

Justice

JUSTICE TRIUMPHS OVER INJUSTICE

Focal Verses • HABAKKUK 2:6-14

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: RECOGNIZE why injustice will be punished; APPRECIATE the fairness of divine punishment of injustice; and DECIDE to follow God's commandment to act with justice.

In Focus

Denise struggled to keep her car on the road as she sped home from the office. After 13 years with the school district, the administrators eliminated her position. As Denise drove, she thought about the hundreds of overtime hours she had freely given.

Worst of all, Lauren and Crystal, two other staff members in the special education department, still had their jobs. Denise often rescued them countless times from obvious mistakes. Yet the district cut her job. Denise panicked over the news because she has been the sole supporter of two kids ever since her husband, Greg, left the family.

She related the whole story to her friend Cheryl over coffee. She listened patiently through the long, angry rant. "What do you think of that?" Denise finally asked.

"Denise," Cheryl softly began. "Do you think God doesn't know all of this already? Don't you think He's watching you?" Cheryl held Denise's hand. "Be patient. He will protect you, and He will bring justice to them. Just watch!"

Just as Denise's severance pay was going to end, she was hired by another district at a higher salary than her last job. The following month, Denise turned on her computer to check the news, and the first headline said that her former district supervisor and several staff members were under investigation for fiscal mismanagement. Denise shook her head and said, "Won't He do it?"

Why do you think God delays justice? Where have you seen delayed justice in your life? Where have you seen justice served?

Keep in Mind

"Woe to him that buildeth a town with blood, and stablisheth a city by iniquity!"
(Habakkuk 2:12, KJV).



Focal Verses

KJV **Habakkuk 2:6** Shall not all these take up a parable against him, and a taunting proverb against him, and say, Woe to him that increaseth that which is not his! how long? and to him that ladeth himself with thick clay!

7 Shall they not rise up suddenly that shall bite thee, and awake that shall vex thee, and thou shalt be for booties unto them?

8 Because thou hast spoiled many nations, all the remnant of the people shall spoil thee; because of men's blood, and for the violence of the land, of the city, and of all that dwell therein.

9 Woe to him that coveteth an evil covetousness to his house, that he may set his

nest on high, that he may be delivered from the power of evil!

10 Thou hast consulted shame to thy house by cutting off many people, and hast sinned against thy soul.

11 For the stone shall cry out of the wall, and the beam out of the timber shall answer it.

12 Woe to him that buildeth a town with blood, and stablisheth a city by iniquity!

13 Behold, is it not of the LORD of hosts that the people shall labour in the very fire, and the people shall weary themselves for very vanity?

14 For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.

The People, Places, and Times

The Babylonians. The battle of Carchemish in 605 BC (Jeremiah 46:2) was an important one because the king of Babylon defeated the Egyptians and added Syria-Palestine to the Babylonian Empire, including Judah. For several years, King Jehoiakim was loyal to his new Babylonian masters. But after three years he rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar. Later the Babylonian army invaded Jerusalem.

During the siege, Jehoiakim died, or was possibly killed in action. Jehoiakim's son, Jehoiachin, took the throne after his father's death, but surrendered the city after a reign of three months. He and his staff were taken to Babylon as captives along with ten thousand others (2 Kings 24:14). This was the beginning of the Babylonian captivity.

Background

In the age of goal setting seminars and vision boards, Christians and non-Christians alike have likely heard some paraphrase of Habakkuk 2:2: "Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables,

that he may run that readeth it." While many reference this Scripture as part of conversations around the importance of writing down one's goals and dreams, in context, these words serve as a much more pointed rebuttal to the prophet Habakkuk's charges toward God on behalf of the people. The book of Habakkuk reads as both a prophecy and a heated conversation between God and the prophet. Habakkuk begins the conversation with a complaint against God. For the prophet, God seemingly cannot or will not hear His people's cries for help and refuses to save them from the violence, wrongdoing, and injustice in their land (Habakkuk 1:2–11). God answers Habakkuk's complaint by promising to do something unthinkable—raising up the ruthless and lawless Babylonians to execute God's judgment (Habakkuk 1:6). In response, the prophet first affirms the holiness and wisdom of God but questions why God continues to tolerate the wickedness and injustice that the people of God faced in Jerusalem. The prophet questions the silence of God while the righteous seem to be "swallowed

up” and compares God’s people to a sea of fish being hooked, tangled, and caught with ease by their foes, whom he compares to fishermen who worship their nets and hooks (Habakkuk 1:13–16). At the end of this second complaint, Habakkuk steps back and declares that he will wait to hear what answer God desires him to give to the believers (Habakkuk 2:1). It is out of this context that God responds with “write the vision, make it plain” as a way of instructing Habakkuk to ensure that everyone is able to hear the response from the Lord—a piece of which we examine in our text for this lesson.

