

## Habakkuk Chapters 1-2a – John Karmelich

1. OK John, you have to admit, we've been discussing these Old Testament dudes for a good while now. Most of your messages lately focus on the Israelites failure be a good witness for God. Isn't this getting repetitive by now? The good news is this guy named Habakkuk decided he would go straight to the source and see how God deals with believers and sin. It ends up being a classic case of wondering if the punishment fits the crime. It bothered Habakkuk because he watched his fellow Israelites sinning all around him as if it didn't matter. He asked God, what about it? God responds that He is going to wipe them out as they're (and us) are held to a higher standard than those who are not familiar with God. The real question course, is how does that affect us?
2. Let me try opening this lesson another way. There are only two prophets that ever in effect said to God, "what's the deal here"? The first was Job. He wanted to question God as to why he had to suffer. God never answered his question. God said to Job in effect, "You idiot, who do you think you are to ask Me how to run things in the first place?" By the time God finished telling Job of how He works, Job effectively apologized for asking the question in the first place. Compare that with Habakkuk. Habakkuk understood God's nature. He knew that God has a zero sin tolerance policy. What Habakkuk wondered is when and how God was going to do something as opposed to Job's inquiry of "Hey God, why aren't you working my way!" This book is in effect a short dialogue between Habakkuk and God explaining how He will resolve the classic problem of "They won't obey me? Watch this!" The book also deals with the question of why God allows His chosen people (that's us Christians too) to suffer at the hands of people who act worse than His chosen. That's the book of Habakkuk in a nutshell. The rest is the details. Since I want to explain those details in this two-part study of a three-chapter book, let me get at it.
3. Habakkuk is another one of those prophets that we know little about. Most likely he wrote it just before the Southern Israelite Kingdom was destroyed. It's brief history review time: Israel broke into two kingdoms when the grandson of King David took over. The Northern Kingdom ended a few hundred years later after a history of kings that pretty much ignored God as they reigned. King David's descendants ruled the Southern Kingdom. It lasted about 100 years longer. The South had a mixture of good and bad kings in terms of whether or not they were good witnesses for God. Before the Southern Kingdom was destroyed by the "big boys on the block" at that time, the Babylonian Empire, when the South had a few bad kings. Habakkuk probably wrote during the reign of those final kings. Most likely, Habakkuk wrote of the Babylonian invasion before it occurs. For those of you who know the bible, he was a contemporary of Jeremiah, Ezekiel and maybe even Daniel. None of those guys ever mentioned a relationship with Habakkuk. However he was accepted as a prophet by both the Jewish and Christian scholars. In fact, Chapter 2, Verse 4 is quoted three times in the New Testament and is considered one of the most important verses in the bible. We'll get to that in this lesson, and I'll just say Habakkuk is worth reading just to realize the power that half-verse makes on our world!
  - a) Anyway, to finish my "when", Habakkuk wrote after the Northern Kingdom was gone. It was also most likely written shortly before the Southern Kingdom got destroyed. Scholars date it about 610 BC and most scholars argue was written during the reign of Jeconiah. I'll just say he was a wicked king and leave it at that for now.
  - b) The "where" was somewhere in the Southern Israel Kingdom that existed back then.
  - c) The "who" was Habakkuk, who's name means "to embrace". I suspect he got that name as he "embraced God" with his message.
  - d) The why is the important question: The main thing is to get is why God acts the way He does and why He's so tough on "His people". To state what I hope is obvious by now, this wasn't the end of Israel with the simple proof that they're around today. It reminds us that God has a "zero sin" tolerance policy. Yes, that's why we're saved by grace. However that is also why we're to confess sin, as to realize He's right and we're wrong on our sin issues.

4. OK John, we're getting the fact that God called Habakkuk to preach, "You're going to get yours as I'm going to allow someone more evil to punish you as I hold you to a higher standard" message. By the way, that is my lesson title. The big question of course, is why do we have to hear it again now? Assuming we get the fact that God holds believers to a higher standard, what are we to get out of this message? That sin isn't to be messed with: Just because we're saved by grace, that does not mean God approves of sin. The way I've always looked at it is, "I'm free to sin all I want. The big question is how much do I want to?" The reason God puts restrictions on our lives isn't so we can't enjoy life. It's just the opposite. It's to say, "God's way is the best way to enjoy life". As an obvious example, if we steal something, we may enjoy it for a season. If we don't end up in jail, we'll still suffer eternally if we choose to live life ignoring what God desires.
5. With that common sense speech out of my system, let me talk a little about Chapter 1 and parts of Chapter 2 that I'll cover in this lesson.
  - a) Chapter One opens with Habakkuk realizing just how sinful the Israelite world around him has become. He asks God in effect, "Why aren't you doing something about this?"
  - b) God responds with, "Watch and see, I'm going to do something about it, that you won't be able to handle". God then tells how the Babylonians will conquer Israel. This goes on for a few verses, as God gets colorful using metaphor's to describe this destruction.
