

# Dr. Gary Yates, Book of the 12, Session 25, Habakkuk

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This is Dr. Gary Yates in his lecture series on the Book of the 12. This is lecture 25 on the book of Habakkuk.

Our focus in this current section is going to be on the book of Habakkuk.

In the Book of the 12, the message of Habakkuk and the message of Zephaniah particularly complement one another because both of these books and the ministry of both of these prophets focused on preparing the people and warning the people of the judgment that was going to come at the hands of the Babylonians. However, the interesting thing is that Zephaniah and Habakkuk approach this topic in entirely different ways. We looked in the previous section at the message of Zephaniah and Zephaniah warns of the coming day of the Lord.

This is what the Lord says, preparing the people, calling them to repentance. Habakkuk deals more with the Babylonian crisis as what appears to be a personal crisis of faith. The Lord reveals and unfolds the future to the people of Judah through a dialogue that he has with the prophet.

What we have here in terms of prophetic literature as the prophet dialogues back and forth with God reminds me in many ways of the confessions of Jeremiah. Where Jeremiah will lament over the circumstances and the situations that are going on in his ministry and his life, then Yahweh will respond back to him and speak to him both of things that will happen to him personally and of what God is planning and intending to do in terms of the people in the nation of Judah.

We have the same thing here. Through the crisis of faith that Habakkuk is going through in terms of God's plans and God's intentions and how he is working in the historical circumstances of his day, God ultimately instructs the people of his plans, prepares them, and warns them of the judgment that is on the way in approaching them. As Jeremiah and Habakkuk are dialoguing with God in this way, I think it reflects for us the rich language of prayer and the examples and instances of prayer.

We'll talk about some of this, but it also reminds us of the difficult role that the prophets played as they were both warning of the judgment that was coming but also experiencing in their own lives the devastating effects of the judgment as God was bringing this upon them. They truly lived out what we would call an incarnational ministry because they experienced in their lives and in their situation and their circumstances, the circumstances of the judgment that God is bringing upon them, and God calls them to this specific role. Particularly in the dialogue that

takes place between Habakkuk and God in this book and the dialogue that takes place between Jeremiah and the Lord in his confessions, we understand that the prophets have a role where they both represent God to the people.

This is what the Lord says, and here's the message of the Lord. But the reverse of that is that they also represent the people to God. Jeremiah and Habakkuk are calling out to the Lord, and they're saying, Lord, remember the righteous people that are in the land.

Remember the promises that you've made to us. Look at what we're going through, notice us, and show grace to us. So, real incarnational ministry, I think, is reflected in the ministry of Habakkuk and Jeremiah and just the struggle and the crisis that the prophets themselves often went through.

In terms of the timing of Habakkuk's ministry and when did all of this take place in relationship to the Babylonian crisis, there's not a lot in the book that helps us to specifically identify that. I think there may be some indications in the book that his ministry is going to span the entire Babylonian crisis. Here's a couple of things that might suggest this for us.

In chapter 1 verses 5 and 6, when the Lord tells Habakkuk to prepare and his plans to send the Babylonians, it seems to be somewhat of a surprise element. Chapter 1, verses 5 and 6 say this: Look among the nations and see, wonder, and be astounded. For I am doing a work in your days that you would not believe if told.

For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans, the bitter and hasty nation, who march through the breadth of the earth to seize dwellings not their own. So, it is somewhat of a surprise element that God is going to use the Chaldeans to be the instrument of judgment. This might suggest that Habakkuk's ministry at least began fairly early in the Babylonian crisis.

Perhaps sometime shortly after Nabopolassar has established the independence of Babylon in 627 or 626 BC, or at least before the time that the Babylonians have begun to put pressure on Judah and have started to carry out the three stages of the exile in 605, 597, and 586. However, as we move forward in chapter 2, there is a woe pronounced on Babylon. Babylon is viewed as this oppressive, violent kingdom that God is going to judge because they have built their empire on blood.

This may suggest that Habakkuk's ministry is now reflecting, in his message, is now reflecting on the Babylonians sometime after 605 BC. And then in chapter 3 verses 16 to 19, at the end of the book, it seems like the invasion of Judah and the disaster and the calamity that's about to come upon them is imminent. And so, perhaps this dialogue between God and Habakkuk and Habakkuk's response to all of this may not have taken place right away.

We see a ministry that spans throughout the Babylonian crisis. Here's what the dialogue is all about. And the questions that Habakkuk raises, and then God's responses to those things, that's the structure for this book.

In the opening verses of chapter 1, Habakkuk's initial complaint, and that's exactly what we have here, is it's lament or complaint like what we see in the Psalms. Habakkuk's complaint is that the land is being overwhelmed by wickedness and evil. The people of Judah have become absolutely corrupt, and it appears that God is doing nothing about this.

