unbelievable.

Well, that's what applies here. It's unbelievable. It's, you know, that's what the word incredible really means.

What is something that's credible? He's a credible witness. He's a believable witness. If you say, wow, that's incredible.

What you're saying is, I don't, I, that's, that's not possible to, to credit, to be believed. I will work a work, which you would not believe, even if it were told to you. For indeed, I am raising up the Chaldeans.

And in the space of time of Habakkuk's life, the Chaldeans, who are just little pipsqueak, upstart rebels, up to the north and east, away and beyond. No, no, no, Lord, it's the Assyrians. Don't you mean the Assyrians, the great mighty scourge that you used to take out the northern kingdom? Won't they be coming back to mop up down here in the south? God says, you're not going to believe it.

It's not going to be the Assyrians. It's going to be the Chaldeans. Much as decades ago, people would have said it's the red scourge.

It's the commies. It's the USSR. It's, it's the dominoes.

Look what's happening in Vietnam and Cambodia and Korea and China. It's the Chai comms. They'll be coming up for the soft underbelly.

They're going to come into Mexico and come across the Rio Grande. Remember that? Oh, it's, it's the commies. It's Senator McCarthy, the red scare, the plague, the blacklist.

Communism was all the, all the threat. Now, somebody had come to Habakkuk back in the 50s and said, you know what? It's not going to be the commies at all. You know, the people out there in the sand with the towels and the robes and the camels and the, you know, all of those impolite things that people say.

That's who you got to worry about. You're going to have to worry about the Muslims. You're going to have to worry about, uh, not a different political philosophy, but a false religion and the extreme violence that some of them will embrace.

Not all, but some. And it is a religion that lends itself to misuse. Some religions don't really lend themselves to misuse.

I haven't been sitting in the airport, uh, back in the 70s, wondering if a, if a, uh, Harry Krishna was going to take my head off or, you know, blow himself up in the middle of a crowded, you remember the orange suits and the bald heads and the, you remember that? Who are those people? Yeah. I never got nervous or I sat next to a whole group of them one time waiting on a plane. Yeah, it was a midshipman sitting there in uniform, all these orange robes, bald heads, tambourines, and I don't know what all they had literature.

They were talking to me. I wasn't worried that one of them had a concealed bomb and was going to send us all to kingdom come. Non-threatening.

You don't hear about, um, Buddhist extremists. We, here's a Buddhist extremist. You know, our threat, Buddhist extremism, you know, those Confucians, you never know what they're going to do.

Look at what they do to their women. Look at what those, look at the way the Confucians treat their families. Look at the suppression and the limitation and the denial of education of those

Confucianists.

Name any other religion that is as noted ever since its founding for violence, for oppression, for militant takeover-itis, that has dedicated itself from the beginning to the proposition, not that all men are created equal, but that all men must be subjugated under a caliphate. That's, that's inherent in the religion. I'm sorry, but I am here to tell you that Islam is to religion, what communism is to political ideology.

It exists to take over the world. We figured that out with communism. Haven't figured it out with Islam till yet.

And the very same people that will go to the mat and throw themselves in front of a car for a woman's reproductive rights, quote unquote, will also throw themselves on the ground in front of a car to protect people who put their women in bags and don't let them get a job or an education. I can't figure that out. There's some weird disconnect.

Well, I told you before, in the post-modern world is also post-rational. It's, you know, reason, the identification and elimination of fallacy from your position isn't a project anymore. I invite you, just do the short form, pull up a page on classic fallacies, fallacy of division, fallacy of composition, fallacy of appeal to authority, post hoc fallacy, just the main ones.

Just pull up the most popular 10 or 12. Read them carefully. Familiarize yourself with them.

This is like the little silhouette cards we used to have for Russian tanks and Russian aircraft and Russian howitzers and things. We had a little deck of cards. I've still got it somewhere.

And you flip through the cards and you say, ah, T-72, you know, this is a Sikorsky, this is this, this is that, this is the other, friend and foe, you know, identification, who's a friend and who's the enemy. Well, familiarize yourself if you don't already know, and I know some of you do. Familiarize yourself, just take a half dozen of the fallacies, learn them, and then start listening to the news.

Listen to what people say in interviews. Listen to what talking heads say on the radio and on commentary talk shows. Listen to sportscasters.

