

Judgement Day  
Habakkuk Series

Do you remember the last time that you had someone jump down your throat? They made a scene. They embarrassed you. They “judged” you, possibly in the court of public opinion. If you’ve ever been judged by someone, you know that it’s very uncomfortable. Just recently, I felt the sting of being judged first hand when someone judged me. It was just a few weeks ago, it came out of the blue and I was both surprised and felt ambushed.

I was at a book sale in the Chicago suburbs early on the morning of April 23rd. It was a little cold so I was sitting in my car and had the engine running to knock out the chill. A friend pulled up in the car next to me and we started talking through the window. Another woman, an acquaintance, came up stood between our cars and started talking to us. Just a few moments into the conversation, she looks around, and yells, “Who the \_\_\_\_\_ has their car running?” She then went on a diatribe about polluting the atmosphere and destroying the ozone. I turned my car off, though I did politely ask her to also please not pollute my air. It was the day after Earth Day and I was judged for being a polluter and an “ozone destroyer.”

What was particularly noteworthy to me, as I know this person, is that she’s an ideological liberal. She’s extremely intellectual and a retired school teacher. Yet, somehow if our roles were reversed, I don’t doubt that if I told her that I believed abortion is murder and that homosexual marriage is wrong, she’d accuse me of being judgmental, even hateful. Yet, she’d be shocked if I suggested that she had judged me...and did it rather pointedly and loudly in the court of public opinion. What she and many in our pluralistic, anything goes world fail to comprehend is that we all judge. We all make judgments according to our value systems.

Don’t believe me? Ask Brett Favre. When he decided to sign with the Minnesota Vikings, he was accused of being of being a Traitor, a Judas, a Benedict Arnold. Those are strong judgmental charges. Yet, today’s maxims are: “Who are you to judge?” “How dare you judge me?” Didn’t Jesus say, “Judge not!”?

We’re all judgmental. We’re judgmental about who we’ll consider our friends, who we consider our enemies. Every time we turn on the radio, we’re judge. There are some things we wouldn’t be caught dead listening to but others which we gravitate to. Isn’t that being judgmental? Yet, most of that which we’re judgmental about are not moral issues; nor are they questions of right or wrong. Often they’re little more than preferences.

Even those who have the “right” to judge in our world do not have that right to judge in and of themselves. The “right” to judge has been entrusted to them by someone else. A Judge has been given the right to judge by government, not because of a right to judge inherently in himself.

That's not the case with God. A recurring theme of Scripture is that of God as the Righteous Judge. The Old Testament describes him as "*the Judge of all the earth*" (Gen 18:25) who will judge not only His own people, but all the nations. In the New Testament Jesus is declared to be the One through whom God will judge the earth (Acts 10:42). **Judgment Day** is a reality we must all face. That's the focus of our passage in Habakkuk 2:4-20. It's **Judgment Day**. Turn again to Habakkuk 2, (p.663).

Do you believe in the **Judgment Day**? Do you believe in Divine judgment? By which I mean; do you believe in a God who acts as our Judge? Many, even in the Church, do not. Speak to them of God as a Father, a friend, a helper, one who loves us despite all our weaknesses and folly and sin, and their faces light up; you are on their wavelength at once, but speak to them of God as Judge and they frown and shake their heads. Their minds recoil from such an idea. They find it repugnant.

There are few things stressed more strongly in the Bible than the reality of God's work as Judge. The Apostle Paul refers to the fact that we must all appear before Christ's judgment seat as "*the terror of the Lord*" (2 Cor. 5:11, KJV). God is the final Judge. God does not act holy, He is holy. He's perfect and sinless. Unlike us, His justice is never tainted. So when God holds individuals and groups accountable, He is both perfectly righteous and just. When God declares it is **Judgment Day**, there's no room for smooth talking lawyers or cutting a backroom deal. Habakkuk 2:4-20 is **Judgment Day** for the wicked Super Power of Babylon.

