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Habakkuk Overview



Bible Book Overviews - Steve Gregg

In this overview, Steve Gregg discussed the book of Habakkuk, one of the minor prophets possibly contemporary with Jeremiah. The book focuses on God's actions and contains two cycles where the prophet complains to God and gets an answer back. Despite the perceived difficulties and troubles, the book concludes with a prayer of praise to God, emphasizing important themes for the New Testament such as justification by faith and the knowledge and glory of the Lord.

Transcript

Today in this session we have two very short books to look at. Each has three chapters. And they are two minor prophets who were contemporary with one another and also contemporary with Jeremiah.

They are the books of Habakkuk and Zephaniah. And it's not clear which of these men really comes earlier. It's possible that Zephaniah was a little earlier than Habakkuk, but no one knows for sure.

Therefore, it seems most convenient just to take them in the order that we have them arranged in our Bibles, which places Habakkuk first. Some of you may have heard Habakkuk pronounced differently. Habakkuk is how some people pronounce it.

And I wondered for years which was correct pronunciation. And I don't know that I ever got a final authority on that. But I had an old King James Bible that broke down the names phonetically and put accents and so forth on Hebrew names.

Whether they did it correctly or not, I don't know, but Habakkuk was the pronunciation. So if you're used to saying Habakkuk instead of Habakkuk, my apologies. It'll sound awkward to you every time I use the word.

In fact, I used to fluctuate so often that even in the course of teaching through the book, I'd say the name maybe 20 times in the lecture, if not more than that. And about half the times I'd say Habakkuk and other times Habakkuk. So I'm going to try to be consistent and call him Habakkuk.

Both of these guys were late prophets, prophesying in the late 7th century BC. That would be the numbers for those years would be early 600s BC. The 7th century BC would be 600 and whatever BC.

Just like we're now living in the 20th century, though the numbers of our years are 19-something. As I said, they were both almost certainly contemporary with Jeremiah. The exact date of Habakkuk is unknown because he doesn't give us very much to date him by, except that we know that there was the threat of the Babylonians coming, and that soon.

And we know that Jeremiah was prophesying for about 40 years before the Babylonians invaded, and that means that Habakkuk must have been contemporary with him. Zephaniah gives his, he doesn't give a date, but he does say he prophesied during the reign of Josiah, and that would put him of course contemporary with Jeremiah also, though possibly a little older man than Jeremiah was. In any case, they are short prophets with a single message, and that is the message of destruction.

But what is in view in both prophecies is the coming of the Babylonians against Jerusalem, and this being brought on by the sins of the people of Judah. Habakkuk is a little different, however, not only different than Zephaniah, but different than all the other prophets, in that he doesn't focus upon the sins of the people, and he doesn't speak to the people about what God is doing. Instead, Habakkuk speaks to God about what God is doing.

And it's kind of an interesting structure Habakkuk has, because there's two cycles of the prophet complaining to God and getting an answer back from God. In chapter 1, verses 2 through 4, we have his first complaint to God, and his complaint is that injustice seems to be going unpunished. Presumably he means in his own society in Judah, in Jerusalem, that the wicked are prevailing and they seem to be prospering and there's no justice being done.

Well, God answers him about that in chapter 1, verses 5 through 11, where he makes it clear that God is going to take care of that. He's going to bring judgment in the form of the Chaldeans, which is the Babylonians, mentioned in verse 6. And the Babylonians are going to come in and wipe out these sinners in Judah. Now, God has given Habakkuk an adequate answer to his first complaint.

His complaint was, well, it's really wicked, these people in our society have just gone to hell in a handbasket, and nothing is done to punish them. And God says, that's okay, I'm going to punish them. Just wait, you'll see.

I'm going to bring the Chaldeans, they're going to wipe everyone out. Well, Habakkuk didn't like that answer, because, now wait a minute, how can you use somebody as evil as the Babylonians, certainly more evil than ourselves, to punish us? That just didn't set

well with the prophet. And so he raises this as his second complaint, which is also in chapter 1, verses 12 through 17.

Basically, his question there is, why is it that you're going to use somebody so corrupt? That doesn't seem just. I mean, we may be deserving of judgment, but are we more deserving of judgment than the Babylonians themselves are? That doesn't make very much sense. And in chapter 2, verse 1, the prophet says, I'm going to go and stand on the watchtower and wait to see what God says to me, when he answers my complaint here.

This is answering his second complaint. And the remainder of chapter 2, that is chapter 2, verses 2 through 20, are God's answer to his second complaint. Now, his first complaint was about injustice in his own society, internal injustice and wickedness that was going unpunished.

God's answer was, he's going to punish them, through the Babylonians. Then his second complaint was that the Babylonians were an unworthy tool of God's judgment. And it didn't seem right.

And so God answers this second complaint in chapter 2 by pointing out that God's justice is just. He will punish wicked people and he'll save righteous people. Basically, the bottom line is that Babylon will also be judged in time, in due time.

In the meantime, Judah is worthy of judgment. And of course, although Habakkuk doesn't say these words, other places in scripture we do read, judgment must begin at the house of God. There may be other nations more corrupt than the Jews, but the Jews are more responsible because they had more advantages, more knowledge of righteousness.

And so judgment rightly begins with God's own people. And if he doesn't judge his own people, who failed to live up to the light they have, it would be questionable whether God was all that just to punish wicked people who didn't have any light, for doing the same kinds of things. And God's answer to Habakkuk is essentially that God will judge all sinners, Babylonians and Jews.

It just so happens he's going to judge the Jews first, using the Babylonians, and later the Babylonians will experience judgment also. And that goes through chapter 2. And when you get to chapter 3, all that is left of Habakkuk then is this psalm that is written by the prophet. It's just a prayer.

And you can see just by looking at it, it resembles many of the psalms. Chapter 3, verse 1 says, A prayer of Habakkuk, the prophet, on Shigionoth. And you will probably notice that words like Shigionoth are found in some of the psalm titles.

They are the names of musical instruments. And usually a psalmist, if he writes something like that in a psalm title, is stating what instrument he had in mind to

accompany this particular psalm. And at the end of Habakkuk, at the end of verse 19, it says, To the chief musician with stringed instruments.

