

How Long, O LORD?
Text: Habakkuk 1:1-2:1
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TEXT

Habakkuk 1:1-2:1

1:1 The oracle that Habakkuk the prophet saw.

1:2 O LORD, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not hear? Or cry to you "Violence!" and you will not save?

1:3 Why do you make me see iniquity, and why do you idly look at wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise.

1:4 So the law is paralyzed, and justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous; so justice goes forth perverted.

1:5 "Look among the nations, and see; wonder and be astounded. For I am doing a work in your days that you would not believe if told.

1:6 For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, who march through the breadth of the earth, to seize dwellings not their own.

1:7 They are dreaded and fearsome; their justice and dignity go forth from themselves.

1:8 Their horses are swifter than leopards, more fierce than the evening wolves; their horsemen press proudly on. Their horsemen come from afar; they fly like an eagle swift to devour.

1:9 They all come for violence, all their faces forward. They gather captives like sand.

1:10 At kings they scoff, and at rulers they laugh. They laugh at every fortress, for they pile up earth and take it.

1:11 Then they sweep by like the wind and go on, guilty men, whose own might is their god!"

1:12 Are you not from everlasting, O LORD my God, my Holy One? We shall not die. O LORD, you have ordained them as a judgment, and you, O Rock, have established them for reproof.

1:13 You who are of purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong, why do you idly look at traitors and remain silent when the wicked swallows up the man more righteous than he?

1:14 You make mankind like the fish of the sea, like crawling things that have no ruler.

1:15 He brings all of them up with a hook; he drags them out with his net; he gathers them in his dragnet; so he rejoices and is glad.

1:16 Therefore he sacrifices to his net and makes offerings to his dragnet; for by them he lives in luxury, and his food is rich.

1:17 Is he then to keep on emptying his net and mercilessly killing nations forever?

2:1 I will take my stand at my watchpost and station myself on the tower, and look out to see what he will say to me, and what I will answer concerning my complaint.

INTRODUCTION (Background & 1:1)

Habakkuk (הַבְּקֻיָּה): “Embrace”

He is a prophet-musician in Temple service.

- We see that he is a prophet by the oracle which the LORD gives him
- We see that he is a musician by his song response in Chapter 3
 - o Use of Selah – Psalmic device for pause/consideration
 - o For the director of music – 3:19
 - o He could play a stringed instrument – 3:19

Written around 605-600 BC (Andersen 27). The people of the Northern Kingdom Israel had been taken into captivity in 722 BC by the Assyrian Empire as a result of their wickedness (see Hosea’s ministry as an illustration for Israel’s wickedness). The people of the Southern Kingdom Judah were still free, though they were about to be carried off into exile by the Babylonian Empire in 586 BC because of their wickedness.

Habakkuk did his ministry at around the same time as Jeremiah. The prophets dealt with a very stiffnecked people. They had just revived the Book of the Law under Josiah’s reign in 622 BC, and yet the people were still worshipping their idols (mostly Ba’al) in place of the LORD who delivered them from Egypt.

The LORD constantly called His people as a husband to an unfaithful wife, crying out for their return and faithful devotion to Him and His covenant with them.

Illustration: Imagine having a beloved pet. You take care of it, and it depends on you. You love your pet dearly, and yet this pet keeps running away from you. If you were a harsh master, it would be understandable that your pet would want to stray. However, in this instance, the LORD is the loving caregiver, and the people of Judah kept fleeing from His presence.

The purpose behind the oracles of the Prophets was commonly to turn the LORD’s people back to Him (cf. Bruckner 219). The people needed to repent, and if they turned back to Him, the LORD would bless them. If not, the LORD would have to take due action in judgment against their wickedness and neglect. The people could either follow their covenant with the LORD and be blessed, or they could neglect Him and undergo chastisement.

The LORD wanted to bless His people. As He promised Abraham (around 1500 years before Habakkuk’s ministry) –

Genesis 12:1-3

1 Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you.