  - c) Habakkuk then effectively responds with the classic question of "Why would you let such a cruel nation destroy Your people?" It's the issue of "We may be bad, but you know we're not as bad as those guys?" As I said earlier, a difference between what Habakkuk and Job is Job wanted his will done. Habakkuk got the fact that God's in charge. All he wants to know is why is God acting this way! God's response is the early part of Chapter 2. It is considered one of the most important aspects of the bible. It keys upon the fact that those who are called to be God's people shall live by faith in what He's planning to do and trust in His plans for mankind.
  - d) From there the text goes on to give some of the details of why God's going to do all of this destruction and what it means to the lives of God's chosen people.
  - e) As always, the lesson for us is not to learn facts about ancient Middle East History. It's for us to realize God's in charge, He's got a plan for our world and our job as Christians is to be a witness for Him as that plan unfolds before us. That's what living the Christian life is all about. What we learn from Habakkuk is God goes through with His plans even if that plan means pain and suffering for those called to be His witnesses to the world. The rest is the details, which we're overdue to start, so let's get going.
6. Habakkuk Chapter 1, Verse 1: The oracle that Habakkuk the prophet received.
  - a) Essentially all we know about Habakkuk is within this short letter. He doesn't say how he became a prophet. Scholars suspect that he was a priest based on something mentioned in Chapter 3. My point is this book gives us almost nothing about his background or how he was called to be a prophet. The book essentially opens by saying, "I'm (Habakkuk) called to be God's prophet, accept it, deal with it and here's what God told me to say."
  - b) The fact he predicted about the Babylonian invasion years before it occurred is why he got accepted as a Jewish prophet. Again, we know that the Christian church accepted him as he is quoted three times in the New Testament.
  - c) OK, enough of the limited introduction, let's see what Habakkuk has to say to us:
7. Verse 2: How long, O LORD, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, "Violence!" but you do not save?
  - a) From Verses 2-4 we get a prayer by Habakkuk to God. What I suspect is because God did answer this prayer in a vivid way, Habakkuk remembered the details and wrote it down before he forgot the details, including what he was thinking that God responded to.
  - b) The next thing to realize is that Habakkuk understood God's nature. That's a reason why scholars suspect he may have been a priest. What Habakkuk understood is that God does not have any tolerance for sin or evil. That leads him to question God about His people?

- c) Have you ever paused to consider why we don't get verbal answers to our prayers? Like most Christians, I spend a lot of time in prayer, but I don't expect verbal answers. I figure if God's got something to say to Me, He will on His timing and because He's God I do not have to strain to hear His answer. The way God normally responds to our prayers is by us going through our lives and watching what happens. However, I never assume He'll not answer when I'm praying. One of the reasons God gave us the bible in the first place is so that we can read answers to common prayers and realize that this is how He likes to work with "His People". My point is if He's worked this way in the past, He will usually work the same way with us. That just means pay attention to how He will respond to this prayer, as we should get the same answer if we ask the same question.
  - d) Speaking of the question, it is essentially, "I see a lot of wicked things going on all around me. I know that You won't tolerate sin forever, especially among Your own people. I see a lot of it occurring around me, and I'm wondering why You're not acting on it!"
    - i) Let me give the general answer and then I'll focus on the specific's that Habakkuk saw in his day. The answer for us is two fold. God may turn and ask us, why are we not doing anything about what we're concerned about? If there's one thing I've come to learn about God is He won't do for us what we can do for ourselves! God does what we can't do as our job with His helps is to discern the difference! That means for example, we can point out evil in our society or bring it to the attention of our authorities. While we can't stop all evil from occurring we can and should do our part to "clean up" what we can around us.
    - ii) Now let me talk about the most likely time era Habakkuk lived in. The last bunch of kings before the Babylonians destroyed the Southern Kingdom were corrupt to put it mildly. Let's just say they personally turned from God and discouraged any form of worship of God. That led to other forms of corruption. It's as if everyone is only interested in doing what's best for themselves even if they've got to harm a few people to accomplish that goal. Habakkuk saw a society where the political leaders and the powerful cheated and robbed to get what they wanted. Obviously nothing has changed in history. Therefore, Habakkuk is here as a reminder of the ultimate fate of those who act that way.
    - iii) Habakkuk appears to be living in a situation were the authorities were part of the problem. He cries out to God to help, because there was nothing left he could do to remedy the problem. So are you saying turn to God last? Of course not. What I am saying is telling God what's going on in our life helps us to focus on what's the issue we're facing and how best to deal with it. I don't even know if Habakkuk did expect an answer from God or was just "thinking this prayer out loud". The point is God heard this prayer and is responding to it, not just to tell the Israelites of that day how He'll work, but to tell us how God responds to evil all around us.
  - e) By the way, this prayer isn't implying that Habakkuk's perfect or he's a better person than the people he's complaining about. He just realizes that there is a problem and it's beyond his ability to do anything about it. That's what we're encouraged to talk to God about, to do what we can't do for ourselves, especially in situations that violate His word. It is as if we say to God, "You're Word says this, and people are acting like that, and there's nothing I can do at the moment to change "that", so what are you God, going to do about it?" We'll get to God's answer in a few verses. In the meantime, Habakkuk's not through talking!
