

The Strangeness of God's Ways

Habakkuk 1:1-11

1500

1969

Tonight we're going to begin our study of the book of Habakkuk. As I said this morning, happiness is sitting next to somebody who knows where Habakkuk is. So I hope you'll find somebody around you who knows where Habakkuk is and turn to it in your Bibles. For the next few Sunday nights we're going to be dealing with the book of Habakkuk. The subject for tonight is the strangeness of God's ways from the book of Habakkuk.

Now in case you're lost, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai and so forth. Minor prophets, Old Testament holy Bible. That's all the directions I can give you. And I'll give you a moment to find it since it is a small book.

Habakkuk chapter 1, and this is a very fascinating book, although it is very brief, merely three chapters and three very brief chapters. It is a very, very important book. Now tonight, primarily, I want to discuss chapter 1 verses 1 through 11. Beginning at verse 1, we read;

"The burden in which Habakkuk the prophet did see. O Lord, how long shall I cry and Thou wilt not hear? Even cry out unto thee a violence and Thou wilt not save? Why dost Thou show me iniquity and cause me to behold grievance? For spoiling and violence are before me and there are those who raise up strife and contention. Therefore the law is slacked and justice doth never go forth, for the wicked doth compass about the righteous; therefore justice goeth forth perverted." It sounds like a description of twentieth century, doesn't it?

Verse 5, "Behold among the nations and regard and wonder marvelously; for I will work a work in your days which you will not believe though it be told you." This is God speaking. "For lo, I raise up the Chaldeans that bitter and hasty nation which shall march through the breadth of the land to possess the dwelling places that are not theirs. They are terrible and dreadful, they're judgment and their dignity shall proceed from themselves. Their horses also are swifter than the leopards and are more fierce than the evening wolves and their horsemen shall spread themselves and their horsemen shall come from far. They shall fly like the eagle that hasteth to eat. They shall come all for violence. The set of their faces is forward and they shall gather the captives as the sand. And they shall scoff at the kings and the princes shall be a scorn unto them for they shall deride every stronghold for they shall heap dust and take it. Then shall his mind change and he shall pass over and offend, imputing this his power unto his god."

A very interesting portion of Scripture. Now we know that life is never a bed of roses and particularly the Christian life is never a bed of roses. Even though we live the life of faith, even though our faith is

very personally and very explicitly placed in the person of Jesus Christ, and even though Christ is all and all, and even though He is sufficient to every need, life, the life of faith, is never just comfortable. There are always problems. There are always problems in the Christian's life. There are always problems in the life of the Israelites. There were problems in the mind of Habakkuk as he wrote in this prophecy. And the reason there are always problems is because there is always an active adversary, Satan, whose desire is to tempt us to sin. And so there are problems. And various temptations are presented to our minds as Christians and Satan's desire in presenting these temptations is to undermine our faith, is to cause us to doubt God, or to doubt God's love, or to doubt that God cares. Surprisingly enough, this is true of Christians.

Many of us find coming into our lives problems that we cannot understand, sorrows that we cannot cope with, various temptations that tend to make us doubt God and wonder if we're really saved, wonder if God really cares at all, wonder if the faith that we hold to so strongly could really have a failing or a weak link in it. And so if Satan tempts us to doubt God, to undermine our faith, and then Satan tempts the unsaved by making Christianity look ridiculous, it's an old, old tactic of Satan to present a ridiculous Christianity to the world, to try to make Christianity look like stupidity. And he's done it all through history.

Today, one of the main anxieties pushed off on the world by Satan is the problem of history. That's what we want to talk about for the next few Sunday nights in this prophecy. The problem of history. You see, today people are perplexed with the historical situation. You look around you and you wonder why it's like it is. Now up until about 1914 or 1915 we had a different problem. It wasn't the problem of history that was bugging everybody, it was the problem of science. For in the nineteenth century and in centuries previous to that, the biggest problem was that science was purported to be a threat to Christianity. And you had during those centuries critics who said that the Bible was scientifically wrong and in great error, etc., etc., etc. They would point to things like the Bible statement that the sun stood still and various things like that and say the Bible is scientifically impossible.

