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Habakkuk is waiting for the LORD to answer him.

The year is somewhere around 586BC. The area is Judah, specifically Jerusalem, its capital. A prophet of the LORD, Habakkuk, has raised a complaint, a lament, to the LORD: 'Why? How long?' (1:1-4) He is saddened by the state of God's people – broken by sin, not representing God to the world.

The LORD has answered (1:5-11). The LORD will judge the sin of his people in an astounding way: he is raising up the Babylonians to wipe them out!

Habakkuk is gobsmacked – he raises a second question of the LORD. 'I know you are like this, LORD; so why are you doing that?' (1:12-2:1)

Habakkuk is waiting for the LORD to answer him. Standing, I imagine, on the walls of his ruined city, listening to the cries of the people of God, the songs of the Babylonians, Habakkuk waits for an answer from the LORD

PRAY...

### **1. The LORD answers (2:2-20)**

And the LORD does respond.

It is important for us to notice the way that this is phrased – 'the LORD'. God has not forgotten his commitment to this world, through Abraham's family. Whatever Habakkuk is perplexed by, it

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has not changed God's fundamental commitment – he remains the personally committed God, who works through his people.

The answer comes in three parts – there is a preamble, the vision, and an expansion – you can see the breakdown there in your outline...

### **(i) The preamble (vs.2-3)**

What God reveals must be preserved – **look at verses 2-3... READ.**

It is almost as if Habakkuk is to write these words from God on big stone billboards so that God's mob can read them. Can you imagine the picture? As the Babylonians stride through, destroying and gloating, Habakkuk quietly places these billboards in plain view.

But it also places this vision from God in a wider, cross-all-history context. What God is about to reveal is for people, his people, across time. Moreover, it is plain to understand. These words have clarity and relevance for God's people everywhere, anywhere, any time.

Part of this whole vision is that 'the end' is coming. In Habakkuk's day, amidst all that the Babylonians bring, God states clearly: 'This will end!' Habakkuk's fear of 1:17 is answered – the Babylonians will be stopped.

But, as this vision is written down, as it is passed to future generations of God's people – to generations who ask the same

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questions – God’s words take on a bigger perspective: there is ‘the end’ that will come, the end of all things, the moment when all things finish. The current circumstances – where sin seems to dominate, where the people of God seem hemmed in, where the wicked seem to make God’s plans ineffective – all those will end.

In both instances, there will be waiting. God is very clear about this. As Habakkuk waits for God’s answer to his perplexity, there will be more waiting to come, waiting until ‘the end’.

At this point, Habakkuk has received a preamble to what God will answer – it is worth writing down, it is relevant to God’s people then and always, it will bring an end to all things, and God’s people must wait for it.

## **(ii) The vision (vs.4-5)**

The vision is a strange one – **look at verses 4-5... READ.**

The vision describes two groups of people in the world.

The first group – those in verse 4 and then into verse 5 – are crooked, ‘without integrity’, puffed up with their own importance. It is not hard to see the Babylonians who are currently laying waste to God’s people – they are people who take pride in their power, who take what is not their’s, who rejoice in the suffering of others. Moreover, these people are ‘restless’, never stopping, always conquering, always devouring, always looking for the next thing, never satisfied. Like death, they devour, eat and are never satisfied. Again, you can’t miss the connection to the Babylonians – they ‘gather prisoners like sand’ and ‘gather’ humans like fish in the sea.

But, if we pause and ponder this image, the description of these people is actually the description of all humans. In their sin, no human is at rest. In their sin, all humans are empire-builders, just on different scales. In their sin, all humans rejoice in their own power, seek their own significance, and are never satisfied.

Does that sound familiar?

The second group is different. They are hemmed in – literally and in the way the words work – by those who have no rest. These are the ‘righteous’. They live by ‘faith’. They stand in sharp contrast to those without integrity. The contrast is unavoidable – righteous versus the arrogant, the living versus those connected with death, those with faith versus those full of restless activity.