In case you're just joining us today, so far in our study of the book of Habakkuk, we've found this virtually unknown prophet crying out to God because of injustice and immorality among his own people, in the land of Judah. Habakkuk says, "God, it doesn't seem like You hear; it doesn't seem like You're doing anything." God responds with, "I am not inactive; I am going to do something. In fact, I am going to do something that you wouldn't believe even if you were told." God then reveals to Habakkuk how He was going to raise up the nation of Babylon and how He'd use that wicked nation as a rod of chastisement to punish Judah for their sins.

Habakkuk doesn't like that answer to his prayer. Again, he cries out to God. But this time He argues with God saying, "But God, you can't do that! Babylon is more wicked than Judah. How can you use a very, very wicked Babylon to judge a not so bad Judah?" Then he stood back to watch and wait, and to hear God's reply. God's reply began in chapter 2:2.

Last Sunday we saw that God told Habakkuk, "Write down what I am going to tell you; this is too important to lose; this is too important to misconstrue. You need to write it down and make it plain. You also need to proclaim it. What I'm about to tell you deals with the future. I'm going to reveal to you how I am going to judge Babylon."

That's where we're picking up the account today. God is both the prosecuting attorney and the judge. He indicts Babylon for her sins and then pronounces her sentence. Earlier, Habakkuk had asked if God is going to do anything about Babylon, if He is

going to hold them accountable, and God gives a resounding, “Yes.” Habakkuk 2:4-20 is God’s answer to Habakkuk’s prayer, **Judgment Day** is coming. If you’re taking notes...

**1. Babylon is indicted for her pride.** According Aquinas, “*Pride is the first sin, the source of all other sins, and the worst sin.*” In the list of the “seven deadly sins” devised centuries ago in the Church, it was no accident that pride was #1 on the list. Pride was the sin that caused Lucifer, the prince of the angels, to fall from heaven. Pride was primordial in the original sin and fall of Adam and Eve. They were told that eating the forbidden fruit would result in them being “like God.” Pride is the linchpin for most other sins.

Five “woes” are pronounced upon Babylon. The poisoned stream for these sins being committed by the nation of Babylon was pride. In verses 4 and 5, God condemns Babylon’s pride, “*See, he is puffed up; his desires are not upright...he is arrogant and never at rest.*” Many theologians believe that pride is the essence of all sin.

**a. Pride puffs us up.** It leads us to have a false estimate of ourselves. Small people, when they get proud, think they are very big. A famous Englishman once said, “*When small men cast long shadows, it’s a sign that the sun is setting.*” That’s true. We have those today who, because of their pride, look really big, but they aren’t really big. They’re just swollen. Pride puffs us up and gives us a false estimate of ourselves.

**b. Pride twists us.** That’s what happened with Babylon, “*his desires are not upright*” (vs. 4). This phrase means that he is *twisted*. Pride has a way of twisting us, of setting its own standards. It has a way of saying, “I’m going to do it my way. I’m going to get what I want...and I don’t care who gets hurt.” Pride can twist our character, making us crooked, even perverse.

**c. Pride fills us with discontent.** It makes us restless, “*he is arrogant and never at rest*” (vs. 5). Peace and pride are incompatible. Want to know why? Pride motivates us to compete, to measure and compare ourselves. When I compare myself to see if others are bigger than I am, I always find someone bigger...and it bugs me. Pride puffs us up, twists us and it makes us restless and discontent. The root of Babylon’s sin was her pride and God was going to her for it.

Can I point out something interesting? Do you think that there were proud people in Judah too? Were they also guilty of pride? Absolutely! I don’t know about you but I find it very easy to spot pride in others, but much more difficult in my own heart. We want God to judge others for their sins but not judge us for ours. We want God to judge other nations for their sins, but we don’t want Him to judge America’s sins. How easy and self-deceiving it is to be convicted about other people’s sins!

Do you have peace this morning, or has pride stolen your peace? Do you need to go to war with the sin in your own heart? Start with pride.

