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Setting The Stage For Habakkuk

Thank you for being here this morning. I'm glad you're here. I'm excited for what the Lord is going to teach us as we work our way through the prophet Habakkuk over the next month or so. After I prayed about what to teach through on Sunday mornings and landed on Habakkuk, I texted a friend named Shannon Hurley. Shannon is one of our missionaries in Uganda. I told him I was going to be teaching through Habakkuk. He wrote back, "Interesting book choice." I am not sure if that was meant to be an encouragement but that is what he wrote back to me.

Why did I choose Habakkuk as my first book of the Bible to teach through here as a pastor? **2 Timothy 3:16 says that all Scripture is God breathed.** Every word of Scripture is breathed out by God. We need the whole Bible to know God and to please God. To know God better we need the whole counsel of God's Word. One of my desires for my own life and for you is that we would be experts in Scripture. That we would know our Bible's better than we know anything else.

This past week we celebrated two birthday's in our home. I turned 47 on Thursday and my daughter Molly turned 12 on Friday. When we lived in Kansas barbecue was a big deal. Smoking meat was part of life in Kansas. **The ability to smoke meat was actually a requirement for being considered a real man.** So a while back I got a traeger smoker and I've been trying to smoke meat.

We had some friends from Kansas visiting this past week and so I attempted to smoke a 9 pound brisket. That's a pretty big piece of meat. In order to smoke it the right way I watched some you tube video's of barbecue professionals. One guy was smoking a brisket and as he was teaching you how to prepare it, another guy was just asking him random questions about how to make it the right way. You could tell this guy was

an expert. Every question that was asked about a basket had been weighed and thought through. He was a barbecue expert.

As I sat there watching that barbecue professional I thought, “If I’m going to be an expert in anything, I want to be an expert when it comes to knowing God’s Word.” Not just knowing it for knowledge sake or to win an argument with someone else, but knowing God’s Word to know the God of the Word.

Remember what Jesus prayed the night before the cross in John 17:3, “And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” Eternal life doesn’t begin when we die. It begins when God saves us. Eternal life is a quality of life that comes from knowing God by knowing Christ. Paul prayed in Colossians 1:10 that people who already know the Lord would increase in the knowledge of God. Peter started his 2nd letter with a desire for his readers to experience God's grace and peace in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

One of the reasons I think we might be tempted to avoid books like Habakkuk is because we're not comfortable with the Old Testament. We're not sure who these guys are who wrote these books or when they wrote or why they wrote. We're more comfortable with books in the New Testament because most of them were written to local churches and since we are a part of a local church they're a little easier for us to wrap our arms around.

My goal this morning is to help you become a little more comfortable with the Old Testament. This morning's lesson is called setting the stage for Habakkuk. My goal this morning is to help you get a little more comfortable with the flow of the Old Testament so when we look at the details of Habakkuk we know what's going on - we know why this book was written. This morning we are going to go through a brief overview of the whole Old Testament. **Yes, I just said brief and overview of the whole Old Testament in the same sentence.** Don't worry - You'll still get to lunch on time.

One of my favorite Bible teachers used to live here and attend Cornerstone. His name is Dr. Doug Bookman. He now lives in Cary, North Carolina where he teaches at Shepherds Theological Seminary. Dr. Bookman has a study of the Old Testament and in one part of the study he breaks the Old Testament into 7 major movements. That's what you have in your notes this morning. He calls it the Divine Drama of The Old Testament in Seven Scenes. When we get to the Minor Prophets toward the end of the lesson I'll talk more about Habakkuk and where he fits into the divine drama of the Old Testament.

One thing I hope you leave here with this morning is hope. We all need hope. Romans 15:13, "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope." God is the God of Hope and he fills us with joy and peace as we rely on the Holy Spirit and trust the promises of God. Let's get into the 7 scenes of the Old Testament starting in Genesis 1:1-11. As we go through each of these scenes we will be reading some important verses in each section.

