

## A Second Complaint

Habakkuk 1:12 - 2:1

God was right! Habakkuk couldn't believe what God was going to do, he wouldn't believe it even if a witness had come back from the future to tell him. God was going to take a nation whom he himself described as ruthless and impetuous, and use that nation to carry out his own righteous judgment upon the nation of Judah.

That's God's answer to Habakkuk's complaint. But now Habakkuk has a bigger problem. He's got a more difficult question for God now. It's one thing to cry out to God for justice only to hear silence in return. But it's far more troublesome for the prophet to hear from God how that justice will actually be accomplished. God's perfect and holy justice will be enacted by a terribly sinful and wicked nation, a nation more sinful than Israel herself.

Oh, how can that be?

### I. HOW CAN A HOLY GOD CARRY OUT HIS PURPOSE BY MAKING USE OF A WICKED NATION?

How can nation of unbelieving infidels bring God's judgment upon the nation of God's own people?

It's a pretty perplexing problem, to say the least.

God's answer had shocked the prophet, for Habakkuk knew what it meant. It meant that God would be silent while a wicked nation conquered another nation more righteous than themselves.

v.13b

How can that be, for God is holy. He is eternally unchanging. And Habakkuk properly understood that. He knew that,

A. God's character is one of eternal holiness.

These reflections upon God's character were his first recorded thoughts after hearing God's amazing announcement of judgment upon Israel.

v.12

Habakkuk demonstrates a good understanding of God in that verse. God is from everlasting, eternally existing, from the past before the creation of the world, to the future after the final judgment has been accomplished. God is unchanging is his eternity.

That understanding of God is adequately expressed by the definition of God written in our Shorter Catechism, Q 4. "God is a spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth." God is infinite, eternal and unchangeable in all his attributes! Think about that. Habakkuk did.

Habakkuk knew, better than most people today, that God is eternally holy. And unchangeably holy.

So he calls God, "my holy one." He knows that he has a personal relationship with God.

He knows that God's unchanging holiness is the only source of life, even eternal life. He is able to speak about that life which the nation of Israel had in God.

v.12a

But Babylon didn't know any of those things. Babylon didn't understand anything about God's character of eternal holiness. So Habakkuk's dilemma was obvious,  
v.12b "O Lord, you have appointed them to execute judgment. O Rock, you have marked them for correction."

That could be spoken as a question too amazing to be believed. "You have appointed THEM to execute judgment? You have ordained THEM?"

There is the obvious implication of the word "why." Or the word "how."

"HOW could you do that, My God, my Holy One?"

"Why would you allow that, My God, my Holy One?"

This is a serious dilemma for the prophet, a serious problem. The God whom he serves is a holy God, and Habakkuk knows that,

B. God's holiness means that he cannot tolerate sin.  
v.13a

And so, the question which the prophet asks in anguish,  
v.13b "Why..."

This dilemma wouldn't be as deep for most people today, because most people don't fully understand or comprehend God's absolute hatred of sin. Most of us take our sins lightly, failing to come to grips with just how offensive every single sin is in the presence of a holy God.

Habakkuk is perfectly correct when he says about God, "You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, And cannot look on wickedness."

We see a tremendously profound demonstration of God's absolute separation from all that is sinful when he called Moses to come up upon Mt. Sinai to receive the ten commandments.

Exod. 19:9 "And the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, I come to you in the thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with you, and believe you forever." So Moses told the words of the people to the LORD. 10 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their clothes. 11 "And let them be ready for the third day. For on the third day the LORD will come down upon Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. 12 "You shall set bounds for the people all around, saying, 'Take heed to yourselves that you do not go up to the mountain or touch its base. Whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death. 13 'Not a hand shall touch him, but he shall surely be stoned or shot with an arrow; whether man or beast, he shall not live.' When the trumpet sounds long, they shall come near the mountain." 14 So Moses went down from the mountain to the people and sanctified the people, and they washed their clothes. 15 And he said to the people, "Be ready for the third day; do not come near your wives." 16 Then it came to pass on the third day, in the morning, that there were thunderings and lightnings, and a thick cloud on the mountain; and the sound of the trumpet was very loud, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled. 17 And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. 18 Now Mount Sinai was completely in smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire. Its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked greatly. 19 And when the blast of the trumpet sounded long and became louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him by voice. 20 Then the LORD came down upon Mount Sinai, on the top of the mountain. And the