That's in chapters 1 verses 2 to 4. There are a couple of very powerful metaphors that are used to talk about this. Habakkuk is going to say that wickedness is so pervasive in the land that the law is paralyzed, and God's Torah is not being observed, and it's not able to carry out what it was intended to do. It also says that justice is perverted, the idea that it's twisted, it's bent.

And so, the law is paralyzed, and justice is perverted. As Habakkuk looks around the land and sees the conditions that are there in his days immediately before the Babylonian crisis, the land is filled with wickedness, evil, and iniquity. And Habakkuk's question is, there is a way in chapter 1, verse 3, why do you make me see iniquity, and why do you look idly at wrong? So, in light of this pervasive evil, the law is paralyzed, and justice is bent, twisted, and perverted.

God, where are you? And so, again, very similar to the lament language of the Psalms. The Psalmist will often ask God, why have you done this? Or where are you? Or why? Or how long? And even, at times, using some language that we're not sure that you can appropriately use with God. God, why are you asleep? When are you going to wake up? And so, Habakkuk wants to know, when is God going to wake up and do something about the injustice that's in the land? And so, why do you make me see iniquity, and why do you look idly at wrong? There are several other passages in the prophets that will highlight this idea that in the final days of either Israel or Judah, the righteous were a tiny minority.

Micah had said that the godly had disappeared in the land during the Assyrian crisis. Isaiah 57.1 says, the godly are perishing and no one takes it to heart. Jeremiah, a prophet whose time overlaps that of Habakkuk as they're both dealing with the Babylonian crisis.

In Jeremiah chapter 5, he talks about the fact that righteous people in the city of Jerusalem are very hard to find. And Jeremiah says, run to and fro the streets of Jerusalem. Look and take note.

Search her squares to see if you can find a man. So, God's encouraging Jeremiah to seek. Can you find anyone that's righteous? And see if you can find one who does justice and seeks truth, that I may pardon her.

Though they say as the Lord lives, yet they swear falsely. O Lord, do not your eyes look for truth. You have struck them down, but they have felt no anguish.

You have consumed them. They refuse to take correction. They have made their faces harder than rocks and they have refused to repent.

So, Jeremiah looks at the culture and things that are going on in Jerusalem immediately before the Babylonian invasion. He says the same thing as Habakkuk. I've been throughout the streets of Jerusalem.

God tells him to do this. And the Lord says, you want to understand why I'm bringing judgment against these people? There are no righteous people there. So, Jeremiah responds back to this in verse four, and he says, well, these are only the poor people.

They have no sense. I've only been looking among the poor people and they don't have the discernment to understand what's good and what's right. Surely the more well-established people, the more wealthy people, the leaders and lambs, surely they're going to be better.

But listen to what it says. The poor people do not know the way of the Lord and the justice of their God. I will instead go to the great, and I will speak to them, for they know the way of the Lord, the justice of their God.

I'm going to go to the wealthy and the prominent and those that are leaders. Surely, they'll know the Lord. But they all alike have broken the yoke and they have burst the bonds.

It's not just the poor, and it's not just the ignorant. It's not just the uneducated. Through every strata of society, these people have turned away from the Lord. The prophet Ezekiel has a similar experience as God is trying to impress upon the prophet Ezekiel as he's living in exile, the perversity of wickedness among his people.

Here's what it says in chapter 9, verse 3. Now the glory of the God of Israel had gone up from the chair on which it rested to the threshold of the house. And he called to the man clothed in linen, an angelic messenger who had the writing case at his waist. And the Lord said to him, pass through the city, through Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations that are committed in it.

And to the others, he said in my hearing, pass through the city after him and strike. You shall not spare, you shall not pity, kill the old men outright, young men and maidens, little children and women, but touch no one on whom is the mark and begin at my sanctuary. So, they began there with the elders who were before the house.

And so, before God carries out his judgment, the angels go through and put a mark on the heads and on the foreheads of those who are righteous and godly. The problem is that there are not many of those there. And while God will take notice of the righteous, ultimately, he's going to wipe out and destroy the city because the wickedness of that city has become pervasive.

And that's what leads to this sort of desperate why question at the beginning of Habakkuk chapter 1. God, why aren't you doing something about this? In chapter 1, verses 5 to verse 11, we get the Lord's response. And the Lord says I am going to do something about this, but here's the surprise element. The way that I am going to punish the wickedness of my own people is that I am going to send the Chaldeans.

And for Habakkuk, this is going to be an astounding thing. Not just because the invasion has not begun, but how again could God use an enemy nation, a wicked and evil nation? How could God use these people as the instrument of his judgment? So, we are back to the same prophetic idea that we've seen in a number of places. Isaiah is going to say, Assyria was the rod of my anger.

God is going to use them to carry out his purposes. And there's this mystery in all of this where God asks us to trust him. That the Lord is a righteous God who can use enemy nations and their violence and their warfare and all of these evil and terrible things, and yet himself not participate and partake in that evil.