You can't even get truth out of guys making comments on football games anymore. It's fallacy after fallacy after fallacy, because people are no longer interested in ascertaining the truth by reason. Well, Habakkuk is doing a classic thing here by asking the source of truth for the truth.

And God replies with the answer. What is the answer? A. Watch those who are transgressing. Watch those who are not doing what they should.

Now, this is the answer. Why is there evil in the world? It is there to be watched. Angels watch.

We as believers watch. When you see evil in the world, watch it. Observe it.

Learn it. Know it. Because God is going to make a distinction.

You may remember a little thing called the sheep and goats judgment. Does God know the difference between a sheep and a goat? More importantly, do we know the difference between a sheep and a goat? Paul says, I pray that you will learn to differentiate, to distinguish the better things, things that accompany salvation. We are convinced of better things.

What's good? What's better? What's best? All things are lawful. Not all things are edifying. Can you distinguish? Can you make a determination? Can you apply truth to circumstance and draw conclusions? Which there's a word for this.

It's called learning. It's kind of a lost art in our education system. But we used to learn.

I'm so grateful to have grown up back when in the education system you learned. It wasn't indoctrination. It wasn't brainwash.

It wasn't political spin everywhere in everything. We were trained in thinking and in using information to solve problems and arrive at conclusions. I thank God for that because you don't get that much anymore.

You have to pretty much teach yourself. It isn't taught. God says, look, watch, observe.

I am going to do something. So principle number one, for answers to questions, you have to look. Look where God says to look.

Secondly, realize that the answer is coming from God. The answer is not in politics. It's not in religion.

It's not in reform. It's not in a call to arms. It's not in a change of policy.

It's not in better laws, different laws, suspending laws. The answer is with God. There's evil in the world.

It's not going to be solved with policy change, with legislation. It will be solved as you watch God do surprising things. God says to Habakkuk, I will raise up the Chaldeans.

These are the Babylonians. This is going to be Nebuchadnezzar, a bitter and hasty nation, which marches through the breadth of the earth to possess dwelling places that are not theirs. They are terrible and dreadful.

Their judgments and their dignity proceed from themselves. Their horses are swifter than leopards and more fierce than evening wolves. Their chargers charge ahead.

Their cavalry comes from afar. And all of these, you can spend a lot of time looking at each one of them. I wish we had time to do a really detailed study of Habakkuk, but just by way of suggestion, they are terrible and dreadful.

At the time that God delivers this word to Habakkuk, they don't seem terrible and dreadful. God says they are. So now there's a choice.

Do you believe what God says or do you believe the evidence of your senses? Science says not to worry. They're small. They don't have many resources.

They're going to be checked by the Assyrians. There's too many obstacles. There's too much friction.

There's too many impediments. They don't have enough. They haven't had it long enough.

They don't have the leadership. They don't have the technology. Not to worry.

Human viewpoint. Science says, God says, you're not going to believe this. That little two-bit entity up there is terrible and dreadful.

Let me tell you all of the things they are that nobody thinks they are. Their horses are swifter than leopards. Surely someone will stop them.

The leopards will get them before they ever get here. God says no. Their horses are faster than the leopards.

Their power is going to be unstoppable by the normal means, by the usual impediments. What's the usual impediment to horses? Leopards. Well, the leopards won't get them, God says.

Horses are usually skittish and they shy away from things. These horses are fierce. You think wolves would intimidate them and cause them to shy and depart from the path? These horses are fiercer than wolves.

They're surprise horses. They're unusual horses. It's unexpected.

The end game for this age is going to come about in an unexpected way. When God resolves the iniquity and the gross intransigent evil in this nation and elsewhere in the world, it's going to come in a surprise fashion. People will say, well, that can't happen.

It's going to happen. You can look at the technology that we have now as a part of that surprise. No one could have imagined.

I was telling somebody earlier, the test for deciding if something had achieved self-awareness and consciousness used to be, well, it will be able to do things that only humans can do. Only a human can write poetry. So if you could ever get a machine to write poetry, it has achieved consciousness.

Then they found out that they can make machines that write what passes for poetry. And you can't tell. You hand it to somebody and say, did a machine write this or did a person write it? They can't tell.

It seems very poetic. They said, well, if it plays chess, if you get something that can play chess, that'll have to be conscious. That will have to have awareness and vast, complex thought abilities.

This is before the modern computer came out. Well, guess what? Now with computers, we say, you know, 40 bucks, I can buy a machine that'll play chess. And I don't think it's conscious or aware.