**2. The wicked will be held accountable for their sins**, vss. 6-19. Justice is something America was built on. It's something school kids learn when they say: *"I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and **justice** for all."* Every time we say that, we're pledging to be part of a nation that is committed to *"justice for all."* And yet, one of our Founding Fathers, Thomas Jefferson, said, *"Indeed, I tremble for my country when I remember that God is just."* We may strive for justice but only God is just. In the words of Martin Luther King, Jr., *"The arm of the universe of long, but it bends toward justice."*

There are five woes in Habakkuk. They're true, not just in respect to Babylon, they're a universal principle of history. Everything evil is under the judgment of God and will have a Judgment Day. Though Babylon was raised up by God to flourish for a while, the limit of its prosperity was absolutely fixed by God. Its doom was sealed from eternity past.

The remainder of this section is a literary form called a *"taunt song."* It was common in that culture for someone to write a poem or sing a song of ridicule. It would be like political caricature today. The aim of the ridicule was typically a fallen army or king. A taunt song highlights the contrast between that king's former glory and power, and the depths to which he has now fallen.

What must catch our attention is that this particular taunt song is prophetic. While it deals with the fall of Babylon, when Habakkuk wrote it, Babylon was still on the rise in becoming a world power. Babylon hadn't peaked. Her best days were ahead. But God, even while Babylon is rising, sees its fall. Today it would be like prophesying the demise of China when they are still on the rise and growing at an unbelievable economic rate.

This taunt song is 15 verses long and is divided into five different stanzas, each composed of three verses. All five stanzas pronounce woe upon Babylon. This is not familiar turf for most of us, so to help you grasp this, you'll find a chart by Dr. Richard D. Patterson on the back of your sermon insert today.

When the word "woe" is found in Scripture, it's used to describe and to pronounce judgment, so here we have a taunt song from God with a five-fold pronouncement of judgment. This series of woes is designed to show that ultimately all evil is doomed to destruction.

Often we look at the power and structures of evil, and we become depressed. We ask, "Is this really God's world? Has it gotten away from Him? Has He lost control of its inhabitants?" These five woes are a potent reminder that this really is God's world and it really is under His control.

The Hebrew word for "woe" is *"hoy."* It's found over fifty times in the Old Testament. It was used to describe funeral laments (8 times); a cry to get attention (4 times); but the bulk of the time it is an announcement of judgment and doom (41 times) and used only by the prophets. So though Babylon is a youthful Super Power on the world's stage, it

was already under the judgment of God. As far as God is concerned, the only thing left for an unrepentant people was to mourn their impending destruction.

Through the ages there have been those among God's people who have been confused when they've looked at their own small slice of history; they've been perplexed when they've seen injustice and great wickedness prevail; and they haven't known what to make of it. My friend, there's an answer to the difficulties that we see in history and that we see all around us. The answer is always the same. The wicked will not stand! These woes are a warning to all who are like the Babylonians in their conduct – and it's a warning which is still in effect. Rebellion against God is not just a matter of ancient history. It still characterizes the human race and the consequences of it remain what they have always been.

***But what about us?*** As we work through these five woes today, let's ask ourselves as individuals...as a nation: Do we somehow think that we're getting away with it? People may forget, history may forget, but God never forgets. As we work our way through these, you'll quickly see this is not just back then – it's as relevant as last night's news broadcast. First...

***a. Babylon is indicted for her extortion,*** *“Woe to him who piles up stolen goods and makes himself wealthy by extortion! How long must this go on? Will not your debtors suddenly arise? Will they not wake up and make you tremble? Then you will become their victim. Because you have plundered many nations, the peoples who are left will plunder you. For you have shed man's blood; you have destroyed lands and cities and everyone in them”* (vss. 6-8). Babylon was called *“the hammer of the whole earth”* (Jer. 50:23). They hammered nation after nation, exploiting those who could not defend themselves. It's becoming wealthy dishonestly. It's what frequently took place in early America with the exploiting of the American Indian or slaves from Africa. It's Colonialism that exploits the nationals.

It can happen when companies go public. They're taken over, their assets depleted and the workers are laid off in order to maximize the profits. It's when executives are given million dollar bonuses while their employees barely eek out an existence. It's seen in eminent domain. Have you ever noticed that freeways rarely go through affluent neighborhoods? Those in poor neighborhoods, blue collar working people, often don't have the political clout to protect themselves. And even in our modern world slavery is still an issue. Human trafficking generates \$32 billion annually with some 27 million slaves in the world. It's when a Christian boss doesn't pay an employee what they're worth, or when a Christian employee doesn't give a day's work for a day's wage. But a day of great reversal is coming when those who have been exploited will collect their debt.