And so, Christianity was always wrangling with science. And if you ever see a book on Christianity and science, the great books, the great traditional books were books written at the very beginning of this century and at the latter part of the last century because that was the day in which science was the problem. But today that's not the problem. Today is the problem of history. It goes like this, how can a God like the one you claim in the Bible let the world get in the mess that it's in? Or for that matter, how can the God that you claim is the God of the Bible let the church get in the mess that the church is in? And so we have the problem of history. And if you look around the world, the world is in a mess...war, famine, disease, suffering, sorrow, death, constant problems all around the world.

And I'll tell you, if you look at the church you're going to find the church in the main is in a mess...apostasy, liberalism, a denial of the authenticity of Scripture, a denial of verbal plenary inspiration, a denial of the deity of Jesus Christ, a substitution of every inane type of philosophy imaginable. There's no question about the fact that the world is in a mess. There's no question about the fact that the church is in a mess. And so, the issue today is if God is really God, why is all this mess such a problem today? Why is God allowing it and why are we having to cope with it? This is the issue today. This is the great problem that's thrown up in the face of Christianity today...the problem of history. And this is what we want to deal with because in this century, the century in which we live, primarily right today in this particular decade, many Christians find their faith shaken. Many find them sort of rattling at their roots because of the course of events in the world. And other people

who are not Christians who have no faith find it very difficult...very difficult to accept the God of the Bible in view of the history that's going on in our world today.

Devastating world problems become very difficult to reconcile with a loving, caring, kind God as He's presented in the Bible. But really there's no excuse for this perplexity on the part of a Christian and there's absolutely no excuse for rejection on the part of a non-Christian because the plain teaching of the Bible sets it straight. There is really no reason to be perplexed about the relationship of the Bible and science. That's a dead issue. James White Dana(?) said there is nothing more true in all the universe than the statements of the Bible that touch on science. And he was a head geologist at Yale University. That's a dead issue. The Bible hasn't made scientific error, it doesn't make any scientific error. And now the history problem is the issue. But there really shouldn't be any perplexity about that either because the Bible deals just as explicitly with that as it does with the problem of science.

Now I know that some people think that the Bible is a text book on salvation and that's the beginning and the end of it. But that's not really so. Salvation is really just one thread that runs through the theme of the Bible. The Bible's purpose, the Word of God's purpose is the entire destiny of the world. If all the Bible cared about was salvation, it wouldn't deal with the fall of man, necessarily, it wouldn't deal with hell, it wouldn't deal with all of the things that have to do with a godless world. The Bible is infinitely more than a textbook on salvation. It is that, to be sure it is that. But it is more than that. The Word of God in total revelation is concerned with the entire world, its condition and its destiny. The Bible, if you please, has a very profound philosophy of history and a distinctive world view.

Careful reading and study of the Word of God will show this to you. If you just peruse your favorite Psalm or reread over and over again the Sermon on the Mount, or flip around in your favorite gospel, you might not get it. But if you carefully study the Word of God, you will find that every thing that occurs in history has a place in God's divine plan. The Word of God then is concerned with the whole spectrum of the world and its destiny.

Now I say all that to say this. Habakkuk is an illustration of this problem because the prophet treats the problem of history in his book and he treats it in a fascinating way. He doesn't treat it from an academic standpoint. He doesn't treat it from a theoretic standpoint. He doesn't treat it from a philosophical standpoint. He treats it from the personal perplexity of his own life. He says, in essence, God, I can't figure out why it's going like it is if You're who You are. That is Habakkuk's problem. And so I want us to join him in his experience. He was troubled by what he saw in the world.