But what does it mean? How is it possible for any human to be righteous and live by faith? And, how does this answer Habakkuk?

It is worth starting with clear definitions:

- ‘Righteous’ means, in simple terms, living in line with God’s design.
- ‘Faith’ is taking someone at their word, and living like it.

God’s vision is meant to take Habakkuk straight back to Abraham. Remember Abraham? Remember the promise God made to Abraham?

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Through Abraham's family, God committed to dealing with the broken state of this world. God promised Abraham a land, a family and through his family, to roll back the brokenness of sin in this world.

Abraham battled with the reality of those promises. There were so many roadblocks, insurmountable barriers, to what God promised: Abraham was 75, Abraham's wife was barren, Abraham was a nomad. Consistently, Abraham struggled: on the one hand, God promised this, and on the other, this is what he was experiencing. Consistently, Abraham responded to this struggle by taking matters into his own hands. He was relentlessly restless in attempting to solve God's problems for him.

By nature, Abraham was the first group of people God has just spoken of. Time and time again, he restlessly tried to do God's job. At no point did it work well. Just read the account.

As Abraham continues to struggle with God's promise, God speaks to him. Turn with me to **Genesis 15:4-5... READ.**

It is a picture we are familiar with. Using the night sky we know so well, God reminds Abraham of his promise. God is stating clearly to Abraham, 'Take me at my word – trust me!'

Abraham responds, if you can call it that, in the only way possible – **look at Genesis 15:6... READ.**

It is the exact same language as the LORD's vision in Habakkuk 2:4. Abraham took God at his word, and lived like it. God credits

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Abraham with righteousness – he declares publicly that Abraham is in line with God’s design.

Here is the heart of the second life that God reveals to Habakkuk: the righteous person takes God at his word, and lives like it. To take God at his word, and live like it, is to have God in charge – in essence, this is to have God in his right place: in charge, in the centre, in the middle. It is a sharp contrast to the life of the endlessly restless human nature that is continually trying to be God – the life we all live on our own, the life of sin, where ‘I’ is in the middle.

Here is the pattern that is reiterated in Abraham: life is about taking God at his word and living like it. When you think about it, that is always the design of God – always has been, always will be. It is the pattern from the Garden of Eden, in creation – it is the pattern of Noah – it is the pattern of Abraham. It is the life that has God at the centre, living in light of what he has promised – and will – do.

Habakkuk needed to be reminded of this truth. The LORD’s vision reminded him. The LORD’s vision reminded Habakkuk that he needed to trust him – to take God at his word, and live like it. That would involve waiting on God to do as he promised, but trust him to do as he says, and live like it!

### **(iii) An expansion (vs.6-20)**

God’s promise – emphasized again in Habakkuk 1 – is that he will deal with human sin, in an astounding way. Habakkuk is doubting the possibility of this, as he stares out over Jerusalem and sees

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what the Babylonians are doing. And God expands on his vision of ‘trust me, take me at my word’ by painting a picture of what will definitely happen to the Babylonians, to the people who decided that God does not belong in the centre.

The expansion begins in **verse 6 – look at it...**

It is a confident assertion, isn't it!

It is made against the backdrop of the Babylonian conquering of Jerusalem. And, the LORD states very clearly: the Babylonians will definitely receive their comeuppance, their judgement. The language appeals to our Australian sense of justice – the conquered will scoff at the conqueror as he is brought down, and the tall poppy is chopped down. But we must not miss the significance of what the LORD is saying very clearly – he will do as he has promised: he will deal with sin and the sinner – ALL SIN AND ALL SINNERS!

As these five pithy and sharp statements of ‘woe’ on Babylon are pronounced, you can almost see the effect they should have had on Habakkuk. As he hears of these judgements, of the overall destruction of Babylon, he is given a reassurance that God will do as he said – his words can be taken as true. Even closer to home, the ‘wicked’ within God’s people will be judged and removed. And on a wider scale, the one ‘without integrity’ will be judged.