8. Verse 3: Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict abounds.
- a) My paraphrase, "Hey God, why do I have to watch all this stuff? Isn't it against Your law to act this way? It's bad enough that the people called to be Your witnesses are acting in this manner, but why do I have to watch all this go down as it happens in public?"
  - b) If you've ever prayed about not knowing what to do next, this prayer is a good model!

- c) I can't think how many times in my life where I feel like I'm stuck and I'm not sure what I am supposed to do next. God's answer is usually, "Do what's the next logical step". That's His way of saying, "Study My word as to how to live your life, and then do what's right as to not violate that word and make the best decisions you can given the situation we have to face." However, there are also times where we might be facing a situation where we see a blatant violation of how He calls us to live (here's the key part) by those who claim they are followers of Jesus. I admit, I'm tougher on people who I know go to church and claim to be Christians than I am those who are not. It's realizing God holds believers to a higher standard and I also try to follow that rule as I judge what is in front of me. He wants us to fix what we can and trust Him with what we can't. That's the prayer request Habakkuk is laying out here as he realizes what he's dealing with is bigger than what he can handle. It is also the case where the authorities who claim to be believers are the corrupt ones, so he has to take this to God as if to say, "What are you going to do about this?"
- i) Let's be honest: Most of the time God effectively responds to that question with, "What am I doing about it, what are you doing about it?" If it bothers you so much, why aren't you doing something about it? That's how I see God responding to a lot of our complaints. What we should be praying is for His guidance as to how to best deal with our situations. That's how He loves to be part of our lives.
- ii) In the meantime, whatever Habakkuk is dealing with, it's a situation that's beyond him doing something about it himself, so he brings it to God to deal with. He sees violence and strife in his world and he brings that issue to God. Maybe he thought God wants him to do something and Habakkuk was looking for guidance as to see what he can do to make a difference. Little did Habakkuk realize what God had in mind for him. God's response is coming up in two verses. First, Habakkuk wants to complain for one more verse:
9. Verse 4: Therefore the law is paralyzed, and justice never prevails. The wicked hem in the righteous, so that justice is perverted.
- a) I'm reminded of the classic comment that Christians see God as a God of love, while those who are religious Jewish people see God as a God of justice. Obviously, God is both. That is simply how both sides focus their emphasis. To paraphrase this verse, Habakkuk says, "Hey God, we Israelites are supposed to be Your witnesses to the world of how to live by obeying Your laws. However, I look all around me, and all I see are those who should be obeying it, ignoring it. The bad guys are winning because those who should be doing the right thing are not right now!"
- b) This is the classic prayer of fixing what we can ourselves, bringing to God what we can't fix and knowing the difference. Habakkuk saw corruption all around him and effectively said what should I be doing here? I don't think Habakkuk expected the answer he got in the next several verses. I suspect Habakkuk was just thinking, "This is bad, what should I or we as a society be doing about this?" The answer Habakkuk got is a reminder that He's still working in our world in ways we can't always understand. He works through people but He also works in ways to correct the wrongs of His people. It's God's way of saying He's in charge, deal with it, live as He commands and realize there are consequences we'll face in this life and the next life when we don't live as God demands we live!
- c) OK, enough of Habakkuk complaining about his problems, let's see how God responds:
10. Verse 5: "Look at the nations and watch-- and be utterly amazed. For I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe, even if you were told.
- a) This is God saying, "Hey who do you think you're talking to! I'm God and I'm well aware of what's going on around here! Yes the problem is beyond your ability to fix, so yes I am going to work in a way that is so shocking to you, you wouldn't believe what I'm going to do even if I told it to you." Stop and think, even if you didn't know the specifics, that had to be a scary statement to hear and get your curiosity up as to what God is going to do!

- b) Personally, if I heard the voice of God talking out loud, first I'd be shocked that He gave me an answer to my prayer and be shocked He was paying attention. God's reply reminds us that He is always listening, but in most cases, He wants to us to think about what we're saying to Him and what should "we" be doing and then what He should be doing!
  - c) One also has to remember that before Jesus came on the scene, God communicated with His people by the "Spirit" responding to specific prophets at specific times. It's not so that any specific prophet can force God to speak to them when such a prophet demanded it. It is always a matter of God communicating to us when He wants to. Just as we can't speak unless we want to (we can be always be encouraged) so God only speaks when He desires to do so. What I'm getting at is God used Habakkuk to get across the idea that here's how He plans on dealing with the evil of Habakkuk's day and it's also a model for us to study if we are in a similar situation. No it doesn't mean God's going to destroy all evil based on our timing. God's timing is always His timing and we can't change that. God is saying His timing is about to coincide with Habakkuk's world and God's calling Habakkuk to go tell His people just how God's going to work in the near future on a major scale!
  - d) So does this mean we shouldn't pray to God unless we expect Him to act in a major way? I believe we're free to ask God anything we want. Since He's God and we're not, we also have to realize that He responds His way on His timing. The reason we do ask Him for all sorts of things is we don't know how or when He'll respond. I've also learned that the best way to get God to work in my life is when it involves me doing His will and not mine! In a sense, that's what Habakkuk is doing here. He realized God can't tolerate evil at all, let alone on a massive scale, so that's why Habakkuk prayed in the first place.