***b. Babylon is indicted for her injustice,*** *“Woe to him who builds his realm by unjust gain to set his nest on high, to escape the clutches of ruin! You have plotted the ruin of many peoples, shaming your own house and forfeiting your life. The stones of the wall will cry out, and the beams of the woodwork will echo it”* (vss. 9-11). The “high nest”

refers to an eagle's nest, which was virtually impregnable. Two thick walls surrounded the city of Babylon. They were 335 feet high and 85 feet wide. Babylon arrogantly thought it was invincible.

The term "*unjust gain*" comes from a weaver's term, "*to cut off the threads.*" Today we'd say, "*getting one's cut.*" American media is obsessed with the Mafia and crime families. Babylonians too were little more than thugs. The picture is of cheating to enrich one's self.

Yet, the walls of their own homes witnessed against them. It's "if these walls could talk..." I wonder though what our homes would say about us. What would they say about who we really are? About our values? What we really believe? How we conduct ourselves behind closed doors?

***c. Babylon is indicted for her violence,*** "*Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed and establishes a town by crime! Has not the LORD Almighty determined that the people's labor is only fuel for the fire, that the nations exhaust themselves for nothing? For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea*" (vss. 12-14). The first woe was to an individual, the second to a home – this third one is to a city. The picture is of bulldozing over other human beings to build your own city.

Genesis 4 records that the first violent person, the first murderer, Cain, was sentenced by God to be a wanderer. Do you know the first thing that Cain did after God had judged him? He built a city. Cities are known for their high crime and violence. Currently, there's a discussion on whether to use the National Guard to patrol the streets of Chicago in an effort to combat street violence.

The American Medical Association has declared domestic violence against women to be a national epidemic. Abuse in the home is the leading source of injury for women between the ages of 15 and 44. One woman is battered every 15 seconds in this country. The tragedy is that the statistics for abuse are virtually the same in Christian as in non-Christian households. In too many instances, Christian women stay in dangerous situations longer than a non-Christian might. Would this indictment be true of us, if we also included "verbal violence"?

Babylon was built by the innocent blood of those it conquered, yet where is Babylon today? They exhausted themselves for nothing.

***d. Babylon is indicted for her debauchery,*** "*Woe to him who gives drink to his neighbors, pouring it from the wineskin till they are drunk, so that he can gaze on their naked bodies. You will be filled with shame instead of glory. Now it is your turn! Drink and be exposed! The cup from the LORD'S right hand is coming around to you, and disgrace will cover your glory. The violence you have done to Lebanon will overwhelm you, and your destruction of animals will terrify you. For you have shed man's blood; you have destroyed lands and cities and everyone in them*" (vss. 15-17). These verses

deal with something we all know, alcohol and immorality go together. It's a familiar equation: Human being + alcohol = nudity. Think Spring Break! Think bar hopping. The picture is of someone who encourages his neighbors to get drunk so he can take advantage of them. God's Word says, "It's not fun or funny."

For the Christian the issue is not alcohol; the Biblical concern is personal holiness. Brothers and sisters, if you can socially drink and it not hinder your walk with the Lord, if it does not retard personal holiness in your life, it's a non-issue. But if it does, it's a sin you must deal with. It's also a reminder to us that we have a responsibility to others to not put them in a precarious situation, to not put a stumbling block in their spiritual path.

Many of you know that I don't drink. My grandfather was moonshiner; my Dad was an alcoholic and a prescription drug addict. My brothers were alcoholics. It just seemed like something that I could live without. I do not believe though that the Bible teaches an abstinence position. The Bible does clearly teach that intoxication, getting drunk, is sin. That being said, some of you shouldn't drink. Some of you are alcoholics.

My Dad was a Deacon in a Baptist church, so let's not be naïve. Many of you need to raise your standards in this area. And every parent needs to have an honest and Biblically accurate conversation with their children about the dangers of alcohol abuse and sexual purity.