The first scene in the divine drama begins with:

1. **Universal Dealings - Genesis 1-11**

This is where Scripture begins. Scripture begins with creation. I realize you're not going to get this from the history channel or from most every college and school today but Scripture teaches a literal 6 day creation. Day means a literal 24 hour day in Genesis 1. God created the whole world in 6 literal 24 hour days.

Genesis begins with two creation accounts. The first one from Genesis 1:1 to Genesis 2:4 describes creation from God's perspective. He's the only One who was there during the first week of creation. The second account, Genesis 2:4-Genesis 2:25 is written from Adam's perspective with the primary emphasis being the 6th day of creation and God's provision of a wife for Adam.

The most conservative date for creation is 4,000 B.C. That's based on the genealogies in Genesis 5, Genesis 11 and the call of Abraham in 2091 B.C. **In the first 11 chapters of the Bible God is dealing with mankind as a whole - that's why it's called universal dealings.** Genesis 1-11 is universal in its scope and outlook. Something interesting about the first 11 chapters of the Bible - Genesis 1-11 is a longer time period than Genesis 12 all the way to Malachi.

Doug Bookman "The 1st major movement covers the events from creation to the call of Abram from the Ur of the Chaldees . This period covers almost 2000 years, which is more than the rest of the Old Testament in total. Abraham-Malachi = ca 1700 years."

Genesis begins with creation in the first two chapters and then we read about the fall of man in Genesis 3. **It's impossible to overstate how important Genesis 3 is to the Bible.** Genesis 3 has been described as the most important chapter in the Bible. Why? Genesis 3 shows us where sin comes from and Genesis 3:15 is the first promise of a Savior. If you want to know why the world is broken read Genesis 3. If you want to know why there is hope for this broken world read Genesis 3. Genesis 3 is both sobering and encouraging.

After Adam and Eve sin the Lord God showed up in the garden and makes a foundational promise to Satan. Look at Genesis 3:15. This verse is called the proto-evangelium which means the first gospel promise. Satan has just deceived Adam and Eve. Look what God tells Satan in Genesis 3:15, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." That's the very first promise of a Savior in Scripture. The offspring of the woman who will inflict a decisive defeat on the serpent is Christ. We don't know it's Christ in Genesis 3:15. It takes the rest of the Bible to show us who fulfilled God's promise.

After the fall, does man get better or worse? After the fall, man grows increasingly more wicked. Fast forward to Genesis 6:5, and we read God's

assessment of the world after the fall. Look at Genesis 6:5, “The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” This is God's assessment and indictment of all humanity after the fall. What does this lead to? Noah and the flood. God judges the whole wicked world through the flood and yet God preserves a man and his family as a way to repopulate the world and fulfill the promise of Genesis 3:15.

So we have Creation then the fall then the flood and then you have nations. The tower of Babel in Genesis 10-11. Man is still wicked after the flood. What becomes clear in the first 11 chapters of Scripture is that people can't make right what sin has made wrong. Man can't reverse the curse of sin.

All of this, the first 11 chapters, sets the stage for the next scene in divine drama of redemption.

2. **The Patriarchal Period - Genesis 12-50**

Look at Genesis 12. Remember in Genesis 1-11 the Lord is dealing with the whole world - Humanity as a whole. **In Genesis 12 God makes a promise to one man - Abram.** The promise God makes to Abraham in Genesis 12 doesn't just affect his family - It affects every family on the earth. Let's read the promises God makes to Abram in Genesis 12:1-3:

12:1 Now the Lord said to Abram,
“Go forth from your country,
And from your relatives
And from your father's house,
To the land which I will show you;
2 And I will make you a great nation,
And I will bless you,
And make your name great;
And so you shall be a blessing;
3 And I will bless those who bless you,
And the one who curses you I will curse.

And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.”