Now what was the situation? Well the situation in Habakkuk's day was that Israel was back-slidden, which is nothing new for Israel. Israel had turned from God, Israel had forgotten God, Israel was completely given over to idolatry. And so he begins in verse 2, the real cry of his heart as he examines Israel and he says this, "O Lord, how long shall I cry and Thou wilt not hear? Even cry out unto Thee of violence and Thou wilt not save. Why dost thou show me iniquity and cause me to behold grievance for spoiling and violence are before me and there are those who raise up strife and contention? Therefore the law is slacked and justice does not go forth for the wicked doth compass about the righteous, therefore justice goeth forth perverted." What a horrible picture of Israel. And the prayer that Habakkuk is praying is...God, they're in a mess, I've been asking You and asking You and crying out for You to change it. Why don't You do something about it? How long shall I cry and You will not hear?

What a situation. Sin, immorality, vice were rampant. Those in government were slack and indolent. And those who applied the law applied it dishonestly and justice was nowhere to be found. And Habakkuk, a man of God, has had his heart just bleeding before God as to why God allows this. Such were the conditions of Israel. There was lawlessness, there was sin, immorality and so forth.

The same thing is true today. As we look about our world we see the same characteristics exactly as in Habakkuk's day. In verse 2 he says, "There is violence." Certainly that's a watchword of our day. In verse 3 he says, "There is iniquity, there is violence, again, there are those who raise up strife and contention." There are revolutionaries stirring up trouble. Verse 4, "Therefore the law is slack and there's no justice fairly and honestly." Law and authority are not dealing fairly and honestly. It's difficult to find justice in this world, just as it was in the day of Habakkuk. And so he's perplexed by the situation and he cries out to God and says, "God, if You're who You are, why are You letting it happen?" We stand today in the twentieth century and we can look at God with almost the same quizzical expression in our brain and say, "God, why is it like it is? Why is it that we constantly cry out about these things and nothing ever happens? They only get worse."

So the situation wasn't very good. Well if you think the situation was bad, wait till you get a hold of the solution. In verse 5 to 11, Habakkuk gets probably the most unusual answer to prayer that anybody ever got. If you think God's inactivity was perplexing, just notice his activity. And Habakkuk was perplexed in verses 2 and 4 but it must have been nothing compared to what's going on in his brain after he heard God's answer. Verse 5 God says, "Behold among the nations in regard.." God doesn't say I'm going to answer your prayer, everything's going to be roses. He says, "And wonder marvelously for I'll work a work in your days, first of all, which you will not believe, though it be told you." And here's the answer to Habakkuk's prayer. Verse 6, "For lo, I raise up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation which shall march through the breadth of the land to possess the dwelling places that are not there. They are terrible and dreadful, their judgment, their dignity shall proceed from themselves," and he describes their horses, their swiftness. Their horsemen are going to cover the land, they're going to come swiftly like an eagle. Verse 9, they're going to come for violence. The set of their faces is forward. That means that they're not going to be distracted, they've got a goal in mind, you're going to go at it. "They shall gather the captives as the sand. They're going to pick up the whole nation Israel. They'll scoff and laugh at the kings and princes. They'll deride every stronghold. They're going to heap dust and take it." And then in verse 11, "They're going to glory and think that they did it because of the power of their own God."

Now listen to this. God answered Habakkuk by saying, "You think it's bad now, you haven't seen anything yet." Now that's an unusual answer. He's been crying out, "O God, deliver us, deliver us, deliver us, deliver us." And God says, "Not only will I not deliver you, it's going to get worse than it is now." God intends to raise up an utterly pagan godless people to come in and destroy Israel.

Now this is the problem of Habakkuk. Number one, why is God inactive? Why does God not hear his cry? Secondly, when He does, why does He answer that way? And through these eleven verses, we learn three great truths about the way God acts. God's ways, first of all, are mysterious; secondly, they are misunderstood; but thirdly, they are moral. God's ways are mysterious, misunderstood yet they are moral. That's our basic outline.

First of all, let's notice that God's ways are mysterious. Now we've hinted at it already. First of all, let's notice His mysterious in action. It is strange how that God is silent in very serious circumstances. And we stand there and we ask ourselves, "Why...why did God let Israel get this far

gone? Why didn't God smash those idols right when they were put up? Why did God allow false prophets? Why didn't He strike them down on the spot? Why did God allow Israel to deteriorate at all? Why didn't God maintain the purity of Israel?"