***e. Babylon is indicted for her idolatry, "Of what value is an idol, since a man has carved it? Or an image that teaches lies? For he who makes it trusts in his own creation; he makes idols that cannot speak. Woe to him who says to wood, 'Come to life!' Or to lifeless stone, 'Wake up!' Can it give guidance? It is covered with gold and silver; there is no breath in it" (vss. 18-19).*** A few weeks ago, talk show host, Joy Behar, had the Granddaddy of talk shows on her program, Phil Donahue. In their ensuing discussion about the separation of church and state, Behar compared President Bush's prayers to God with Terrorists' prayers to Allah. Phil Donahue, not to be outdone, suggested that presidents shouldn't pray. He said, "*The framers were right. They saw this coming. You know, what we don't want is a president who talks to God every day and God talks back...We never should permit any president or any leader of any kind to suggest that God is on their side in a war.*" Folks, we are Babylon. In America you can believe anything. You can worship anyone or anything...as long as you do not say that you are right and everyone else is wrong. It's okay to pray...as long as it's private. And please use the generic "God," not Jesus. Pluralism is PC, Biblical exclusivity is anathema.

Recently, a San Diego math teacher was forced to remove two posters from his classroom walls because they included the phrases "*In God We Trust*," "*One Nation Under God*" and "*God Bless America*." A federal judge though said the Poway Unified School District was wrong to order the removal of the posters, and the school district is now appealing the judge's ruling to the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals.

Brad Johnson, who has been a teacher for 32 years, said that he began hanging motivational posters in his classroom early on in his career. U.S. District Judge Roger Benitez ruled this past February that Johnson's First Amendment rights were violated and that he should be allowed to hang the posters. Judge Benitez also noted that other classrooms at the school contain posters quoting John Lennon's "Imagine" and Hindu leader Mahatma Gandhi, as well as posters of the Buddhist leader Dalai Lama and Muslim leader Malcolm X, a Libertarian Party poster, a "Stop Global Warming" sign, and even an anti-war poster that says, "How many Iraqi children did we kill today?" among many others.

School officials have stated under oath that they have no objection to allowing teachers to promote personal political causes such as gay rights and global warming. They even have no objection to a 40-foot display of sacred Tibetan prayer flags in a science classroom but the "God" posters must go. We are Babylon!

Dorothy Sayers observed, *"In the world it is called Tolerance, but in hell it is called Despair. The sin that believes in nothing, cares for nothing, seeks to know nothing, interferes with nothing, enjoys nothing, hates nothing, finds purpose in nothing, lives for nothing, and remains alive because there is nothing for which it will die."* God is intolerant of sin. Jesus is intolerant of any other suggestion of salvation because He is **the** only way of salvation.

The idolatry of the Babylonians was a source of all the other atrocities previously mentioned. Because their religious orientation was wrong, their moral standards were perverted. Babylon was addicted to idolatry. They thought that their many gods gave them their victories.

***So do we have idols today?*** Most of them are not wood or stone but they're idols nonetheless. Warren Wiersbe suggests that if you want to find out if you have idols in your life, here's a checklist. There's the *devotion* test: For what are you working and living. There's the *dependence* test: What do you trust? When difficulties come, to what do you turn? There's the *delight* test: What gives you the most pleasure? There's the *decision* test: What guides you when you make your decisions? And there's the *destiny* test: What are you looking forward to? ***Babylon is indicted for her idolatry...***would God indict us today for ours?

**3. Righteousness will ultimately triumph,** *"Has not the LORD Almighty determined that the people's labor is only fuel for the fire, that the nations exhaust themselves for nothing? For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea"* (vss. 13-14). *"As the waters cover the sea"* means that there is no room for anything else. Everyone and everything hostile to God will be destroyed.

After Babylon marched into Judah, God's Word was fulfilled just seventy years later. Seventy years after Habakkuk wrote this little book, Babylon fell. It was one of the most short-lived flashes of brilliance of an empire that history records. In a historical blink

Babylon rose from obscurity to become a world power and then was just as quickly annihilated by the Medes and the Persians.

