

How Wet is the Sea? – *Habakkuk 2:5-20*

Introduction – The burden of Habakkuk continues. Convinced of Judah’s injustice in the land, Habakkuk complains to God only to find out that the coming invading armies of Babylon are God’s answer (1:1-11). But they are only worse and so Habakkuk complains (1:12-17). God replies that the just shall live by faith (2:1-4) and now God makes clear His intended judgment upon Babylon as well (2:5-20). God is not mocked; we reap what we sow (Gal 6:7-8). In addition, God’s plans are never thwarted and His redemptive plans have always been that the knowledge of His glory will cover the earth. How much? How far? Answer: How wet is the sea? Hidden in this dark series of burdens and righteous judgment is the optimistic hope of our Victorious Savior. Every knee shall bow.

The Proud Man, the City of Man (v5) – The Chaldeans would grow to be a terrible and dreadful force (1:7), swallowing up nations as they built their wicked empire (1:15-17, 2:5). God intended to use Babylon to bring judgment upon unbelieving and idolatrous Judah, but that did not excuse Babylon from its own sin. Skip ahead chronologically to the book of Daniel. In the midst of a drunken orgy celebration with his lords, wives, and concubines, Belshazzar the king gave command to bring the gold and silver vessels which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple in Jerusalem. They drank and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze, iron, wood and stone – but the handwriting was on the wall (Dan 5). Habakkuk is prophesying – “*Indeed, because he transgresses by wine...*” (Hab 2:5). Displaying his treachery to Yahweh with wine, the wine becomes his traitor. “*That very night Belshazzar, king of the Chaldeans, was slain. And Darius the Mede received the kingdom...*” (Dan 5:30). Some 70 years earlier, Habakkuk prophesied and described why God would bring this upon the Babylonians with a series of five mocking statements (vv6-20).

Five Taunting Riddles – These proverbs are taken up against the proud city (this is Babylon, the city of man). They will reap what they have sown.

The Plunderer will be Plundered (vv6-8) – They have loaded themselves up through wicked violence, but a remnant will be used by God to render it back to them. Some final balancing of the scales will wait for eternity, but in the reign of God over all nations today, a measure of equity does come to pass as God ordains.

Timbers of Shame (vv9-11) – They have built their home and throne high above all threats (they think) by means of evil gain, cutting off many peoples. But the stones of the walls cry out to the timbers of the structure, and both groan with the impending implosion.

Cities from Bloodshed (vv12-14) – They think they have built a glorious civilization, but it will turn out that the Lord of Armies was just feeding His fire of justice with it. The city of man will be in ashes, but the City of God will fill the earth.

Shamelessness Disgraced (vv15-17) – The baseness of Babylon’s sin is exposed, and they are now forced to drink the cup of the Lord’s wrath because of their perverted violence upon others.

Their Idols are Teachers of Lies (vv18-19) – They made and then served the gods of their own hands in order to propagate their own lies, but the idols are dead mute and no help at all.

God is in His Holy Temple (v20) – The conclusion of this is that God is in His Holy Temple and there are no other words to be spoken. Babylon and Judah and Habakkuk and the whole world is to be silent. We must be silent because we serve a God Who is not silent. He spoke the Word and everything that was created was created (Gen 1:3, John 1:1-3). He is the God Who sent His Word, His Son (John 1:14, Heb 1:1-2). And this Word, His Son, holds all things together in perfect coherence (Col 1:16-17). He is the first Word and the Final Word, the Alpha and the Omega. There is no other Word and so all rebellious words are told to “shush.” The great empire, Babylon, was raised up by the power of His Word to chastise the covenant people of God for refusing to heed His Word. That same Word then declared the final day of the impenetrable walls of Nebuchadnezzar. It is God’s Word that raises up kings and kingdoms. It is God’s Word that brings them down. He will have mercy on whom He has mercy and He will harden whom He hardens. And there is only one Word that is spoken and that Word is Jesus. He is the Word, the Way, the only Way to the Father.

What do we learn? Any and every idol will be toppled. Any and every rebellion will be put down. Any and every secret sin that produced a profit will be turned inside out, measured, and returned in full to its perpetrator. We are a generation crying out for justice but we should be careful. The only justice we really want is the justice and wrath that was poured out upon the Just One on our behalf in a torrent of mercy and love. Only in that One Word, “*mercy and truth have met together, righteousness and peace have kissed*” (Psalm 85:10). Only in Jesus Christ will everything be put right. But in Jesus Christ, everything will be put right.

Did I Just Haul Jesus Into This? – No. It is plain in the Scriptures that God is talking about the reign and rule of Christ. Look again at verse 14. This is a conflation of Num 14:20 and Isaiah 11:9. Numbers 14 is when the covenant people of God tested God with their rebellion and unbelief. No matter, the LORD seems to say, “*the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD.*” Isaiah 11 is the promise of the stem of Jesse, a Branch growing out of the rooted remains of Israel judged and what would come forth: “*...the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.*” All through the Old Testament the theme of the covenant people spreading to all the earth with blessing is taught, beginning with Abraham (Gen 12:3), but even hinted before that in the curse upon the serpent in the garden (Gen 3:15).

And so, Babylon fell in such a way that the glory of the LORD was revealed. But the antithesis, the struggle between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent continues from beginning to end in this story of redemption. Paul quotes Isaiah 11:1 (and so the point of 11:9 and Habakkuk 2:14) to defend his ministry to the gentile nations. Whether Assyria, or Babylon, or the Medes, or Rome, or America, or whoever God is humiliating because of their proud and open rebellion against Him, He is always using it at the same time to spread His kingdom, to reveal in greater ways the crown rights of King Jesus and the spread of the Gospel to the ends of the earth. How much of the earth? How wet is the sea?

The Just Shall Live by Faith, with a View to the Salvation of the World – God is good all the time. God is holy all the time. God is sovereign all the time. And that is how the just shall live by faith. Faith is the natural reaction to the supernatural vision of God’s faithfulness. This faith is intensive to the believer on a personal level amid individual circumstances. But this faith is also extensive for the church as it worships a God who has spoken and is still speaking. Hab 2:14, Psalm 2:8-9, Psalm 110:1, 1 Cor 15:25-26, Rom 11:30-32, Rev 7:9-10, Phil 2:9-11.

When a holy judgment is upon us, even a judgment meted out by unholy hands, watch for a glorious and holy deliverance as well.

Dave Hatcher – February 7, 2021

Habakkuk 2:14 (NKJV)

14 For the earth will be filled With the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, As the waters cover the sea.

Psalm 2:8-9 (NKJV)

8 Ask of Me, and I will give You The nations for Your inheritance, And the ends of the earth for Your possession. 9 You shall break them with a rod of iron; You shall dash them to pieces like a potter’s vessel.’ ”

Psalm 110:1 (NKJV)

1 The LORD said to my Lord, “Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.”

1 Corinthians 15:25-26 (NKJV)

25 For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. 26 The last enemy that will be destroyed is death.

Romans 11:30-32 (NKJV)

30 For as you were once disobedient to God, yet have now obtained mercy through their disobedience, 31 even so these also have now been disobedient, that through the mercy shown you they also may obtain mercy. 32 For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all.

Revelation 7:9-10 (NKJV)

9 After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, 10 and crying out with a loud voice, saying, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”

Philippians 2:9-11 (NKJV)

9 Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, 11 and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.