  - e) Anyway, I left Habakkuk puzzled as to why God would say "You'll be shocked at what I am planning, so since I teased you with that answer, let Me give you the details!"
11. Verse 6: I am raising up the Babylonians, that ruthless and impetuous people, who sweep across the whole earth to seize dwelling places not their own.
- a) Keep in mind that the Babylonians were not next door neighbors. They were a distant city that was the "big boys on the block" at that moment in history. When Habakkuk wrote, I'd say (along with most bible scholars) that the Assyrian Empire was already on the decline. It may have been past the point where the Babylonians destroyed the Assyrian capital city and now the Babylonians were emerging as the big boys on the block! If you are familiar with the book of Daniel, the emperor was named Nebuchadnezzar. My point is when this book was written, Nebuchadnezzar was probably the head general under his father's rule as the Babylonians were expanding their own influence.
  - b) I need to pause for a technical note. Some translations say "Chaldeans" as opposed to the word "Babylonians". The word Chaldeans is a more literal translation. The Chaldeans are the people who dominate that part of the world. Babylon was the major city. Either title is acceptable, I just wanted to get that point there.
  - c) Like the Assyrians the Babylonians had a reputation for being ruthless. Just as ISIS today has that same reputation, all three of those groups come from the same area. To make this simple, let's just say the Babylonians organized a large army, that would conquer cities. If there were any survivors, they were separated and relocated long distances away. All that they found in places they conquered they kept. It was their way of getting rich as they stole and killed. Like I said in the introduction, there is pleasure in sin for a season, but God never allows people to get away with sin forever.
  - d) The underlying issue here is the classic case of "We may be guilty of sin, but we're nothing compared to those guys"! How is it fair for God to allow them to conquer us? The reason is God holds believers to a higher standard. Yes the punishment may not fit the crime, but God won't allow the "punisher" to stand for long either as He still wants to prove that He is in charge and by allowing His people to return to that land (70 years after captivity) it's a way of showing God's still in charge and still rules over the world.

- e) The reason scholar's suspect Habakkuk wrote this shortly before that invasion, is that the Babylonian reputation was already "out there". Word probably got back to Israel of all the damage this group has been doing around the Middle East. I suspect the Israelites knew that they overthrew the Assyrian Empire as the Northern Israel Kingdom probably had signs there saying "Under New Management" as the Babylonians took over that other empire. The simple point being that God told Habakkuk about the upcoming Babylonian invasion, he understood something about that group and what they've done so far.
  - f) Finally a few words on " who sweep across the whole earth". Both the Babylonian and the Assyrian Empire were vast that covered most of the Middle East as well as parts of Asia and Europe. The term "whole earth" does not mean for example China or the America's. It is just a colorful way for Habakkuk to realize "the whole world Habakkuk can relate to". In the meantime, God's still busy describing the Babylonians.
12. Verse 7: They are a feared and dreaded people; they are a law to themselves and promote their own honor.
- a) Translation: They're not a God-fearing people. They are only in it for themselves, as they don't care who they hurt or kill in order to gain power, wealth and fame.
  - b) Again, we're back to the issue of "we're bad, but they're worse". God's acknowledging that fact in this verse. If there is one thing to learn from this book is God's not above sinking to "horrid things" if that's what it takes to get His people to turn back to Him. All I'm saying is if you want a motivation to "stick it out" with God, realize He's willing to make our life miserable if that's what it takes to drive us back to Him and turn from a life of sin.
  - c) In a sense, as horrid as all this is, it's God's way of saying, you want a world where people sin all they want and get away with it? Well, I'll give you over to that world and you will be the victims of it to see how horrid it can be. That's the lesson here.
13. Verse 8: Their horses are swifter than leopards, fiercer than wolves at dusk. Their cavalry gallops headlong; their horsemen come from afar. They fly like a vulture swooping to devour; <sup>9</sup> they all come bent on violence. Their hordes advance like a desert wind and gather prisoners like sand.
- a) Meanwhile, God's still getting "warmed up" describing these people. The technical point is the Babylonians relied upon men on horseback as opposed to chariots for quick attacks. God wants to get the point across that the Israelites won't be able to run away from that attack. Leopards are the fastest animals on earth. It's a colorful way to say that the Babylonian invasion is so quick it'll be like "leopard speed". The reference to wolves is that they like to attack when it is hard to see them. They also attack in packs. All this is saying is the attack will be fierce, fast and the Israelites won't be able to outrun them.
14. Verse 10: They deride kings and scoff at rulers. They laugh at all fortified cities; they build earthen ramps and capture them.
- a) If you google maps of the Babylonian empire, it covered a wide area. The short version is they go from the east end of the Mediterranean Sea, the Black Sea to the north, the Persian Gulf to the east and all of Egypt to the south. That covered most of the Middle East as well as parts of Turkey. If you don't know geography, my point is they covered a wide area.