LORD called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up. 21 And the LORD said to Moses, "Go down and warn the people, lest they break through to gaze at the LORD, and many of them perish. 22 "Also let the priests who come near the LORD consecrate themselves, lest the LORD break out against them." 23 But Moses said to the LORD, "The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai; for You warned us, saying, 'Set bounds around the mountain and consecrate it.'" 24 Then the LORD said to him, "Away! Get down and then come up, you and Aaron with you. But do not let the priests and the people break through to come up to the LORD, lest He break out against them." 25 So Moses went down to the people and spoke to them."

God told Moses to put limits around the mountain, to keep the people off. For their own safety and protection, for a sinful creature cannot see the sight of God and survive. God is so holy, so infinitely, eternally, and unchangeably holy, that no one, no sinful creature, can see God and live.

How horribly we forget that in our day. We hear things to excuse sin, like, "God will understand." "I know I shouldn't do this. I know he wouldn't want me to do this, but God will understand."

What a perverted sense of God's holiness!

Or we excuse sin by saying, "I just didn't have any other choice." Or, "I couldn't help it."

We redefine sin. We call it sickness, to be treated not repented of. We rationalize it--making up excuses. We make it relative--changing with the ever changing standards of our society. We soften it up, we dress it up in nice clothes.

And we live in. All because of a defective understanding of God's holiness. I believe that the main reason why we treat sin so casually in our day is because we treat the holiness of God so casually.

And the depth of Habakkuk's struggle should be a challenging reminder to us to take God's holiness seriously, and therefore to take sin seriously.

Ps. 24:3 "Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? Or who may stand in His holy place? 4 He who has clean hands and a pure heart, Who has not lifted up his soul to an idol, Nor sworn deceitfully. 5 He shall receive blessing from the LORD, And righteousness from the God of his salvation."

Jesus would say that,

Matt. 5:8 "Blessed are the pure in heart, For they shall see God."

And the book of Hebrews warns us,

Hebr. 12:14 "Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord."

So Habakkuk's understanding of God is absolutely correct. God's holiness means that he cannot tolerate or approve of sin.

For that reason, the prophet believes that his complaint is valid and legitimate.

v.13b

Habakkuk has quite a dilemma. How can a holy God carry out his purpose by making use of a wicked nation?

There is a corollary to that question, a very intimately connected question that is part of this second complaint Habakkuk lodges with God. The first part of the complaint has to do with God's nature, his holiness. The second part of the complaint has more to do with the nation of Babylon itself.

I will phrase the question this way:

## II. HOW CAN A HOLY GOD ALLOW A WICKED NATION TO SUCCEED AND PROSPER?

Habakkuk describes the process he expects to see as a fulfillment of God's answer to his first complaint. He describes the judgment Babylon will bring upon Judah, at least from his own perspective.

v.14-16

Then the statement of his dilemma,  
v.17

"Will he get away with it?"

"Will he be able to keep on destroying nations without mercy?"

"Will he be able to act sinfully and not pay for his sins?"

All of those questions are very real for the prophet. Very significant and meaningful. Very troubling.

It seems to Habakkuk that the Lord will be violating his own promises, something the prophet is trained to believe won't happen.

If God's promises are true, how can a wicked nation prosper?

Habakkuk knew those promises.

Ps. 34:15 "The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, And His ears are open to their cry. 16 The face of the LORD is against those who do evil, To cut off the remembrance of them from the earth. 17 The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears, And delivers them out of all their troubles."