So, it's kind of interesting. It would appear that this resembles many of the psalms in having dedication to the chief musician and so forth. And it is simply a psalm of praise to God.

Habakkuk complains twice to God, but once God has given his final answer, the prophet basically says, Well, you're worthy to be praised. And in the very end, verses 17-19, he says, No matter how badly things go, I'm still going to rejoice in the Lord. Now, there are some things in Habakkuk that figure into the New Testament as quotations and very important themes in the New Testament.

In verse 5, for example, there is a verse that Paul quotes to the Jews in the synagogue at Pisidian Antioch. When we come to that, we'll make comments about the connection between what Habakkuk meant and what Paul was saying. In chapter 2, verse 4, we have what could easily be Paul's favorite verse of the Old Testament.

It would certainly be a rivalry between this verse and Genesis 15-6. Genesis 15-6 says, Abraham believed in the Lord and it was accounted to him for righteousness. This verse says, The just shall live by his faith.

And Paul quotes both of these Old Testament passages, often together, and more than once, because they form the basic Old Testament case for Paul's emphasis on justification by faith. And it was Paul's quoting of these verses, especially in Romans, that influenced Martin Luther so heavily to the Reformation to see that the Roman Catholic Church, in imposing a great number of religious and ritualistic requirements on people for salvation, was going beyond the Scriptures, which basically taught that justification comes as a result of faith. Now, when we come to Habakkuk 2.4 and comment on it this morning, I'll point out that there are some interesting, maybe slight difficulties in the way that Paul uses it, but we'll come to that in due time.

There's also some interesting, well, a very important declaration in chapter 2, in verse 14. It is not quoted directly in the New Testament, but it is alluded to by Paul. Habakkuk 2.14 says, The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

This resembles two other Old Testament statements, and it also is, I believe, alluded to, the language of it is taken up by Paul in a statement he gives in 2 Corinthians, which we'll look at later on. Therefore, although it's a short book, there's at least three parts, three verses in Habakkuk, one of them very significant, that are woven into the New Testament and become part of the New Testament revelation. Now, I've told you something about the outline of the book.

We've got the prophet's short complaint and God's short answer, and the prophet's longer complaint and God's longer answer, and then we have the prayer of the prophet, and that's how the book concludes. Let's go ahead and look at it. There won't be too many comments, I trust, that I'll feel compelled to make on most of it, but there will be some.

The burden which the prophet Habakkuk saw. O Lord, how long shall I cry and you will not hear? Even cry out to you, violence, and you will not save. Why do you show me iniquity and cause me to see trouble? For plundering and violence are before me.

There is strife and contention arises. Therefore the law is powerless and justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous.

Therefore perverse judgment proceeds. Now, some of the wording of this complaint could almost sound like he's talking about the invasion of the Babylonians. For instance, the wicked surround the righteous, as later did occur when the Babylonians besieged the city of Jerusalem.

However, that wouldn't quite be true because Jerusalem was not righteous. That's why the Babylonians did surround them. The Babylonians were the agents of God's judgment upon a very unrighteous city.

This is much more likely a description of domestic injustice within the Jewish society. The statement that the law is powerless and justice never goes forth doesn't sound like he's complaining about an international struggle, but the fact that God's law is not observed in the courts. There is a law which, if followed by the judges and magistrates, would result in justice in society, but the judges are not honoring God's law.

The law seems powerless because there's no one loyal to it in the law enforcement system. Therefore justice just doesn't happen. The last line in verse 4 says, therefore perverse judgment proceeds.

In verse 3 he complains that he has to behold all this iniquity and this trouble, which of course reminds us that we do live as righteous people among an unrighteous nation, an unrighteous society, and we are grieved by seeing, at least we should be. He is not happy seeing this iniquity. Now, of course, no one is happy seeing iniquity when they're the victims of it, but a Christian, a godly person, who has sympathy for God's heart about things, is grieved over events that they are not personally victimized by, but which they know God is grieved by.

We read that Lot, who is not the most righteous man we can imagine in the Old Testament, but he was more righteous than his contemporaries in Sodom, it says in 2 Peter that he grieved or he vexed his righteous soul day by day in Sodom by observing and hearing their unlawful deeds. Habakkuk was observing those kinds of things in

Judah, and it grieved him, it vexed his soul, and he cries out to God about it. He says in verse 2, why do I, how long shall I cry and you don't hear? I even cry out to you about violence, and it doesn't seem to get taken care of, you will not save.

It seems like he's saying, God, you are allowing the Jewish society to go to pot, and you're doing nothing to redress the injustices. You're just letting the wicked get away with it. And so God answers him, beginning in verse 5, look among the nations and watch.

In other words, you've got tunnel vision, you're just looking at what's going on in your little society. Something's happening on the international scene that you ought to observe, because this will answer the complaint that you have. Look among the nations and watch.

Be utterly astounded, for I will work a work in your days which you would not believe, though it were told you. For indeed I am raising up the Chaldeans, a bitter and hasty nation, which marches through the breadth of the earth to possess dwelling places that are not theirs. In other words, they're just swallowing up other people's territory.

They are terrible and dreadful, their judgment and their dignity proceed from themselves. Their horses also are swifter than leopards, and more fierce than evening wolves. Their chargers charge ahead, their cavalry comes from afar, they fly as the eagle that hastens to eat.

They all come for violence. Their faces are set like the east wind, they gather captives like sand, they scoff at kings, and princes are scorned by them. They deride every stronghold, and they heap up mounds of earth and seize it.

That is, they heap up siege mounds and they seize strongholds, fortified cities. Then his mind changes and he transgresses and he commits offense, imputing his power to his God. Now, what this seems to mean is that the Chaldeans are being raised up by God, as he points out in verse 6, and they go and they do their conquests and they win their victories, and then in verse 11, rather than attributing their victories to Jehovah who gave them those victories, they burn incense to their own deities and give credit to them, which makes them guilty and worthy of judgment too.