That's a mystery that God asks us to trust. And as Habakkuk raises this why question, that's what God is asking him to trust as well. For behold, verse 6, I am raising up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation who march through the breadth of the earth to seize dwellings not their own.

They are dreaded and fearsome. Their justice and dignity go forth from themselves. So, the Babylonian army allied with the Medes and they have brought down the Assyrian empire, Asher 614, Nineveh 6012, Haran 609, and then the great victory over Egypt at Carchemish 605 BC.

Ultimately, those people are going to come against God and this violent power or against the people of God and this powerful army and this powerful nation that God has raised up. They are the answer to the why question that Habakkuk raises at the beginning of this book. There is no dispute about the fact that the Chaldeans and the Babylonians themselves are wicked and violent.

We get an idea of their arrogance at the end of this and the fact that they disregard the Lord completely and yet God is going to use them as his instrument. Verse 11 says this: they sweep by like the wind and go on. They are guilty men whose own might is their God.

So, the Lord is certainly not using the Babylonians to punish Judah because the Babylonians are an exemplary people. They are another wicked and evil empire. In some sense, they mirror the Assyrians, and in their arrogance, they trust in their own strength.

In Isaiah 13 and 14, the Babylonian king is the one who says, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God. He views himself as being on par and on equal with God. Isaiah's response to that is, well, ultimately this proud, arrogant king is going to fall from the sky like the morning star at the beginning of the day.

There is nothing about the Babylonians themselves that is exemplary. They trust in their own strength. They have made a God out of that.

And again, verses 16 and 17, talking about the godlessness of the Babylonians, say this, therefore, he sacrifices to his net, the net that he uses to capture the nations. That's what he worships, and he even offers sacrifices for it. He makes offerings to his dragnet for by them he lives in luxury and his food is rich.

Is he then to keep on emptying his net and mercilessly killing nations forever? There's nothing about the Babylonians that is godly or righteous. They worship their own might. It's not just an issue of them worshipping false gods.

They worship the weapons that they use to trap and oppress and, ultimately to conquer these other nations. So that's God's answer. I'm sending the godless Babylonians against you.

That's the response that the Lord has to Habakkuk's lament. So that is going to lead to a second lament and an obvious one and a question that as we're working to this if we didn't know the resolution to this story, I think we'd be asking the same question that Habakkuk does. And so, Habakkuk is going to come back to God with a second question in chapter 1, verses 12 to 17.

And you can probably anticipate this even if you haven't read the book in a while. Habakkuk is going to affirm something about God at the beginning here. He is a man of faith, and he says about God from the beginning, are you not from everlasting? O Lord, my God, my Holy One, we shall not die.

So, in the midst of this, there is a confidence that even though God has said, I'm sending the godless Babylonians against him. God, we believe that you're the everlasting one. You're the Holy One.

We will not die. You're going to protect us. We also know, verse 13, one of the greatest statements about the holiness of God and the righteousness of God that's found in all of the Bible.

Habakkuk confesses, and he says, the Lord, I know your character, and I know that you are a God whose eyes are too pure to look upon evil. God, you have separated yourself from evil. You're a Holy God.

And part of what holiness involves in the Old Testament is God's separateness that is the result of his moral perfection. And Lord, you're too pure and holy to even look on evil. You cannot look at it wrong.

That's God's character. And so, the question is, how can you use an ungodly nation like the Babylonians to be your instrument of judgment? How can you use these people who trust in their own might as their God to be your instrument of judgment? How can you allow these armies and Nebuchadnezzar and the people of Babylon? How can you allow them at the end of this complaint in verse 17? Is he then to keep on emptying his net and mercilessly killing nations forever? Lord, you're going to allow the Babylonians to be the ones who judge us? Are you going to just allow them to keep killing and capturing and oppressing and enslaving nations forever? Are you ever going to do something about the Babylonians? So, in his first complaint, Habakkuk says, Lord, when are you going to do something about the wickedness that's in the land of Judah? God says I am doing something. I'm sending the Babylonians.

So, the second question, well, Lord, how can you do that? And are you ever going to judge and ever take care of the wickedness of the Babylonians? God gives his second response in chapter two. And in preparation for this, as the dialogue continues, here's what Habakkuk says at the beginning of chapter two. He says I will take my stand at my watch post.

Remember, the prophets were watchmen in Israel. I will station myself on the tower and look out to see what he will say to me and what I will answer concerning him. I want to hear what God has to say.

And the Lord says I want you to write this vision down. I want you to make it plain on tables so that he may run who reads it. For still, the vision awaits its appointed time.

It hastens to the end. It will not lie. All right.

There's not always an immediate or direct command to a prophet to write something down. And so, it's significant that God says, I want you to write this down. The word of this vision, I want you to write it down.

