

## Wrestling with God

Habakkuk 1:12-2:20

This is Habakkuk's SECOND complaint. The first one was two-fold: God, why are you ignoring me, and God why are you allowing all this horrible violence to go on amongst your covenantal people. And God's response to Habakkuk was, I am NOT ignoring you...and get ready to receive my judgment. Those ruthless Babylonians who are bent on destroying all things in their way...I'm sending them to you. So now, in 1:12 thru 2:20 what we have is Habakkuk's RESPONSE to God's response to his first complaint. So now he knows, "*Hey...God does listen!*" But now it's "*God, I don't like your plan.*"

**READ TEXT:** Habakkuk 1:12-2:20

Habakkuk's second complaint is kind of emotionally all over the place. He proclaims the vast unendingness of God, he calls him MY God, MY Holy One who never dies...as well as his Rock. And he acknowledges God's right and to have these Babylonians deliver his judgment...and he "gets" it. He's quite OK with God being in control of the whole thing...but he's not OK with it too. God's plan doesn't sit well nor does it make any sense to have a worse people deliver God's judgment.

For Habakkuk, this simply "isn't fair."

He says that God's eyes are too pure to look at evil and he cannot tolerate wrongdoing. "*So yes God, I get it. We were wrong, we did evil, and you will deal with evil because that's what you do – but how can you allow evil to judge evil? How can evil punish evil? God, it's simply not fair!*"

And Habakkuk goes into this beautiful imagery that gives his complaint weight. He says it's unfair that God has made the people so populous that they are simply easy to pick off. He likens it to that of fish. On one hand this imagery cries the "unfairness" of God in how he made people so numerous...but then it also cries of the brutality of the very judgment people in how they act as well as their motivation AND THUS GOD'S motivation in using them (so it's three-fold). Habakkuk says that the people are so numerous, so clustered together and so pathetically weak like fish that these fisherman don't even need bait. Simple hooks, simple dragnets, simply buckets will do the trick. They look over the side of their boat and gather in other nations for their taking – dump their haul in and proceed to do it again. It's too easy. We, today, have a saying for this, "It's like shooting fish in a barrel."

It's ridiculously easy!

*“But God, if that wasn’t enough, if it wasn’t already too easy what about the fact that these people, these Babylonians, are wicked!”* And THIS is where his complaint becomes a theological struggle for him. The first complaint was the “unfairness” and now we have the “this doesn’t make sense to me” struggle for the prophet.

*“God, you are holy and you will never die. You have ordained these ravenous unholy people to punish because your eyes are too pure to look upon evil and you simply cannot tolerate sin and hatred and anger... and while I get that...how does that make it OK for you to use those very things to take us out? It not only doesn’t make sense to me but it’s not fair! These people will praise and worship what THEY do – not what YOU do. They don’t care about you, they only care about themselves. They worship that which their hands produce and what their eyes can see. They worship their actions, their battles, as well as that which they steal from others.*

*And how long will this last Lord? Nothing is stopping them, nothing HAS stopped them. You are holy and good and righteous...and yet you are allowing all of this to take place!?*

*Will you stop them as you are stopping us? Punish them as you are punishing us?”*

Habakkuk is in a theological struggle. Everything he knows about God is being questioned. His heart and his mind are not reconciling things at all. His understanding of who God is and what he has done in the past is stuck on one side of a canyon and his current reality is on the other – and there is no bridge that he can see that will allow him to reconcile the two into one. And so in response to all of this...in verse 2:1 he proclaims that he will stand here, at his watch, and wait. At the very outskirts of the city, on the very front line of defense, here Habakkuk will watch and wait for God. Either by word from God or galloping leopard-like horses with Babylonian cavalry. Either way...he knows he will hear God’s answer because he personally cannot think of what that answer will be. So the only logical thing is to wait on the Lord.