Perhaps you wondered what it means in verse 7, their judgment and their dignity proceed from themselves. It's not entirely clear how that is to be understood. It may mean this, that whereas there are people who obtain dignity and office and so forth because somebody appoints it to them, people who are subordinates under greater kings or whatever, and they receive dignity that's theirs by appointment from someone above them, the Babylonians are autonomous.

They're sovereign. They are rising to power and answerable to no one. Of course, this is

not taking into consideration that they're answerable to God, but speaking in human terms, they're an independent nation.

They don't receive their dignity by appointment from some superior king or they're not vassals of someone else. They are rising up as an independent, autonomous force, and they're doing so as the most powerful force on earth at the time to conquer all the lands around them. Now, he doesn't specify that he's going to judge Judah by the Chaldeans here, although it may be implied.

And certainly when it says they deride every stronghold in verse 10, for they heap up mounds of earth and seize it, it sounds as if Habakkuk would understand that to mean the stronghold of Jerusalem itself and that the Babylonians are going to seize it. And since God is giving this prophecy, although he doesn't specify Jerusalem, God is giving this prophecy in response to Habakkuk's complaint about the injustices done in Jerusalem. It would follow naturally that God is saying, well, this is going to affect Jerusalem.

I'm going to answer your complaint by bringing the Chaldeans. And Habakkuk at least could put two and two together, that this means Jerusalem is going to succumb to the Chaldean flood and invasion. Now, this answer of the Lord begins at verse 5 with this verse that Paul actually quotes.

Now, Paul, as I pointed out, I think was quite familiar with the book of Habakkuk, partly because he loved chapter 2, verse 4 so much. His acquaintance was more than average because he alluded to and picked up language from chapter 2, verse 14 without even quoting it. It seems like the language of the book was woven into his thinking so that he even spoke in the language of the book even when he wasn't quoting.

And therefore, when he quoted verse 5, it cannot be that he was ignorant of its context. He was familiar with the book of Habakkuk. And yet the way Paul quotes it, it raises questions as to what is the connection between what Habakkuk actually said and what Paul is saying.

The quotation of Paul, or by Paul, of this verse is in Acts chapter 13, which is in the first recorded sermon of Paul. It wasn't his first sermon, but it's the first one that is recorded in Acts. And he was on his first missionary journey, and he was preaching in a synagogue to the Jews of Pisidian Antioch who were not being very receptive to the gospel.

The Gentiles who were hearing him were, but the Jews were not all that receptive in Pisidian Antioch. And he says to them in verse 40, Acts 13, 40 and 41, Paul says, Beware, therefore, lest what has been spoken in the prophets come upon you. Behold, you despisers, marvel and perish, for I work a work in your days, a work which you will by no means believe, though one were to declare it to you.

Now, if we didn't read Habakkuk, and we only saw Paul quoting this, and we knew he was quoting something from the Old Testament, but we didn't know the context of the original statement, we might wonder how he means this. Does he mean what they won't believe is the gospel, even though it's being declared to them? In the immediate context of Paul's sermon, it sounds like he's saying something like that. Because he's saying, if you don't believe my message, then you may fit into this description in the prophet, that God is doing something in the world, which you're paying no attention to.

It's declared to you, but you won't listen to it. Now, the problem with seeing him referring to the gospel itself, as the work that God is doing, that they will by no means believe, even if it's declared to them, is that it doesn't jive with what Habakkuk was saying. What is the work that God was doing in Habakkuk 1.5? What is the work that God is referring to when he says, I'm working a work in your days, which you would not believe, though it were told you? Well, God tells us what the work is that he's doing.

In verse 6, the very next line, for indeed I'm raising up the Chaldeans. In other words, the work that God was doing in Hosea's day was bringing a foreign power against Jerusalem to destroy it as a judgment for their rejection of God's ways. In Habakkuk's time, the people of Israel were corrupt rebels against God.

And God was going to do a work that would be so amazing that the Jews themselves could hardly believe it. Now, that the Babylonians would destroy Jerusalem is the work that he's talking about here. And indeed, the Jews didn't believe it, though they were told.

You remember in Jeremiah chapter 7, they were saying, well, the temple of God is here in Jerusalem. God would never allow anything to happen to the temple. We're safe as long as the temple of Jehovah is here.

And Jeremiah warned them that you don't take security in that. And there were many prophets, even after the first two waves of the deportation, that some of the false prophets were saying, well, in a few years, all those things that were taken from the temple are going to be brought back. And although Jeremiah and Habakkuk and Zephaniah were prophesying doom on Jerusalem, most of Jews were not believing it, even though it was declared to them.

Now, how does that go along with what Paul is saying? Paul was speaking to an audience of Jewish rebels also. They were not receiving the gospel in this case. He was declaring the gospel to them, and they were not receiving it.

But what does it have to do with Habakkuk's warning? Well, I personally believe that Paul is saying the same kind of destruction that came on Jerusalem, which the Jews refused to be warned of, refused to take heed to when Habakkuk preached, you're facing a very similar thing. Notice what he says there in Acts 13, 40. Beware, therefore, lest what has

been spoken in the prophets come upon you.

The prophets predicted the doom of Jerusalem at the hands of Babylon. He says, now you beware or the same thing will happen to you. Now, someone might say, but these Jews were not in Jerusalem.

Paul was preaching in Pisidia, not in Jerusalem. Well, that's true. But if you study the history of it, Josephus points out that in the Jewish war, the three and a half years that culminated in the destruction of Jerusalem, Jews were being slaughtered in Gentile territories all over the Mediterranean world.

The uprising of the Jews in Judea brought general civil war between Jews and Gentiles and extermination of Jewish populations in many Gentile places like Alexandria, Egypt, and in Syria and other places. Like 50,000 Jews and 20,000 Jews in some of these places were wiped out in connection with the Jewish rebellion. And so the people in Pisidia, Antioch, the Jews there could not expect necessarily to go unpunished in this Holocaust that was coming.

They were Jewish. They were in the Mediterranean world where this general upset was going to take place. The Jews were going to suffer horrible things.