The purpose behind recording this is so that as this happens and as this transpires, the righteous will remember that God said this would happen at the very beginning. It is to encourage those who are trusting in the Lord and looking to the Lord to ultimately resolve this. The Lord says, if it seems slow, wait for it.

It will surely come. It will not delay. And that's why it's written down to be concrete evidence that God said this was going to happen at the beginning.

Isaiah, in chapter 8 of the book of Isaiah is told to write down the name of his son before he is born to remind the king and the people after the son is born that this son conveyed a message to the people, and the writing down of this conveys it. Normally someone did not stand with a pencil and transcribe everything that the prophet said. So, it's written down so that it will be preserved.

And the people of God and those who trust in God, the righteous like Habakkuk, as they're living through this crisis and observing all the disaster and the chaos that is going on, they're to wait for God to keep his promise. The promise in verse 4 is that the righteous shall live by his faith. Those that are righteous, those that are trusting in God are to wait for what God is going to do.

And then the answer that God gives is that after he has judged Judah and after he has used the Babylonians to be his instrument of judgment, he will carry out his judgment on the Babylonians. As the exile is taking place, it may seem as if the Babylonians were an invincible nation. It may seem to the people of Israel even, wow, it looks like the gods of Babylon are greater than the God of Israel.

In the midst of that, God will ultimately judge the Babylonians. There are a series of woe oracles in the remainder of chapter 2 where there are five different woes that are pronounced on the Babylonians. God is going to say, ultimately his judgment will fall on Babylon.

The use of the woe oracle, remember the background of this is the funeral lament. There is going to be a funeral, and the Babylonians themselves will face death and destruction because of their wickedness, their violence, and the oppression that they have used to build their empire. So, God is going to even the score.

Again, thinking about Habakkuk and the message of Jeremiah, who is a contemporary of Habakkuk. Jeremiah said Judah will drink the cup of God's wrath at the hand of Babylon. The nations around Judah will drink the cup of wrath at the hand of Babylon.

God has entrusted dominion over these nations to Babylon at the present time. In a sense in the way that David had been God's servant, and David had been his vice-regent and his representative. The king of Babylon is now the servant of God.

But Jeremiah says, after the nations and after Judah have drunk the cup of God's wrath, Babylon herself will drink this wrath and will drink the cup and will drink it down to the dregs, and God will bring judgment on Babylon. Habakkuk is saying exactly the same thing. The focus here is that in chapter two, in these woe oracles, the judgment will fall because of the violence and the oppression, and specifically, I think there's a focus here on how Babylon has broken the dictates of the Noahic covenant.

All right. In the layout of chapter two, these woe oracles are laid out in a very artistic, poetically structured way that I want to call attention to. In the first three woes that are given in chapter two, verses six to 14, we have three woes that are expressed in ten poetic lines.

And then, at the end of these first three woes, there is a statement about the greatness of God that will be reflected and revealed through the judgment that is going to fall. Verse 14 says for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. As judgment falls on this great empire, the greatness and the glory of God will be evident and visible for all to see.

The Jews and the exiles that would go away into Babylon, I'm sure, at times, thought the gods of Babylon were greater than the Lord. But when God brings this judgment, everyone will be able to say, and everyone will be able to say, everyone will see the greatness of God's glory. Then we have the last two woe oracles, again, in chapter two, verses 15 to 19.

They are laid out in ten poetic lines that balance what we have in the preceding part of the chapter. And again, there is a closing statement, but the Lord is in his holy temple. Let all the earth keep silent before him.

And so the great judgment that God is going to bring is ultimately going to impress upon the people the greatness of God and the glory of God. God is greater than the Babylonians. And God will use the Babylonians as his instrument of judgment and then turn around and judge them for all that they've done.

Now, I specifically want us to notice that it's their violence; it's their bloodshed. I want us to notice the connection between the judgment of Babylon in Habakkuk 2 and the Noahic covenant in Genesis 9. This theological idea keeps just bouncing across us as we come through the prophets. Chapter two, verse eight in Habakkuk, says, because you have plundered many nations, all the remnant of the people shall

plunder you for the blood of man and the violence to the earth, to cities and all who dwell on them.

They have practiced violence and bloodshed that is going to come back on their heads. The punishment will fit the crime. God will execute the sentence on them.

Chapter two, verse 12 says this: woe to him who builds a city with blood and who finds a city on iniquity. What was the foundation of the Babylonian empire? The foundation was their violence and their bloodshed. Chapter two, verse 17, the violence done to Lebanon will overwhelm you, as will the destruction of the beasts that have terrified him for the blood of man and violence to the earth, to cities, and to all who dwell with them.

So that's kind of a refrain through all of this. The Lord is going to hold them accountable for the bloodshed. In the Bible there's a direct connection back to Genesis nine and the Noahic covenant that said, whoever sheds man's blood by man shall his blood be shed.