2 And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.

3 I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

The LORD loved the people of Israel and Judah, and He desired so heavily to bless them. Instead, the people ran far from Him. In Jeremiah 4:1-4, there is a poignant example of the theme of *blessing-or-judgment* to the people of Judah and Jerusalem:

Jeremiah 4:1-4

1 "If you return, O Israel, declares the LORD, to me you should return. If you remove your detestable things from my presence, and do not waver,

2 and if you swear, 'As the LORD lives,' in truth, in justice, and in righteousness, then nations shall bless themselves in him, and in him shall they glory."

3 For thus says the LORD to the men of Judah and Jerusalem: "Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns.

4 Circumcise yourselves to the LORD; remove the foreskin of your hearts, O men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem; lest my wrath go forth like fire, and burn with none to quench it, because of the evil of your deeds."

The people were to return to the LORD and do it in His way. The LORD sought that His people turn from their wickedness.

Note: literally-translated, 'remove your *filthy garments* from before Me.'

The LORD also desired His people to be genuine.

Note: Using the LORD's name properly, in due respect, in integrity (Jeremiah 4:2).

The LORD would bless the nations and bring people to belief in Him if the Judeans would obey (see Jeremiah 4:4).

Illustration: The power of a good testimony – how powerful it is to someone to see a Christian walking an authentic walk. Live as a servant of Jesus Christ and people will wonder what you have that they don't.

If the people did not obey, however, they would undergo unquenchable wrath for their deeds (Jeremiah 4:4).

The people were warned by the LORD to either turn away from their evil and return to Him – what would they do?

Structure of Chapter: Dialogue with the LORD

(1:1) Superscription

(1:2-4) Habakkuk's Local Lament

(1:5-11) The LORD's Global Response of Judgment

(1:12-17) Habakkuk's Questioning

(2:1) Habakkuk braces himself for a Response

1:1 The oracle that Habakkuk the prophet saw.

Oracle: נשׂוּן – Also can be translated, “Burden.”

Habakkuk cries out to the LORD for help and relief through this burden.

I. Habakkuk’s Local Lament (1:2-4)

Let’s look at Habakkuk’s lament to the LORD:

1:2 O LORD, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not hear? Or cry to you "Violence!" and you will not save?

1:3 Why do you make me see iniquity, and why do you idly look at wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise.

1:4 So the law is paralyzed, and justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous; so justice goes forth perverted.

A. Initial questions from Habakkuk to the LORD (1:2):

- How long do I have to cry for help?
- Why do you not hear my prayers?
- Why haven’t you delivered the righteous?
- Why do you let injustice run rampant?
- When will you bring justice?

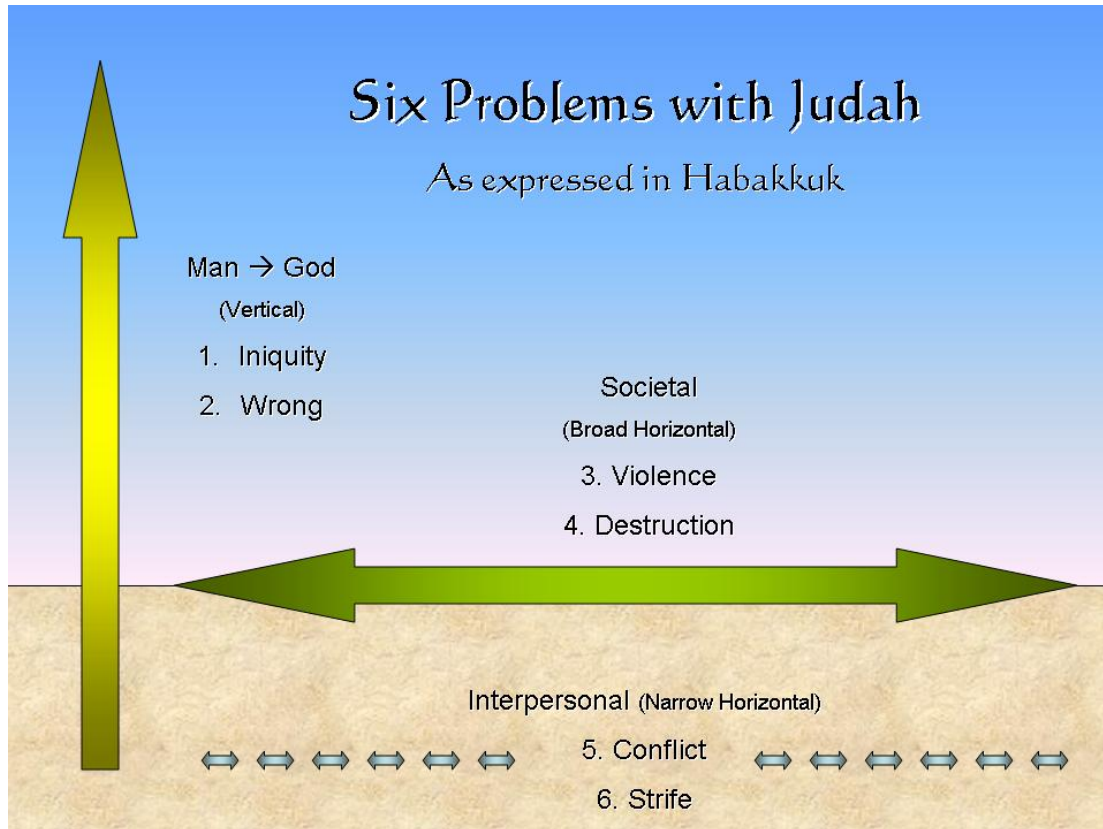
These are honest questions, and as we will see, Habakkuk’s lament is rooted in faith. How often have we asked these same questions of God in our hardships?