  - b) The reason I'm sharing all of this is they came, they conquered and then moved on. When they faced a king or ruler, it became a non-issue. Even a city with big walls wasn't an issue as the Babylonians would build ramps out of dirt to climb over the walls. They would win by far outnumbering their opponents, and then overrunning wherever they went.
  - c) The reason Habakkuk is getting into all of this is for the Israelites living in the Southern Kingdom to realize they're going to captivity, deal with it, give up and accept that reality. If you've read 2nd Kings, when the Babylonians were knocking on the door, the Israelites didn't give in. There were three separate sieges of Jerusalem. By the third time they dealt with the Israelites, Babylonians essentially said, enough of this rebellion as they burnt that city to the ground. God said this is going to happen, there's nothing to do that can change it. Keep that prediction mind about His word and it'll occur as it says it will!

15. Verse 11: Then they sweep past like the wind and go on-- guilty men, whose own strength is their god."
- a) Meanwhile, I left Habakkuk describing what the Babylonians are like. Realize that they're thinking they're winning because of their own strength or their own pagan gods. They've got no idea God's behind all of this.
  - b) Here's a quick question to ponder: Why would God allow so much destruction all around the greater area just to prove He raises up who He raises up? Why did God allow a pagan empire to dominate so much territory? Why allow so many people to suffer as they attack all that area? As I've said many times, if this life is all that there is, life is unfair. If there is a god who judges all people and we live eternally based on what we do know of that god that controls everything, that's a fair system of justice. Finally, I like to remind myself that if God created the world, then He gets to make the rules and we must live by them!
  - c) Anyway, Habakkuk's still discussing the swiftness by which the Babylonians did conquer all of that territory. The good news here is Verse 11 is the final verse on this topic. Verse 12 is Habakkuk asking God, "Hey, why you doing all of this?"
16. Verse 12: O LORD, are you not from everlasting? My God, my Holy One, we will not die. O LORD, you have appointed them to execute judgment; O Rock, you have ordained them to punish.
- a) By Verse 12 Habakkuk had had-enough of hearing God describe the Babylonian invasion. Habakkuk understood God's nature. He understand that God made eternal promises for the Israelite people. He also understood that God had "had enough" of the Israelites there ignoring Him and that this punishment is coming down hard and fast.
  - b) One type of prayer we Christians rarely do, but is a good idea, is to recite what God will do in the future. It's stating His promises to us "out loud". It's not that God forgets. It's to remind us that He will keep His word and He will do what He says he's going to do. That includes punishing the guilty as well as keeping His eternal promise to give that piece of land we call Israel to the Israelites.
  - c) I'm fascinated by the titles that Habakkuk uses here. It includes the most holy name that one can use for God, when "LORD" is in all capitals. We pronounce it "Jehovah". We also get a title that David uses in the psalms, "O Rock" and finally "My Holy One". Habakkuk realizes he's pleading before the God who created all things, He's unchangeable, like we may consider a huge unmovable rock and is pure in thought. The reason he's inciting all of these titles is Habakkuk realizes that God will go through with this plan to execute judgment on the Israelites and the Babylonians are His instrument for it! It's one of those realizations where, God said it, I believe it and now I must deal with it.
17. Verse 13: Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong. Why then do you tolerate the treacherous? Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?
- a) I'd like to pause at this moment to discuss the idea of God's "eyes to pure to look at evil". First, God is not a big human with a set of eyes. It's not meant to be taken that literal. It is the idea that God cannot tolerate any sin whatsoever. The reason for my pause is I'd like you to consider how God "considers" sin. Let me explain:
    - i) First if God is pure, than any sin would make Him less than pure. That's why we accept the idea of God as being perfect. That's why we must be perfectly forgiven to spend eternity with God. OK, that's Christian theology 101.
    - ii) Time for Christian theology "102": Does that mean God thinks say a parking ticket is just as bad as murder? Of course not. A bible verses that's always fascinated me is John 19:11. Jesus told Pilate that the men who brought him (Jesus) to Pilate were guilty of a greater sin. The point being that Jesus didn't think that all sins have the same weight as he said those men are more guilty than Pilate of that particular sin.
    - iii) All I'm saying is "sin is sin", but some sins are considered worse than others.

- b) Of all things, that leads me back to Christian theology 101. One of the reasons Jesus had to die on the cross "alone" is because Verse 13 here says that, "God is too pure to look at evil. I'm implying that when Jesus paid the price for sin, God in effect turned His back on Jesus at that moment in time. I imply that based on this principal here in Verse 13.
  - c) While you're contemplating that fact, I'll get back to Habakkuk. He's saying God has to do this "judgment thing" because God cannot tolerate any sin whatsoever. We don't get that type of wholesale judgment today as He already paid the price for sin. We may still lose our ministry opportunities or be wiped out if we fail to be a witness for Him, but the "big scale" thing of sin being paid for is done for once and for all at the cross.
  - d) Now that I've got "Christian theology 101" out of my system, let me get back to the story. The related thing Habakkuk is pondering here is "Why do You allow wicked people to get away with stuff and are tougher on Your people if they do the same things" It shows that Habakkuk understood God's nature. What he didn't grasp is why He would use a pagan nation like the Babylonians as His instrument of judgment. As I stated to start this lesson, "We may be bad, but what about those guys, aren't they much worse?"