Notice all the I's in these verses. I will...I will.,I will. That's the Lord God speaking. God takes the initiative once again to reveal Himself to Abram and to make him these promises. Abram wasn't seeking for God when God spoke to Him. **God is always the seeker in salvation.** That's really important to the storyline of Scripture. From Genesis 3 on man doesn't seek for God. God always takes the initiative in salvation.

The Abrahamic covenant is unilateral. What does that mean? God promises to bless Abraham despite what Abraham does. Abraham does believe God, as it says in Genesis 15:6, and God credits Abraham with righteousness, but God's promise will come to pass regardless of what Abraham does or doesn't do.

Something very important about these verses. **When God chose to reveal Himself to Abraham and made these promises to Abraham, the Lord was not abandoning the rest of the world.** That's not what God is doing in Genesis 12. This is God's plan to reach the wicked world God made. This is God's evangelism strategy to reach the world. Notice in verse 3 God promises to provide Abraham a descendant through whom who is blessed? **All the families of the earth. God is going to use one family to bless all families.**

This is what the rest of the Old Testament is about and what gives us hope. God keeps His promises. "From the book of Genesis chapter 12 to the book of Acts in the New Testament, the Bible traces the history of one family. The patriarch of that family is Abraham, the Hebrew, whose physical descendants became known as the nation of Israel. As God prepared a land, so He also chose a people, Abraham's descendants, through whom He would work to all mankind's benefit. Abraham's story-biblical-history is a "theological treatise whose purpose is to show that God the Creator will through an elect nation Israel, sovereignly achieve His creative and redemptive purposes for all humankind." God's plan to bless mankind through Abraham and His descendants culminates in the descendant of Abraham, Jesus the Messiah.”

The rest of Genesis (Genesis 12-50) is the record of 4 Generations of one clan beginning with Abraham. **It lasts for 215 years.** Abraham is the focus from Genesis 12-24, then Isaac from Genesis 25-26, then Jacob (whose name is changed to Israel) from Genesis 27-36, and Joseph (Genesis 37-50). At the end of Genesis Jacob takes his clan of 70 into Egypt and he dies. God uses Joseph, the fourth major patriarch, to get His people into Egypt.

This brings us to the end of the book of Genesis. As we finish Genesis the family of Abraham is living happily in Egypt. **They are a tiny clan, but because of Joseph they have been received very well in Egypt.** So, we have the universal dealings in Genesis 1-11 and then the patriarchal period in Genesis 12-50. We're still a long way from Habakkuk but we're moving in that direction.

The third scene in the divine drama is:

3. **Israel Becomes A Nation - Exodus 1-Deuteronomy**

Once the family of Abraham gets into Egypt things go well until a new king takes the throne. His name is most likely Aminhotep II. The clan that starts with Abraham back in Genesis 12 goes from 70 people to around 2 million during the 430 years the sons of Israel lived in Egypt. Under this new king, the family of Abraham become slaves and they eventually cry out to God in their distress.

Look at Exodus 2:23-25:

"Now it came about in the course of those many days that the king of Egypt died. And the sons of Israel sighed because of the bondage, and they cried out; and their cry for help because of their bondage rose up to God. So God heard their groaning; and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God saw the sons of Israel, and God took notice of them."

Remember who God used to get His people to Egypt - who was it? God used Joseph to get His people into Egypt. **Who does God use to get His people out of Egypt? Moses.** God uses Moses to get His people out of Egypt. The way God gets His people out of Egypt shows us who the real God is. How God delivers His people out of Egypt puts His own infinite power and glory on display for the rest of the world so everyone knows Israel's God is the one true God.

Doug Bookman, "God used the pride and stubbornness of the Egyptian Pharaoh (Amenhotep II) to put on display His own infinite power and glory. This is an important element of the biblical narrative, and it shapes Israel's history through the rest of the Old Testament and beyond (1 Samuel 4:8)."