Ps. 9:3 "When my enemies turn back, They shall fall and perish at Your presence. 4 For You have maintained my right and my cause; You sat on the throne judging in righteousness. 5 You have rebuked the nations, You have destroyed the wicked; You have blotted out their name forever and ever. 6 O enemy, destructions are finished forever! And you have destroyed cities; Even their memory has perished. 7 But the LORD shall endure forever; He has prepared His throne for judgment. 8 He shall judge the world in righteousness, And He shall administer judgment for the peoples in uprightness. 9 The LORD also will be a refuge for the oppressed, A refuge in times of trouble. 10 And those who know Your name will put their trust in You; For You, LORD, have not forsaken those who seek You."

Ps. 1:1 "Blessed is the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful; 2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night. 3 He shall be like a tree Planted by the rivers of water, That brings forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also shall not wither; And whatever he does shall prosper. 4 The ungodly are not so, But are like the chaff which the wind drives away. 5 Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, Nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. 6 For the LORD knows the way of the righteous, But the way of the ungodly shall perish."

This is a very real problem in the mind of the prophet, for he knows that,

A. Wicked nations rejoice in their cruelty to others.

v.14-15

Maybe Judah will get what she deserves, but is that a reason for allowing the wicked to glory in their cruelty.

Habakkuk sees Babylon as a fisherman, dragging the waters with his huge net. He sees the fisherman snaring all the fish with their big hooks, rejoicing in their great catch.

Now, I've never been much of a fisherman. In fact, in all my life, I've caught one fish. It just doesn't seem very appealing and enjoyable to me. But for many people, fishing is just the opposite, the one activity above all others that brings an enjoyable delight.

And fisherman measure their delight, don't they? By the size of the fish, and by the number of the fish.

With God's answer that we studied last week, Habakkuk sees the nation of Babylon like the delighted fisherman who has just won the biggest tourney of the year.

And the poor nations, Judah included, are just as helpless as those fish caught in the dragnet.

v.14-15

Certainly, such rejoicing over the conquest of other nations is wicked cruelty. How can a holy God allow such a thing?

But, it gets even worse. Habakkuk adds even more strength to his complaint, more defense for his argument.

v.16

Not only do they rejoice in their cruelty, but,

B. Wicked men worship the false god of their own prosperity.

According to Habakkuk's complaint, God has set up the situation where Babylon is actually going to worship their own strength, strength which God is allowing them to use against Israel.

How can God use a nation that worship it's own strength?

The Babylonians will offer a sacrifice to their own nets--the symbol of their army and dominating military might. They will actually be led to worship themselves!

They will burn incense, the fragrance of worship God desires for himself, they will burn that incense to their own glory.

And with good reason, humanly speaking.

v.16b "Because by them their share is sumptuous And their food plentiful."

He lives in luxury. Literally, his catch is fat, their food was the fat portion, which meant for the Hebrews that it was the best portion for eating. You have to disregard our contemporary understanding of nutrition to get the meaning of that verse! Babylon would have nothing but the best to eat and to enjoy.

Of course they would worship their nets, the nets that had enabled them to live in such luxury.

The issue Habakkuk raises is a common one. How can God allow the wicked to prosper?

It is the same dilemma expressed by the psalmist Asaph in,

Ps. 73:1 "Truly God is good to Israel, To such as are pure in heart. 2 But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled; My steps had nearly slipped. 3 For I was envious of the boastful, When I saw the prosperity of the wicked. 4 For there are no pangs in their death, But their strength is firm. 5 They are not in trouble as other men, Nor are they plagued like other men. 6 Therefore pride serves as their necklace; Violence covers them like a garment. 7 Their eyes bulge with abundance; They have more than heart could wish. 8 They scoff and speak wickedly concerning oppression; They speak loftily. 9 They set their mouth against the heavens, And their tongue walks through the earth. 10 Therefore his people return here, And waters of a full cup are drained by them. 11 And they say, "How does God know? And is there knowledge in the Most High?" 12 Behold, these are the ungodly, Who are always at ease; They increase in riches."