B. The six problems of Judah (1:3)

The people of Judah had six problems, expressed in three related pairs:

- | | | |
|--------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Iniquity | 3. Destruction | 5. Strife |
| 2. Wrong | 4. Violence | 6. Conflict |
| (Sins against God) | (Chaos on a social level) | (Interpersonal ills) |

(See Diagram)



C. The essential message of Habakkuk's lament (1:4)

As a result, Habakkuk cries out to the LORD saying that because of this:

1. The Law is paralyzed
2. Justice never goes forth
3. The wicked surround the righteous
4. Justice goes perverted (literally – ‘*bent* judgment’)

Habakkuk is essentially saying, ‘LORD, do justice! The people here are wicked, and the righteous are being persecuted. *How long*, O LORD, until You step in?’

His cry was a *lament* – an expression of anguish and woe. Here, the anguish comes because of the current state of things locally in Judah.

A lament hopes for a message and response of comfort. He hopes for the LORD's justice in this matter. How does the LORD respond to Habakkuk's lament?

II. The LORD's Global Response of Judgment (1:5-11, Genesis 37, 50:20; Job 5:17-18, Hebrews 12:6)

(Read text)

1:5 "Look among the nations, and see; wonder and be astounded. For I am doing a work in your days that you would not believe if told.

1:6 For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, who march through the breadth of the earth, to seize dwellings not their own.

1:7 They are dreaded and fearsome; their justice and dignity go forth from themselves.

1:8 Their horses are swifter than leopards, more fierce than the evening wolves; their horsemen press proudly on. Their horsemen come from afar; they fly like an eagle swift to devour.

1:9 They all come for violence, all their faces forward. They gather captives like sand.

1:10 At kings they scoff, and at rulers they laugh. They laugh at every fortress, for they pile up earth and take it.

1:11 Then they sweep by like the wind and go on, guilty men, whose own might is their god!"

A. God Meant it for Good... (Thematic, 1:5-6; Genesis 37, 50:20)

The LORD alerts Habakkuk and the people (note: **2nd Person Plural**) in 1:5

Look among the nations,
and **see**;
wonder
and be **astounded**

(Structure from Robertson 141-2)

More literally, you will be '**astoundedly astonished.**'

... For I am doing a work in **your** days that **you** would not believe [even] if you were told.

The LORD's response to the lament of Habakkuk was a response of judgment. The LORD would raise up a godless people to punish His people who have strayed from Him. Only the Sovereign LORD could do such a thing for good purposes.

