

(Through the Bible) Nahum & Habakkuk

by Zac Poonen

God's message through Nahum emphasizes His anger and wrath against Assyria, but also His goodness and kindness to those who repent.

Duration: 55:28

Topics: "Gods Sovereignty", "Faith And Trials"

Description

This sermon delves into the book of Nahum and Habakkuk, exploring the themes of God's control over nations, the importance of patience and faith, and the triumph of faith in the face of trials. It emphasizes the need to trust in God's sovereignty even when faced with wickedness and challenges, and to find joy and strength in praising the Lord amidst difficulties.

Transcript

We're going to turn today to the book of Nahum in the Old Testament. I think it's true that lots of Christians never read some of these what are called minor prophets because they find it heavy to read and yet we believe that all Scripture is inspired by God. I'm not saying that every part of Scripture is of equal value, certainly the New Testament is far more important for us than the Old Testament, but if we believe that all Scripture by God there must be something even in these Old Testament books that we need to hear.

One of the things that we can be tired of is repetition, but the messages of a lot of these prophets repeat something for emphasis and until we hear something frequently it doesn't sink in and the second thing we learn from repetition and emphasis is the importance that God gives to one particular subject or theme compared to other subjects. God may speak about ten different subjects and he may speak two or three of those again and again and again and again. Now that's not man's way.

Man usually speaks on different subjects and then he wants to go on to other subjects to get a reputation for not being monotonous and for variety, but the prophets in the Old Testament and even the prophets today are not bothered by all that. They say what God wants people to say and God knows exactly what people need to hear and if they need to hear it a twentieth time the prophet will say it a twentieth time. So we see that emphasis repeated, certain things repeated again and again in the prophets and sometimes the same prophet repeats the same thing again.

Now Nahum was a man who lived a hundred years after Jonah and he was speaking at a time when Assyria was still the most powerful nation on earth and for these prophets to speak against the most

powerful nation on earth and say God is going to judge them was as ridiculous as someone telling a powerful nation today that God is going to destroy them and reduce their whole country to rubble. Nobody would believe them and very few believed these prophets, but today as we look back in history we find that it was exactly like those prophets said. Every word was fulfilled whether it was concerning Assyria or Egypt before that or Babylon or Tyre, some nations God said there will be no remembrance of you anymore, Tyre, a city of Tyre is just reduced to rubble, Assyria has been reduced like that, but God never said that about Egypt.

Egypt was a nation even before Assyria, long before the time when Moses was there, but God never said about Egypt that it'd be reduced to nothing and that's why Egypt exists today. But the nation of Assyria has just disappeared, the nation of Babylon has just disappeared. So when God says about a nation that this is going to be the end of you, there'll be no mention of you anymore, that's what happens and when God just says well you're going to be defeated but doesn't say you're going to be completely wiped out, it happens like that.

So these things written in the Old Testament give us great confidence as we look at the promises in the New Testament, what God has said about the future, about the fact that all people who live in sin will one day be punished, take a simple word like this, Jesus said that every idle word that we ever speak we will give an account in the day of judgment. Now it's my conviction that 99% of believers don't believe that, at least the ones I've met. If they did, they would be very careful about their words.

But because judgment doesn't come immediately, we say ah, nothing has happened. That is exactly what Assyria said here. Oh, Nahum is saying this but nothing is happening, but it did happen.

So that warns us that even though Jesus said something and the judgment hasn't come, it doesn't mean it won't happen, it will, it may take time but it will happen. Now the other thing we see here is that when God sent Jonah to Nineveh, we could ask why did God send Jonah to Nineveh, because he knew this nation is going to just flourish and become evil and be destroyed after a hundred years. But God dealt with that nation as it was then.

At that particular time, they were willing to repent and God could see that many, many people in the city of Nineveh had a heart for repentance. And that's why God sent Jonah there. And that's a word to us that God does not send us to a place unless he's got a purpose for that.

Now, if you go on your own, you say, oh, there's a need over there, I'll go. Well, then you better take care of yourself. But if you waited on the Lord and God led you, even if it was to a difficult place like Nineveh, you can be absolutely sure that there is some purpose with which God sent you there.

And certainly Jonah was sent with a purpose. And there were many people there who repented and turned from their sin in that generation. Nahum was not sent like that to go to Nineveh because God knew that now these fellows are not going to repent.

So he doesn't waste his time sending his prophet there. What I want to say to you from this example of Jonah and Nahum is that if you listen to God, you will not waste your life. You will not go where you're wasting your time and you will go where something useful can be accomplished for God.