It was unexpected how much technology could do, what the information revolution would do. Nobody saw it coming. The rise of extremist Islam has been a surprise.

Shouldn't have been a surprise. It's been, I mean, you look back at the Crusades, everybody says, boo on the Christians. They made the Crusades.

Why did the Christians go on the Crusades? Because Islam was taking over the world. And, you know, nobody says, wow, look at those violent Muslims as they sacked Jerusalem, as they took over the Holy Land and as they were spreading and trying to take over, you know, all the rest of the Middle East and somebody had to go stop them. No, it's the Christians fault for going and trying to stop them, trying to keep Jerusalem from being overrun by what they considered rightly to be a false religion.

It's the city of the Lord Jesus Christ. It's the city of the crucifixion. It's the place.

It's David's throne city. And these Allah worshippers have slain people by the thousands and have taken it over. So they went on the Crusades.

Well, we get all the flack for the Crusades. At any rate, their chargers charge ahead, their cavalry comes from afar. They say, well, cavalry can only go so far.

You've got to have lines of supply. You've got to have oats for the horses. You've got to have water.

You've got to have grain and fodder. You know, the range of cavalry is limited. God says, no, these guys, their cavalry is going to come over huge distances.

Remember when they thought that, you know, Rommel couldn't cover great distances, Patton couldn't cover great distances. You've got to have fuel. You've got to have lines of supply.

Well, they did it. It surprised everyone and won great battles. Rommel is legendary.

Both Rommel and Patton for what they could do with what amounts to mechanized cavalry, covering distances and accomplishing feats that nobody thought they could do. God says, that's the Chaldeans. That's what's going to happen.

So don't be shocked when things go pear-shaped and strange and the unexpected starts happening all over the place. You see the unexpected in technology. I love how they're making

little robots now that they claim are sentient and claim have consciousness.

And it's so funny. It's such a, you know, that David Blaine or whoever he is, the guy that, you know, they show a picture of him and he's hovering in midair off a building and he's elevating himself. He's picking up a dead bird and it comes to life and flies away.

And, you know, so what's our conclusion? It's possible to resurrect birds. It's possible for an unaided man to fly above a building. It's possible to elevate yourself three or four inches off the ground with no artificial means that have you ever seen that where the guy turns around and your little group of girls are all shocked and amazed because David Blaine turns around and all of a sudden he's hovering three or four inches off the ground.

Most amazing thing. So we must conclude from that, that levitation is actually possible. He just does it right on the street.

Do you know how that is done? Have you ever seen that? It's an illusion. It's an illusion. Maybe I won't spoil it by telling you, but I know how it's done.

I can do it. It's illusion. Well, now they have the illusion of sentience on the part of robots.

They've got this little nano or nao or owner. It's three letters. Nao in some order.

And it's a little robot. And it's past some test where allegedly it's self aware. You know, it looks at the other two robots and says, well, I must be wearing the white hat, you know, equivalent.

But if you look, they have so anthropomorphize these robots, they have legs, they have arms, they have fingers, and they have little eyes and the eyes look around and they've programmed them to move in a very human way. The test, the proof that allegedly says that they are sentient or conscious, you could do with a toaster and three lights, but we're not going to do it with a toaster and three lights. It's a test of programming logic.

But to run the program, they put it on these robots because it's more convincing. It's an illusion. It's sleight of hand.

Well, this is not sleight of hand. This is the real deal. This is the reality.

What people expect is not what's going to happen. They all come for violence. Their faces are set like the east wind.

Tell me, how is the face of the east wind set? Does the east wind have a face? And if not, what is God saying here? Their faces are set like the east wind. Your face expresses your attitude, right? Many times you can see a very, they used to talk about the chiseled jaw and the firm set expression. Somebody has purposefulness.

They have intentionality. They have dedication. They will not be stopped.

They will not be deterred. And you can see it in their face. People rely on this when they're playing poker or when they're, you know, sometimes you, it's, it's your, your game face, put your game face on.

Well, if their face is set like the east wind, what's the reputation of the east wind in the ancient near east? What is it about the east wind? You can't stop it. You can no more stop these Chaldeans than you can stop the east wind, the withering, blighting, dry across the desert sands, east wind that can roast your crops on the hoof. So to speak, you want to go out there and stop the east wind.

