

Text: Habakkuk 1:12-2:1

Title: More Questions for God

Truth: Trust God in the midst of catastrophe.

Date/Location: Sunday May 24, 2020 at FBC

Introduction

The prophet asked God questions in 1:2-4 about how long he would have to wait for God to restore justice and righteousness in Judah. He heard God's reply concerning the near-term arrival of the Babylonians. They were not coming for a friendly visit. That shocks him and he wants to know more.

I. Habakkuk Expresses Trust in the Lord, 1:12

A. Nature of God as eternal and holy.

1. "From everlasting" is found fairly frequently in the English translations of the Old Testament, but the precise Hebrew used here is a bit different than usual. This is not a big deal, but I noted the same Hebrew phrase is found in Micah 5:2 (5:1 in Hebrew). It speaks of the Bethlehem-born ruler of Israel, whose origins are "from of old." Many other uses of the English phrase reflect either God's eternal existence or His worthiness of praise "from everlasting to everlasting" (1 Chron. 16:36).
2. "Holy One." God is light and in Him is no darkness at all (1 John 1:5). Habakkuk brings his questions with the rock-solid presupposed conviction that God is holy. There is no hint of sin in God. God cannot do wrong. God does things that we might not understand—that's for sure. But He never does something wrong. Without that presupposition at base, your questioning and attitude toward God spins out of control and your struggle with evil in the world much more easily turns to blasphemy.
3. God is the "Rock." A modern media star is called "The Rock," but there is no other Rock, no other god, than the true and living God (Isaiah 44:8; 1 Samuel 2:2).

B. Did you note the simple phrase "O LORD my God, my Holy One?" The possessive pronoun "my" stands out. The prophet has taken

the LORD as his God. He considers God as His own God. He recognizes Him as LORD, as God, and as Holy. This is a radical shift of mindset from the state of unbelief that we all start out in. It is even a radical mindset shift from the lip-service of an immature Christian or even a name-only Christian. Many claim that God is our God, but this phrase comes from the depth of Habakkuk's heart. He has a personal connection to God and so He trusts Him implicitly.

- C. "We shall not die." Habakkuk trusts that total destruction is not their portion. He understands from the covenant promises that God will never allow Jerusalem to cease being a nation (Jer. 31:35-36). He probably knows what Jeremiah wrote that 70 years of punishment would be poured out on the nation. But this was going to fall short of a total destruction. What happened to the northern tribes was not going to happen to the southern kingdom. Many individuals in fact did die; but the nation as a whole did not die. There was a remainder of survivors both in the land (Jer. 39:10, 52:16) and who were exiled but after two or three generations returned.
- D. **Application.** When you face catastrophe of some sort, always go back to these truths: God is eternal, God is holy, and God should be trusted completely. He is not making some terrible mistake when He allows His people to suffer.
- E. Because of this, Habakkuk knows that God has not appointed the Babylonians to *destroy* Judah, but for *judgment* and *correction* of Judah. This is in the last half of verse 12. They are going to be used to punish and reprove Judah for its sins.

II. Habakkuk Questions How God Can Use a Wicked

Instrument, 1:13-17

- A. Character of God. Having already established that Habakkuk holds a high view of God's holiness, he knows that God cannot "look on" evil and wickedness. This doesn't mean God cannot see those things or that He doesn't know they exist. It means He cannot look upon them with favor. Psalm 34:15-16 speaks to this, and it is quoted by 1 Peter 3:12. So Habakkuk asks "Why?" regarding God's

“looking on those who deal treacherously” and God’s “holding Your tongue when the wicked devours.” The whole problem is that God’s holiness seems, on first blush, to preclude God’s use of evil instruments. How can he allow those people to prosper at all?

- B. Character of the Babylonians. They are definitely evil and wicked and treacherous. We saw that in 1:6-11 and Habakkuk “reminds” God of that fact now.
- C. With the exception of Jesus Christ, there are no perfect instruments for God’s work. In a sense then there are only more or less sinful people or nations from which God can choose. Someone might suggest that today, God could use a “Christian nation” or a Christian church to carry out such judgment, but that falls short because there are no Christian nations and the mission/authority of the Christian church does not extend into the governmental realm. The answer in short is that God indeed *does not* “look with favor” upon an instrument of His judgment. He does not hold His tongue forever against them. He simply uses them as servants for His sovereign purpose. Their time shall come as well.
- D. Habakkuk shows a bit of a misunderstanding when he suggests that Babylon is less righteous than Judah. Only in human eyes does this kind of comparison work. As we argued last time, what is the right metric for righteousness? Do you think, for example, that Muslim societies are less righteous than ours? Before you answer with an “absolutely” consider some possibilities. What if you knew Muslims did not allow abortion or homosexuality? What if they do not permit lewdness in media? In some ways they are more righteous! Certainly they do not accept Christ as the Son of God and have other areas of moral degradation. So the calculation is not as simple as taking a few of our pet issues and comparing ourselves with others. We always look better in our own eyes than others (Prov. 12:15, 16:2, 21:2, 26:12, 28:11). The brutalities of Babylon were awful. But Judah’s affronts to God could be considered more blameworthy because of the “to whom much has been given” principle (Luke 12:48). Israel *knew* what was right.
- E. The problem of evil is a difficulty that people have had for thousands of years and still the debate rages today. We know that

God does have the power to stop evil, but He does not. Therefore we know that He permits it. We believe that He permits evil (natural and man-made) for reasons that we do not fully understand. But we believe these reasons are good and justifiable reasons. We also know that God is righteous and good, and cannot therefore be implicated in the doing of the evil. So his reasons for allowing evil must be good and just.

F. Verse 14-17 might puzzle you a bit because the prophet asks about fish and creeping things—where do they come from? What this means is that the Babylonians treat other human beings like animals. They kill them without pity like hunters who take a fish or an animal for food, and they destroy them like a person smashes a bug without any thought of being a murderer. The attitude of a hunter or someone who kills a bug is not necessarily unrighteous. God has given mankind dominion over the creation to use it wisely as we see fit. Righteousness does *not* include killing for fun or wasting what is killed. But killing people like you kill an animal is totally wrong. People are made in the image of God and must be protected—lives, property, rights, etc.

The Babylonians caught people like people catch fish with a hook or net or dragnet. This “catch” makes the Babylonians happy. The net or hook is their military might and prowess.

When they have success, they offer a sacrifice to their “god.” Remember 1:11 – either their strength is their god or they ascribe their strength to some pagan god. In either case, they really think of themselves as something very special. So they celebrate victory by offering sacrifices to their deity. It is because of those things—the hook and net of military power—that they have a huge catch and much food. The spoils are significant. But the reality is that the spoils are granted them by the true God. He permits them to gain those things. It is a sin for them to not recognize this.

G. Habakkuk asks one more question of God: Will it be that they empty their net repeatedly, only to fill it again? In effect, how long, O Lord, will you allow this wicked nation to prosper?

III. Habakkuk Watches for God's Answer, 2:1

- A. Watchman metaphor. The prophet is probably a contemporary of Ezekiel and likens himself to a watchman, like Ezekiel was told in in 3:16-21 and 33:1-20. The job of watchman was extremely important because many lives depended on a swift and accurate report of conditions surrounding the city or army. The watchman is not necessarily concerned with the why and wherefore of what is coming. He is simply reporting *that* it is coming. Others can concern themselves with the affairs of nations and the philosophical questions about evil and all that.
- B. Habakkuk awaits an answer from God that he can relay to the people. The reply will come starting in 2:2.
- C. **Application.** Every Christian today is in effect a watchman. You may feel like you do not have frequent occasion to exercise that office. But in your family you do; in your community you do; you should look for more occasions to exercise it. You know the enemy of sin and the Savior from sin, and other people are clueless. Whether you know all the philosophical or theological explanations for it, the fact remains: people are sinners; sinners die; sinners die and are punished; Christ is coming again; Christ will judge all people; but also Christ died for sinners; and if any sinner believes in Christ, he will be saved from judgment.

Conclusion/Application

To me, the overwhelming truth here is not God's use of the wicked to advance His plan, for He uses sinners all the time in His program— even unsaved ones!

Neither is it that the Babylonians are very wicked, because there have been exceedingly wicked people from the foundation of the world.

What is striking is that Habakkuk **trusts God** in the midst of his questions. He is not one who has the attitude of, "Why have you made me like this?" (Romans 9:20). He is honestly asking, because he wants everything to be right in his world. It is not right, and it is going to become less right as Babylon comes into power.