That's why these prophets lived before God's face and waited for God to tell them to do something. They didn't just rush around like a lot of Christian workers today doing this, that and the other. They took time to

wait on God.

Okay, the message of Nahum is a message of God's anger and wrath. And if you look at chapter one and verse two and verse six, just these two verses, you see seven words, I mean, maybe different in different translations. God is a jealous God, jealous, avenging, wrathful, vengeance, and indignation, verse six, anger, burning, or in some translations, rage, fierce anger, number of words that speak of a variety of words used to express God's intense anger and blazing fury against, not just against sin, but against Assyria for their continuing in sin.

And it says in verse three, the Lord is slow to get angry. But when he does get angry, you can't stop him. He's very slow to get angry.

He's very long suffering, is very patient, but finally, he will bring justice. And mainly, he's angry against those who are exploiting other people. You see this theme throughout the prophets.

Like I said, way back in the beginning, let me repeat again, there was a difference between Adam's sin and Cain's sin. Adam hurt himself, Cain hurt somebody else. Whenever we do something which hurts another person in any way, in any way, as I said, even if it is just you speak a word against him and ruin his reputation, or you hurt him in other ways, any way you exploit, for example, you become friendly with a girl and stir up her emotions and then drop her, you have hurt her.

You may not have touched her body, but you have hurt her. And I want to say that God is angry, wrathful, indignant, has got a blazing fury, and will take vengeance and revenge on anyone who does things like that. It may not have happened yet, because he waits for you to repent.

But anything, the smallest little thing that we ever do against another human being to hurt that person, I tell you, God takes a note of it and he will reward people for it. Many, many people have lost the anointing of God upon their life because they have spoken careless words against others of God's servants, whom they knew nothing about, they just criticized because they heard some stories and spread the stories themselves. That's why God removes the anointing from their life.

And if they continue like that, he'll even remove their salvation. So God has got a blazing fury. Why was he so angry at Assyria? It's not because they were smoking and drinking.

No, it's not because they were taking drugs. Now if you heard that somebody here was taking drugs, you'll be horrified. But if you hear that somebody hurt somebody else, we're not so horrified.

And I want to do what those Old Testament prophets did, give us a proper focus on what God considers serious sins. Other things are also sins, but God says these are more serious. His blazing fury against Assyria was not because they were taking drugs or drinking.

It's because they hurt other people. And one day God will administer justice when he comes again against every single human being on the face of the earth who has ever, ever in any way hurt another person with his words or his actions or in any way. So that's something we must all take seriously.

God is a God of anger. And if you find it difficult to believe that, people cannot believe, for example, that hell is a reality. There are people who like to believe that one day God will save everybody.

There are even some believers who have believed that, that everybody in hell will finally get converted. I mean, some even go to the extreme of thinking that Satan will get converted someday. But I say, I'd rather believe God's word.

If you cannot believe in a God who is full of anger, then you cannot believe in a God who is full of love. Love demands anger, punishment. I'll tell you why.

Supposing you have two children and you love both of them equally. And you see the bigger boy taking a stone and hitting and hitting and hitting and hitting that smaller boy, making him bleed and seeing that poor little boy can't help himself. And you as a father just watch because you love, you love that older boy.

If you love, you'll be angry. If you don't love, you couldn't care less. You won't be angry.

Love and anger go together because love demands punishment on somebody who is being hurt unnecessarily. You'd stop it. And you would punish that older boy for taking advantage of this poor weaker boy and hitting him.

That's exactly what God was doing with Assyria. And that's what he does with people throughout the ages and which we will see more fully at the final judgment seat of God. So I hope all these things that I say will teach us to be extremely careful in the words that we speak about other people, in the things that we do that in any way hurt another person or bring another person down.

My dear brothers and sisters, do you want to be a servant of God? Be careful with your words about other people and even with particularly about those you don't like, although those you don't agree with. So God is slow to anger, but when he does get angry, he's really furious. And in verse 7 to 10, we find the Lord is good.

And there we see his attitude to those who respond to his word in repentance. When trouble comes, he's a strong refuge. See, if we humble ourselves and respond to these strong warnings of the prophets, you'll find God is very good to you.

And when trouble comes, he'll be like a refuge protecting you, definitely, like a father would go and protect that little boy from this person who's trying to hurt him. And it says the Lord knows everyone who trusts in him. Oh, yeah, he doesn't forget even one person, you may be weak, poor, helpless, but God knows if you trust in him.