Notice the reference on this slide to 1 Samuel 4:8. That's a long time after the Exodus. Years later a wicked people group called the Philistines still remembers the power of Yahweh in delivering His people out of Egypt. They still remembered how God delivered His people out of Egypt. The Philistines didn't know much, but they knew enough to know that you don't mess with Israel's God. Again, what God did in Exodus, the way He delivered His people out of Egypt showed the rest of the world who the one true God is.

As you know, God always delivers His people before He tells them how to live. **That's true for Israel and it's true for us.** When did God give Moses the ten commandments to teach His people how to live for His glory? Did God give His people the ten commandments and then tell them that if they obey God will deliver them. No! God delivered them before He gave them the ten commandments. **God saved them before He instructed them.**

Friends, this is how a relationship with the Lord works. He delivers us first. He puts His power on display first in sending His son to save us and raising His Son from the dead for our salvation. **God saves us through the work of Christ, gives us the Holy Spirit and then He teaches us how to live for His glory.** Aren't you thankful for this? The strength to follow

Christ in obedience to all He commands doesn't come from us - It comes from the Spirit of God who lives in us.

God puts His power on display for His people and Israel enters into a covenant with King Yahweh in Exodus 19. **Israel becomes a nation in Exodus 19.** God becomes their God and they become His people. Exodus 1–18 show us Israel's exodus from bondage in Egypt. Exodus 19–40 shows the instructions given by God on Mount Sinai to direct the life and worship of the nation.

One of the most important chapters in this divine scene, a chapter I recommend reading is Deuteronomy 28. Just look with me at Deuteronomy 28 - we don't have time to read the whole chapter. It's 68 verses long. Just notice how the chapter is divided - **It begins with blessings for obedience in the first 14 verses and then consequences for disobedience from verse 15 to verse 68.** Remember earlier when Israel became a nation they pledged to a life of obedience to King Yahweh. The Mosaic covenant was a conditional covenant - The obedience of the people matters. What happens when the people of God get into the promised land through the rest of the Old Testament flows from Deuteronomy 28.

Moses dies in Deuteronomy 34. He isn't allowed to enter the promise land. Later in the course of the wanderings in the wilderness, Moses "spoke ill advisedly with his lips," taking to himself some of the glory that belonged only to God. Because he had failed to give God the honor in all things, Moses would also die at the border of the Land. Who takes over for Moses? Joshua.

Do we need to take an Old Testament time out or should we keep going? Let's keep going. We're only about 1,000 years away from Habakkuk. I say this for your encouragement :). No I am thankful you are here and I hope this brief overview is an encouragement.

I was thinking this morning as I was preparing about a song from Steve Green. If you know Steve Green you've been a Christian for a while. He sang a song called People need the Lord:

Everyday they pass me by
I can see it in their eyes
Empty people filled with care
Headed who knows where
On they go through private pain
Living fear to fear
Laughter hides their silent cries
Only Jesus hears

People need the Lord, people need the Lord
At the end of broken dreams, He's the open door
People need the Lord, people need the Lord
When will we realize people need the Lord?

We are called to take His light
To a world where wrong seems right
What could be too great a cost
For sharing life with one who's lost?
Through His love our hearts can feel
All the grief they bear
They must hear the words of life
Only we can share

People need the Lord, people need the Lord
At the end of broken dreams, He's the open door
People need the Lord, people need the Lord
When will we realize that we must give our lives?
For people need the Lord, people need the Lord

Over and over again throughout the Old Testament this is what we see. People need the Lord. We think we need so much else, but we don't. Christians are complete in Christ, filled full in Him. **If we have King YHWH and walk with Him we can have joy no matter what.** This is what God

teaches Israel over and over again - Life is about knowing and loving and living for the Lord. That's when life is the most blessed.