God judges the nations then and now on the basis of that Noahic covenant. There's even in this passage, I think a more subtle reference to Noah and to the Noahic covenant that helps us to make this connection. In chapter two, verse 15, here's another one of the woes that are pronounced in Babylon.

Woe to him who makes his neighbors drink. You pour out your wrath and make them drunk in order to gaze at their nakedness. So, in the same way that Nahum had talked about Assyria as a prostitute that allured and enticed these other nations and then used that to oppress them and to do violence to them.

Babylon gets them drunk, entices them by their power, by the possibility of military alliances, by sharing in the wealth of Babylon. Then Babylon ultimately exposes the nakedness and takes advantage of their neighbors after they have made them drunk. It says, who makes him drink and makes them drunk? You pour out your wrath and make them drunk in order to gaze at their nakedness.

Obviously, I think in light of the emphasis on bloodshed, there's a reference back to the story of Noah and his drunkenness after the time of the flood. So all of these woe oracles, the idea that kind of ties all this together, is the specific idea that God is going to bring judgment on Babylon because of their violence and their bloodshed. In chapter one, as they carry out their conquest, their might is their God.

They worship their nets that enable them to entrap the other nations. However, that ultimately is going to be the cause and the reason for their judgment. So, the dialogue between Habakkuk and the Lord has kind of reached a stopping point here.

Habakkuk raises the first question, Lord, what are you going to do about injustice in the land of Judah? God's response, I am doing something. I'm sending the Babylonians, and they will be there shortly. Second question, well, in light of that, how can you use the Babylonians to judge us when they're more wicked and more guilty than we are? God's response is, ultimately, I'm going to judge the Babylonians.

Can you imagine how difficult it was for even a prophet like Habakkuk to believe this message? To see everything that was going on and to ultimately believe that God was going to bring about a reversal of all of this. To see the power of the Babylonian army. They look invincible.

They look invulnerable. There's nothing that Judah can do to withstand this. God tells Habakkuk, ultimately, I'm going to judge the nation of Babylon.

That's easy for us to see because we know the rest of the story. We know what happened 70 years later. Habakkuk had no way of being able to confirm historically that this was true.

That's why there's this idea: write this vision down. Those who trust in the Lord and those who believe wait for it to happen. Zephaniah chapter 3, as God is going to bring this ultimate salvation, the righteous are to wait for this.

Micah chapter 7, I wail and mourn over the fact there's no righteousness in the land. We're being oppressed by our oppressors. God is bringing judgment, but those who are righteous and godly and people of faith are waiting for God to bring the deliverance.

So, what we have at the end of the book of Habakkuk, the resolution of this, is that we have a psalm and a song. In some sense, it's separated from this cycle of question and answer. We have a superscription.

We have a musical notation at the beginning of this. It looks like the superscriptions that we see in the Psalms. This is somewhat separated and isolated from the dialogue that we've already had in the book.

The reason for this is this is what provides the resolution. This is not a separate composition that I think has been attached to the book later. It's essential to the message and the argument here because it provides the resolution.

What it demonstrates is that it reflects to us that after he has dialogued with God, after he's expressed his lament, after he has raised his questions, and even in some sense expressed his doubts to the Lord, he doesn't stay there. Habakkuk doesn't remain in a state of perpetual doubt or questioning or being puzzled and not being able to understand the Lord. He ultimately moves to a position of faith where he

expresses his confidence in his confession that he believes that God will do what he has promised to do.

In the midst of this disaster, in this chaos, Habakkuk expresses a prayer where he asks God to ultimately intervene for his people and save them and deliver them. In the midst of this, while the disaster is happening, Habakkuk confesses that he will trust in God even when he doesn't fully understand. So, I think it's very important for us to understand in this book there is a movement from lament and questioning ultimately to an expression of faith.

If you'll look at the laments that are found in the Psalms, they can raise some very serious questions with God, but ultimately, in almost all of the laments, the resolution to the crisis, the promise of God's intervention, leads to either a statement of confidence or faith or a confession of trust or a vow of praise about, I will praise the Lord. I know that God is going to intervene and save us. That's what we see here in the book of Habakkuk as well.

Habakkuk demonstrates that he embodies what chapter two verse four says: the just shall live by faith in the midst of this crisis. As they are waiting, as it doesn't seem to make sense, they still will trust God. So, the movement of Habakkuk where he acknowledges this and where he expresses his faith, this is a model for all of the people of Israel as we're going through this, as we're waiting for God to bring this about.

How do we respond? Habakkuk shows us what a true worshiper should look like. He characterizes the righteous who live by faith. In the prayer that's in chapter three, what Habakkuk does, and I think this is something that we often see bolstering the faith of God's people in the Old Testament, he reflects on what God has done for Israel in the past.