And then in the next few verses, you see against God's attitude towards his enemies. Verse 8, he sweeps away his enemies like in an overwhelming flood. You know, when a flood comes, it just wipes out everybody in a moment.

That's how judgment is going to come upon God's enemies. He pursues his foes into the darkness of night. God chases his enemies.

The prophets use these expressions to show you how God pursues after those who don't take sin seriously. He will destroy you. Verse 9, why are you scheming against the Lord? He will destroy you with one blow.

He will not need to strike a second time. And his enemies, when they are struck by God, will stagger like drunks, verse 10, and be burnt up like dry straw in a field. Who is this king of yours who dares to plot evil

against the Lord? What are Assyria's sins? Basically, pride towards God, who dares to stand up before God, and secondly, cruelty towards other people because they took advantage of others and exploited others.

Basically, these are the two things which always these prophets keep on emphasizing. You're proud in your attitude towards God and you're hard towards your fellow human beings. So, what's the solution? All the prophets are saying the same thing.

And in spite of that, here are believers who don't read these prophets, unfortunately. And that's why they remain proud and they remain hard towards other people. Because they say, oh, these prophets are all boring.

That's exactly what the devil wants you to say, so that you never understand God's anger against pride and God's anger against hardness of heart towards other human beings. I want to encourage you to read these prophets, even if you find it a bit laborious, and get the heart of God to understand how God feels about these things. You see, when you read the prophets, you get an understanding, you get a feeling of how God feels about certain things.

And that constant repetition finally hits home. It's like writing something with a diamond on a rock, and something finally gets written on our hearts, that God hates something and we tremble and we fear to commit those sins. And that's the value of repetition and reading these prophets.

So this is what the Lord says to the Assyrians. He says, you're going to be judged and you'll have no more children to carry on your name, verse 14. And then to Israel, the Lord says, look, a messenger is coming over the mountains, verse 15, with good news.

He's bringing a message of peace. This is a similar verse to what we read in Isaiah about the gospel being preached. Celebrate your festivals, O people of Judah, for your enemies will never invade your land again.

It's like the proclamation that the devil has been destroyed. Assyria is a picture of Satan and his kingdom. And the good news that we have to go proclaiming to people is that, don't be afraid, O people.

Satan has been defeated. His kingdom has been destroyed. Very often when we preach the gospel, most people who preach the gospel only proclaim that your sins are forgiven.

That's good. But that's only, to me, a part of the gospel. You can have victory over sin.

That's another part of the gospel. Satan was defeated on the cross. On the cross, Jesus died to forgive our sin.

Jesus died that our old man might be crucified with him, that we might not serve sin. Jesus died so that Satan might be defeated. Jesus died that the curse of the law might never be upon us.

Many, many reasons why Jesus died. Very often, most people who preach the gospel proclaim only one part of that truth. Your sins can be forgiven.

Here it says, the messenger who is proclaiming the gospel, verse 15, is bringing a message of peace. What is that message? Your enemy has been defeated and will never have power over you again. I want to ask those of you who preach the gospel, have you preached that? That Satan can never have power over you again? That sin can never have power over you again? This is the picture.

And now we see the judgment itself. In Nineveh's judgment, Nineveh, you're already surrounded by enemy armies. This is exactly what happened a few years later after Nahum had prophesied that.

There was no hope for them. This is not like Jonah's time when he said, repent, because God's going to judge you. Here, there's no opportunity for repentance.

The doors are shut. God has waited long enough. And they kept on sinning, sinning, sinning, sinning, sinning, sinning.

And they crossed that red line that God had drawn in front of nations and people. You know, John says, there is a sin unto death. It's no use praying for such people.

1 John chapter 5. A person can keep on sinning, like it says in Proverbs 29.1. He keeps on rejecting, rejecting, rejecting, keeps on hardening his neck. And suddenly, one day, he crosses the red line, and there's no hope for him. He has sinned against the Holy Spirit, and there is no forgiveness after that.

It's a very dangerous thing, particularly for a believer, to keep on sinning and keep on rejecting God's pleadings. Now there was no place for repentance for Nineveh. They have destroyed the land of Israel and hurt it, verse 2, in so many ways, but the Lord will restore its honor far again.

And then it describes the enemy being destroyed with shields and people coming with uniforms and the king shouting to the officers and the plunder of all the silver and gold, verse 9, of Nineveh's treasures being taken away by... It was actually Babylon that came some years later and destroyed Assyria and took over everything. And what has become now of this great Nineveh, verse 11, Lion of the Nations, full of fight and boldness? You were once a mighty lion, verse 12. You crushed your enemies to feed your cubs.

