

There are many beautiful places in this world. Personally, I quite like deserts. However, they are harsh places in which to live. Yet they can picture those times when life is harsh for us. For then it's almost like living in a desert. We wonder where the world is heading when there's so much wrong with it. Sometimes, the voice of God in His Word seems to dry up. We feel lost and alone. We lose sight of the 'big picture' of God's plan.

To use a different metaphor, we can get caught up in the noise of life. In other words, we're distracted by the difficulties we face. It's like trying to concentrate on your tasks while heavy machinery works outside your window. Unless you're deaf, it's almost impossible to concentrate.

Like sunlight breaking through the clouds, we need a glimpse of how God works. We want to be able to see into the mind of God, so that we can see His big picture. That's what Habakkuk was given. As it was in Habakkuk's time, so too it is for us. Today, we need God's Word more than ever, to strengthen and sustain us. We need to know that God is working His purpose out for His glory. For we live in a world that has been corrupted physically and spiritually. It's not the perfect Garden of Eden that Adam and Eve first saw. The land, sea and sky are polluted. Life is polluted by greed and all forms of evil. Spiritually, the world is polluted by a weakening of evangelical faith. Associated with that is the rise in religious pluralism, the idea that all religious beliefs are equal in value.

Some people believe that all of the world's religions see the truth from a different point of view. They say that it's like climbing a mountain from different sides. Now, that sounds nice but it is nonsense. It might be true if you were on top of the mountain watching everyone else ascend. But that cannot be, for no one stands there. For, in this view of the world's religions, no one knows the whole truth. You cannot be there on top of that mountain. Furthermore, all religions are not striving to reach the same goal.

We, who are Christians, know that the cross makes the difference. No other system of belief is based on the death and resurrection of a Saviour.

Listen to 1 Corinthians 15:13, *if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith*. Can we be sure that Christ was crucified and raised three days later? Yes! The evidence for the resurrection is clear. Whatever people might like to think and say, Christianity is true. If you doubt this, then I urge you to examine the evidence. In fact, you owe it to yourself to examine the claims of Christ. Your life, now and in the future, depends upon it.

What's God's perspective on all this? In Scripture, we see how God reveals Himself as Creator and Redeemer. We see how God not only loves the world, but that He *is* Himself, love (1 John 4:16b). Only in Christianity will you find a personal God who is love. Love motivates everything God says and does.

But, don't confuse God's love with some warm, mushy feeling inside you. God isn't a fluffy pussycat or a cuddly puppy. Nor can He be summed up in religious tolerance. God hates sin. His wrath is always against sin. This leads to His justice. Sin must be punished.

However, God's wrath against sin is softened with mercy and grace. We see this in John 3:16, *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life*. The word, *world*, in John, has a negative connotation. In other words, this world is at enmity with God. Yet this is the world He has made. This is the world Christ died to save. Romans 5:8b, *While we were still sinners, Christ died for us*.

Habakkuk chapter 2 reveals God's plan for the ages. The LORD says in 2:3a, *For the revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false*. Habakkuk's complaint is also our complaint. God also reveals the contrast between the wicked and the righteous. Listen once more to 2:4, 5a, *See, he (the wicked) is puffed up; his desires are not upright—but the righteous will live by his faith—indeed, wine betrays him; he is arrogant and never at rest*.

Nestled in between God's words to the wicked is one of God's gems, a word of promise: *the righteous live by faith*. Here is hope for a nation (Judah) that had largely turned away from God. God would not hesitate to punish the violence in Judah. But a faithful remnant would survive. Their trust in God would be rewarded.