We can ask ourselves the same questions in reference to the church. Why has God let liberalism come into the church? Why has He allowed it? Why doesn't He strike those false teachers? Why doesn't He strike them dead on the spot when they utter their blasphemy and their denial of the faith? Why does God allow so many wrong things to be done? And why in the context of the church does God allow people under the name of Jesus Christ to commit the atrocities that have been committed? So many churches in our world that name the name of Jesus Christ and under the name of Jesus Christ are doing things unbelievable. Why does God allow it? If God is really God, why doesn't He keep the church pure? Why does He let this happen? And not only that, why hasn't God answered yes to all of my faithful prayers? How long have we been praying for a revival in America? How long have we been praying for a revival all over the world? Why hasn't God answered yes? Why no revival?

We pray for decades and God doesn't hear, why? Why doesn't God bring America to its knees? Why doesn't God take these people who have turned against Him and turn them toward Him? And you've probably asked in your own heart on an individual level, why does God allow so-and-so to be ill? Why doesn't God heal? Or you've asked, why doesn't God save that person that I've prayed for month after month after month after month, why? Why is God silent in the midst of the atrocities committed under His name in the church? Why do they allow it in Israel? Why does He allow the world to go like it's going if He's really God?

See, God's ways are mysterious, aren't they? His inaction is mysterious. Secondly, His unexpected providences are mysterious. Second thing we discover from Habakkuk is that God sometimes gives very unexpected answer to our prayers. Now this really shook Habakkuk...really shook him. For a long time God didn't seem to answer. And then all of a sudden God answered. In Habakkuk's mind, God was answering all along but He wasn't answering the way Habakkuk wanted him to. Finally God answered and it was even more mysterious than before He answered because, you see, Habakkuk thought he knew what Israel needed. He thought in his mind...well, here's what Israel needs, God, number one, God, just do it this way. They need a revival, God. And secondly, after You've kind of placed them a little bit, and had a revival, turn them around and make them turn toward You, God. That's exactly what they need. They just need a good whipping, God. They need to be smashed down and punished a little bit and then they need a great revival, God, and they'll turn to You and everything will be great.

But, you see, God had other plans for Israel. John Newton said that he felt that he wanted something better in his spiritual life, at one time, so he cried out to God for a deeper knowledge of God. He cried out for a deeper understanding of his own spiritual light and he besought God that he might have a new dimension in his Christian experience. You know what happened? He expected some wonderful vision of God, or he expected some dramatic blessing from heaven. But you know what he got? Instead he had an experience in which for months God seemed a million miles away and God seemed to abandon John Newton to Satan himself. He was tempted and he was tried beyond his comprehension, the exact opposite of what he prayed for. But, you see, God had allowed Newton to go into the depths of suffering to teach him to depend entirely on Him. And then when Newton had learned his lesson, he brought him out and blessed him.

In the Bible there's a basic principle...suffering always precedes glory. You know that? Suffering always precedes glory. I suppose the best illustration of that is football practice. Some of you guys know. As I look back on that, you know, you live for the glory on Saturday but oh the suffering through the week. There's some basic principles in life that suffering precede glory. No man ever attained anything in life but what he suffered through some sacrificial hours to take himself to that glory. No man ever became effective and astute in any dimension of education until he had sacrificed hours and hours and hours of careful study. No man ever becomes a well-trained athlete who performs well at the big moment unless he is disciplined and sacrificed throughout the hours and hours that nobody saw. How many of you have ever asked God to make you suffer? Have you ever gotten down on your knees and said, "God, make me suffer. God, literally smash me down. God, crush me." Have you ever prayed that? I never have, I'm afraid to.

Well what do we pray? Lord, protect me, Lord, keep me safe as I go over here. Lord, bless our family. Lord, watch over us. Lord, take care of us. Lord, do this, do that. You know, keep the little wall around us. Lord, don't let anything happen to us. That's the way we pray, isn't it?