I think many of us have wrestled with this “unfairness” of God feeling. I think many of us look at our lives, look at events that have taken place or that we currently are in and it just doesn’t make sense. Not only does it not make sense but theologically it doesn’t work with what we know about God and his love, mercy, justice, compassion, and hope. This is not what we know of Christ, or what the Holy Spirit is doing! We read texts like **Prov 3:5-6** and find comfort in the knowledge that we put our trust in the Lord and lean upon him and not ourselves and that he will make our paths straight – but those words are hard to swallow when divorce happens, infidelity takes place or abuse plagues the home. Easy to say when someone else is struggling...harder when it’s you.

And the question becomes, “Is it OK to struggle and cry ‘Not fair!’ to God?” when it seems “not fair” to you?

It's clear that Habakkuk struggles...but there's a peace here that we cannot overlook. Even though Habakkuk doesn't get it...what he does get, what he does know, what he does affirm are those very truths he started his complaint with. And that's where we too must begin when we struggle with God's working in our lives. We need to remember that our understanding of God does not precede faith. Faith precedes understanding – and ALWAYS in that order. Our trust and hope in God comes first – and it is in that order that we are tethered and anchored to hope in...especially when things simply are not fair for us. And this is why Habakkuk stands, watches, and waits. He has faith in God. He knows God will respond – his faith is still there and not wavering or crashing to the ground simply because he doesn't get it.

God's response was the affirmation this man of God needed. It was a response that doesn't necessarily give him the theological peace he was specifically looking for, but it's the peace he needed to be reminded of. That God doesn't sit back idly. God doesn't allow bad people to thrive. And so God gives Habakkuk these 5 “woes” that speak of the atrocities the Babylonians live by and do – and wonderful challenges for you and I to remember IN OUR WALK as well.

The **first woe** comes to us in verses 6-8 and speak of how they accrue wealth and thrive off their conquest and their enemies. They build more and more and treat human life as if it means nothing. Life isn't cheap. Life isn't meaningless. Life isn't to be abused and taken over or tossed aside. When you treat others this way, when you treat their life poorly, when you harm others and become more and build more because of what you have taken...woe to you because God will deal with you in the very way YOU have dealt with others.

Verses 9-11 have our **second woe** which is very similar to the first. You hurt all these people, do all these things and then you build yourself up high so that you cannot be touched. You are NOT impregnable. And in fact this house you built, that was built on violence and exploitation...will crumble easily. There is nothing secure about what you have created. And the fact that you try to protect YOURSELF and do nothing to protect others? Woe to you because God will deal with you in the way YOU have dealt with others.

Verses 12-14 are our **third woe**. And this woe steps aside a bit and declares that those who take other cities to war and attempt to expand their kingdom and reign via violence, harm, killings, and all other things...they will not last. Your kingdom will rise, your kingdom will fall. Your kingdom will expand and then your kingdom will collapse. There is only one kingdom that is forever and ever – and that's the kingdom of God.

We live in *his* world, *his* kingdom, *his* reign. Kings of this earth come and go, we've seen it throughout history, throughout time. Woe to you who thinks that you can outlast your time on this earth, cheat death, take over more and more nations and attempting to expand your touch and

your throne. Only the Lord's reign is over all – and when it is time the earth shall declare HIS knowledge and his alone. So “woe to you” who seek self, seek more than you need, and do so with bloodshed, harm, and hatred.

The **fourth woe** comes to us in verses 15-17 doesn't do so much about what you take, but how you treat others and make them feel about themselves. It's about abusing others, stripping them naked and exposing them to humiliation and shame. At some point when you are so degraded and have nothing left to fight for...you give in. You quit fighting, you quit trying to stand up to do what's right. You're humiliated, weak, and have zero honor left. Woe to you who harm others. Woe to you who remove all honor, break down and disrespect someone to the point where they cannot hold their head high, speak with and for hope, and simply fall to you because you're bigger and push your weight around. Woe to you who do not show compassion, bring hope, give hope, and lift up the weak.