The fourth scene in the divine drama:

4. **Conquest and Division of the Land (The Life of Joshua) - Joshua 1-24**

Look at Joshua 1. This was a text for one of the sermons that was preached at the shepherds conference some of us went to a week or so ago. It was a sermon on boldness. Courage. We all need help with boldness, with courage to live for God in the midst of a pagan world. Remember what the Lord told Joshua at the beginning of his call to lead the people under King YHWH:

Joshua 1:1-9

- Jos 1:1** After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, the Lord said to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' assistant,
- 2** "Moses my servant is dead. Now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the people of Israel.
 - 3** Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, just as I promised to Moses.
 - 4** From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites to the Great Sea toward the going down of the sun shall be your territory.
 - 5** No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you.
 - 6** Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them.
 - 7** Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go.

- 8 This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.
- 9 Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”

As the preacher went through these verses at the shepherds conference he reminded us that there are parallels in these verses to us. We're called to be bold and courageous. Jesus tells us to go into the world and make disciples and He promises to always be with us as we obey (Matthew 28:16-20). We're called to trust the Lord is with us as we seek to make disciples. Paul asked the church in Ephesus to pray for him to boldly proclaim the mystery of the gospel. We need courage in our day to live and speak for Christ.

Joshua succeeds Moses, leads Israel across the Jordan River. Then you have the 7 year conquest of the land. The land is divided among the tribes of Israel. *God gave Joshua a two fold mission - To destroy the Canaanites and to conquer, divide and dwell in the land.* After Joshua dies the tribes are unfaithful. They allowed Canaanites to remain in the land, and soon God's people were marrying the daughters of the Canaanites, and worshiping their gods. The disobedience of the people in the land to King Yahweh leads to the darkest period in Israel's history.

The fifth scene in the drama of redemption in the Old Testament is:

5. **Period of the Judges (“No King in Israel”) - Judges 1-1 Samuel 12**

The Time Period of the Judges is 1350-1051 BC. It covers the the time from Joshua's death to the time when Saul was made King over the entire nation. The Grand distinctive of the book of Judges - There is no king in Israel. Yes, YHWH was still their King in the ultimate sense but after Joshua dies God does not appoint a new leader. Why did Joshua not appoint a new leader?

Paul Benware, "It was God's intention that the newly formed nation be a theocracy (God ruling) with no single human leader. God would govern through the laws given at Sinai and through the priests as the interpreters and enforcers of the law. But the theocracy turned out to be a failure because Israel would not obey her own constitution. Judges records these years, known primarily for their defeat and failure."

Why was the period of the Judges such a dark time? Two times in Judges we read, "In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes." When there is no reliable king ruling and everyone is doing what is right in their own eyes wickedness prevails. Why does wickedness prevail when everyone does what is right in their own eyes? What we do on the outside flows out of the condition of our hearts. Is the man heart evil or good by nature? Contrary to popular opinion, God's Word says the human heart is desperately wicked. We are all by nature rotten to the core. Jeremiah 17:9, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?"

Jesus said in Mark 7:20-23:

- 20** "What comes out of a person is what defiles him.
- 21** For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery,
- 22** coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness.
- 23** All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."

When you remove the right leadership from a nation and everyone does what is right in their own eyes wickedness prevails. It's like gangrene. It spreads rapidly. Wicked hearts produce wicked lives and this was the condition of Israel during the time of the judges. God provides a final judge during this time to turn the wicked people's hearts back to Him.

Who was the last judge? Samuel. Samuel, which means heard of God, is the last judge. Samuel is one of the heroes of the Old Testament. God

uses Samuel's message of repentance to turn Israel around. Samuel is the focus of 1 Samuel 1-12.

Doug Bookman, "The most important Judge, and the only Judge to exercise leadership over the entire nation, was the final Judge, Samuel. He preached for 20 years and turned the nation back to God. As he grew old, the nation realized that they had no mechanism for choosing a successor, and that they did not want to return to the days when the tribes warred among themselves. Therefore they demanded that Samuel choose a leader before he died. Samuel realized that there was wickedness in the demand, but Yahweh directed him to fulfill the request, and so he did. The first (human) king to be anointed and enthroned was Saul. (Remember that Yahweh had been, and continued to be, the King in Israel. But beginning with Saul He administered His rule through a succession of hereditary human leaders whom we know as "kings".) In 1 Samuel 12, Samuel preaches a sermon in which he abdicates civil rule, turning it over to the newly enthroned King Saul. Samuel insists, however, that he was not abandoning spiritual leadership, that he would continue to call upon the nation to follow their real King, Yahweh (1 Sam 12:23-25)."