And it was in an event that was not unlike that which came on the people of Habakkuk's time. So I think what Paul is saying is that if you reject the gospel, you are in danger of suffering something like Habakkuk warned his people about. In his day, it was the Babylonians who had come and destroyed Jerusalem.

In Paul's day, that generation lived to see the Romans come and do the same. And the similarities between those two events in history are striking to anyone who has studied both those times when Jerusalem was destroyed and the Jews were deported. Now we have the second complaint of the prophet beginning at chapter 1 verse 12.

After God has told him he is raising up the Babylonians as an agent to use in judgment, the prophet complains that God is too pure, too holy to sully his reputation by using such ungodly instruments. He says, Are you not from everlasting? O Lord my God, my Holy One, we shall not die. O Lord, you have appointed them for judgment.

O Rock, you have marked them for correction. Meaning the Babylonians, they're the ones who need to be corrected. They're the ones who ought to be judged, not us.

You are of purer eyes than to behold evil and cannot look on wickedness. Why do you look on those who deal treacherously and hold your tongue when the wicked devours one more righteous than he? Now the prophet has complained that his own people were not righteous, but he now complains, well, they're at least more righteous than the Babylonians. How can you bring this to pass, God? How can you stand by and not stop it when a powerful nation comes and destroys a nation that's not as wicked as itself? A

nation that's more righteous than the instrument itself.

Your eyes, he says in verse 13, are purer than to behold evil. Some people have thought this means that God can't even see sin, but of course that's ridiculous. The Bible says elsewhere that the eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good.

To say his eyes are too pure to behold evil and cannot look upon wickedness needs to be understood in the sense that countenancing it. He cannot look with approval upon it. He can't watch it without emotion.

He can't watch it without being affected with anger. He is, he cannot in any way countenance or look approvingly on evil. So how can he approve or apparently approve of the Babylonians in their conquest of the holy land? Verse 14, why do you make men like fish of the sea, like creeping things that have no ruler over them? They take hold, excuse me, they take up all of them with a hook.

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

Because by them their share is sumptuous and their food plenteous. Shall they therefore empty their net and continue to slay nations without pity? Now he is likening the Babylonians to fishermen just going out into the sea of the Gentile world and with a big net and gathering all the nations through their military enterprise. The net is apparently their military machine because they go out with their net and they bring back their victims conquered like fish and animals that have been trapped and snared.

And God is making all these nations including Jerusalem, Judah, like fish of the sea, like creeping things that have no ruler over them. In other words, like subhumans. These Babylonians don't treat their captives very humanely, like human beings, they treat them like animals.

And you're allowing this God, this doesn't make sense. You're blessing their enterprise. You're allowing them to gather these people as fishermen gather fish in a net and they don't give you the credit for it.

They offer sacrifices to their net and burn incense to their drag net. Meaning they worship their own military power rather than God. Of course God had already pointed that out in verse 11.

The Babylon's mind changes, he transgresses and commits offense imputing his power to his God. So Habakkuk is not introducing any new thoughts here. He is simply responding to what God has said.

That doesn't make sense God that you would use and countenance an evil nation like that when your eyes are so pure you cannot be expected to countenance evil. Well, the

prophet I think has the impression that maybe he's spoken a little out of turn. He says in verse 1 of chapter 2, I will stand by my watch, I'll set myself on the rampart and watch to see what he will say to me and what I shall answer when I am reproved.

He expects God to reprove him a little bit like he's been maybe a little bit too mouthy with God and God's going to have to reprove him for that. Anyway, he spoke his mind as Jewish people often do, especially Jewish prophets, ventilated his thoughts and he knows that he is to be taken to the witch hut a little bit. Here God is going to come and reprove him for that.

Well, I'm going to just wait and wait for God to come and do that and see what he says and try to give some thought to how I'll answer him. Well, the way Habakkuk actually answers him is in chapter 3, which is a psalm of worship. But here comes the reproof.

Verse 2, Then the Lord answered me and said, Write the vision and make it plain on tablets that he may run who reads it. Another way to render that last line is that he who runs may read it. Now, the way it reads here in the New King James, that he may run who reads it, almost sounds like if a person reads it, they'll receive encouragement or marching orders or whatever they will.

They'll run as a result of reading it. They will be able to run to the battle or whatever. It's hard to know exactly what is meant in that or simply run the good race in the sense of the New Testament uses the word of enduring and doing the right thing against some challenges and so forth.

But another way to render that last line of verse 2 is that he that runs may read it, which might suggest, since he says make it plain on tablets, write it and make it plain so that whoever is running can read it. It might mean put it in big letters, put it in an obvious, plain, conspicuous place so that even a person running by can get the message. A person who is not paying close attention, like a big billboard or something, so that a person who is not particularly listening, someone who is hastily going by can't miss it.

Make it that plain. And that is how some have understood the meaning of that last line in verse 2. Verse 3 says, for the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it will speak and it will not lie, though it tarries, wait for it, because it will surely come and will not tarry. Behold the proud, his soul is not upright in him, but the judge shall live by his faith.

Now, the statement, the vision is for an appointed time, in the end it will speak, it will not lie, though it tarries, wait for it, because it will surely come and will not tarry, is actually quoted or strongly alluded to over in the book of Hebrews. In Hebrews chapter 10, this is in the closing of this chapter of Hebrews, Hebrews 10, the writer of Hebrews reminds the readers in verses 32-34 how they had in an earlier time in the Christian walk run the good race. They were getting weary of it now, but they had run well when they had first

become believers.

But now that was changing. And in verse 35 he says, therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward, for you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God you may receive the promise. Now he quotes from Habakkuk, he says, for yet a little while, and he who is coming will come and will not tarry.

Now the judge shall live by faith, but if anyone draws back, my soul has no pleasure in him. Now it's interesting, that's clearly a quote from Habakkuk chapter 2 verses 3 and 4, although it reads differently. And the reason it reads differently is that the writer of Hebrews is quoting from the Septuagint.

That renders it a little differently. And Paul always when he quotes Habakkuk 2 verse 4, he always quotes from the Septuagint. And there's a reason, I'll tell you in a moment.