You filled your city and your homes with captives and plunder. See, this is how they exploited others. They made themselves rich at the expense of other poor people.

Do you think pastors don't do that today? Make themselves rich at the expense of other poor people? Do you think the judgment of these creatures will be any different from the judgment of Nineveh? My dear brother, sister, if you want to make money, go into business. Don't serve the Lord. That's not the place to make money.

A lot of people are doing it today, making themselves rich at the expense of poor believers from whom they collect tithes, etc. I believe their judgment will be worse than the judgment of Nineveh because they have more light than Nineveh had. Steer clear of that type of Christian work.

Those who exploit, take advantage. Your home, verse 12, last part, is filled with what you have taken from other poor people. Is that true? It's not true of many people who earn their own living and do an honest business.

But it is true today in India of a lot of people who have done Christian work. So that's a warning. And the Lord says to such people, verse 13, I am your enemy and you will never again be able to plunder these poor people again for I will judge you.

And how terrible, chapter 3, verse 1, it will be in that day when God does judge the city, the city of murder and lies. She's crammed with the wealth that she took from poor people. Listen, hear the crack of the whips.

It says here in verse 4, How did Nineveh attract people? There was something very powerful about it, just like people are attracted to the United States of America. There's something attractive and people want to go there and live there. Nineveh was like that.

It enticed people with its earthly attractiveness. And I want to say to all of you, it's not just in nations. The warning here is, beware of being enticed.

That's the word used here in this translation. Entice people with your beauty. Beware of being attracted to anything on earth that appears attractive, if it is not Godly.

That's a warning. There are a lot of things on earth which are attractive and the devil will try to tempt you with them. He even tried to tempt Jesus with them.

He told the Lord, I'll give you all the glory of this world, all these beautiful things, if you would bow down and worship me. And I want to tell you this, if you go after the attractive things of this earth, which are not Godly, you can get it. But the way you get it, will be by bowing your knee to Satan in some area.

And I've seen lots of believers who do that, and they've suffered the consequences in their own life. So take heed to this warning. Don't let anything on earth be attractive.

Chapter 3, verse 8. Are you any better than Thebes, surrounded by rivers, protected by water on all sides? Ethiopia and the land of Egypt were the source of her strength, which seemed without limit. Put and Libya supported her, yet Thebes fell, and her people were led away captives. Her babies were dashed to death, and soldiers cast lots, verse 10 last part, to find out which Egyptian officers would become their servants, and their leaders were bound in chains.

And Nineveh, you attacked Thebes many years ago, in Egypt, and Thebes was one of those difficult cities in Egypt, that Assyria could not conquer, because it was surrounded with waters, protected by so many allies they had. But Thebes was defeated, and Assyria conquered it. And now the Lord says, you think you're any better? The same thing will happen to you.

Sometimes, God may give us a ministry that somebody else had, because he backslid. Like David was put in Saul's place. Somebody else fell away, and maybe you got a position.

Beware of pride. Beware of thinking, well I'm not like him, and God's given me something. Beware of ever thinking, that what happened to that person, can never happen to me.

The Lord says, you are no better. Paul, the great apostle said, I'm afraid that I can preach to others, and be disqualified myself. Because he lived in that fear and humility, he was never disqualified.

And so, the Lord says, you will be punished, and your troops will become as weak, as women, verse 13. And finally, he says in verse 19, there is no healing for your wound. Your injury is fatal, and all who hear of your destruction, will clap their hands for joy.

Men will agree with God's judgment, on Nineveh. One day, when God judges all men. I don't know whether you've ever thought of this.

Why does God pull people out of hell, put them back into their bodies, resurrect them, and make them stand before him, for the final judgment. I mean, they've already gone to hell. The rich man went to hell, long, long ago, Jesus said.

But God is going to pull that rich man out of hell, after 2000 years, put him into his body, resurrect him, and Revelation 20 says, he'll stand before God in the day of judgment. Why? And then send him back into the lake of fire. Why not leave him there? There's a reason.

Everybody who's gone to hell, the whole world must know, why they went. And the whole world will agree, with God's judgment in that day. Today, there are a lot of people, who've gone to hell, and I don't know why they went to hell.

And I may sit in heaven, and have a doubt, was that, did that fellow deserve to go to hell? You know, there are a lot of people, who speak about, oh, so and so is a good man, does he deserve to go to hell? Some of you may have a doubt like that. Some such a person is a good person, I know he doesn't believe in Jesus, but he's a good person. That day, God will remove every doubt from your mind.