Look with me at 1 Samuel 12:23-25, How does Samuel lead the people?
Prayer, truth and a warning.

- 23** Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for you, and I will instruct you in the good and the right way.
- 24** Only fear the Lord and serve him faithfully with all your heart. For consider what great things he has done for you.
- 25** But if you still do wickedly, you shall be swept away, both you and your king."

That's what love looks like. When you love someone you pray for them and you point them to Scripture to instruct them toward what is best for them. You also warn them. Sin has consequences. God is not mocked. You reap what you sow. Sowing to our sinful flesh always has consequences. Sowing to the Spirit reaps eternal life. Paul's ministry

revolved around teaching and warning every man because he wanted to present every man mature in Christ.

That leads us into the 6th scene in the divine drama of redemption:

Remember there was no human king in Israel during the period of the Judges so the people ask for a King and God gives them a king. That leads us to:

6. The Monarchy (Human Kings reign in the name of the Divine King) - 1 Samuel 13-2 Kings 24

The monarchy of Israel extends from the enthronement of the first king, Saul, in 1051 BC to the time when the nation was carried off as slaves to a foreign country, Babylon in 586 BC. Thus, for about 450 years Kings ruled in Israel. Who are the first three kings in Israel and how long do they rule? **Saul then David then Solomon and they each rule for 40 years.**

Remember that Yahweh did not cease ruling as King during this time. He simply instituted a succession of human mediators of His rule, rather than hand-picking each one as He had done in the past.

During the Monarchy there were two major events - In 722 the Northern Kingdom, the 10 tribes in the North called Israel, was destroyed by Assyria. In 586 the Southern Kingdom, Judah, is defeated by the Babylonians. Now, this is where Habakkuk comes in. This is where we get the major and the minor prophets.

Let's think about this for a minute. In the Old Testament you have Moses and the Prophets. Moses was used by God to write the first five books of the Bible. Then you have the historical section, 12 books from Joshua to Esther, then you have the 5 wisdom books (Job-Song of Solomon) and then you have the 12 major and minor prophets.

What was the prophets role? To defend God's reputation. The Lord didn't want anyone to get the wrong idea about who the real God is. Before the Assyrian invasion of the Northern Kingdom in 722 BC and the Babylonian destruction of the Southern kingdom starting in 605 BC God sent the prophets to tell the people what was about to happen and why. Stay with me here - Why did God send the prophets before these two invasions? God didn't want anyone to get the wrong idea about who the real God was.

Remember Israel was constantly surrounded by pagan nations who worshipped false gods. Each nation had their own tribal deity. When a nation went to war against another nation, whoever's nation one the battle showed that their god was the real god. Their god gave them victory. **War was ultimately about who had the real God and who didn't.**

God didn't want His people or the other nations to get the wrong idea about who the real God is. **He didn't want the Assyrians or the Babylonians to think that because they defeated Israel and Judah's their gods were real.** They weren't. They were worthless idols. This is what we are going to see in Habakkuk. Habakkuk comes right before the Babylonians invade the southern kingdom. *Habakkuk is God's explanation of why this other pagan nation is going to come in and wipe out Judah, with Jerusalem as its capital.*

God would call and raise up a prophet to foretell what was about to happen and why it was about to happen before it happened. The fact that God knows the future shows who the real God is. The reason Assyria took control of the northern kingdom in 722 BC and the reason Babylon took over the southern kingdom in 586 was because of Israel's idolatry. They disobeyed their constitution. They transgressed Deuteronomy 28. God disciplined His people by raising up pagan nations to do His will.