It provides him with confidence that God will ultimately intervene for his people in the future. The pattern of God's behavior, the characteristic of God's faithfulness, as it has been demonstrated throughout the history of Israel, gives the people of God confidence. We know that God will keep his promises.

We have an entire history that reflects that and demonstrates it. And so Habakkuk says this: O Lord, I have heard the report of you and your work, O Lord, do I fear. And I think in light of the terrible things that God has said are going to happen, that fear is a real emotion.

But in the midst of the years, revive it. Habakkuk is also in awe of the things that God has done in the past. And he says, Lord, what you have done for Israel in the past, I want you to revive it.

In the midst of the years, make it known, in your wrath, remember mercy. So, Habakkuk knows about the wrath of God and the wrathful things that God is going to do. He knows about how God is planning to use the Babylonians.

But in the midst of this, God, remember mercy. And in the rest of this prayer, in the way that you marched out as a warrior and fought on behalf of your people and delivered them out of Egypt and rescued them at the Exodus and have fought for them and against their enemies throughout their history. Lord, ultimately, acts in that way on behalf of the people of Israel.

In this psalm and in this prayer, we have an incredible description of the power, the might, and the awesomeness of God as he marches out as a warrior. Remember in chapter two, when God judged Babylon, the glory of the Lord would fill the earth and it would cover it like the waters that are on the face of the earth. Well, that's what you see in chapter two as God is marching out.

God came from Timon, a city in Edom, and the Holy One from Mount Paran, also in the south below Judah. And his splendor covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise. His brightness was like the light.

Rays flashed from his hand, and there he veiled his power. So, God is marching out as a warrior. Again, I think the primary allusion here is back to the time of the Exodus.

When God marches up from Mount Sinai, he's delivered his people, he's brought them out of Egypt, and he's going to march with his people. As a warrior and as their king, he's going to lead them into the land. His presence and the theophany of God that we see described here, his glory is overwhelming.

You can imagine a storm and the flashes of light here, the lightning that comes along with that. It says in verse five, before him, in a personified way, those that are in his army, pestilence is one of the figures that accompany him, and plague follows at his heels. In this mighty divine army, pestilence and plague are warriors that come along with God.

God, in his greatness and glory and pestilence and plague behind him, came out to fight against Israel's enemies. God had done that in Israel's past. Habakkuk looks forward to the time when, yes, I understand that you're going to use the Babylonians to judge us, but I pray, God, that in the future you will come out as a warrior, and you will defeat our enemies and deliver us as you've promised to do in the past.

So, the Lord marches out as a warrior, and in verse eight of this psalm, in chapter three of Habakkuk, it says, was your wrath against the rivers, O Lord, and was your anger against the rivers or your indignation against the sea? When you rode on your horses and on your chariot of salvation, you stripped the sheath from your bow,

calling for your many arrows. You split the earth with its rivers. The mountain saw you and writhed.

The raging water swept on. The deep gave forth its voice, and it lifted its hand on high. I want to try to help us to understand this imagery a little better.

We are back to the common image that is used in a number of places in the Old Testament of God battling the unruly waters of chaos. The reason that God marches out as a warrior and the reason that God marches out in anger is ultimately to split the rivers and to defeat the seas. This was common imagery that was adopted from the ancient Near East.

The Canaanites talked about Baal, their god, being the god of the storm, who ultimately defeated Yam, the god of the sea, and Nahar, the god of the river. It represented for them how Baal had established his kingship by defeating and subjugating the waters of chaos. Now, because of that common imagery that is used in other ancient Near Eastern religions as well, we often see the Lord in the Old Testament described in a similar way.

Not because the Israelites are adopting a mythological worldview but because they are using a common cultural construct as a way of making a polemic that, look, it is not Baal who is the god who subjugates the sea. It is not Baal who rules over the forces of creation. It is not Baal who subjugates the waters.

It is Yahweh. Yahweh is the one who defeated Leviathan, the dragon in the sea, not Baal, who defeated Lotan, the seven-headed dragon. So, the Old Testament uses this imagery.

It is not simply ripping off the mythology and incorporating it with an understanding that Yahweh is the sole exclusive god. Yahweh is the true king. Yahweh is the divine warrior.

Ultimately, what this does in the Old Testament gives us a promise that Yahweh, the creator god, who controlled and subjugated the waters at creation and established his kingship there, is also the god who defeats the nations that rise up in opposition to God's people. He has done that in history. The primary demonstration of that and the primary example of that is the Exodus.

God did not simply defeat the sea. God used the sea to defeat the Egyptians. John Oswald has talked about the distinction between the Old Testament and the ancient Near East.

He does this in his book, *The Bible Among the Myths*. He stresses this idea that the Old Testament is not borrowing mythology. The Old Testament is not adopting a mythological viewpoint.