But notice in Hebrews 10 verse 37, he who is coming will come and will not tarry. Now I think Christians in reading this, especially if they're not very familiar with Habakkuk, from which it comes, assume that's a reference to the second coming of Jesus. I've heard Christians quote this about Jesus.

You know, wait for him, his coming, it'll come, even though he may seem to tarry, but he won't tarry. Well, the fact of the matter is that Jesus has in fact tarried a great long time since the days that Hebrews was written. I don't think he's talking about what we call the second coming of Christ.

One of the issues that the writer of Hebrews has in mind a great deal throughout his book is the destruction of the Jewish system, because he predicts it very clearly in many places in Hebrews and seems to allude to it in places not so clearly. For example, in Hebrews 8 verse 13, he tells us that the Jewish system is about to vanish away. Obviously it vanished away in 70 AD and he wrote this shortly before then.

In chapter 12, he reminded his Jewish readers that he said, here we have no continuing city. Jerusalem, where they would sit in worship, was not going to continue. It was going to be destroyed.

There are allusions to the destruction of Jerusalem in Hebrews, quite a few. In fact, I think it was the looming destruction of the Jewish order that in one sense motivated the author to write the book of Hebrews, because his readers were Jewish Christians who were tempted to go back to Judaism. He said, hey, there's nothing there.

It's sinking. It's going to be gone soon. Don't bother to go back, even if it was going to be here forever, don't go back.

But it's particularly foolish to go back to Judaism in view of the fact that Judaism is on its last leg and is soon going to vanish away. The city is going away. It's not going to

continue.

Now, in view of the fact that the writer has these things and mentions them in his mind in chapter 8 and chapter 12, it's not unthinkable that he's thinking of something like that in chapter 10 as well. Jesus did come, not in the sense of the second coming, as we still anticipate, but he did come in judgment on Jerusalem and his coming in judgment is spoken of in those very terms, sometimes in his own teaching and sometimes in the prophets. The coming of Jesus means more than one thing in different passages, depending on context.

Some contexts, the coming of Jesus is his coming at the end of the world, and other times his coming is his coming in judgment at some point in history on some particular people. And most frequently in the New Testament, I should say, in Jesus' own teaching to his disciples, I believe that it applies to the coming of destruction on Jerusalem. Because Jesus said in Matthew 16, I think it was verse 28, some of you standing here will not taste death before you see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.

And he said something similar to that in the Olivet Discourse. He said that generation wouldn't pass before the Son of Man came and so forth. And I believe that a number of these passages, well, here's a good one, here's a clear one.

When he told the parable of the vineyard, he said, you know, after they killed the son, after the tenants of the vineyard killed the son, he said, when he comes, what shall the owner of the vineyard do to those tenants? And the answer was he'll miserably destroy those people and give the vineyard to others. Well, sure enough, he did utterly destroy those miserable men and gave the vineyard to others, and Jesus announced that that was so. But what's interesting is he said, when he comes, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to them? Well, what he did to them, he did in 70 AD, and yet Jesus refers to that as him coming and bringing punishment on those who killed Jesus.

So, when the writer of Hebrews says, he is coming and will not tarry, he may be referring to the second coming, but it's so he was off. I don't believe he could because Jesus has tarried a great deal, 2,000 years since this was written. But since he has earlier said, the old testament is about ready to vanish away.

If he's here talking about the judgment, Jesus coming in judgment on Jerusalem through the Romans, there's two reasons to support this. One is it didn't tarry, it came shortly after this was written. Secondly, it agrees with what Habakkuk was talking about, because Habakkuk is saying, or God is saying to Habakkuk, you're complaining because Babylon is going to judge you guys, but don't worry, I'm going to judge them too.

But the vision has its own time of fulfillment. In one time, Babylon is going to destroy Jerusalem. In another time, Babylon itself will be destroyed.

But just wait for it. In due time, each thing will come. And in the context of Habakkuk, the next thing to come was the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians.

And when Hebrews was written, the next thing to come was the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans. And I think that the quotation from Habakkuk in the mind of the writer of Hebrews, just like when Paul quoted it in Pisidian Antioch, quoted from the same book, I think these writers saw a parallel between their own day and that of Habakkuk. Habakkuk actually wrote, in all likelihood, about 40 years before Jerusalem fell.

And Paul and those guys were preaching about 40 years before Jerusalem fell again. But the writer of Hebrews, of course, wrote much sooner than that. And when he says, it will come and it won't tarry, he's implying it's coming immediately.

It's not going to wait. It's coming soon. Now there's another difference in the way that Hebrews quotes the Habakkuk passage, and that's with reference to the quotation of Paul's favorite verse there.

The just shall live by faith. In Habakkuk, chapter 2, verse 4, it says, Behold the proud, his soul is not upright in him, but the just shall live by his faith. But the writer of Hebrews quotes it this way.

Now, the just shall live by his faith, but if anyone draws back, my soul has no pleasure in him. Now that statement, if anyone draws back, my soul has no pleasure in him, is the Septuagint's way of rendering this statement. Behold the proud, his soul is not upright in him.

So it's real different in the Septuagint. It's real different. What God is saying in either case, whether we take it in the Hebrew Masoretic version, which our book of Habakkuk in our Bible renders it from, or whether you take it from the Septuagint's translation, which reads quite differently, what God is saying in Habakkuk 2, verse 4, is that there's two classes of people.

Those that God is pleased with and will be judged, and those who God is not pleased with and who will be judged. Now, those that God is not pleased with, the Hebrew version translates it, the proud, the one whose soul is not upright in him, the person whose heart is wrong toward God, the Septuagint reads it, the one who flags or the one who draws back, my soul is not pleased with him. The contrast is with the one who has faith.

There are those that God is pleased with and there are those that God is not pleased with. And what God is saying here to Habakkuk is, listen, I do not countenance wickedness. Whoever is wicked, I'm not pleased with him.

Whether that's Babylonians or citizens of Jerusalem, it doesn't matter. Whoever is wicked, my soul is not pleased with him. His heart is not upright with him.