The five judgements – and they begin in verses 6, 9, 12, 15 and 18 – display a very clear cause-and-effect. The evil and self-centred restlessness and destruction of those who take matters

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into their own hands will come back to them. However, we must not mistake this judgement as a simple case of cause-and-effect justice, or people just receiving their just desserts. I don't think it is a mistake or a random act that the five judgements centre on **verse 14... READ.**

The whole purpose of God doing as he promised is for the world to know God, as he is: the one who is the most significant in all the world. Just as Adam and Eve forgot this truth, just as Abraham was taken to look at the stars to know this truth, just as Habakkuk had to be reminded of this truth – the whole world will come to know it: because God does as he says, he is the most significant being, factor, thing, being in all the world. All of this is taking place so that the world knows this truth about God.

Now, when you stop and consider this reason, it becomes clear that this is the rolling back of sin and its brokenness – just as God promised. The essence of sin, as we heard last night, is that I am the most significant being in the universe – sin is the attitude and action that says, 'I am God, and God is not'. For God to be revealed as he truly is, for the whole world to be 'filled with the knowledge' of who the LORD is – this must mean that sin will have been dealt with once and for all. In this sense, as he did in verse 3, the LORD's expansion on his vision is not just for Habakkuk to survive and understand the Babylonian invasion of Judah, and the ebb and rise of international politics – the LORD is actually painting a picture of what he will do in 'the end'.

Well, at least in the here and now, the judgement of Babylon took place. Their rise was remarkable, and their fall was just as swift. They carted off the cream of Judah's society in 596 and 586BC,

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but by 539BC, Cyrus and the Persians defeat the Babylonian empire. They rose, they did their job, their sin was judged, and they were destroyed. Who else could do this, but God alone?

We don't know if Habakkuk saw this fall, as the LORD had spoken it so clearly to him. But, as the remnants of God's people returned, they could not have forgotten what Habakkuk had seen. And yet, the problem, in its deepest sense, remained: could the LORD keep his promise to deal with sin in 'the end'?

The silence of the LORD reinforced the wait on his words.

The birth of Jesus was heralded as the moment when the one descended from Abraham had come – this was the moment, as Mark, Luke, and Matthew state clearly, that God's word would be seen to be right and true and fulfilled.

And, as you gaze over the life of Jesus, you cannot avoid the realization that Jesus himself is the fulfilment of **Habakkuk 2:4 – read...**

Let me give you this challenge – read the biographies of Jesus, the gospels, with the lens of Habakkuk 2:4, because everywhere you go, Jesus lives as THE man who takes God at his word. Think on the temptation he faced as the proving ground for his work, in Matthew 4:1-11. 'Here is an alternative way to express your sonship of God, Jesus' – that is the offer of the devil. And each time Jesus responds with the very words of God and trusts that God is in the centre. In the Garden of Gethsemane, as he ponders the moment ahead of him (the moment of drinking from

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God's wrath on behalf of all humans), and what does he pray? 'Your will God, not mine' – 'I trust your words, and live like it'. And so he does. As he gives up his life on the cross, he commits his very Spirit into the hands of God – he trusts what God said at his baptism and his transfiguration – 'This is my son whom I love'. And he lives like it. It is the case throughout his life – he took God at his word, and lived like it. He lived with God at the centre. Like Habakkuk 2:4, he is surrounded by those 'without integrity' but he lives by taking God at his word, and living like it.

God did as he said – he dealt with sin through the family of Abraham. It is astounding. It is the judgement of sin, visited upon the head of this man Jesus. As God raised him from the dead, God clearly stated, 'Look, you have waited, and I have done what I said: sin is dealt with. I did as I said I would'. Is there any more significant moment, or person, or power, in all the world?