But there's a basic biblical principle that says what precedes glory? Suffering always precedes glory. Well we don't pray for that, do we? All we want is the glory. You want to know something? Some day Israel is going to be glorified, did you know that? Some day they're going to reign with Christ who is their Messiah, aren't they, for a thousand years. They're going to have the glory but not without the suffering. And some day the church is going to be glorified, isn't it? In the day that we meet Jesus Christ in our glorified bodies, but not before we go through some suffering in this world. We all like to prescribe our own answers to our own prayers, don't we? We pray and in the back of our minds we say, "God, in case You're stuck for a plan..." But we forget the fact that God sometimes makes things an awful lot worse before they get any better. Just remember that God may do the opposite of what you expect, but don't forget it might look like the backside of a Persian rug to you but on the other side, the side that God sees, it's a beautiful, glorious tapestry. What we're seeing today is the backside. What we're seeing today in the world is the suffering that the world is going through to get ready for the glory that's going to be there. You know that some day this world is going to be in the hands of Jesus Christ and the lion is going to lie down with the lamb and the little child is going to play in a snake pit and never be bitten. And do you know that the nations are going to go in and out and see Jesus Christ reigning on the throne of David and Israel is going to be glorified and the church is going to be glorified and Christ is going to be glorified. But not before suffering and God is beating this world down in judgment right now and beginning right now up until the time that Christ comes in final judgment, until that day this world is going to be under the judgment of God to get it ready for the glory.

Why should I deserve anything that Christ never had? It was needful for Christ to suffer before He could be glorified. And so it is for us. And things are going to keep getting worse, 1 Timothy 3, about verse 13 Paul said to Timothy, "Evil men shall wax...what?...worse and worse in the last days." We start reading prophetic Scriptures and we're going to get into a series on prophetic themes for today following our study of Habakkuk, and we read about the fact that in the end times there's going to be wars and rumors of wars. We read about in the end time there's going to be lawlessness. Thessalonians, the Apostle Paul says that the spirit of lawlessness is going to run wild in the end times. We read that in the end times there's going to be a rise of cults, false religions called by Paul in his letter to Timothy doctrines of devils. We read that in the last days there are going to be apostates who go around denying the Lord that bought them, 2 Peter 2. That things are going to get worse and worse and worse, not better. And I'll tell you, if you're spending your time praying for

peace, you might as well forget it. Pray for peace in the hearts of men, not in the world, there never will be peace in this world till Christ comes. And if you're praying for an end to all wars, forget it, there's never going to be an end to all wars till Christ comes. Things are going to get worse and worse and worse before they ever get any better. The lines are being drawn right now for the battle of Armageddon. Russia is ready, the king of the north. Egypt and the Arab states are ready, the king of the south. From the east the great Red Chinese guard now numbering 200 million, exactly as prophesied in the book of Revelation is ready as I shared with you two years ago, the Russians started a seven-year project to dam up the Euphrates. The Bible says the Euphrates will be dried up and the kings of the east will march across. The world is getting ready and there's not going to be any respite in war, it's going to get worse and worse before it gets any better.

And so, sometimes though we think we know how God ought to answer, He doesn't answer the way we think He should. And in verse 6 He told Habakkuk, "I'm going to raise up the Chaldeans to judge Israel." And so God's ways are mysterious. His unexpected providences are mysterious. And certainly His instrument is mysterious. When He talks about the Chaldeans, that must have really been a problem for Habakkuk cause the Chaldeans were very, very despised. They were absolutely pagan and godless.

There's a fellow who writes me letters all the time from Canada. And he's a writer. And he wrote me a novel, just personally for me he wrote a whole novel. He's very prolific. His letters are like about twelve pages long. And he wrote me this 100-page thing, all typed out, just a personal novel...excellent. And he had one line in there that I thought as classic and it was this. He said this, "God ain't stuck for carrier pigeons." And you say, "What does that mean?" It must mean this, that if God wants to use the Chaldeans, He can do it. That's what it means. I mean, God has used all sorts of strange instruments to bring His purposes to pass including an ass in Numbers 22 and perhaps many other occasions.