And that's why he pulls people out of hell, puts them in their bodies, and makes them account for every single thing, they did from the day they were born, and asks the whole world, what do you think? They all will say, he deserves hell. That's why there's going to be a judgment. So we learn a number of things, from the book of Nahum, read it more carefully next time.

Now we turn to the book of Habakkuk. If Nahum spoke about God's anger and vengeance, Habakkuk speaks about the conflict that faith has, and the triumph of faith. It's the story of a man of God, who has questions.

Basically, Habakkuk has two problems, and he asks God questions. And God gives answers. You know, even a man of faith, a man of God, can have doubts, can have questions in his mind.

And those questions, the chapter begins with the conflict of faith. The book begins, and the book ends, with the triumph of faith. And that's how it should be in all of our lives.

There's nothing wrong in asking God questions. In fact, if little children, as they grow up, ask their father no questions, something is wrong. A father, a good father, will encourage his children to ask questions.

Come my little boy, don't you have any questions? And no father is upset, when his little boy or little girl asks questions. And let me tell you, God is not upset when you ask him questions. The thing is, when you have a doubt, don't go to other people of your level of maturity.

They'll only confuse you, and you may confuse them. They don't have any doubt, and you put some doubt into their mind now. Go to God.

And the first question that Habakkuk has, is a question that we all have. Why do the wicked people prosper? This is the question that Esau had in Psalm 73. We saw that.

This is the question that Jeremiah had. Also, in Jeremiah chapter 12. And that's the time the Lord told Jeremiah, if you can't run with men, how will you run with horses? That means, if such simple things worry you, how are you going to face major problems in life? Major questions.

But God answers these people. Esau said, I went into the sanctuary of God, and I understood. Jeremiah went before God's presence, and he understood.

Habakkuk went before God's presence, and God gave him an answer. And that's the thing that we must bear in mind. When we have a doubt, if you want, go to a godly brother.

And Habakkuk went to God. There were not many godly brothers around those days. But it's interesting that Habakkuk, he lived around the same time as Jeremiah, and both of them had the similar question.

How long, O Lord, chapter 1, verse 2, must I call for help? And you don't listen. I say violence. People are harassing me.

I'm your servant. Look what these people are doing to me. But you don't come to save.

I'm godly, and these people are all ungodly, and it looks as if you're not doing anything. Have you ever felt like that? Christians have felt like that for 2,000 years. Lord, why do these godless people prosper? Why are you allowing them to harass your people? Must I forever see this sin and misery all around me? Wherever I look, there's destruction and violence.

I'm surrounded by people who love to argue and fight. He's looking at Judah, and the law has become paralyzed and useless. You know, that happens sometimes for Christians in North India, where the law is not on their side.

It's as if the law is paralyzed and useless. And it does not help them. And if some of you go to North India to serve the Lord, you may find that.

And a book like Habakkuk can help you then. There is no justice given in the courts. It's here, verse 4. There is no justice given in the courts.

It's injustice even when you go to court. And the wicked far outnumber the righteous. And justice is perverted with bribes and trickery.

Written 2600 years ago, relevant for us today. And the Lord replies. He doesn't directly answer Habakkuk's question.

Jesus very often did not directly answer questions people asked him. Sometimes they would ask him a question, and Jesus said, I'll also ask you one question. You answer that one and then I'll answer you.

And then they would be caught in a situation. They say, if we answer like this, the people will get upset. If we answer like this, then we'll be proved to be wrong.

So they pretended and they say, we didn't know, we don't know. And the Lord says, then I also don't know. I'm not going to answer it.

But sometimes he would answer them straight. We need wisdom. God's wisdom is very different from man's.

And the Lord replies to Habakkuk in verse 5. Look at the nations and be amazed. Watch and be astounded. For I'm going to do something in your day that you won't even believe if someone told you about it.

Because it never happened before like that for Judah. It's true that, I mean, Israel had gone into captivity, but Judah had never experienced anything like that. Many, many years earlier, nearly 800 years earlier, they have been slaves in Egypt.

And that was a long time ago. But now the Lord says, I'm going to do something in your generation that you won't even believe. And that's not some mighty miracle of deliverance.

You know, you can take that verse and misquote it. I'm going to do something in your day that you won't even believe if somebody told you about it as if God is going to do some great miracle. But that's not what he's talking about.

He's saying, I'm going to raise up an evil, corrupt nation to destroy my people. And you won't believe it, that God will ever do such a thing. I'm raising up the Babylonians to be a new power on the world scene.