Illustration: I'm reminded of the story of Joseph. In Genesis 37, his jealous brothers cast him into a well, leaving him for dead. As a result, he was taken as a slave by a caravan going to Egypt. The LORD, however, through the evil of the brothers, had a plan for Joseph to be the second-in-command to the Pharaoh, allowing His people to be spared through a severe famine. When the brothers are reunited and Joseph looked at the situation in retrospect, he said,

"As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today." – Genesis 50:20.

Though the Babylonian people meant it for evil, the LORD would mean it to chastise His people and to bring them back to Him! The LORD, even through all this time of waiting for His people to return, still was actively pursuing His people. He desired their repentance and loyalty. He desired their faithfulness. He desired forgiveness and blessing. We will also see in Chapter 2

(later in this series), as well, that the LORD would bring justice on the attacking Babylonian army, but not before gearing His people toward repentance through their ruin.

B. Judgment & Chastisement (1:5-11; Job 5:17-18; Hebrews 12:5-6)

There is a purpose in our chastisement and suffering. Part involves being within a fallen world, in which death and decay are prominent. Because of our sin, even from the first generation Adam, death has passed upon all men as a consequence (see Romans 5:12).

Job went through a harsh situation, where he essentially lost everything except for his life, and even then, his condition of life was dismal. Even through this, he states –

Job 5:17-18

17 Behold, blessed is the one whom God reproveth; therefore despise not the discipline of the Almighty.

18 For he wounds, but he binds up; he shatters, but his hands heal.

And the writer of Hebrews makes note of discipline and chastisement –

Hebrews 12:5-6

5 And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him.

6 For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives."

The LORD intends things for our good purposes. We ought not fight against Him.

C. The Nature of the Wicked Nation (1:6-11)

These people rejoice in their own strength – so much so that their strength is their god (1:11).

Strength – the same word is used in describing a wild ox in Job 39:11 as well as a blacksmith in Isaiah 44:12. These people of Babylon had massive brute strength!

Though they were many miles away, they had an amazingly strong army, and the distance could not be considered comfort to the Judeans, as the LORD ordained this devastation to occur.

In all their pride, these people would soon be marching into Judah to bring chastisement to the people of God.

Challenge: Do we find ourselves in the same place as the Babylonians?

- What idols do we have in our own lives?
- These people were merely worshipping their means to livelihood – a strong army.

- Do we do this in our everyday life?
- Do we worship our job, our income, or our hobbies?

How would Habakkuk respond?

III. Habakkuk's Questioning (1:12-2:1)

(Read text)

1:12 Are you not from everlasting, O LORD my God, my Holy One? We shall not die. O LORD, you have ordained them as a judgment, and you, O Rock, have established them for reproof.

1:13 You who are of purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong, why do you idly look at traitors and remain silent when the wicked swallows up the man more righteous than he?

1:14 You make mankind like the fish of the sea, like crawling things that have no ruler.

1:15 He brings all of them up with a hook; he drags them out with his net; he gathers them in his dragnet; so he rejoices and is glad.

1:16 Therefore he sacrifices to his net and makes offerings to his dragnet; for by them he lives in luxury, and his food is rich.

1:17 Is he then to keep on emptying his net and mercilessly killing nations forever?

2:1 I will take my stand at my watchpost and station myself on the tower, and look out to see what he will say to me, and what I will answer concerning my complaint.

A. Habakkuk Clings to Hope (1:12)

1. Habakkuk's Comfort Chiasm (1:12)

Everlasting – Steadfastness, Constancy; Eternality

LORD – Master, King

My God – In charge of everything; thus, set apart

My Holy One – Set Apart

LORD – Master, King

Rock – Steadfastness, Constancy; Refuge

Note: The LORD our God is Holy, Holy, Holy

Triple emphasis – superlative use. It's used in Isaiah 6:3 and Revelation 4:8.

Isaiah 6:3 And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!"

Revelation 4:8 And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!"

The LORD our God is utterly holy! He is without imperfection, He is ultimately set apart.