    - i) If I could speak for God (I don't, this is just my opinion from studying history and reading my bible) is God allows the wicked to get away with stuff, as that's all the reward they'll get for eternity. It's also a matter of God saying to us, "Why are you asking Me what I'm going to do about them? What are you doing about them?" I am just saying if evil exists in the world, God expects us to fight it as He will work through us to bring such evil to an end. Yes, sometimes God does it himself. Then sometimes He allows others to conquer those who conquer His people. The point is the wicked don't get away with stuff forever, just for a "season".
    - ii) Anyway, that's my "God theology" talk on why He tolerates evil. Back to the text.
18. Verse 14: You have made men like fish in the sea, like sea creatures that have no ruler.
- a) Translation: Everybody's ignoring God and doing whatever they want to.
  - b) Think about fish: They mostly just wander from place to place looking for food and avoid trying to be eaten themselves. The point is they don't have the intelligence to realize there is something greater than themselves that created them and wants to guide their lives and give their lives meaning. That is why God made us with a greater purpose than to just live. Habakkuk's point is he's looking around at all the people who should know this and they're acting no wiser than fish in the sea.
  - c) Let's modernize this. We look at the world around us. People are busy going through life trying to accomplish their goal of the day while pretty much ignoring the God who gives them life in the first place. The point is God wants to give us a purpose for living greater than any and all purposes we can have without Him. That's what Habakkuk saw and it's what we can easily see if we look at people around us.
  - d) So what do we do (besides the normal things we have to do every day)? Make Him a part of those normal things. Take on projects to make a difference for Him. Work with others to make that difference. Be grateful for what He's done for us. See life as having a greater purpose than just living to make a buck or just living to have fun. That's the goal here, to use our life for God's glory. Meanwhile, Habakkuk's still complaining about the situation.
19. Verse 15: The wicked foe pulls all of them up with hooks, he catches them in his net, he gathers them up in his dragnet; and so he rejoices and is glad.
- a) Let's be honest: There is some pleasure in sin, or else it wouldn't be tempting in the first place. The issue is having the wisdom to appreciate long-term happiness versus any gain of short-term pleasure. The issue here is about stealing to get what one wants as opposed to honestly working for a living. When the bible uses the word wicked, it simply refers to those who don't care what God (or the authorities) think of what we're doing. They do it for that short-term pleasure of the moment and don't care who they hurt. Habakkuk looks around him and realizes non-God fearing people are getting away with this stuff!



- b) Remember why he's complaining in the first place. He sees the world around him and he realizes God's not doing anything. God's usual response to us is, "Hey, if it bothers you so much why aren't you doing anything about it". His other answer is, "I am, but I work on My timing and those people will suffer far more than what they gain from doing evil".
  - c) Meanwhile, Habakkuk is still on a role here.
20. Verse 16: Therefore he sacrifices to his net and burns incense to his dragnet, for by his net he lives in luxury and enjoys the choicest food.
- a) The underlying point here is everybody worships something. It may be their own ability to "win in life" or some other manmade god. If one ignores the God who created us and has some success in life, it's amazing who'll they'll credit for their success.
  - b) I remember reading about a famous pastor in my area (John MacArthur) being invited to a home of a well-known celebrity. I'll just say the celebrity tried to lecture John about him throwing "negative energy on the spiritual forces of the world". The point is those people ignored the God who created them and created their own explanation for how the world works. That in effect is what Verse 16 is saying. Those who ignore God and get success in this world, will thank anything and everything other than humble themselves before God.
  - c) Well, if those people achieve success, isn't that something to be admired? I'm well aware that God gives special talents to people and with hard work, people can enjoy that success for a season. That's not the issue. The issue is not acknowledging the God who gave it to us in the first place. I learned a long time ago never to be jealous of other people's success. I figure God's got a purpose for their success. Our purpose as Christians is to lead others to Jesus or lead others in a closer relationship with Him. Yes, I know we still have to live a life and provide for ourselves. My point is there's a greater purpose for living than just to be a financial success or try to have as much fun as possible. Our purpose is to glorify God with our lives. OK, drifted off topic. Time to get back to Habakkuk.
21. Verse 17: Is he to keep on emptying his net, destroying nations without mercy?
- a) Keep in mind Habakkuk is focusing on the Babylonian Empire as they were the "bad guys of the day". They were going around the Middle East conquering places, destroying those who lived there or taking people captive to be slaves in distant lands. Again, we're back to the question of "Hey, God why are You allowing this evil to occur?" Again, God could respond with, "Why are you allowing it or I am doing something about it or I'm allowing it because My people are ignoring Me". Since I've beaten that point to death, I can move on. I think even Habakkuk realized it by this point in his speech. He knows that God will not allow evil to rule forever. He often allows it for a "season" to run it's course and so the world can see what is the ultimate outcome of living that way.
  - b) Anyway, Habakkuk sees all of this evil, realizing it's occurring and he decides he's going to wait to see what God's going to do next, which is speak to Habakkuk in two verses.