The Old Testament is not simply ripping off the worldview of this pagan Canaanite culture. The Bible is using this in a polemical way. What the Bible does that is somewhat unique here is that it takes this idea and this imagery of Yahweh controlling the sea and defeating the waters and subjugating the forces of chaos and it historicizes these things.

The forces of chaos are not just the forces of nature that Yahweh controlled at creation. The forces of chaos are also the evil nations. So, God defeated the waters of chaos at the Exodus, defeated the Egyptians, and delivered his people.

The hope of the Old Testament is that God will ultimately defeat all of the forces of chaos. The prayer and the desire of Habakkuk is that in the same way that God subjugated the evil forces of chaos at creation and in the Exodus is that as the Babylonian crisis unfolds, God will ultimately be the warrior who fights on behalf of his people and delivers them from the forces of evil in the future. So in Isaiah 27.1, looking forward to the time when God would ultimately defeat and destroy all evil, Isaiah says, In that day the Lord with his hard and great and strong sword will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan the twisting serpent, and he will slay the dragon that is in the sea.

The Lord will defeat all of the enemies of both himself and his people, Israel. The Lord will defeat the enemy nations that have oppressed and enslaved and defeated and taken away into exile the people of Israel. So the nations are compared to Leviathan, the dragon that's in the sea.

Isaiah chapter 51, verses 9 and 10, also a promise relating to and a prayer for God to act and bring his people out of exile in the way that he acted at the time of the Exodus. Awake and awake, O Lord, put on strength, O arm of the Lord, awake as in the days of old, the generation of long ago. Was it not you who cut Rahab in pieces and who pierced the dragon? Was it not you who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep, who made the depths of the sea away for the redeemed to pass over? Lord, we know what you've done in the past.

You defeated the forces of chaos. You split the sea. You divided it.

You provided a way for the people to go over. Habakkuk is asking God to do the same thing in the future. There's this hope and this promise in the Old Testament.

All of the forces that oppose God, all of the enemy nations that have attacked them, God will ultimately defeat them and deliver them. On the basis of that and in that

kind of confidence, that's what Habakkuk is talking about in this particular passage. In chapter three, verse 11, the sun and the moon stood still in their place at the light of your arrows as they sped.

The greatness of God even causes the sun and the moon to simply freeze in fear and paralysis because of the greatness of God. We might remember here the reference in Joshua chapter 10 to the day that the sun stood still and God sent a great storm and defeated the enemies of Israel. In the midst of this, Habakkuk believes that God will ultimately deliver his people.

And so, at the end of this, as he's living through this disaster, there's this incredible expression of faith and maybe one of the greatest statements of faith and statements of confidence in the Lord that I can remember reading anywhere. Habakkuk says Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor will there be fruit on the trees, the produce of the olive fails, and the field yield no food. The flock be cut off from the fold, and no herd in the stalls.

In other words, if we lose all of the blessings that God promised to give us as the covenant people living in the promised land, if we don't have crops, if we don't have vines, if we don't have wine, if we don't have grain if we don't have oil, if we do not have livestock, if we lose all of this in the Babylonian crisis, and that's exactly what's going to happen, he says this, Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, and I will take joy in the God of my salvation. God the Lord is my strength. He makes my feet like the deer, and he makes me tread on the high places.

Habakkuk says, God has revealed to me his plan. God has told me what he plans to do. God is going to bring the army of the Babylonians to devastate us.

If we lose everything, yet I will trust in God, and I will believe in him to keep his promises. Now we can often say, if everything goes according to plan and if God blesses me and I'm prosperous and everything in life works out, then I know that God is watching out for me and God is taking care of me. Habakkuk says, even if disaster comes, I will trust in the Lord.

So, Habakkuk becomes a demonstration of this idea and principle that is laid out for us in Habakkuk chapter two, verse four: Behold, the righteous shall live by faith. Like Habakkuk, they will wait for God to ultimately fulfill his promises. Now, I want to look at this verse for a minute, and then I want us to think about how it is used and applied in the New Testament.

The righteous shall live by faith. The righteous shall live by his faith. That's the way that it's translated in the ESV.

The word that is translated as faith in the ESV is actually the word *emunah*. And what this word literally means, rather than simply faith, I think a better way to translate this is that the righteous shall live by his faithfulness. This word is talking about integrity, reliability, rectitude, and faithfulness.

It is a quality of God in Deuteronomy 32:4 in Psalm 36:5 and a number of other places. God is faithful. You can rely on that, but it is also a quality of human beings.

So, what we're talking about here is not simply belief, not simply trust, but a lifestyle that grows out of that trust.

So the idea here is that God has made a promise. Ultimately, he will save and deliver his people. And in the midst of all of this disaster, God is carrying out and accomplishing his purposes.

Ultimately, we can trust that and the person who trusts God will live in faithfulness and obedience to God and will wait for the time when God ultimately brings that deliverance. Now, there's a variant here. Some have seen that the righteous shall live by his faith, and they have seen him as a reference to God.