So the first thing God says, which Habakkuk, if he's listening carefully, can get, is this, listen, I'm in control of this universe. Don't think these Babylonians came up by accident. I am raising them up.

Through the years in India, in our church, whenever there's been elections, we've always had times of prayer. Prayer, we cannot influence the elections by voting. But we believe we can influence the result of the elections by prayer.

Because we believe God is in control. Promotion comes from God, as we read in the Psalms. God raises up one and puts down another.

And so we pray, Lord, we don't know what is good for this country, or especially for the believers in this country, or for the spread of the gospel in this country. But we want you to put into power those whom you have sovereignly permitted for the good of your purposes. And sometimes what we think may not be good.

How many of you would select the Babylonians to rule over Judah? Nobody. But that's why God says, I'm going to do something which you won't even believe, because you don't know my ways. See, when we don't know God's ways, we can't believe it.

We can't believe that God would ever do such a thing. Because our idea of God is like a grandfather who sits in heaven and always gives us toys and cakes and ice cream and makes us happy all the time. See, a lot of Christians don't have a proper idea about God.

They have no idea of God's holiness. They only think of God like a grandfather who's always giving them gifts. And that's a totally wrong concept of God.

And that's why God says, I'm going to do something which you won't even believe if somebody tells you that God would ever act like that. That God would use heathen people to punish his children. For example, let me take a situation.

Supposing in one country, all the Christians are always fighting with each other. I'm not going to tell you which country that is. Where all the Christians are fighting with each other.

Everybody's thinking we are the only group and everybody else doesn't belong to the Lord. And they go to court against one another and they hate one another and criticize one another. Always trying to find some little fault in the other group or find some little fault in some preacher.

And as if only their leaders are the holy people in the world. And supposing God finds a country like that where Christians, who are supposed to be a testament to the world, are like this. And the election time comes.

And all the Christians are praying, Lord, give us some godly government, people who will allow us to preach the gospel and people who will give us freedom to have conferences and people who will allow plenty of foreign money to come inside India. Oh, sorry, I mentioned the country. I wanted to keep the country a secret anyway.

And then God raises up a government that stops foreign money and persecutes the Christians. What is going to happen? These Christians who were criticizing one another will stop criticizing one another. They become a little united.

And these Christians who are always dependent on foreign money will say, oh, we've got enough money in our country to serve the Lord. Why do we need to get it from there? And those Christians will become better, stronger Christians. Wasn't God's way better? But who understands that? This prophet says, even if I tell you, you won't believe it.

Because you think God is a grandfather who is always sitting giving gifts to his people and keeping them happy. So Habakkuk's message is very relevant for our day. You read these minor prophets, I tell you they've got a prophetic message for our time.

So the Lord says, I'm raising up the Babylonians. They didn't raise themselves up. I am raising up the Babylonians.

The Lord told Pharaoh, the greatest man on earth in his time, in Moses' time, I have raised you up to manifest my power through you. That means, in the way he rebelled against God, God would crush him and manifest his power. At the same time, God raised up Moses in that same generation to manifest his power through Moses in another way.

If you cooperate with God, he will manifest his power through you like Moses. If you don't cooperate with God, he will make you a warning to all generations as to what will happen to a man who defies God. If you humble yourself, God will make you an example to other people as to what he can do to a humble man.

If you are proud, even if you are a believer, God will do something through you, make you a warning to all other believers, say, don't be like that believer. It's up to you. So he raises up the Babylonians.

It says, to be a new power on the world scene. They are a cruel and violent nation who will march across the world and conquer it. They are notorious for their cruelty.

They do as they like. Their horses are swifter than leopards. They are fierce people, more fierce than wolves.

Like eagles, they sweep down and pounce on their prey. Verse 9, all of them are bent on violence. The hordes advance like a wind from the desert.

They scoff at kings and princes, scorn their defenses. They simply pile ramps of earth against their walls and capture them. They sweep like the wind are gone.

They are deeply guilty for their own strength is their God. You think this is answered Abba Cook's question? He is asking, why do the wicked prosper and say, Lord, you haven't answered my question. You just told me that these wicked are going to be still more strong.

But behind that, God did answer that question. That question. He said, I have raised them up.

I am in control. And I am accomplishing a purpose. Even if you can't see it fully.

Today, we look back, 2,600 years later, and we see Babylon was raised up and Babylon was destroyed. And you say, Lord, it was so wonderful what you did. Do you know what happened as a result of the people of Judah being taken to Babylonian captivity for 70 years? Do you know what happened? Let me tell you something.