That is what Habakkuk is about. Habakkuk is a conversation between Habakkuk and the Lord about the sinful condition of Judah. Habakkuk has concerns and he takes his concerns to the Lord. The Lord answers Habakkuk by describing His plan to raise up a nation more wicked than

Judah to destroy His people on account of their sin. Habakkuk is perplexed about God's plan. It doesn't make sense to him. He doesn't like the plan. But he works it through and Habakkuk ends with some amazing verses of trust. Habakkuk chooses to live by faith because He knows God's power and God's plan even though that plan will eventually lead to a very hard way of life.

We've already covered close to 4000 years of history. Obviously, we could say a lot more about each of these scenes but I hope you are getting the flow of the Old Testament.

The flow of history through the OT moves along the following lines:

- Creation of the universe
- Fall of man
- Judgment flood over the earth
- Abraham, Isaac, Jacob (Israel)—fathers of the chosen nation
- The history of Israel
 - Exile in Egypt—430 years
 - Exodus and wilderness wanderings—40 years
 - Conquest of Canaan—7 years
 - Era of Judges—350 years
 - United Kingdom—Saul, David, Solomon—110 years
 - Divided Kingdom—Judah/Israel—350 years
 - Exile in Babylon—70 years
 - Return and rebuilding the land—140 years

The details of this history are explained in the 39 books divided into 5 categories:

- The Law—5 (Genesis—Deuteronomy)
- History—12 (Joshua—Esther)
- Wisdom—5 (Job—Song Of Solomon)
- Major Prophets—5 (Isaiah—Daniel)
- Minor Prophets—12 (Hosea—Malachi)

The 7th scene in the drama of redemption from the Old Testament is:

7. The Restoration Period (Ezra, Esther, Nehemiah) - 538-430 B.C.

It was Babylon who carried Judah off into Captivity, but Persia allowed them to return. Three times Jews returned from Babylon to Israel - Under Zarubbabel to rebuild the temple in 538, under Ezra to restore pure worship in 458 and under Nehemiah to rebuild and rein-habit the city of Jerusalem in 446.

Remember the first temple was destroyed by the Babylonians. The second temple was rebuilt in 516 until it was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD. Nehemiah had held a very responsible position in the court of the Persian king, Artaxerxes. When he had heard that the sacred city was yet unprotected and lying in waste, Nehemiah was broken hearted, and the king allowed him to return to restore the city.

Nehemiah was resisted in the effort by the local inhabitants, but he was able to complete the project of rebuilding the walls in just 52 days. This is where the Old Testament historical narrative comes to a close. The Jews have been allowed to return to their sacred city and land, but the greater measure of the Jewish people have chosen to remain in Babylon. Israel is once again worshiping in her temple on Mt. Zion, but the second temple pales in comparison to the first temple. It's an unimposing structure.

Though the Jews in Israel are allowed a measure of self-rule, there is no king in the land; Israel is simply a province in the greater kingdom of Persia, and the final authority is the Persian monarch. The spirit of the Restoration community is perfectly represented in Ezra 3:10-13 (esp. 10:13).

Ezra 3:10-13, if you want to turn there with me in your Bible:

- 10** And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, the priests in their vestments came forward with trumpets, and the

Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise the Lord, according to the directions of David king of Israel.

- 11 And they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the Lord, ***“For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever toward Israel.”*** And all the people shouted with a great shout when they praised the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid.
- 12 But many of the priests and Levites and heads of fathers’ houses, old men who had seen the first house, wept with a loud voice when they saw the foundation of this house being laid, though many shouted aloud for joy,
- 13 so that the people could not distinguish the sound of the joyful shout from the sound of the people’s weeping, for the people shouted with a great shout, and the sound was heard far away.

This is at the end of the Old Testament. The nation could look back on her history and trace the goodness of God - His steadfast love for His people. God chose Israel and uniquely blessed His people. God’s loyal love was the reason she was still in existence in spite of continual rebellion.