In fact, in the Septuagint, the Lord says, the righteous will live by my faithfulness. So there's an issue here. Is this the faithfulness of God or the faithfulness of the righteous person? However, the righteous is the nearest antecedent and probably seems like the most likely interpretation or the most likely referent here for what we're talking about.

His faith is talking about the faith of the righteous person, not of God. Other people have viewed the third person suffix here as referring to the faithfulness of the promise. But again, the nearest antecedent, and I think the most natural reading of this, is that the righteous will live by faith, and they will live by their faithfulness, and they will demonstrate their confidence in God to ultimately keep his promises by living the right kind of life.

Now, this passage is used three different times in the New Testament. There's one of these passages in the book of Hebrews where it seems like the writer is using this in a way that almost directly corresponds to exactly the way that it's being used here in the book of Habakkuk. In chapter 10, I'm sorry, I was looking in chapter 11 because it's the faith chapter.

But we have a reference to Habakkuk 2 in Hebrews chapter 10, and it says, Yet in a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay, but my righteous one shall live by faith. And if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him. The righteous person will trust in God and, in the midst of persecution, will live the kind

of life, will demonstrate the kind of faithfulness that is reflective of that kind of person, and will not shrink back.

That's exactly what Habakkuk is saying. But there's also an interesting use of this passage in Paul's letters in the book of Romans, in the book of Romans and in the letter to the Galatians, where Paul uses this verse to talk about the difference between being justified by faith rather than being justified by keeping the works of the law. And so, we asked the question, well, in light of what we've just talked about, how can Paul use Habakkuk chapter two, verse four, and the righteous shall live by his faithfulness? How can he use that to make that contrast? I think part of what we have to understand here is that Paul is reading the promise of Habakkuk chapter two and he's reading it in an eschatological way.

Because what's the person in Habakkuk 2? What are they waiting for? They are waiting for God's ultimate deliverance. They are waiting for what is described in chapter three, verses 12 to 13 when God will deliver the people from the Babylonians and fully restore them. In a sense, as we come to the book of Romans and as we come to the book of Galatians, we come to the New Testament and to the coming of Jesus, we are still waiting for the ultimate fulfillment of that promise.

Paul reads the promise of Habakkuk in an eschatological way. Paul was not the only person to do that. In a text from Qumran that provides a commentary on the book of Habakkuk, the Peshar from Qumran on Habakkuk 2:4, it also sees it as referring to the eschatological salvation that God is going to bring to his people.

And it says in the Peshar from Qumran on Habakkuk 2:4, for all of the time fixed by God will come about in due course as he ordained. So, the deliverance that God promised in 2.4 is still on its way. We're waiting for that to come.

The community at Qumran saw the promises of God defeating the enemy army. They did not see that as a reference to the Babylonians. They interpreted it as a reference to the Kittim, the Westerners, and the Romans. And so they saw the eschatological promise that was being provided here as that God would ultimately defeat his enemies.

He would restore the people of Israel. What was not completely carried out in the Babylonian crisis ultimately would still be fulfilled. So, in other words, the righteous were still waiting by faith and still waiting in faithfulness for the promise of ultimate deliverance.

In light of Jesus and in light of the new revelation that has come in the New Testament and what God has done in Christ, Paul now understands and makes more specific the promise that is found in the book of Habakkuk. The promise is not just that God is going to deliver Israel from the Babylonians. The promise is that God will,

through Jesus and what Jesus has done in the cross, will ultimately bring about the restoration and deliverance.

The people of Qumran were looking for that deliverance. Paul helps us to understand this is where it ultimately comes from. It comes from Christ.

And so now Habakkuk, in the way that he waited by faith in the promise of God, and he waited in faithfulness for the promise of God to ultimately deliver Israel from the Babylonians. Those who know Jesus live by faith because they trust in Jesus to be the one who provides that deliverance. And in the progress of revelation, the focus of faithfulness is no longer Torah observance and doing what the law commands.

It is trusting in Jesus and the deliverance that he provides through his death on the cross and the justification for God's people that is available by faith because of the righteousness of God. So, in a sense, Paul is not changing the meaning of Habakkuk. He is reading it in a more focused and informed way because he understands God's ultimate deliverance.

One of the greatest testimonies and confessions of faith in all of the Old Testament is found in the book of Habakkuk. And in the midst of this disaster, Habakkuk is a model of those who will wait in faithfulness for God to ultimately deliver his people. And as God's people today, as we understand this passage in light of Christ, we live that same kind of life.

We live and we model and we exemplify that same kind of faithfulness as we wait for the final and the ultimate fulfillment of God's promises of restoration for his covenant people.

This is Dr. Gary Yates in his lecture series on the Book of the 12. This is lecture 25 on the book of Habakkuk.