One perhaps prime example of that I find in Isaiah 44. If you have your Bible, you might look at that passage, Isaiah 44. And here you have the incident of Israel, the prophecy regarding Israel being released from the Babylonian captivity. In Isaiah 44, let's see, I think it's verse 28...yes, here's the prophecy about Cyrus. And this was many, many years before Cyrus was ever king. God says, "Who saith of Cyrus, he is My shepherd?" God says that Cyrus, this pagan king is his shepherd, "And shall perform all My pleasure, even saying to Jerusalem, 'Thou shalt be built,' and to the temple, 'Thy foundation shall be laid.'" Now look at the first verse, I think, of the next chapter, verse 45...er, chapter 45 verse 1, not only does He call him a shepherd, but He says, "Thus saith the Lord to His...what?...anointed, to Cyrus."

Now Cyrus was a pagan king, go back to Habakkuk. Cyrus was a pagan king and yet God said, "I'm going to use Cyrus to free Israel from bondage." And He carried it even further by saying, "Cyrus is My shepherd, Cyrus is My anointed." And I'll tell you, God uses some strange instruments to carry out His judgment, doesn't He? One perhaps very strange instrument is Antichrist who is definitely, believe it or not, being used, or going to be used by God in the Tribulation to do exactly what God wants him to do.

Not only that, the same is true of the kings of the north. All of the parts that are involved in prophecy in the Tribulation are used by God. You read Ezekiel 38, there's one little phrase there. It talks about the kings of the north coming against Israel and it says God's going to put hooks in their jaws and bring them down. God literally brings down the kings of the north against Israel. God uses strange

instruments to fulfill His plan. Today because of the New Testament we know how it all ends, don't we? Habakkuk didn't know. He was in a worse dilemma than we are. We know that God is letting things happen to prepare the world for judgment because after judgment comes...what?...glory, the Kingdom. The worst judgment this world will ever see will be the Tribulation. In Matthew 24 Jesus says there's nothing like it since the beginning of time...nothing like it. Following that tremendous wrath of God outpoured on this world, immediately following it, immediately is the glorification of Christ, of Israel and of the church.

So God's ways are mysterious. His enaction is mysterious. His unexpected providences are mysterious. And certainly His unusual instruments are mysterious. As a result of that, secondly, God's ways are misunderstood. Not only mysterious but misunderstood, and there are two different groups of people that misunderstand God's ways. First of all, careless religious people misunderstand God's ways. And we saw in Matthew chapter 7 several weeks ago that there are going to be many very religious people at the judgment, right? Now they're going to say, "Lord, Lord, here we are," and He says, "Depart from Me I never knew you." There are going to be many people who were religious but very, very careless..godless, religious people. Look at verse 5. "Behold among the nations in regard and wonder marvelously for I will work a work in your days which you will not...what?...believe though it be told." These religious Israelites didn't believe the message that God gave them. They didn't believe it. Israel never would believe. No matter what God did, they never believed the prophets.

In Matthew 21 you have one of the saddest parables in all the Bible. And I'll just refer to it. The man who had the vineyard and he brought servants in and people would come and kill the servants. And finally he said, "I'll put my own son there, surely⁷ they won't kill my son." And what did they do? They killed the son. Graphic illustration of the fact that no matter who God sent to Israel, they always did the same thing with them, they never believed God, they never would believe God. God said judgment, judgment, judgment. The prophets kept crying judgment, judgment, nobody ever believed them. And yet they fancied themselves to be very religious people. There are people like that today. There are people in churches, liberal churches sitting around glibly singing little hymns and listening to little spiritual thoughts dripping off the lips of their preachers who carelessly sit there thinking that religion is going to protect them and ignore again and again and again the Scriptures that talk about judgment...careless religious people.

Just to show you how they do this, look at 2 Peter chapter 3 and I want you to see a characteristic of the careless religious people. Second Peter 3, let's see, verse 4, well verse 3 really we should start with. "Knowing this first that there shall come in the...what?...in the last days scoffers walking after their own lusts...and here it comes, verse 4...and saying...what?... 'Where is the promise of His coming?'"