What does the Lord have to say to those who persecute others? Listen to Habakkuk 2:12, 13, **“Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed and establishes a town by crime! Has not the LORD Almighty determined that the people’s labour is only fuel for the fire, that the nations exhaust themselves for nothing?”** Just as ancient cities were destroyed by fire, so the Lord will one day come with fire, in judgment. Listen to 2 Peter 3:10, **“But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.”**

Why do we live in cities? Together, we are to form a culture and a community that is to glorify God. Yet this has rarely, if ever, been achieved. Man’s arrogance led to the disaster at Babel (Genesis 11:4). The people had built a city to make a name for themselves. Finally, in judgment, God scattered the people all over the earth and confused their languages (Genesis 11:5-9).

Over the years, there have been attempts to run cities as a theocracy with a united church and state. In the Christian community they’ve never been totally successful. These days, Islam seeks to unite church and state. But that’s an even bigger disaster.

Today, we wonder why God doesn’t act as quickly as He has done in the past. Habakkuk helps us. The Babylonians would take the people captive to Babylon for some 70 years. But after that time, they were overrun (by King Cyrus), just as God had predicted through the prophet Habakkuk.

So too, God will one day bring an end to violence on this earth. In Revelation 16-18, Babylon is portrayed as the world set against God. In 17:1 Babylon is referred to as the great prostitute. Paul Gardner comments, *Just as a prostitute sells her body to another person to be used as he or she wants, so the world that has turned against God has sold itself to Satan to do as he pleases.* But Satan only brings on death and destruction. And so it’s with good reason that Revelation refers to God as the Alpha and the Omega (1:8). The Lord Jesus uses these words to refer to Himself in 22:13, **“I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.”** God is sovereign in all the earth. He has the final word.

Habakkuk 2:14 seems (at first) to be unrelated to the consuming fires of God’s judgment in 2:12-13. We read in 2:14, **“For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.”** But when Isaiah uses similar wording (Isaiah 11:9), his prophecy concerns the coming of the Lord Jesus. And the Lord Jesus is pictured as coming in judgment. Isaiah 11:4b, **“He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.”**

We ask, how can the glory of God fill the earth amidst such wickedness? The **knowledge of the glory of the LORD** can only come when the wicked are judged. Yet, as God’s revelation to Habakkuk spreads—that *the righteous will live by faith*—the earth is filled with the knowledge of the glory of God. Even so, fulfilment of these words from Habakkuk await the return of Christ. 2:3a, **“For the revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false.”** Like Habakkuk, we must be patient, and wait.

Habakkuk’s fourth woe is found in 2:15-17. 2:15, **“Woe to him who gives drink to his neighbours, pouring it from the wineskin till they are drunk, so that he can gaze on their naked bodies.”** Apparently the Babylonians would get people drunk and then manipulate them into degrading situations. This is not uncommon today. Too many people are unable to control themselves when they get drunk.

The growing use of these drugs of addiction is a curse on our society. Once again, though, the effects are turned back on those who abuse others in this way. 2:16, **“You will be filled with shame instead of glory. Now it is your turn! Drink and be exposed! The cup from the LORD’s right hand is coming around to you, and disgrace will cover your glory.”**

The *cup of the Lord* contains His wrath. Again, the book of Revelation speaks to us about this. 17:4, **“The woman (the prostitute who sums up Babylon)... held a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries.”** In Habakkuk 2:16, God’s word to her—to Babylon and to all the wicked—is, **“Drink and be exposed!”** Did the Babylonians really think that they could get away with mocking God? Can the wicked today think the same?

Is there an answer to the ungodly behaviour that we see around us today? Maybe not in our lifetime, but the Lord Jesus provides the ultimate answer. In the garden of Gethsemane the Lord Jesus prayed that He might not have to drink the cup of God's wrath against sin (Mark 14:36). That cup contained the sins of the world and God's judgment on them. The only way to bring salvation to a corrupt and violent world was for Him to drink that cup and drain it.

Jesus drank it. He gave His blood to atone for all the blood shed in the world, by the world. Now, He holds out the cup of His own shed blood, the blood of the new covenant, ***poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins*** (Matthew 26:28). And so the Lord invites us to drink from the cup of salvation. We do, in order that we don't have to drink from the other cup, the cup of God's wrath.