22. Chapter 2 Verse 1: I will stand at my watch and station myself on the ramparts; I will look to see what he will say to me, and what answer I am to give to this complaint.
- a) Habakkuk's essential complaint is that "evil people are winning". He also realizes there's nothing he can do here but complain to God about it. This is about the wisdom to realize that God will do for us what we can't do for ourselves. In Habakkuk's case, he was aware of the huge army the Babylonian's had and I suspect he also realized that God wanted to use that army to punish the Israelites for ignoring Him. The complaint at this point is he realized, "This is going to happen, what should I do now?" We're working our way up to the key verse of this lesson, in a few verses. First, it's time for God to speak here.
23. Verse 2: Then the LORD replied: "Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it.
- a) This is God saying, write down what I'm about to say so people in the future who ponder this same question will know the answer. It doesn't mean God doesn't want to hear from us. It means a lot of answers we want from God are in the bible if we look for them!"

- b) There is also another purpose here. Remember at that time in history at that place, God's people are about to be overrun and conquered by the Babylonians. The Israelites can't say they didn't see it coming. Jeremiah preached it was coming. Ezekiel lived out his life in the Babylonian Empire describing the destruction from the "victor's side of the fence".
  - c) Let me pause to ask, why is this event so prominent in the bible? If you read through the entire Old Testament there's a lot of space dedicated to the Babylonian invasion as well as their rule over the Israelites. It's such a common topic, I joke at times that the bible is "The tale of two cities" being Babylon and Jerusalem. It's a metaphor for people seeking either God or the "world" with Babylon being one of the symbolic places that worshiped things other than God Himself. By the way, I have this strange suspicion that God's not through with punishing Babylon. Since that city was so prominent for so long in the bible, I hold the strange view that it'll be literally rebuilt one day essentially so God can destroy it once and for all. Today it exists in Iraq, as Saddam Hussein spent time rebuilding it before his death. All I'm saying is I suspect the bible as a "tale of two cities" is not done yet.
  - d) Meanwhile, God's got His next message ready for Habakkuk and I'm interrupting Him.
24. Verse 3: For the revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay.
- a) Ok the natural question here is what is the "revelation"? What is it that will surely come? What is it they or we should wait for? Keep in mind that prophecy is "patterns". All that means is God likes to work in patterns. The other way I describe it, is since we don't learn from history, God "repeats" history so we do learn from the present age. For Habakkuk it just means the Babylonian invasion is surely coming. Expect it, and deal with it. It's God bringing the hammer down hard on the Israelites for ignoring Him. This is God saying in effect, "Yes, nonbelievers act horribly, but I expect those who do believe in Me to live to a higher standard. When they fail to live to that standard, the hammer's coming down!"
    - i) Yes I know the bible doesn't say that literally, but that's the idea being portrayed in this verse and much of the bible. As I've been preaching for many years, there is a danger of knowing one's bible: God holds us accountable for what we know. Yes, it's far better to know it and having the joy of living as God desires, but we must realize He holds us accountable for what it says. Yes, that's tough to realize, but that's how life works for the believer and we must accept it.
  - b) Yes, the Babylonian invasion did come and many died because of it. The other way this is going to affect you and me is we too are always on the verge of facing His judgment. It's a matter of realizing we're accountable to Him and He's got the right to end our life when He wants to. The one thing none of us know is how much time we have left to live. What is the best thing we can do with that time is use it to make a difference for Him before the "Hammer comes down" as I'm fond of saying.
  - c) Meanwhile, it's time for my favorite verse of the lesson. Yes, it's memorization time.
25. Verse 4: "See, he is puffed up; his desires are not upright-- but the righteous will live by his faith-
- a) By the way, I'll make this easy for us: It's only the second half of the verse that we should know by heart. It's quoted three times in the New Testament, but first, let's talk about the first half of the verse.
  - b) Verse 4 is meant as a contrast. Those who don't care about pleasing God are in effect only caring about pleasing themselves and their own desires. That's why the first half verse is referring to nonbelievers. The key point here is those who don't care about pleasing God are focused on what they want and nothing more. Those who care about pleasing Him do want to, and that's why they live by faith.
  - c) Before I get all "New Testament" on us, let me share how Jewish rabbi's consider the 2nd part of this verse. In the first five books of the bible, Jewish scholars have added up every command in those books and they came up with a total of 613 commands. I won't argue. My point is the second half of this verse is considered a summary of all those commands.

- i) My point is not that "the righteous shall live by faith" is the only verse we should learn. It's that this half a verse is a good summary of how God wants us to live.
  - ii) The official Jewish commentary on the Old Testament, referred to as "The Talmud" by Orthodox Jewish scholars refers to this half a verse as a summary of all 613 of the commands given by Moses. I could explain it better, but the New Testament does a pretty good job of that as we're about to see.
  - d) Speaking of that half a verse and the New Testament, consider the following facts:
    - i) The half verse, "The just shall live by faith" is quoted in the book of Romans 1:17.
    - ii) If you've ever studied the New Testament book of Romans, the key topic is who is "justified" by God. Think of "justified" as "just as if one never sinned".