Now this is always, always, always the attitude of the apostate. They deny the deity of Christ and secondly, they always deny the Second Coming. They reject every Scripture that talks about judgment. And they'll sit in their churches year after year and their schools and seminaries and all of this and reject all of the Scripture that is so explicit about judgment. And you want to hear the brilliance of their argument? This will shock you, look at verse 4, listen to this logic, here's what they say, "For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." Isn't that brilliant? You know what they're saying? "Well, He never will come because He never has," see. I will never die because I never have. I'll never be judged because I never have been judged. Isn't that brilliant? That's what they said before Noah, didn't they? It never will rain

because it never has. And God said, "My Spirit will not always...what?...strive with man," and it did rain and judgment came. And it says here in verse 5...you say, "Well how can anybody be stupid enough to believe that kind of logic?" Well verse 5 explains it, "For this they....what?...they're willingly ignorant." They want to be stupid on this point. They don't want to buy judgment, do they? They don't want anything to do with it.

All right, go back to Habakkuk. So we see then there are people who believe a lie. Who's the father of all lies? Satan. So they believe Satan. And the same like Sodom and Gomorrah, easy-going, sinful people who never believed their city will be destroyed, but God's going to come and careless, religious people misunderstand the judgment of God. Let me tell you, if you're a careless person who is sitting beside someone day in and day out and living life as if it was very glib, who is going to the job standing wherever you do with people all around you, coming to church, sitting beside someone here, going over here, meeting people, circulating in the world, never a thought for eternity, never a thought for the judgment of God...let me warn you tonight that God's going to judge this world, judgment is inevitable. It's time that you check your own life to be sure you're prepared. God did judge Israel, you know. He did. Not many years after Habakkuk's time He judged them. They were taken into captivity and it was a disaster.

Paul picks this same verse, verse 5, and records it for us in the thirteenth chapter of Acts. And he says in this chapter, and he's, of course, in a different context speaking, but he says in Acts 13:41, "Behold, you despisers, and wonder and perish, for I work a work in your days, a work in which you shall in no way believe though a man declare it unto you." He stood there and he talked to those Jews in that synagogue and he said, "You won't believe this but God's going to judge you just like He told those Jews in Habakkuk's day He was going to judge them and you're not going to believe Him now anymore than they believed Him then. God's going to judge you for crucifying Jesus Christ," he was saying. "God's going to judge you for refusing the gospel. But you're not going to believe it anymore than your fathers believed it in Habakkuk's day, but it's going to come. And judgment came by way of the Chaldean army, just as Habakkuk promised. And I'll tell you something else, judgment came by way of the Roman army, as Paul promised in Acts 13, for in 70 A.D. the city of Jerusalem was wiped out. One million, one-hundred thousand Jews were killed. One hundred and sixteen thousand bodies were thrown over the wall just for the sport of it. A hundred thousand Jews were sold into slavery, so many that the market was flooded and they didn't bring as much money as a horse.

It came. The judgment of God always comes on sin. And it will come to careless religious people. God's at work in His judgment right now. And His judgment slumbereth not, it's near. Don't you ever let yourself be lulled into senselessness, you wake up and start reading the signs of the times. God's judgment is near.

Not only are God's ways misunderstood by careless, religious people, but sad to say, they're also misunderstood by the world and even more misunderstood. In verse 11, "Then shall his mind change and he shall pass over and offend imputing this his power unto his God." Now that's a difficult verse to understand. What it means is this, that after the Chaldeans conquered Israel, they're going to think they did it themselves. They're going to think they did it by the power of their own god. The Chaldeans when they did conquer Israel, completely failed to realize that they were being used by God and they went around patting themselves on the back telling themselves how great they were for having done this. They thought they owed their military success to their own ability. Boy, that's so typical. No matter what a man accomplishes, he always pats himself on the back. But God was soon

to demonstrate to them that it was not so because the God who had lifted them up was about to smash them down. Sad to say in the world in which we live today, people soon forget that what they do they do not do in many ways by their own power, but are permitted by God. Great powers have come and gone and conquered and become drunk with their own success and God has cast them down, and still man never learns the significance of history, the real history that is God's history, never dawns on him.