From the time of the judges, which was, what was it, 1400, 1300 BC, up to the time of the Babylonian captivity, which was around 600 BC, 700 years, Israel frequently worshipped idols. Even during David's time, they were worshipping that bronze serpent. There was idol worship going on almost continuously for 700 years.

And God sent them into captivity for 70 years. And you know what is the result? For the last 2,500 years, the Jews have never worshipped idols. God has solved that problem permanently.

Isn't that amazing? I mean, they've done a lot of other wrong things, but they haven't gone back to idolatry. Why is that? See, God can teach one final lesson to a person, like he broke Jacob once and he became a different man. Sometimes God has to use strong-arm methods to teach us a lesson, a permanent lesson.

So God, it's enough for us to know. We don't know why God allows so many things. I don't know.

But it is enough for me to know that God is in control. I have raised them up. And you will see, 50 years from now, if you're alive, or even 25 years from now, if the Lord tarries, you'll look back and you'll say, Lord, you were right.

The ones you raised up accomplished your purposes, even though they were an evil people. Even though the Babylonians hated the people of Judah. And God can use people who hate Christians.

For example, we have in our own lifetime seen what communism did against Christians in China, Albania, Russia. What was the result? How many people would pray that such communist government should come to power? Like the Babylonians were raised up and put down, God allowed the communists to come up and put them down. But in that process, what happened? Some of the finest Christians in the world came forth in these countries, like China and Russia.

Far better than the Christians who live in comfortable countries, where life is easy and where they have plenty of money. Because in the fires of persecution, they got purified. We don't know what to pray for.

It's enough for us to know God is in control. Okay, Habakkuk's second question is, Lord you are eternal. Is it your plan to wipe us all out by sending these people? Surely not.

You have decreed, okay I agree, you have decreed the rise of these Babylonians to punish us and correct us for our terrible sins. Okay, you are perfectly right in this. But will you? You cannot allow sin in any form.

You are too holy to look upon sin. Can you just stand idly by while these people swallow us up? Okay, we are sinners, but they are worse sinners. Will you be silent when the wicked people destroy people who are more righteous than them? Are we just like fish to be caught and killed? Are we just creeping things with no leader to defend us? Verse 15, do they have to string us up on their hooks and drag us in their nets? If they do that, Lord, they will worship their nets and burn incense in front of them.

These nets are the gods who have made us, which they will claim. Lord, if you allow these heathen people to conquer your people, don't you think they will worship their idols even more and say their idols are all powerful? That is exactly the question that a lot of Christians in our country can ask today. Are you going to let them get away with this? Will they succeed forever? And Habakkuk does one wise thing.

He says, I'll climb up into my watchtower now, chapter 2, verse 1, and wait and see what the Lord is going to say to me in answer to my complaint, my question. And the Lord said to me, the Lord replies to the second question, write my answer in large, clear letters on a tablet so that everyone can see it and tell everybody else. What is that? The things I planned will not happen right away.

Slowly, steadily, surely, the time approaches when the vision will be fulfilled. And if it seems slow, what a word for us in our time. If it seems slow, be patient.

Verse 3, wait patiently, chapter 2, verse 3, because it will surely take place. It will not be delayed. I will judge them finally.

And I will make my people prosper, but it won't happen overnight. You see, we are people who want everything in an instant. You press a button and something must happen.

Coffee, instant coffee, various things, instantly. Instant salvation, instant baptism in the Holy Spirit, instant miracles. God doesn't work like that.

God says you've got to be patient. Character is not formed by pressing a button or in an instant. It takes a long period of time and suffering and trial for character to be formed.

Tribulation works patience, Romans 5. Patience, experience, experience, hope. Tribulation produces character of which we are not ashamed. So God, the first thing God says is be patient.

Can you hear that word in our time? The second thing God says is have faith. Live by faith. This is the verse, verse 4, that is quoted three times in the New Testament.

In Romans chapter 1, Galatians chapter 3, and Hebrews chapter 10. The righteous will live by faith. It was the great watchword of the Reformation.

Salvation is by faith. But the context here is about the Babylonians coming into Judah. What you need is faith.

Look at those proud Babylonians, verse 4. They trust in themselves. Their lives are crooked. But the righteous one, if you're really righteous, you live by faith.

What is your faith? Your faith is God controls this universe. Your faith is God loves me and he will deal with these people at the right time. That is faith.

So the opposite of faith is not just unbelief, according to this verse. The opposite of faith is pride. There are the proud people and there are the people who live by faith.

There are only two categories of people in the world. The proud person whose soul is not upright, like it says in the verse. A proud person's soul is not upright.