    - iii) The book of Romans can be summarized as "The JUST shall live by faith.
    - iv) That half a verse is also quoted in the New Testament book of Galatians 3:11.
      - a) The main topic of that book explains how we should live as Christians.
      - b) In other words Galatians is "The just SHALL LIVE' by faith".
    - v) The final quote is in Hebrews 10:38. One of the main topics of that book is who is it who has faith and why. Chapter 11 of Hebrews lists a whole bunch of characters from the Old Testament and explained how they had faith in God.
    - vi) In other words, Hebrews can be summarized as "The just shall live BY FAITH".
    - vii) In the original Hebrew, that phrase is only three words. You can guess each of the words mean by now.
    - viii) One more bit of bible trivia while I'm in the neighborhood. Paul wrote the books of Romans and Galatians. Bible scholars accept that fact. The book of Hebrews does not list the author. Personally, I think it was written by Paul but he kept it quiet as he wasn't accepted by the Jewish people as he lead so many of them to Jesus. All I am saying is I think the "Just shall live by faith" trilogy is proof that Paul is really the author of Hebrews. Does it prove it? Of course not. Even if someone else did write Hebrews, it is amazing how this half a verse in Habakkuk of all places is part of three major New Testament books and a key New Testament theme.
  - e) To explain what it means let me share part of the story of Martin Luther as this verse was a key to changing his life. If you don't know, he was Roman Catholic at one point in his life. He wanted to travel from Germany to Rome and it was difficult. He almost died as he crossed the Swiss Alps. A monastery nursed him back to help and they reminded him of this half verse. While in Rome, Martin Luther punished himself hard, as he wanted to show his worthiness to God. One day the half verse of "the just shall live by faith" hit him and let's just say it changed the course of Western Civilization by that change. Other than Jesus and then, Paul, I'd say Martin Luther had a bigger affect on western civilization than any other person as the Christian Reformation changed the course of human history.
  - f) Now that I've spent over a full page discussing that half a verse, hopefully you all know it by heart by now. I'm only going to cover one more verse in this lesson. It's a good natural break as Verse 6 gets the focus on what's going to happen to the Babylonians for attacking God's chosen people. However, that's the discussion of the next lesson. In the meantime, let me discuss Verse 5 and that'll be it for this lesson.
26. Verse 5: indeed, wine betrays him; he is arrogant and never at rest. Because he is as greedy as the grave and like death is never satisfied, he gathers to himself all the nations and takes captive all the peoples.
- a) Before God "interrupted Himself" with the famous, "The Just Shall Live by Faith" (wanted to get that in one more time to make sure you memorized it!) Anyway, right before that, we got a condemnation of how people act who turn from God. The first half of Verse 4 as well as Verse 5 is not intended as a complete list of sins, but simply "evidence" of how any person acts when they're turned from God with their lives. Since I covered the first half of Verse 4 earlier, the wrap up for this week is the condemnations here in Verse 5.

- b) Again before I discuss this list, remember these are signs of how someone would act if the belief in God was a non-issue in their life. Keep in mind the Israelites were facing close to extinction by the Babylonians. It is God saying in effect, "Here is why all these people do deserve eternal death, because they've been ignoring Me all their lives.
  - c) Remember this is not a complete sin list. With that understood, let's discuss the verse: The first sin listed is "wine betrays him". I grew up in a home where Croatian was spoken as well as English. That phrase reminded of an old Croatian saying: "Istina Vina". It just means there's truth in wine. It's the idea that when people are drinking, the truth comes out. It's also the idea of "wine betrays him" of what one is really thinking.
  - d) The next is "arrogant" which is self-explanatory. The idea of "never at rest" is about being busy with stuff that won't matter for eternity.
  - e) Then we have this strange reference to "greedy as the grave". It's sort of a Proverb about the fact that there is "never enough death" in the sense that everyone dies. Obviously, if Israel was facing being wiped out, lots of death would occur and that's the idea here.
  - f) Speaking of the Babylonian invasion, the final part of the verse seems to be referencing all the destruction and killing that's about to occur. It's a colorful way of saying a lot of death is about to occur, mainly because My people have been ignoring Me for so long.
27. Finally, realize that if the book ended here, it'd be a horrid ending. I'm cutting it off in the middle of Chapter 2 as the rest of the chapter focuses on the Babylonians. It's as if God's saying, Yes I am allowing you to conquer My people because they failed to be a witness for Me. However, let Me tell you "how you will get yours" because I still need to prove to the world that the Israel God is also the God of the Universe. Anyway, that's the next lesson, so I'll stop here until the next one.
28. Let's pray: Heavenly Father, one of the hardest things to keep in mind is that You desire to be in charge of every aspect of our lives. Help us to grow in You as we study Your word and realize that the way You've worked in the past is also indications of what to expect in the future. We get that You're consistent in who You are and what You expect of us. Help us to remember that in order to be justified in your sight, we must live by faith and not try to prove our worth to you. With that said, help us to do good works out of gratitude to You as we use our lives in order to make a difference for You. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.