Look at these people's faces. You're not going to stop them any more than you're going to stop the east wind. You can't negotiate with them.

You can't reason with them. If we could just sit down and talk, surely they will understand. It's we just, you know, you're too hostile.

It's your fault that they're coming. If you'd be nicer and not, and not, you know, be such a pill, why they, they would, they would reason, let's, let's all talk. Let's have a, let's move the chairs into a circle.

Let's, you know, let's, let's all be equal. We don't want anybody sitting at the head of the table. That's, that's denigrating to the people that aren't at the head.

It's a circle. Everybody's the, everybody's the same. Let's, let's work in, in cells that don't have a leader.

I mean, it just goes on and on. No, these people have a face that shows you they are absolutely going to do what they have set out to do. And there's no stopping them because their effort is God blessed.

God is blessing the pagan instrument of judgment. He is going to ensure that they succeed and that nothing stops them. They deride every stronghold.

He's unpredictable. That's the essence of what verse 11 says. His, his, his spirit, his, he's like the wind.

You can't, you can't stop him and you can't predict or influence his direction. You think he's going to do one thing. He's going to do something else.

His spirit is, is unpredictable. He commits whatever he does, it succeeds. And he says, my God, Lord, gee, help me do this.

So that leads Habakkuk to a second question. So you remember the first question and the first answer, right? Lord, we're plagued with this evil. Why don't you deliver us? God says, I've got a purpose in allowing this evil to continue.

And one of my purposes is I'm going to judge it in a surprising way. And I'm going to use a surprising means. Well, that leads to Habakkuk's second question.

Why are you going to do that? Kind of makes sense, doesn't it? Well, in, in my human two-dimensional thinking, there's evil, evil should be removed. But you say you're going to remove it with, with an evil instrument. This is like, uh, you know, saying, well, a bullet shaped piece of metal has pierced my body and is causing internal bleeding.

And God says, stand by. I'm going to use a piece of metal to dig that bullet out of you. Well, the next question is, but Lord, so I've already been pierced with one piece of metal.

You're going to pierce me with another piece of metal. I've been shot and now you're going to cut me with a knife. You see that in its simplest form, this is Habakkuk's second question.

And, and in that form, you can see that we struggle with the limits of our human viewpoint. Now in the doctor situation, we, it makes perfect sense to us. Well, you've been shot.

We're going to have to cut you open and make the wound worse before we can make it better. Right? To get the bullet out. I've got to cut you open worse, but in the end you will be better than if I don't cut you open worse.

You've been shot. Now I'm going to knife you. You are, that's Habakkuk's second question.

Why are you going to allow your people to be punished by people that are even more wicked than your people? That's the essence of the question. Are you not, in verse 12, are you not from everlasting? Oh Lord, my God, my Holy one, we shall not die. Oh Lord, you have appointed them for judgment.

Oh rock, you have marked them for correction. You are a purer eyes than to behold evil and cannot look on wickedness. Why do you look on those who deal treacherously and hold your tongue when the wicked devour a person more righteous than they? Why do you make men like fish of the sea, like creeping things that have no ruler over them? They take all of them up with a hook.

They catch them in their net, gather them in their dragnet. Therefore they rejoice and are glad. Therefore they sacrifice to their net and burn incense to their dragnet.

He's talking about the Chaldeans. He's talking about the godless. And once again, there is a secondary echo here of the idolaters and the evil people within the people of God.

Is he talking about the external pagans or is he talking about the internal reprobates? Yes, both. And that's the beauty of poetry is you can say two things at once. A well-turned poetic phrase has functions at multiple levels.

And that's the beauty of Habakkuk's word here. They rejoice and are glad. They sacrifice to their net.

They glorify the means. And you see this, among other things, in modern worship forms. Actually, modern is a loose term.

In current worship forms in Christian churches where, well, in order to really have a worship experience, we need a worship team and we need smoke and lights and music and effects and the right seating and the right screens and a multi-level. We want to give people an experience because the experience that we create will help people have an experience of God. And you end up crediting the net with which you catch the people.

You do a lot of fancy stuff and a lot of people come to the church. You say, see, I knew that fancy stuff was worth the money. That's the idea here within the people of God.

What is it for the Chaldeans? Our methods work. Look at the Palestinians in the Middle East. Look at the anti-Israel people, the ones that want to drive Israel into the sea and take that land over for themselves.