Yes the ways of God are mysterious to the careless, religious people and to the world. The world thinks its doing it on its own and in reality they're nothing but the pawns of God. So the ways of God are mysterious and they are misunderstood, but thirdly and most importantly, though they be mysterious and though they be misunderstood, they are moral. They are always moral. The ultimate triumphant of right, the ultimate glorification of God, the ultimate setting up of God's Kingdom is the end of all history and God's ways are right, they are always right, they are always righteous. God is moral. God can do no wrong. God exerts a divine superintending power over the history of His world. God has divine control of this world. In verse 6 it indicates that God is going to raise up the Chaldeans. God is the one in control. Every single nation on this earth is under the power of God.

How do you know that? Romans 13:1, "The powers that be are...what?...ordained of God." God is the Lord of history. Listen, God was sovereign in creation, was He not? God is sovereign in the dispersion of man at the Tower of Babel, was He not? God is sovereign in the historical process, is He not? And I'll tell you, God's just as sovereign in how it all ends as He was in how it all began. God is going to end history because He began it and He's responsible for everything that happens. So there is a divine control over history. And may I say at the same time, there's a divine plan in history. Things don't happen by accident. They're a part of God's plan. Because, you see, it's God who sees the end from the beginning, because it's God who knows the times and the season. God knows exactly what He's doing, the clock of God is never off one split second. Every single thing happening in this world today is happening right on schedule because God is a divine timetable. In Ecclesiastes chapter 3 you have that beautiful passage about a time to love and a time to die and a time to weep and a time to work. And just as there are times and seasons in the lives of men, so divine history is on time. You look back to Daniel and you read about the 70 weeks of Daniel and you know that God keeps timetables that are infinitely accurate, that are careful. There's a divine plan, there's a divine control, there's a divine timetable. God is running history and He's running it to the end that He sovereignly desires it to come to.

And what is that end? It's the glorification of His Kingdom. The key to the history of the world is one concept, get it and never forget it. The key to the history of the world, here it comes, is the Kingdom of God...that is the key. God's redemptive history...history of the Old Testament was Israel, history in the New Testament is the church. And in the Old Testament the Kingdom was promised. In the New Testament age it was promised again and then postponed. The Kingdom of God runs right through history. God's desire was to call out a people holy, set apart unto His name. That's His plan. The Kingdom of God is central in history. The only thing that matters in this whole world and this whole universe is the Kingdom of God. The problems of today are to be understood only in the light of the Kingdom of God. The problems of yesterday are to be understood only in the Kingdom of God and so the problems of tomorrow.

What God permits in the church and what God permits in the world is related to His Kingdom. And it's going to be established. And the principle is the same, before the glory there must always be the suffering. So don't stumble at world events. We've just scratched the surface of this book, we're

going to go on further. But don't stumble at world events. If you're a Christian, ask yourself this....whatever is happening, ask yourself this...how does this relate to the Kingdom of God? Ask yourself that if you're a Christian. Whatever is going on, how does it fit in to God's plan to establish His Kingdom? If you can't figure out why there's conflict in Israel, how does it fit in to God's establishing His Kingdom? If you can't figure out why there's problems going on in our country or around the world or in your own life, how does it fit in to God's Kingdom? If you're not a Christian, if you don't know Jesus Christ and you're not a part of His Kingdom, ask yourself this...what is God trying to tell me? What is God saying? What is there in the world and what is there in me that needs to be corrected? Why is this judgment coming? What's wrong with the world and what's wrong with me? And having asked yourself that question, come to the sense of your own sin and then turn to Jesus Christ who can take you out of the kingdom of this world and put you into the Kingdom of His dear Son. Let's pray.

Father, tonight we realize we have just scratched the surface of this tremendous book. But, Father, tonight perhaps somehow we've been able to think about some of the things that are important in this, Thy precious Word. Oh we know Thy ways are mysterious and we know how people so easily misunderstand them. But, O God, we know Thy ways are always moral.

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2017 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright>).