Our **fifth** and last **woe**, verses 18-20, declares that those who worship idols and take on material worship...will be dealt with. It's a theme and topic that is not new, almost all the prophets speak of this and was extremely prevalent in the day. God asks this rhetorical question of how valuable is this man-made thing? *“How can something you made, with your hands, give you wisdom and council? How can you trust something that was made? And here you cry to this piece of wood, “Take breath! Come to life!” and yet here it remains – lifeless.”* Woe to you who worship anything but me. Woe to you who put your trust in things not living and yet you worship it anyway.

An image, that might come to mind, is Elijah and the Baal prophets battle from **1 Kings 18:27** where Elijah is egging the prophets of Baal on by asking them, “Maybe he's asleep and needs to be awakened?” Which actually WAS the belief of Baal – that he was so “human” that he had to rest and be aroused from slumber (he also had to eat and go to the restroom).

This, this response from God, was the theological answer Habakkuk needed. This is the God he knows, declares, and was wanting to hear from. And while it didn't make sense why God was STILL going to use these horrible ungodly, unrighteous, and vicious people to carry out his judgment, even knowing that God knows how bad they are...knowing that God was still working outside of his own understanding and dealing with things beyond what he could see was what he needed to hear.

He needed to be reminded that God was in control – and that he wasn't someone else that the prophet thought he was. God was, and is, the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. This answer from God became the bridge to his theological chasm and understanding of God that allowed him cross the bridge from where he was and where God stood.

I want to draw us back to verse 2:4b: “the righteous will live by faith.” That sums up all of it. Habakkuk didn’t know what God was doing, struggled to understand what God was doing because none of it made sense – but his faith was in the God of covenants, the God of justice, righteousness, and mercy. The God of his ancestors and of hope and goodness. Who will not allow his children to ultimately be wiped out. He didn’t know why God was doing it, it made zero sense in every way...it rattled him quite a bit – but his faith was still securely *in* God. The unrighteous, those like the Babylonians, will die by their own hands, by their love of self and self-worth and work. But the righteous, the faithful, will live by and *in* their faith.

This is God’s ultimate proclamation. He doesn’t expect you to understand, but nor does he say “*you cannot question what I am doing.*” But what he does say is have faith in me. Because to have faith in God is to know God – even when we don’t get God. To have “faith in God” is to have hope in God even when we struggle *in* that hope. Faith, hope, trust – they can be weary...they can be confusing...but don’t allow your feelings of not-understanding God’s workings to be placed *on God* and create him into something he is not. Those are your feelings, your confusions, your misunderstandings. God isn’t confused, God isn’t shaken, God isn’t rattled or wishy-washy either.

We have hope and faith in a God who works outside of our understandings and yet is doing something now with our misunderstandings, confusions, and ignorance. We see it when we struggle with accepting the fact that we have been forgiven, we struggle with accepting the fact that God’s grace, as given to us by Jesus Christ, is more complicated and yet simpler than our minds can comprehend...and we struggle with accepting the fact that God calls, summons in, predestines, and sets aside some but not others. So much of this life doesn’t make sense to us, so much of what we see and do doesn’t make sense to us...but what does? God’s love. God’s forgiveness. God’s just mercy and judgment. It makes sense to us to know that for God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life (**John 3:16**). Guess what...Jesus doesn’t say that only life is given to those that never question, never are unsure, never are confused – that only those people are given life! If that were the case...none of us would receive life. Our comfort is in the fact that God, that Christ IS our Rock and solid foundation. That the one who brings judgment is the one who secures as well.

So wrestle with God. Bring to him your confusions and unknowns. Declare to him that it simply doesn’t make sense – but remember that you are going to him...because he is who he is and you declare it with every fiber of your being. Allow your confusions to wander if need be – but secure yourself to the Rock and foundation of all things. Hold to the everlasting and Holy One.

Let’s pray.