At-A-Glance

1. The Power of The People (Habakkuk 2:6)
2. Destroyed by Their Own Devices (vv. 6–11)
3. God Will Get the Glory (vv. 12–14)

In Depth

1. The Power of The People (Habakkuk 2:6)

In response to Habakkuk’s second complaint of questioning God’s silence in the face of violence and injustice and what felt like an unwillingness of God to intervene on behalf of His people, God describes the enemy as puffed up, not upright in his desires, betrayed by wine, arrogant, restless, and greedy (Habakkuk 2:4–5), and chronicles how the enemy has prioritized taking captive the peoples of all nations. However, God then provides Habakkuk with a unique prophecy, declaring that at some point, those same people whom the enemy captured will overcome the enemy, taunting him and speaking unavoidable truths of the enemy’s demise (v. 6). This small portion of the text is packed with some big implications, namely that the beginning of the

work of restoration is when God’s oppressed people tap into their own power to use their voices to speak to and against the injustices that they have witnessed. As in the day of Habakkuk, today God’s people have the power and obligation to speak to people, policies, and systems that are unjust and oppressive. This power is given to us like a spark plug for the change that God will bring about in His perfect time.

What injustices and oppression have you seen or experienced that God may be calling you to speak against?

2. Destroyed by Their Own Devices (vv. 6–11)

Next, God reveals at least three warnings or “woe” statements that the people would speak against the enemy. What is interesting about these statements is that, in each scenario, the enemy is destroyed utilizing the same methods that they used against God’s people. God reveals that those who gain their wealth by stealing and exhorting God’s people would come to ruin at the hands of their creditors (vv. 6–7). God declares that those who plunder many nations would eventually be plundered by the nations that remain (v. 8). Finally, God says that those who try to escape ruin by ruining others would be ruined during the end (vv. 9–10). These three woe statements illustrate the great irony of injustice—eventually, the very devices one uses to destroy others will be the devices of one’s own demise. This lesson foreshadows the lesson Jesus seeks to teach Peter: “All they that take the sword shall perish with the sword” (from Matthew 26:52).

Can you recall a time when the methods someone used to destroy others were eventually used to destroy them?

3. God Will Get the Glory (vv. 12–14)

The final statement of the text contains the good news! In the final “woe” statement of our text, God speaks directly to the violence

and injustice that Habakkuk gave his initial complaint about. God declares that these efforts are ultimately futile as the Lord Almighty predetermines that the final glory would not be given to the work of the oppressors but that “the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD” (Habakkuk 2:14). This text serves as a reminder to Habakkuk and to the reader today that injustice, violence, and oppression cannot win. In the end, God will get the glory!

Can you name some instances where justice was delayed but ultimately was achieved on a local, national, or global level?

Search the Scriptures

1. Paraphrase God’s “woe” statements (Habakkuk 2:6, 9, 12). Where else in the Bible do we find “woe” statements and who is being warned?
2. Why is Israel being attacked by its enemies (v. 8)?
3. What promise does God mention in verse 14?

Discuss the Meaning

1. As believers in Jesus Christ, why is it important to maintain hope that God will punish injustice?
2. What does it look like to act justly and pursue godly justice in our private and public lives?
3. What hope does God provide in the midst of our despair regarding our need for justice?

Liberating Lesson

The theme of injustice has been a mainstay of American public discourse over the last decade—particularly as it relates to the violence experienced within black and brown communities. The murder of Trayvon Martin at the hands of an acquitted vigilante, and the countless cases of unarmed black women and

men killed at the hands of law enforcement with painfully few convictions have caused citizens and clergy to sing Habakkuk’s song of lament. *How long will this continue to go on? How long will we cry violence and God does not intervene? How long will God allow injustice to persist?* The lesson of the text is that God is not asleep and God will ultimately get the glory—but God’s people must use their power to speak against the systems of oppression and injustice to spark the desired change.

Application for Activation

Justice work is not a cultural phenomenon but a biblical requirement. Micah reminds the believer that the Lord requires us to “do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with [Him]” (from Micah 6:8, KJV). As a group, create a list of potential justice issues that exist within the area where your congregation is situated. Expand the list by discussing major justice issues in your city and state. Now discuss justice issues that interest the group on a national level. From your list, select one local, state, and national issue and discuss practical ways that the congregation can be proactive in “lending a voice” and resources to these causes.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

Say It Correctly

Chaldeans. kal-DEE-ans.
Pre-exilic. PREE-ex-ILL-ic

Daily Bible Readings

DAY 183

Lamentations 4–5

Psalm 75:6–10

DAY 184

Ezekiel 1–4

Psalm 76:1–6

DAY 185

Ezekiel 5–8

Psalm 76:7–12

DAY 186

Ezekiel 9–12

Psalm 77:1–6

DAY 187

Ezekiel 13–15

Psalm 77:7–12

DAY 188

Ezekiel 16–17

Psalm 77:13–20

DAY 189

Ezekiel 18–20

Psalm 78:1–8

Notes