Doug Bookman, "During the final stage of the restoration, when Israel was rebuilding the city of Jerusalem under Nehemiah, the prophet Malachi - the last prophetic voice of the Old Testament era - was ministering to the Jews in Jerusalem."

Paul Benware, "With the end of the book of Nehemiah, the story of the Old Testament comes to a close. Some four hundred years would go by before the Scriptures would pick up the story again. The years of silence would be broken by an angelic messenger, Gabriel, who would announce the birth of John the Baptist and the birth of Jesus the Messiah, the "great son" of David. God had not forgotten or gone back on His covenant promises to Abraham and his descendants."

I'd like to close our time this morning having you turn to Galatians 4:4. If we go all the way back to Genesis 3:15, the first promise of a Savior, and we trace God's promise through the Old Testament we learn that the

Messiah will be a descendant of Abraham. He will come through the tribe of Judah (Genesis 49:10). He will be a descendant of David from 2 Samuel 7. We read the genealogy in Matthew that connects Jesus back to David and back to Abraham. Matthew's gospel shows us how Jesus is the Messiah God promised His people.

Then we read what difference this makes for us in Galatians 4:4-7:

- 4 But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law,
- 5 to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.
- 6 And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"
- 7 So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

Paul's letter to the Galatians is a defense. Paul defends the true gospel because it was under attack. The gospel was under attack by a group of people called Judaizers. They were coming into the church telling people that you needed to do more than trust in Christ alone for salvation. You needed to trust in Jesus and obey the Law of Moses to be saved. It was faith plus works equals salvation.

Paul makes it clear in these four verses that the only one who kept the Law perfectly was Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ did something no-one else has ever done or will ever do. Jesus obeyed the law perfectly. Jesus never sinned.

Jesus is God's Son. He was sent by God the Father at the perfect time appointed by God. Jesus was born of a woman, born under the law. Why? To redeem those who were under the Law. Jesus died to redeem lawbreakers. To redeem means to enter the slave market of sin and purchase our freedom. Jesus died to redeem His people from the curse of the Law. He died to set us free from the curse of the law. The law God gave can show us our sin but it cannot save us from our sin. Only Jesus can do that.

The way Jesus work becomes effective in our lives is trust. Trusting Christ alone to save us from our sins. This is how the Spirit works in our lives. He comes into our lives through hearing with faith. The Spirit is given to those who trust Christ alone for salvation. He enables us to believe. The **Spirit** imparts assurance of being God's children (**sons**) and enables believers to recognize and confess their new intimate relationship with God (**Abba**).

That's amazing isn't it? We are saved completely by the work of Jesus Christ. Salvation that is 100% the work of Christ brings glory to God. The Spirit is sent to reside in us forever and through His power we call God Father. We are God's children, heirs according to promise.

Salvation is a trinitarian work. Warren Wiersbe, "The entire Trinity is involved in our spiritual experience: God the Father sent the Son to die for us, and God the Son sent His Spirit to live in us...Christians have been purchased by Christ and indwelt by the Spirit. We are awaiting the public declaration at the return of Christ when "we shall be like Him." We are "sons and heirs," and the best part of our inheritance is yet to come."

Wow! How amazing is grace? Think about what we have and where we're headed. We have a relationship with the Trinitarian Lord of redemption. He knew us before we knew Him. He sent His son to redeem us and He sent His Spirit to live inside of us and when Christ comes back we will be like Him for we will see him as He is. If that doesn't give you hope, I am not sure what can.

I hope this morning has filled you with hope. I know we look around today and it appears like sin is winning. Sin never wins. God always has the last word. Sin won't win because God promises to defeat it and Jesus has and Jesus will. I hope you'll come back next week as we jump into Habakkuk. Habakkuk will be a hopeful reminder for all of us that life is hard. Life is hard but God is in control and God is good and God always strengthens His people to endure whatever He sovereignly chooses to send our way. Let's pray.