He's proud. Yes, the Babylonians are proud. So are the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

Whoever is proud, I'm angry at them and they'll get theirs. But in any case, the one who lives will be the man of faith. The man who has faith will live.

Now, here we have another difference between the Septuagint and the Hebrew text, and this is very significant in terms of Paul's usage of the verses. The Hebrew text and the Septuagint, which is the Greek translation, differ in the way they describe the person that God is not pleased with, as we pointed out. One says he's proud, the other says he draws back.

A little bit different, but in both cases, it's the wrong way to be. And God's not pleased. But the Hebrew text and the Septuagint also differ in their description of the man that God is pleased with.

Because in the Hebrew text, where we read here, the just shall live by his faith, actually the word faith in the Hebrew is faithfulness. But when it's translated in the Greek and the Septuagint, it's *pistis*, which means faith. Now, Paul, of course, banked heavily on the translation of the Septuagint, where he said the just shall live by faith, by the quality of believing God.

He pointed out that that's how Abraham was justified. Abraham believed God and it was counted as righteous. Also, he says Habakkuk said that, that the just shall live by faith, that is by believing.

Faith is really believing. But that's not what the Hebrew version of Habakkuk actually says. In Hebrew, it is the just shall live by his fidelity or his faithfulness, his loyalty to God.

And what God seems to be saying in the Hebrew text, which is followed by our Bible mostly, however, the translators here were affected more by their Protestant understanding of it than by the loyalty to the Hebrew here, because the last line in Habakkuk 2, 4 should read the just shall live by his faith. Now, there is some overlap in the meaning of the word faithfulness and the word faith. But for the most part, those words have different meanings.

Faith is trusting or believing, and that's how Paul used it, and he depended heavily on the Septuagint in order to make the point. The Hebrew text, which says the just shall live by his faithfulness or his loyalty, suggests something somewhat different, because believing is one thing, being faithful, being trustworthy, being steadfast, being loyal in the face of adversity is not exactly the same thing. Now, one could argue a couple of ways about this.

One could argue that if you have faith, if you have true saving faith, it will be seen in your faithfulness, that faithfulness is a fruit of true faith. If you really are trusting God,

you will not defect. If you really are a believer and justified by believing God, then faithfulness will be the result in your life.

You will be a faithful Christian. Now, I believe that statement is true. I don't know if that is how Paul meant it.

I don't know if that's how Paul meant to interact with the Hebrew text. There is another consideration, and that is that the Septuagint might actually be the original. Habakkuk might have actually written something that's more like what Paul quoted from the Septuagint, and our Hebrew text as it stands might be corrupted.

I'm not saying this is true, but it's not an impossibility. What I mean by that is this. The Septuagint was translated 285 years before Christ, and the oldest version of the Old Testament text in Hebrew we have is from the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Now, that means the Septuagint is about 285 years older than the Hebrew manuscripts that were found in the Dead Sea Scrolls. And therefore, the Septuagint, though it reads very differently in this particular case, might actually preserve the original reading better than even the Dead Sea Scrolls did. It's possible that when Habakkuk originally wrote it in Hebrew, the word he used was in fact the word for faith rather than faithfulness.

But since that time, the Hebrew or Jewish scribe corrupted it and changed it to faithfulness. Maybe because the Jews, the religious opinions of them, didn't think that faith alone was an adequate means of a basis for salvation. Now, the Septuagint translators on this theory would have translated correctly from the way it said it in the original.

But the Hebrew text that is followed by our versions, which dates from a few hundred years after the Septuagint, may well have been corrupted and may reflect Jewish thinking or rabbinical thinking. That they thought, well, it's too easy on people to say that God would save them just by their believing, by their faith. We should maybe alter this just a little bit and say by their faithfulness, because certainly the Jews would believe something like that.

Now, I don't know what the solution is. There is a difference in the words in the Hebrew and in the Greek. As I say, maybe the most satisfying solution is to say that the Greek actually preserves the original meaning.

And that the Hebrew text as we have it has changed and is not as accurate. In any case, I believe that both statements, now this is not very satisfying to those who are trying to resolve what the original text said, but either statement is true. Either statement is theologically true.

That we are justified by faith. But faith that justifies will be manifest in loyalty to God, in faithfulness to God. And if we take the Hebrew text as it stands, what God is saying to

Habakkuk is, people who draw back or people who are proud or people who are not upright in their heart, people who are in other words not right with God, God loathes them, God is not pleased with them, but those who are faithful to God will not die.

God is bringing a destruction on the wicked, but not on the faithful. There was a remnant in Israel, in Judah, which included Habakkuk, included Jeremiah, included Zephaniah, included a few others. And this remnant would be saved, they would live, because they were faithful.

There were not many faithful in Israel. But the man who is faithful will live for his faithfulness. He will not come under the judgment that is here being predicted.

And that is probably the only meaning that Habakkuk got out of the statement, unless of course the original Hebrew said something different than what we have here. It could be that God's statement to Habakkuk was that the just man should live by his belief or by his trusting God. And that would be meaningful to Habakkuk too, because he couldn't quite understand God's justice in the situation.

God could just be saying, trust me, trust me, a good man, a man who is on my side will trust me, and he'll be rewarded for his trust, he'll be rewarded for his faith. In any case, it leaves some unanswered questions as to how Paul, or why Paul made such heavy use of the Septuagint in this case. But if indeed the Septuagint preserves the original reading better than our Mesopotamian text or than the Dead Sea Scrolls text does, then that would make Paul more correct, actually, than the Hebrew manuscripts from which our book of Habakkuk were translated.

I hope I didn't lose anything. The issue of how textual transmission and corruption occurs is kind of mind-boggling, and we can't really settle some of these things, but I just want you to know that it's a little different as it stands right now. Faithfulness is what it says in the Hebrew here.

Verse 5, Indeed, because he transgresses by wine, he is a proud man. He does not stay at home, because he enlarges his desire as shale, and he is like death, he cannot be satisfied. He gathers to himself all nations, and he heaps up for himself all peoples.