And when they use terror, when they use what we would term very heinous and illicit violence against soft civilian targets, they glorify that and they say, look, we use it because it works. We can't raise an army. We can't put on uniforms and get weapons and march out there like they did in the World Wars.

So we have to use the means at hand. And we do it by blowing up women and children in school buses and so on. We do it by hitting whatever we can.

And if we create enough havoc, somebody will give us what we want. And they glorify the means. This is the net by which we capture what we want.

The Babylonians, the Chaldeans would glorify their military techniques and their military technology and the means by which they are able to send their cavalry so far. Nebuchadnezzar was a civil engineering and military genius. He did all kinds of amazing things in Babylon.

They've dug it up there in Iraq. They've seen that he and his team, his staff did extraordinary things. And his father, his whole line, they were an amazing dynasty.

And they did amazing things. And you know the trouble Nebuchadnezzar gets into in the book of Daniel. Look at what I have done.

And so God turns him into a clawed, four-footed beast for a while. They glorify themselves and what they use. By these the share is sumptuous, verse 17, shall they therefore empty their net and continue to slay the nations without pity.

Are God's people who have gone far from God going to continue to slay the innocent? And are these outsiders going to come in and slay people more righteous than them? It's a double-edged sword. Each of Habakkuk's questions cuts both internally and externally. And it's really a thing of beauty.

He's such a deep thinker. This is a thoughtful, if you're going to approach the Lord God and engage in dialogue, wouldn't you hope that you had thought out your question and that you would ask it in a way that the answer would apply in multiple areas? It's kind of like the story of the three wishes. You know, the thing with the guy carelessly saying, I wish I had a sausage and his wife gets all over him, well, you wish for a sausage, we could have wished for anything.

We could have had the world, you wish for a sausage. He says, I'll be quiet. I wish a sausage was on your nose.

Well, that's wish number two. And now the sausage is stuck to the end of her nose and they have to use wish number three to get the sausage back off of her nose and they're right back where they started. If you'd stopped and thought as you made your wishes, you know, history is replete with examples of incautious wishes in these, you know, genie of the lamp stories.

Well, Habakkuk in approaching God as a prophet of God has very carefully thought out his questions. It's helpful for us to do the same thing as we reflect on the Word of God and we're preparing to go before the Lord in prayer instead of rushing in half-cocked and thoughtless and without any plan. Stop and think.

What is the prayer that God will answer? What is the prayer that God will honor? What is it that I can pray and truly say, I ask this in Jesus name on his behalf, in his interest, for his purpose to expand and fulfill the victory that he accomplished on the cross. I pray the following or I pray the preceding. Wouldn't it be great if we could do what Habakkuk does? Think it out.

These are really beautifully phrased and beautifully expressed questions because Habakkuk is going to get the answer to two things at once. The answer to the problem of internal domestic evil and the larger problem of you're going to use the bitter and hasty Babylonians the way you use the bitter and hasty Assyrian. And thirdly, at a third level, it's the problem of evil in the world.

There's a whole ontological argument about why does God permit evil in the world? Why are we left here to suffer evil? All three of these levels are in the question and they're also in God's answer. So chapter two, I will stand my watch and set myself on the rampart and watch to see what he will say to me. This is also a very important component of dialogue with God.

How many of us pray, make requests, ask questions, and we don't stick around for the answer? We don't really listen. We don't look and pay attention and say, maybe that answer is going to be in the Bible study I'm currently engaged in. Maybe it's going to be in the reflections as I review what I learned in the last class or two.

Maybe it's going to come out in conversation I have with my fellow believers as we speak the truth to one another in love. Maybe God will reveal it to me in an unexpected way if I just watch. Not only does Habakkuk ask beautiful questions, but look at his policy after asking them.

I will stand my watch. He doesn't stand somebody else's watch. He stands his own watch.

I will perform my duties. I will be where I am supposed to be doing what I am supposed to do. I'm not going to say, well, sorry, I can't be bothered.

I'm waiting for an answer from God. I will stand my watch. I will set myself on the rampart.

What is the rampart? What's a rampart? Is that an offensive thing or a defensive thing? I will stand on the rampart. This does two things. It is the place of defense, and it is the place where I have the most visibility.