And the psalmist solution at this point was an unhappy one.

v.13 "Surely I have cleansed my heart in vain, And washed my hands in innocence. 14 For all day long I have been plagued, And chastened every morning. 15 If I had said, "I will speak thus," Behold, I would have been untrue to the generation of Your children."

There are times, I expect, when you consider the same dilemma. That unbeliever, that non-Christian over there is living for his own glory and worshiping his own strength, and he's doing pretty well. And I'm struggling sometimes just to get by. That could refer to your financial situation, it could refer to your satisfaction at work or your home and family life. It could refer to your health, or any number of things.

The dilemma is, how can a holy God, by his own sovereign control and providential governing of everything that happens, how can he allow the wicked to prosper?

Next time, God's answer. But tonight, let's finish by seeing how Habakkuk ended his complaint, and how we must end all such inquiries of God.

2:1

The prophet is,

### III. WAITING HUMBLY FOR AN ANSWER.

As I said last week, this is the verse that demonstrates Habakkuk's faith. This is the verse that demonstrates the appropriateness of his questions and his complaints. This is what demonstrates how we are to inquire into God's ways.

A. We must always be eager and alert to receive God's answers.

In other words, you can't go to God and tell him your answers. You can't make your case before God and then tell him what he has to do. You can't demand that God agree with you. You can't box God in a corner and expect to win the argument by the sheer force of your own logic or reason.

You must present your case, then be alert to receive God's answer.

I might admit personally, as we all likely have to admit, that I don't always do that. Maybe, we don't do it very much at all.

It can become easy for us to become angry at God, or at the very least confused to the point of frustration. Maybe even

bitterness. We don't know what God's doing, only that it's difficult for us to go through.

And we end up justifying ourselves. Or we end up ignoring God by giving in to despair or depression.

Habakkuk was waiting. Standing at his watch. Stationing himself upon his ramparts. Waiting for God to speak.

And as he waited, there was the willingness to be rebuked and corrected. The end of verse one says, quite literally, that he is waiting to see "how I can reply upon my rebuke." The prophet is waiting to be corrected. Only then will he really be able to give an answer to God. Only after God has spoken to him and rebuked him.

There is, in Habakkuk, a humble and submissive spirit, a readiness to hear and accept God's answers, even if they come as a rebuke. That readiness to accept God's answer is called submission.

And in filing these complaints against God, that is his worthy example for us.

B. We must always be humble and submissive to receive God's answers.

There is no place for pride in God's presence. There is no place for arrogance. There is no place for one who thinks he knows and understands everything.

Has God ever done something in your life that you just didn't understand? Are there circumstances in your life that you just can't explain? Especially difficult, even tragic, circumstances?

Do you ever find yourself wondering what God is doing, or why he's doing it?

Do you ever find yourself questioning what God is doing? What is it in your life that really discourages you? What are the circumstances of your life that cause you trouble, that make you wonder why God is doing and why?

Maybe those circumstances make you angry at God, or at the church, or at other people. Maybe those circumstances just wear you down with discouragement.

Whatever your particular circumstances, don't fret and worry. Don't vent your anger or cherish any root of bitterness. Don't give in to despondency and despair. Don't let yourself walk down the path to grumbling by developing a complaining spirit.

Instead, like Habakkuk, file your complaint with God, and wait humbly for his answer.

Such humility requires great faith, the faith to believe that God "works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will." (Eph.1:11)

Such humility requires the faith to sing the words will sing shortly, "whatever my God ordains is right, his holy will abideth. I will be still whatever he does, and follow where he guideth. He is my God, though dark my road, he holds me that I shall not fall. Wherefore to him I leave it all."

Whatever my God ordains is right. Believe that! Believe that with all your heart, no matter what your circumstances. Whatever God ordains is right. Then, with that faith, ask God what he is doing, and wait for his answer.