Who's that? He's talking about the Babylonians. He transgresses by wine, apparently means that he gets all psyched up by getting drunk and bold and proud, and he just gets ambitions that a man ought not to have. Instead of being content to stay at home and enjoy the territory God's given him, he wants to take everyone else's too.

And it says in verse 6, Shall not all these take up a proverb against him, and a taunting riddle against him, and say, Woe to him who increases what is not his? How long? And to him who loads himself with many pledges? Now this is the first of five woes here that follow through the rest of this chapter. And these woes are said to be a taunt song that

the nations will bring against Babylon someday. Now you recall in Isaiah chapter 13 and 14, in Isaiah 13 and 14 there was a couple of chapters about Babylon and its fall, and there was a taunt song there too, saying, How is he who shook the nations, you know, fallen and so forth.

It's predicted that Babylon will fall. And although in Habakkuk's time, Babylon was gathering up nations as plunder, the time would come when those nations would have the last laugh, where they would taunt Babylon and pronounce woe upon it. And so we have five woes here.

The first is of the one who increases by getting what's not his, that is the Babylonians are increasing their empire by taking territory that doesn't really belong to them. Will not your creditors rise up suddenly? Will they not awaken who oppress you and you will become their booty? Because you have plundered many nations and all the remnant of the people shall plunder you because of men's blood and the violence of the land and the city and of all who dwell in it. Here's the second woe.

Woe to him who covets evil gain for his house that he may set his nest on high, that he may be delivered from the power of disaster. You gave shameful counsel to your house, cutting off many peoples you send against your soul, for the stone will cry out from the wall and the beam from the timbers will answer it. This is a figure of speech.

Apparently the king of Babylon is seen as building up his house or his estate, his empire on the strength of conquest and evil and bad stuff he's doing. But the house itself will complain. The stones and the timbers will cry out against him.

This is not literal, of course. It's like Abel's blood cried out from the ground when Cain slew him, it says in Genesis chapter 4. But the point is that the evidence of your sin will be crying out to God for vengeance. And in this case, in the imagery that you're building your house on the backs of all these nations you've conquered by injustice, well, the house itself will cry out against you.

And God will have to hear your cries for justice. Verse 12, a third woe. Woe to him who builds a town with bloodshed, who establishes a city by iniquity.

That would be Babylon being built by war and conquest. Behold, is it not of the Lord of hosts that the peoples labor to feed the fire, and nations weary themselves in vain? For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. Now this prediction that the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea, probably in the immediate context suggests that God will make himself known by his judgment upon his enemies, which in this particular case when he judges Babylon, his glory will be seen in his conquest over that world power.

But there's more to it than that. There are two other occasions where essentially the same prediction is made. It was first made, actually, by Balaam.

In Numbers chapter 14, I'm sorry, not Balaam, I'm sorry. It was made by Moses, I guess. In Numbers chapter 14.

There's something a little like this said by Balaam, but no, Moses made this statement. Numbers 14.21, it says, But truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord. Now notice what it said here.

All the earth will be filled with the glory of the Lord. Then in Isaiah chapter 11, something is added to it or changed a little bit, and then Habakkuk takes up both statements and combines them. Numbers 14.21 says, The earth will be filled with the glory of the Lord.

Isaiah 11 and verse 9 says, They shall not hurt nor destroy all my holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord. And then he adds, As the waters cover the sea. So in Numbers it said the earth will be full of the glory of the Lord.

Now in Isaiah it says the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord. And adds, As the waters cover the sea. Habakkuk takes both thoughts.

The earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord and the earth will be full of the glory of the Lord. And adds, As the waters cover the sea. He puts it this way, For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord.

As the waters cover the sea. So he's combining the elements of Numbers 14.21 and of Isaiah 11.9. Now what is the fulfillment of this? Or in what sense is the earth to be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord? This is, as I said earlier, something Paul alludes to. He doesn't quote directly this verse, but he clearly has it in mind when he makes this statement.

In 2 Corinthians 4.6. 2 Corinthians 4.6. It says, For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light, notice, of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Notice, the knowledge of the glory of God. God has illuminated us by showing us or giving us, shining in our hearts to give us the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus.

That is, in seeing Jesus we see and obtain the knowledge of the glory of the Lord. And we are among those throughout the world, the Corinthians were Gentiles, among those beyond Jerusalem in Gentile world throughout the earth, who are beginning to get the knowledge of the glory of the Lord. And they got it through the gospel, through coming to know Jesus.

And when it says in Habakkuk 2.14, The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea, it suggests that all the world will come to

know Jesus. Now this can be taken in a very literal sense, in which case it may be that the post-millennialists are true because they believe that the whole world is going to become Christianized and that the glory of the Lord will be a universally known phenomenon throughout the world through the preaching of the gospel. Or the pre-millennialists would say, well this will be fulfilled during the millennium and of course at that time only Christians will remain or even those who are not Christians will know of the glory of the Lord and that will be fulfilled throughout the earth.

Or the all-millennialists would basically say the fulfillment of that is essentially in the church and it's not so much that every last person becomes a Christian but that such a huge widespread dissemination of the gospel, a global international knowledge of the global Lord is all that is being preached. That is all that is really referred to here. That as the waters cover the sea, the knowledge of the Lord will cover the land completely.

So that the gospel will be preached to every nation is all that it could mean. I think the all-millennialists would generally understand it that way. Not so much that every last person will become a Christian but that the way that the knowledge of the glory of the Lord becomes known is through the gospel as Paul said.

God has shined in our hearts to give the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus. So as we look upon Jesus, as we are exposed to him, we discover the knowledge of the glory of God in that revelation and that is of course the result of conversion. Whether this means every last person will have that conversion experience or whether it just means that it will be widespread globally throughout the world.

The words could be taken to mean either one and any eschatological view has a way of looking at that. But it is the ultimate purpose of God that his knowledge of his glory be seen and known throughout the world. That is of course how the church needs to interpret its mission is to spread the knowledge of the glory of God through exposing the world to Jesus.

Verse 15. Now he says you drink to exploit your neighbor. You actually force drink upon him.

Get him drunk so you can take advantage of it. Well God is going to do the same to you. He is going to get you drunk.