The God Who pronounced woe on the Babylonians has stated that the wicked will not stand. Over the course of history our world has seen the rise and fall of petty tyrants and puny empires. All of them were used by God to accomplish His purposes, only to be leveled in His due time. The wicked will not stand! In our own country today there is an alarming decay in the moral fiber of society. The growth of debauchery is repulsive to thinking, sensitive Christians. And what will be the outcome of all that we see around us? In the short term, I don't know; but in the long term I know this: the wicked will not stand. **Judgment Day** is coming!

**4. God is on His Throne,** *“But the LORD is in His holy temple; let all the earth be silent before Him”* (vs. 20). If we want to know the meaning of this verse we must go into the courtroom where God is exercising judgment. The point of the text is expressed when we think of a man sitting before a judge and then the crier stands up like they still do in New York State, I understand, and says *“O yea, O yea, this court is not called to order”* and the judge enters, takes his gavel and strikes his desk in token of the fact that now a case was going to be heard and judgment would be pronounced. That's the picture found here. It's the thunderous call of an outraged God against a world that has too long mocked Him. It's a call against the wicked Babylonians and any other unrighteous people who do not believe the divine revelation concerning His Son, the Lord Jesus. The contrast is between pagans chattering before dead idols who have no ability to hear or respond, and the one true God Who resides by His almighty power in His holy temple ready to respond to the needs of His people.

*“Let all the earth be silent before Him,”* is a command to fear and revere Him, to fall on our faces before Him and worship Him. The word *“silent”* literally means *“hush.”* It's a command to trust Him, regardless what the circumstances may be like.

The implication is that God is about to judge the nations of the world, revealing Himself as the omnipotent Holy One, *“Let all the earth be silent before Him.”* There must be no questions; no doubts expressed about the goodness and the holiness and the power of our God. We are to look to the God of Scripture; the ultimate One; the absolute One. We are to hush, to put our hands over our mouths so that we will not speak foolishly.

We must realize that God is in His holy temple; He is God over all! Therefore we must silently humble ourselves and bow down before Him to worship Him. Let us magnify His grace; let us magnify His might and power and His goodness. And then, in quiet peace of heart, let us wait for Him to do what only He can do.

**Conclusion:** Some years ago I heard a sermon and the preacher said, *“If God doesn't judge America, He will have to apologize to Sodom and Gomorrah.”* As we've worked through these five woes, it's obvious that every one of those indictments could also be made against our country. None of us can guarantee that God's judgment will not fall on America. We can live, pray, and work toward the end that God will spare us, but we

can't be certain that He will. Yet, every single person here this morning can be certain about escaping God's eternal judgment on a personal level.

Scripture says, "*Christ died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God*" (1 Pet. 3:18). God made Christ, Who knew no sin, to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (2 Cor. 5:21). That righteousness comes to us, not by our good deeds, but only through faith in Christ (Rom. 3:22, 26).

My friend, if you will trust in Him today, your sins will be charged to His account and you will escape God's coming wrath. Jesus Himself promised, "*He who hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life*" (John 5:24). You see, you have up to the point of death, but not one second later, to put your trust in Christ and escape God's eternal judgment. Maybe you're thinking, "I'm young; I want to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a while. I'll wait." Don't be a fool! You may be hardened beyond remedy! You could die today! Christ could return at any moment and you'd be lost. You're gambling against eternity!

Some years ago the "ABC Evening News" reported on an unusual work of modern art—a chair affixed to a shotgun. It was to be viewed by sitting in the chair and looking directly down the gun barrel. The gun was loaded and set on a timer to fire at an undetermined moment within the next one hundred years. Here's what's shocking! People waited in line to sit and stare into that gun barrel! They all knew it could go off at pointblank range at any moment, but they were gambling that the fatal blast wouldn't happen during their minute in the chair.

My friend, I wonder, could you be sitting in that chair today, gambling that the gun will not go off in your face? Unless you have put your trust in Christ, you're playing with your eternal destiny. God is patient, but if you continue to reject His Word, judgment is certain! **Judgment Day** is coming soon. Run to the Cross, my friend! Flee to Jesus now!