I'm going to put myself in a position to see and hear God's answer. Can you see and hear God's answer if you tolerate sin in your life? If you haven't eliminated iniquity and bad practice, if we haven't gotten the beam out of our eye, how are we going to see anything? So he's going to stand on the rampart. He is in the right place at the right time doing the right thing.

He is watching. He's gone where he can observe. He is in a position to observe.

He is qualified to observe. He has made a point of being ready to observe the answer. I've asked a question of God.

I fully expect an answer. I'm going to go where I can best expect to see and hear the answer. I will watch to see what he will say to me and what I will answer when I am corrected.

He already figures that there's going to... Obviously, he doesn't know what he wished he knew or he wouldn't have to ask the question. But he says, God is going to teach me something. I will be instructed.

I will be corrected. I may get rebuked, but I want to be there and be ready for that. This is an attitude of faith.

This is an attitude of confident expectation that God will honor his promise. We know the promise in concrete form. Ask and it shall be given.

Seek and you will find. Knock and it will be opened unto you. The one who seeks finds.

You will seek me and find me when you search for me with all your heart. So Habakkuk says, I'm absolutely confident that having asked this question, this set of questions, God will answer. I need to be sure I'm in the right place doing the right thing.

And I'll wait. And I fully expect that whatever the answer is, I will learn something from it. It will correct me.

And I want to be corrected. Very difficult to accept correction. Very difficult to accept that, oops, I was wrong, especially when arguing with one another.

We will move heaven and earth to avoid being pinned down as having been wrong sometimes. I'll wait to be corrected. Then the Lord answered me and said, write the vision and make it plain

on tablets that he may run who reads it.

Guess who he is? He is you. He is me. He is us.

Of course, in Hebrew, he is she. Remember that? Who is he? He is she. And she is it.

Anyway, write the vision and make it plain on tablets. That's what he did. That's why we have this book.

We know when the book of Habakkuk was written because Habakkuk wrote it down when God told him to write it down. And he wrote it in a permanent form. He didn't say write it on papyrus.

He didn't say write it in the sand. He said, write it on tablets so that he who reads it may run. What does this mean? We'll look at that next time.

The vision is yet for an appointed time. This is preparation for the future. God has not judged our nation the way he's going to judge it.

God hasn't judged the human race as he's going to judge it. At the time Habakkuk received this answer, God had not judged the southern kingdom the way he was going to judge it. It is for a future time.

So if you get information that applies to a future time, what does that create an opportunity for? Starts with prepare and ends with ation. Right? You get information in advance. I tell you, December 25th, a traditional day of gift giving is coming up in a couple of weeks.

This is information that allows you to do what? Prepare. Better get my cards out. Better do some shopping.

Better get ready. The vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it will speak and it will not lie. This answer that God is going to give us in this book over the next few weeks is applicable and it is truth.

Though it tarries, wait for it. Be patient. You have need of patience.

You're going to suffer, but afterward you will receive what has been promised. It will surely come. It will not tarry.

It will not delay. And verse four, one of the most famous verses of the Old Testament, quoted at least three times in the New, Behold the proud. What did he say back in verse five of chapter one? Look at the transgressors.

Look at the outsiders. Look at the proud. His soul is not upright in him.

He's not ready. He's not prepared. He's not going to survive, but the just shall live by his faith.

Are we the just? Do we have faith? Then we will live. It's two simple requirements. The just are the ones who are justified.

Those with faith are the ones who express faith, who have something in their hearts and minds to aim their faith at. Promises, principles, doctrines. The just, those who have eliminated their personal sin and iniquity by the cleansing blood of Christ, will live by their pattern of faith in life, trusting God, looking to God, being ready the way Habakkuk is in chapter two, verse one, standing on the rampart, looking for the answer, confidently expecting God's presence and power.

The just shall live by his faith and he's going to watch what happens to the proud. So this is what we'll pick up next time, but it's a lot to think about. Can we be Habakkuk? Can we be the one who embraces the promise of God, embraces the truth from God, embraces the answer to the problem? Both components of which are from God.

The problem is allowed by God. The answer is sent by God. Can we latch onto it? Give it a big squeeze.

Well, we'll continue. We'll pick up here in verse four next time. Father, thank you for the truth of your word.

Thank you for the wonderful message of this book, the uplifting and confidence inspiring truth that you are with us. You hear us. You answer us.

You love us and desire to teach us and prepare us for wonderful things to come. We pray that God, the Holy Spirit, will enliven these truths in our hearts. We ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen.