

Habakkuk 1-2:1 "The Deep Dilemma"

We actually know very little about the *person* of Habakkuk. We can deduct from his book that he prophesied to the southern kingdom of Judah. We also know (from his writing) that it was in a period of national spiritual decline.

It would seem (based upon the fact that God tells him that He will use the brutality of the Babylonians to bring correction) that he prophesied some time *after* King Josiah (who was the last good king of Judah), probably during the reign of his son, Jehoiakim. *His* reign was one of disintegration, deterioration & degradation. The people were turning away from the law.

In the book of Jeremiah, God informs us of what He thought of Jehoiakim. He told him that his father did what was right, he was fair & just... He said, *"Yet your eyes and your heart are for nothing but your covetousness, For shedding innocent blood, And practicing oppression and violence."* Therefore thus says the Lord concerning Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah: *"They shall not lament for him, Saying, 'Alas, my brother!' or 'Alas, my sister!' They shall not lament for him, Saying, 'Alas, master!' or 'Alas, his glory!' He shall be buried with the burial of a donkey, Dragged and cast out beyond the gates of Jerusalem."*¹ He dragged the nation down. So God said, "They're going to drag your body beyond the gates of Jerusalem, there will be no mourning, no lament for you."

So; it would seem as though Habakkuk saw this transition from thriving times of revival under the reign of Josiah, to the injustice of Jehoiakim & he watched God's people slip into spiritual lethargy & sin. W/all that; we probably wouldn't be too far off to say that he prophesied somewhere between 607-604 B.C. He'd have been contemporary (at least in part) with Jeremiah.

But there he was... & as he looked around at the social/spiritual conditions that surrounded him. The injustice, the turmoil, the oppression. The righteous suffering, the wicked prospering, he thought, "Where is God in all of this?" "Why does He allow this to go on?" "When is He going to do something about this?" "Why does He just seem to sit in silence while the righteous are being swallowed up by the wicked?" – So he writes...

Vs 1

This is the "heavy message", the burden of the prophet Habakkuk.

¹ [The New King James Version](#). (1982). [Je 22:17-19]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

It was heavy, not only in the sense of its content & the coming judgment that he would announce upon Judah. But it was also heavy in the sense that Habakkuk is dealing w/tough questions & perhaps the even tougher response that he receives from God.

I almost entitled the message, “Be Careful What You Ask For”. Because sometimes we want to know, “God where are You in the midst of this situation & what are You going to do about it?” We forget that God’s ways aren’t our ways. That we so often get so focused on the tree that we lose sight of the forest. Listen, it’s ok to ask God tough questions. But if we ask tough questions, we need to be prepared to receive tough answers...

We find out right here in Vs 1 that God gave Habakkuk a brief glimpse into the future. He’s going to tell us what he was struggling with & what God shared w/& showed *to* him.

Vs 2-4

In Vs 2, you should realize that the words “cry”, though translated the same into English is actually 2 different Hebrew words. There’s an escalation of intensity to it. “How long shall I cry, & You will not hear? Even cry w/intensity, shout passionately, ‘Violence!’ & You will not save!?”

The word “Violence” being like a summary word. All kinds of injustice, oppression & wickedness that God simply seems indifferent toward. He expounds in Vs 3 as to exactly what he’s seeing all around him. “Iniquity, trouble, plundering, violence, strife & contention.” Evil behavior, perversity, destruction, cruelty, controversy & strife...” We read this & we think, “Was this written 2,600 yrs ago in ancient Israel, or last week in modern day America?” -- & Habakkuk is wondering, “God, are You seeing what I’m seeing? Why aren’t You doing anything about this?”

& I could be wrong, but it’s my suspicion that if we were to be transparent, these are questions that every Christian (at some point, or multiple points) has wrestled *with* & sought to work *through*.

& This is just one more section of scripture that should help you to realize that the word of God is always relevant. It’s never antiquated, outdated or old fashioned. Because, though there are cultural references in it, it’s not a book that speaks (ultimately) to culture. **Though there are political nuances mentioned, it’s not a book that deals w/politics. Though there are historical facts, scientific truths & archaeological places pointed out, the bible doesn’t really focus on any of those things.**

God's word addresses, speaks & makes its appeal to the human heart & the heart of man (regardless of time, place, political posture or a societies culture) remains the same.

We all share the same struggles, we have the same questions, we wrestle w/the same issues. Oh, we may phrase them a bit differently, but ultimately there is tremendous commonality shared by humanity.

Habakkuk was a lot like you are & I am. He had questions about what seemed to be injustice. Much like Asaph wrestled with (Ps 73, 74) & David dealt w/in the psalms. This, counter intuitive thought of, "Why does it seem like so much wickedness is thriving, unrighteousness is prospering & righteousness is having to take a backseat, it's being virtually ignored or intentionally gone against & there seems to be zero ramifications to it?" It's like, "Where are You God? & How long are You going to allow this to go on unchecked?" It's not like you're not praying, or you're not pleading w/God to restore righteousness, yet nothing seems to be happening... God simply seems – silent.

But truth be told; there may be more than one reason for that... Sometimes, God may be silent because there's unrepentant sin in our lives... David wrote, *"If I regard iniquity in my heart, The Lord will not hear."*² Isaiah wrote, *"Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, That it cannot save; Nor His ear heavy That it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden His face from you, So that He will not hear."*³ So, should we find ourselves in a place where God seems silent, we do well to echo the words found in the 139th Ps, *"Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; And see if there is any wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting."*⁴ If we're the reason for God's silence, then let's not be upset w/God, let's turn from our sin! Often times we like to point the finger at God when the problem is in us...

Sometimes, spiritual warfare is involved. As you read through the book of Daniel, you discover that Daniel's prayers were heard instantly, & God's response (via an angelic messenger) (Daniel 10) was dispatched immediately. But there were forces interfering demonically. Perhaps the answers you're waiting for are tied up in a spiritual battle, keep praying, keep seeking...

Sometimes we simply need to exercise patience. We live in the age of instant information. We broadcast our church service online & it's instantly available around the world. People all around the world can be instantly aware of exactly what we're doing.

² *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Ps 66:18]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

³ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Is 59:1-2]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁴ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Ps 139:23-24]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

& I know it can be a bit of a bummer for us, but God doesn't work like that. His timing doesn't always line up w/our desire. We want to hear from God immediately, sometimes we're called to wait patiently.

Habakkuk asks the question, "Why do You show me iniquity, & cause me to see trouble?" It's a good question. & I can tell you that it's not so you & I can sit back and scoff at those dirty rotten sinners... ☺ Or so that we can feel really good about ourselves & thank Him we're not like other men (Luke 18:9-14).

There are a # of reasons that God might show us iniquity & cause us to see trouble. # 1 (in no order of priority) so that we might be stirred to prayer. God wants to do a work, He wants to bring salvation. He's looking for someone who will stand in the gap & intercede on behalf of others. When you see someone bound in iniquity, it should stir you to pray for their deliverance, their salvation by grace through faith in J.C. #2 Sometimes we see the end of sin so that we might grow to hate it, rather than desire to indulge in it ourselves... When you see sin in full bloom in someone's life – the destruction & ruin that it's brought upon them, you see the wisdom in avoiding it rather than being tempted to entertain it. #3 It magnifies God's grace when He saves sinners. You can't out sin the grace of God. & When we see someone turn from sin & trust in Jesus, it glorifies God & magnifies His grace.

Sometimes God reveals to us our own iniquity. It has a way of working into us a deep humility. We have a sober realization that in us, that is, in our flesh there is no good thing that dwells. & It keeps us drawing near to the cross of Christ. – We might add that when we see the depths of our own depravity it causes us to value salvation (the sacrifice of Jesus) all the more... We could probably come up w/more, but there are a # of reasons God might show us iniquity, cause us to see trouble, oppression & strife.

But Habakkuk's question is, "Why isn't God doing anything about it?" He's seeing this escalation in degradation... & nothing is being done about it.

In Vs 4 he says, "The law is powerless, justice is paralyzed, & the righteous have become the pawns of the wicked..." The justice system is broken... it's not working. People don't respect the law... (Again, sounds like where we live, doesn't it?) (In Vs 5 God responds)

Vs 5-6

Remember when I told you that tough questions sometimes receive tough answers? God essentially tells Habakkuk, "You're accusing Me of indifference, of inactivity, of sitting by idly.

The fact is, I haven't overlooked what's happening, I very much have a plan to deal w/this issue specifically, but if I tell you what it is, you won't believe Me."

& He tells Habakkuk that his problem is that he's been myopic (tunnel vision, narrow) in his perspective. He's looking at the problem nationally, but God is working His solution *globally*. He says, "You've got to broaden your perspective Habakkuk. Look among *the nations* & watch – I'm going to blow your mind!" "I'm raising up a *nation* that will be *My instrument of judgment against Judah...*" Often times when we hear the phrase, "You're not going to believe this!" We think in terms of "Too good to be true." But when God uses it *here* it's in terms of "Too *bad* to be true." "I'm going to judge Judah by the brutality of Babylon." (Or the Chaldeans).

But allow me to rewind for just a minute here & expound a bit upon an interesting sideline kind of principle (or point). Habakkuk's question (back in Vs 2) was, "How long?" & We to, often wonder, "How long will God allow the wicked to prosper?" In our minds 1 day, is 1 day too long. **Yet we forget that God is gracious & merciful, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. But too often people confuse the patience of God w/the approval of God or perhaps a lack of concern w/God. "God doesn't immediately strike me dead, so I guess He's either ok w/it, or He isn't paying attention to it."** So rather than see the window of grace as an opportunity to repent, they ramp up their pursuit of sin to the next level... Solomon said it like this, "***Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.***"⁵

However, the Bible teaches us an interesting truth... That there is, (let's call it) a, "sin meter" (if you will) that God has, that has a cap on it (a limit to it). & When it reaches the top, God will pour out His wrath, unleash His judgment & deal w/that person or that people. **Scripture actually refers to it as "the cup of the wine of the wrath (or indignation) of God."** & Somehow, & in some way (metaphorically or otherwise) the sins of the nations are filling up that cup, & when that people's sin reaches the brim, God will press it to their lips & make them drink of the ramifications of their iniquities down to the dregs. (Jer 25:15, Rev 14:10, 16:19)

The mystery is, "How long does it take to fill the cup?" I have no idea. We discover in the book of Genesis, God tells Ab that it would be 400 yrs that his descendants would be enslaved (in Egypt) because the iniquity of the Amorites had not yet been complete...

⁵ [The New King James Version](#). (1982). [Ec 8:11]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Again, we see things from a linear perspective, God is moving from an eternal perspective. – Something else I find interesting is how people wonder why God doesn't judge the wicked, but then when He annihilates them, people call Him cruel & unloving... So there's a cry for God to defend the innocent, & when He destroys the wicked, people call Him cruel... Interesting isn't it? People can spin anything to justify their position.

I say all that to say this: We wonder, "how long"? But there are generally more things at work than what seemingly lies at the surface. #1 God is gracious, giving people time to repent (Judah). #2 Meanwhile they're filling up the wine cup of His wrath & judgment is coming (Babylon).

& God was saying, "Habakkuk, this is going to seem insane to you, you're not going to get it." That God would use a godless, barbaric nation to punish & bring correction to the nation of Judah, was unconscionable to Habakkuk. His distress deepened into a profound dilemma! How could God use people *more wicked* than Judah to punish them?

That doesn't seem fair. Imagine crying out to God over the sins of Joplin MO, & God says, "I see it, I'm going to deal with it, I'm raising up another city to come & punish Joplin for its sins... Las Vegas." You'd be like, "Wait, what!? The cure sounds worse than the disease!" – The Babylonians (historically) were a ruthless, pagan, brutal people... Look at Vs 7.

Vs 7-11

Of course, the ruler in view being Nebuchadnezzar... God says, "They're bitter, hasty, marching through the earth conquering & controlling places that aren't theirs. & I'm bringing them your way... They're terrible & dreadful, ravenous & swift, they come for violence sweeping across the nations, scoffing at kings, scoring princes. They deride (or mock) every stronghold & seize it & give the credit to their gods..."

Now; put yourself in Habakkuk's sandals for a second. How are you going to handle this information? Like I said, the cure seems worse than the disease! He's like, "Listen God, when I was praying for our nation, I was thinking more along the lines of a spiritual awakening, a renewal & revival!" But what God is basically telling him is that the wine cup of His wrath was full, & it was time for Judah to drink it down to the dregs..."

Habakkuk continues to try & show God the perceived inconsistencies of using a nation even worse than them to punish them... It didn't seem right to him that a wicked, merciless, idolatrous nation would be used of God to punish His own people.

Vs 12-17

They worship their own military might, sacrifice to their means of victory.

Habakkuk is trying to wrap his mind around it (Vs 12). He knew that Babylon could easily (militarily) erase Judah off the map. But he also remembers God's covenant w/His people (Israel), that it's everlasting. "We shall not die." "I know You won't let them eradicate us, you've appointed them for judgment, for correction. But I still don't get it (Vs 13).

Now; let's not be confused when he says that God can't behold evil or look on wickedness. God sees everything that's going on. The idea is that of looking on w/approval. He doesn't condone evil or wickedness. That's his whole dilemma, Judah may be acting wickedly, but Babylon is WAY MORE wicked! Why raise up Babylon to bring down Judah?

Imagine crying out over the state of the church in America & God responding by saying, "I'm going to fix it through an enemy invasion of America." We'd be prone to object wouldn't we? That sounds worse than the initial problem!

Now; to be fair, God had tried other ways. He'd tried wars (resulting in military defeat), natural calamities (droughts/plagues), the preaching of prophets... The people wouldn't listen. Rather than repent, they hardened themselves against God & looked to the false gods of the nations around them. God was done w/it & now He was dealing w/it.

Again, God can take the tough questions. Sometimes (however) we struggle w/the tough answers. Don't be afraid to take your questions to the Lord (that's where you *should* take them). Maybe *your* question is, "God, can You *really* save me? Can You *really* forgive me & wash away my sin?" Call to Him & He will answer you, & show you great & mighty things which you do not know.

Vs 2:1

This is where we'll leave Habakkuk today. Waiting, watching, wondering. He knew that he'd sort of mouthed off to God a bit & so he set himself to receive a rebuke, a correction of sorts ☺.

& We commend him for this. His struggle was real, but his attitude was right. He was willing to wait on God to answer him. He doesn't know *when* God will answer, but he's willing to wait for it.

We should also note the phrase, "When I am corrected." He wasn't questioning God because he thought *God* was wrong. He was questioning because he knew that *he* was wrong & needed to see appropriately & understand correctly. He's essentially saying, "God, I don't understand what You're doing, but I know that in everything You do, You are righteous. Please speak to me & correct me here."

He knew that if he couldn't connect the dots or do the math, the problem wasn't on *God's* end; it was on his.

Might I say we would do well to adopt this mentality. Sometimes we run across seeming complexities or what our minds perceive as irreconcilable positions scripturally. When that happens, we need to realize, the problem isn't on *God's* end, it's not that He's contradicted Himself, or has put forth some irreconcilable point. The problem lies in our ability to comprehend, or the fact that we haven't put in the work to search it out. We like to blame the infinite, unlimited *God*. More accurately, the problem lies in our limited, finite, sin tainted mind/heart.

Seek the Lord, wait *on* the Lord, don't be afraid of silence, remain teachable. Habakkuk didn't become an atheist, or agnostic because he couldn't connect the dots. He realized the breakdown was on his end. So he *sought* the Lord & purposed to wait patiently *upon* the Lord to clear the fog & bring him through his season of struggle.

Like David wrote, *I waited patiently for the Lord; And He inclined to me, And heard my cry. He also brought me up out of a horrible pit, Out of the miry clay, And set my feet upon a rock, And established my steps.*"⁶

If you're in a season of struggle, seek the Lord. He'll meet you, minister to you, & strengthen you. You will grow & He will be glorified. You wait, you watch & you'll see.

Prayer Points:

God we thank You for the timeliness of Your word. Help us in our seasons of doubt or confusion. Strengthen us to trust in You. God You are good & Your mercy endures forever. Your ways aren't our ways, we get tunnel vision, You see the big picture. So we trust in You.

God loves you, Jesus laid down His life for you. You can receive Him even now & be made new. For whoever calls upon the name of the Lord, shall be saved.