## **2. 'Trust me'**

Habakkuk places his perplexity before the LORD – how can God do this, and remain faithful to his promise and consistent in his nature? The LORD answers Habakkuk. His answer is to be written down. His answer is for God's people across the ages. His answer is a vision of the two types of people – those 'without integrity' and those who are righteous and live by faith. The former are destined for judgement, the latter will live. The culmination will be at 'the end', when God's dealing with sin will be seen completely, and the whole world will see how significant God is.

Habakkuk is to live, waiting, with faith. Jesus himself is that in his very person. In Jesus, God does as he promised: he deals with

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sin through the family of Abraham. And Jesus lived by taking God at his word.

It is no mistake that one of the early messengers about Jesus, a bloke called Paul, quoted Habakkuk 2:4 as he described what God had done – listen to what he wrote to a bunch of God's people in Rome – **Romans 1:16-17... READ...**

The gospel – the good news about God and his promise to roll back sin in Jesus Christ – is powerful because it shows that God does as he says. At its heart is the life, death and resurrection of Jesus – who lived as someone who took God at his word. It is received 'by faith' – any human being can be declared right with God – in line with his design – by taking God at his word and living like it. Put simply, it is to look at Jesus' life, death and resurrection, and accept that God did as he promised in Jesus. It is to have God back where he belongs – at the centre of life, because he did as he promised!

Brothers and sisters, this is life.

Let me ask you – do you take God at his word, and live like it? Do you accept that God did as he promised in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus: he dealt with sin, for any person who takes him at his word?

Brothers and sisters, if you take God at his word and live like it, that is life as God designed it – he declares you in line with his design. This has always been the case, and it always will be.

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Brothers and sisters, let me encourage you – this is life as God designed it. Do not be tempted to give in to perplexity, like Abraham, by trying to do God’s job for him, by trying to take matters into your own hands, because you think God cannot do as he promised.

### **Listen to Hebrews 10:32-39... READ.**

I suspect that for many of us, the perplexed question of Habakkuk is something that we have often asked ourselves: ‘God, I know this about you, but why are you doing this?’ Again, and again, again, and again, many of us have asked this question. We have been perplexed! And never more than now, perhaps...

But the person who wrote this letter to the Hebrews states very clearly: continue the way you started. It is exactly the same as God’s vision to Habakkuk: ‘Wait, trusting that I will do as I promised’ (REPEAT).

Our natural default is to get busy, to take matters into our own hands, to be people of action and decision and to resolve the tension we see before us by getting our hands dirty. If not this, it might be to throw our hands up in despair, asking, ‘What is the point?’

Now, don’t hear me wrongly: I am not saying, ‘Let go and let God’. I am not saying that we are to be inactive and gormless fatalists, floating like dead dogs on the river. I am not saying that we should give in and give up.

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I am asking you: ‘Do you take God at his word, and live like it?’

Do you trust that he has dealt with your sins? Do you trust that he will deal with the broken state of the world, finally? Do you accept that Jesus has done everything you could not? Do you acknowledge that, because Jesus has done this, God has removed your judgement?

Let me suggest that there are two very tangible and practical ways that you can display such a dependence and waiting.

First, do a Habakkuk, and actually come before God in prayer and question. Just the simple act of bringing our requests and concerns before God, asking him to provide some clarity, expecting an answer – just such an approach is to live as if God’s words are true.

Second, wait and listen for answers by hearing God’s words – look at the stuff that has been written down for the generations. A faithful member of God’s mob, who lives in line with God’s design, who lives as if God’s words are trustworthy, is a person of God’s words: you read and apply the Bible!

I want to finish on a slightly more somber note. There might be people listening today who might be restless, who remain with ‘I’ at the centre, who are so perplexed by what they see in front of them and what they hear that the safest option is to take matters into your own hands. There might be people listening today who do not take God at his word and who live as if God has no place in their life. Let me lay before you two questions:

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First, what is the substance of your life? How is your restlessness going?

Second, how will you handle the end, when all those who have decided that being restless and being the centre must face the reality that God will do as he promised?