There's another side to this fourth woe, in 2:17, ***"The violence you have done to Lebanon will overwhelm you, and your destruction of animals will terrify you."*** The forests in Lebanon were systematically destroyed by the Babylonians. They also destroyed large numbers of wild animals. All of that was done in the name of conquest and building an empire. Such violence, directed at the world God created, will also return to ***overwhelm*** the Babylonians.

This is also relevant for us, today. God will hold to account those who destroy the Earth He created. As Christians, we have a responsibility to care for God's creation. That was God's word to Adam in Eden at the beginning (Genesis 2:16). So too, we are not to pollute and destroy what He has made.

Habakkuk 2:18-20 are the fifth and last woe. 2:18, ***"Of what value is an idol, since a man has carved it? Or an image that teaches lies? For he who makes it trusts in his own creation; he makes idols that cannot speak."*** Habakkuk clearly speaks against idolatry. An idol is lifeless and useless. You know it cannot speak.

It's interesting, for those who worship idols would probably agree with you. They would tell you that they worship the god whom the idol represents. Which god? I ask, for idols are tools of Satan, the father of lies. In effect, idol worship is satanic. Idols lead worshippers into error, something that pleases Satan. Thus, they come between the true and living God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Anything that comes between you and the Lord God is an idol. Whatever becomes the focal point of our lives, that for which we live, is essentially an idol. It may be your possessions, your home, your career or even your family. Once they become the centre of your life, they are as foolish as any wooden or stone idol. Habakkuk says, 2:19, ***"Woe to him who says to wood, 'Come to life!' Or to lifeless stone, 'Wake up!' Can it give guidance? It is covered with gold and silver; there is no breath in it."***

Habakkuk 2:20 is a word to the world. ***"But the LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him."*** Here is the contrast between the living God and dead, silent idols. We're not to worship an idol that cannot speak. Rather, let us worship God, before whom all creation stands silent, in awe and reverence. Worship God, who speaks to us in His Word.

Habakkuk is now assured that God is on His throne. From there, God directs history for His purposes and for His glory. God is in control, even over this dark world.

Again, we turn to the book of Revelation, to 8:1, to the opening of the seventh scroll. ***When he opened the seventh scroll, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.*** As the final, great day of the wrath of the Lamb (the Lord Jesus Christ) comes, the whole of heaven stands in silence. They stand in awe of the dreadful event that is about to happen.

How do you feel when you read through passages of the Bible, such as Habakkuk 2:6-20? Yes, we've had glimpses of God's sovereignty. We've seen His promise in 2:4 to the righteous. In 2:14, 20 we've seen something of His glory. But, for the most part, this section has dealt with His justice. The sins of the wicked will lead to their downfall. How do you feel about that?

You could say that they deserve what's coming to them. That may be true, but do we deserve any better? After all, the Bible teaches that no one can call themselves righteous (Romans 3:10). Nothing in us merits God's salvation. Well, you could perhaps note the end of the wicked and turn to God in repentance and faith. There *is* good value in that if you're not a Christian. But I don't want to trust in Christ just to avoid punishment on Christ's return.

Instead, let us respond to God's love, His mercy and grace. Let us trust in Christ, acknowledging that He suffered, died and rose again, in our place.

There's another way to respond. Weep! The Lord Jesus, on His final approach to Jerusalem, wept (Luke 19:41). He wept because they ***did not recognise the time of God's coming***. Here are His words concerning their future, when their enemies come upon them (19:44), ***"They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you."*** Yes, weep. Weep for the lost who face a Christ-less eternity.

But you can do more than weep. The Lord Jesus went about preaching and teaching the good news of the kingdom of God. As His disciples, that's what we want to do. By the life that you live and by the words that you say, urge sinners, to trust wholly in the Lord Jesus Christ. That's God's plan. It's part of His big picture. Amen