We remember the imagery from Jeremiah chapter 25 of all the nations going to drink the cup that God was going to give them and they would be drunk and stumble. But that was a symbol of them being judged. And also Babylon was one of those that was to drink that cup according to Jeremiah 25.

By the way almost everything that these woes include could be applied to Jerusalem but in the context I believe the way that the whole series of woes began in verse 6 it

indicates that these woes are directed toward Babylon when it falls. Verse 18. Now the holy temple here cannot mean the temple in Jerusalem because that would be in my opinion contrary to Habakkuk's whole message.

Jerusalem and its temple are going to be destroyed. It is not that the temple in Jerusalem is permanent but God has his holy temple in heaven too. And he is in heaven.

Man is on earth. Let the earth keep silence before him. Now this last statement let all the earth keep silence before him might be in a sense a rebuke to Habakkuk himself.

He was complaining about God's judgments. He was complaining about God's methods. And he said I am going to go and wait and hear what I am told when I am reprov'd by God.

Well this may be his reproof. God says the Lord is in his holy temple let all the earth keep silence before him. It is a little bit like Job's.

God said to Job listen mind your own business. You suffer that is my business. I am the one ruling the universe not you.

You just trust me really is what God is saying. And you keep silence and just watch and see what happens. So we have this prayer in the end of Habakkuk in chapter 3. A prayer of Habakkuk to this prophet on Shiginoth.

The exact meaning of Shiginoth is not known to scholars. It is one of those words that is not used often enough in ancient literature to pinpoint its exact meaning. But it is probably a musical term.

Oh Lord I have heard your speech and I was afraid. Oh Lord revive your work in the midst of the years. In the midst of the years make it known.

In wrath remember mercy. God was showing wrath on Jerusalem soon but he would also show mercy on them later. He wouldn't make a complete end of them.

God came from Teman which was an Edomite region. The holy one from Mount Paran, Selah. His glory covered the heavens and the earth was full of his praise.

His brightness was like the light and he had rays flashing from his hand. And there his power was hidden. Before him went pestilence and fever followed his feet.

He stood and measured the earth. He looked and startled the nations. And the everlasting mountains were scattered.

The perpetual hills bowed. His ways are everlasting. Now anyone who doesn't believe that the prophets use figurative language can have serious problems with these.

Perpetual hills bowing down to God. The everlasting mountains scattered. This is very possibly a reference back to Mount Sinai because Moses in Deuteronomy 33.2 had a song that remembered Mount Sinai and started with imagery very much like this in Deuteronomy 33.2. Although this could be a reference to God's judgment acts in general.

Only highly figurative. I saw the tents of Kushan in affliction. The curtains of the land of Midian trembled.

O Lord were you displeased with the rivers? Was your anger against the rivers? Was your wrath against the sea that you rode on your horses? Your chariots of salvation? Your bow was made quite ready. Oaths were sworn over your arrows. You divided the earth with rivers.

The mountains saw you and trembled. The overflowing of the waters passed by. The deep uttered its voice and lifted its hands on high.

The sun and the moon stood still in their habitation. At the light of your arrows they went at the shining of your glittering spear. Now I suspect that what Habakkuk is doing is sort of reviewing God's manifestation of his power in judgment of the past.

Starting in fact with references to Sinai. And we talked about the rivers and the sea fearing God. It may refer to when he parted the Red Sea and parted the Jordan River so that his people could pass forward.

And when it talks about making the sun and the moon stand still, of course that sounds like a reference to Joshua chapter 10 when God made the sun stand still to give the Israelites an advantage in battle against their enemies. So this may be just sort of a very poetic and figurative recitation of some of the acts of God in judging the wicked and showing his power in the past. You marched through the land in indignation.

You trampled the nations in anger. You went forth for the salvation of your people, for salvation with your anointed. You struck the head from the house of the wicked by laying bare from foundation to neck.

Some of this is very hard to interpret. You thrust through with his own arrows the head of his villages. They came out like a whirlwind to scatter me.

Their rejoicing was like feasting on the poor in secret. You walked through the sea with your horses through the heap of great waters. That sounds like the Exodus.

When I heard my body tremble, my lips quivered at the voice. Rottenness entered my bones, and I trembled in myself that I might rest in the day of trouble. When he comes up to the people, he will invade them with his troops.

This is apparently his future prediction because he talks up through verse 15 of what God did in the past, and now in verse 16 he's predicting what God's going to do to Judah and eventually to Babylon. It caused the prophet to tremble when he heard it, and his bones rotted, figuratively speaking. But now he sees that God does the right thing after all.

So he says in verse 17, Though the fig tree may not blossom, nor fruit beyond the vines, Though the labor of the olive may fail, and the fields yield no food, Though the flock be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stalls, Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will join the God of my salvation. The Lord God is my strength. He will make my feet like deer's feet, and he will make me walk on the high hills.

By the way, that reference to making feet like hind's feet and making him like a deer on the hills is taken from Psalm 18 verse 33. It's just a recapping of it. Now, verses 17 and 18 basically say no matter how much goes wrong, I'm still going to rejoice in God.

Now, it sounds in verse 17 like he's talking about agricultural disaster, and it could be. He could be saying no matter how bad a year we have, and the worst thing that usually happens would be crop failures. Well, I'm still rejoicing God in the face of crop failures.

Though it is possible that all this imagery, the fig tree, the vines, the olive tree, the flocks, all could refer to Israel. And after all, he has had it revealed to him that the Jews are going to be conquered. And he could be referring figuratively to the fig tree not blossoming, the fruit on the vines, there's no fruit on the vines.

The labor of the olive tree fails. We know the olive tree is a figure for Israel elsewhere. And if the flock is cut off from the fold, that certainly could refer to Israel being cut off from their land.

It's not certain if that's how the prophet means it, but the language certainly allows that possibility. So he's saying even if this destruction comes on my people that I've foreseen here from God, I'm still going to rejoice in God. He'll be my strength.

I'll be one of those loyal ones that will live by my faithfulness. Others may not. But that's the only position I can take in the face of God's sovereign judgment.