And the man of faith who is righteous. When your soul is not upright, you know what upright means? Absolutely straight. When there's crookedness in your soul.

I think it's the King James Version that says your soul is not upright. When there's crookedness in your soul, the outward manifestation of that crookedness is pride. Whenever you see a proud person, proud of anything, you can believe from this verse.

There's crookedness inside him. There's a lack of straightforwardness inside him. An upright man will always be humble and will always be a man of faith.

The proud whose soul is not upright in him. So remember this, whenever you find pride in you, it's because there's some crookedness in your soul and God resists the proud. So patience and faith.

Those are the two things. Patience and faith. Please remember that in a time of trial.

Then it speaks about wealth, verse 5, being treacherous. Wealth of any sort is treacherous. Wealth in terms of money, wealth of intelligence, wealth of opportunity, wealth of Bible knowledge, wealth of anything, any type of wealth is treacherous because that's what makes people proud and the other characteristic of such people is they are never at rest.

Their mouths are opened as wide as death and they are never satisfied. They are greedy, always wanting more and the time is coming when their captors will taunt them saying, you thieves at last justice has caught up with you. One day justice will catch up with all these people.

Chapter 2 verses 6 to 19 is a description of how a self-centered life finally destroys itself. A proud person is a person centered in himself. He does not live by faith.

He is a person who has confidence in himself. He depends on himself. Ultimately such a life will destroy itself.

In the midst of this, here is a lovely verse verse 14 this is what the man of faith believes in. The time will come when the whole earth will be filled with the glory of the Lord as the waters fill the sea. That's the time we look forward to and we have faith for that.

And then when Habakkuk gets this answer his heart is full of praise. Now he's got his answer. The conflict of faith has ended in the triumph of faith in chapter 3 chapter 2 verse 20 onwards.

Chapter 2 verse 20 The Lord is in his holy temple. Let all the earth be silent. No more questions.

Habakkuk says Lord I'm silent. I've got no more questions. Like Job said when he saw the glory of God he said I put my hand on my mouth.

I've got no more questions Lord. I've seen you. I don't have any more questions.

Don't think that God answers all your 10,000 questions because when you get 10,000 answers you'll have 10,000 more questions. The answer to everything like in Job's case and in Habakkuk's case is to see the Lord. You see the Lord.

The Lord is in his holy temple. Have you seen him? Let all flesh be silent. And this prayer was sung by the prophet Habakkuk.

He says I heard about you Lord. I'm filled with amazement at the things you've done. Chapter 3 verse 2. In this time of deep need begin again to help us.

Show us your power. Remember mercy. And I see God.

This is the answer. I verse 3 see God the Holy One. Just like Isaiah.

I see God. His brilliant splendor fills the heavens. The earth is filled with the praise.

What a wonderful God he is. Rays of light flash from his hands. He rejoices in his awesome power.

Pestilence marches in front of him. Plague falls close behind. When he stops the earth shakes.

When he looks the nations tremble. He shatters the mountains. See he's seeing God.

He's not seeing the Babylonians. The trouble till now was he seeing the Babylonians. The trouble till now he was seeing wicked people who were prospering.

All his questions are solved when he sees God in his glory. In his greatness. That's the answer.

And he describes God in his greatness. And he says I tremble inside. Verse 16.

My lips quivered with fear and I shook in terror. I will wait quietly for the coming day. And when that day comes of chastening and the fig trees verse 17 have lost their blossoms.

There are no grapes on the vine. The olive crop fails. The fields are empty and barren.

The flocks are all dead. The cattle barns are all empty. Let them be empty.

Let my business go to ruins like Job having lost everything. I will rejoice in the Lord. I will be joyful in the God of my salvation.

That is the triumph of faith. They believed his words. Psalm 106.12 and they sang his praise.

The Sovereign Lord is my strength. And look at this man who had all these doubts and fears in the beginning. He says he will make me as sure-footed as a deer and bring me over these mountains.

These mountains of doubt. You know how the deer is so sure-footed. It doesn't lose its grip on this mountain.

It just runs over it. And Habakkuk says my feet are going to be like a deer's. I'm going to climb over these mountains and go.

And he adds a little note at the end. When you sing this song, please use some instruments. Just really praise the Lord with all of your heart.

Don't just sing it in a drab, uninteresting way. Praise the Lord. Let's sing it to the Lord also with instruments.

And God is on the throne and He's the victor. And no matter what happens, if everything around us fails, we will rejoice in the God of our salvation. Amen.

Let's pray.

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