2. "We shall not die" (1:12)

- Habakkuk clings to hope in the LORD's preservation of His people
 - Habakkuk recognizes God's faithfulness to the covenant with Abraham.
 - o Indeed the LORD promised Abraham about 1500 years beforehand,
-

Genesis 12:1-3

- 1 Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you.
- 2 And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.
- 3 I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

Genesis 13:14-17

- 14 The LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, "Lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward,
- 15 for all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring forever.
- 16 I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted.
- 17 Arise, walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I will give it to you."

Genesis 15:18-21

- 18 On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates,
 - 19 the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites,
 - 20 the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim,
 - 21 the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites and the Jebusites."
-

In Habakkuk's cry, "How long, O LORD?!" Realize that the LORD had been calling His people desperately asking, "How long, my people, until you turn back to me?"

Habakkuk would in due time realize that the LORD was not only faithful and just, but merciful and forgiving.

B. Habakkuk Questions the Outcome (1:13-17)

1. You are Good... (1:13)

Shock & Denial – Habakkuk wonders why.

His argument: ‘Besides, the people of Judah weren’t as wicked as the Babylonians.’

Theodicy – Why does a just and righteous God allow for evil in the world?

2. ...But the Wicked Prosper (1:14-17)

Habakkuk is very poetic – he gives a drawn-out fish *conceit* (extended metaphor)

- Poetic structure, full comparison
 - Man – parallel to fish
 - Wicked – parallel to the fisherman
-

14 You make mankind
like the fish of the sea,
like crawling things that have no ruler.
15 He brings all of them
up with a hook;
he drags them out
with his net;
he gathers them
in his dragnet;
so he rejoices and is glad.
16 Therefore he sacrifices
to his net
and makes offerings
to his dragnet;
for by them
he lives in luxury,
and his food is rich.
17 Is he then to keep on emptying
his net
and mercilessly killing nations forever?

(Structure notation, mine)

Habakkuk notes the present circumstances. Sometimes we get myopic – nearsighted. The LORD’s faithfulness throughout history is evident –

- Man sinned, and God provided an animal sacrifice (Genesis 3:21).
- The people rejected Him in the wilderness, and yet He still was faithful to give His people their land, through many trials and adversities (Exodus through Joshua)
- The people strayed from God in the times of the Judges, and yet He would raise up Prophets to call His people back to Him (1 Samuel through the rest of the Old Testament)

- The people continually rejected Him, and He continually sought their loyalty (cf. Jeremiah 4:1-4)
- The people were punished for a time in exile, and the LORD still preserved a remnant (cf. Nehemiah)
- The LORD desired us so much that He gave His Son Jesus to die in the place of our sins (cf. John 3:16). Even though we were disobedient to Him, and even were hostile toward God, He gave us an amazing gift – eternal life through His Son (Romans 5:6-8, Romans 6:23). However, you must repent and accept the gift!
- We still disobey Him, and we still fall short of God’s glory, but we have forgiveness through Jesus (cf. 1 John 1:9).

The LORD is faithful, despite our wickedness. The LORD’s faithfulness is made more evident, though, because of our wickedness. Habakkuk notes the current circumstances, yet the LORD had a plan to chastise His people and bring them back to Himself. In this time and age, He has provided the ultimate sacrifice for our sins – Jesus. We all need Him in our lives.

Given Habakkuk’s response, he expects to hear the worst –

C. Habakkuk braces himself (2:1)

2:1 I will take my stand at my watchpost and station myself on the tower, and look out to see what he will say to me, and what I will answer concerning my complaint.

Habakkuk realizes that his comments are quite bold. He expects to be rebuked by the LORD, especially after how the LORD responded in 1:5-11. We will see how the LORD responds in the next part of the series, especially relating to the justice that He would bring in this instance. However, with the text that we have gone through today, I want to bring up some serious things for us to consider –

Application & Call to Response:

1. When we suffer, do we question Him faithfully?
 - Can we acknowledge God’s goodness and faithfulness even when we feel the most pain?
 - Does our questioning turn into unjust accusation?

2. When we suffer, do we run to God or away from God?
 - The LORD chastises those He loves. He intends to discipline us and grow us up when we need correction.
 - He also is the God of Comfort and Provision in our times of loss and need. If we run away from Him, we are losing out.
 - The goodness of God leads us to repentance. Is there anything needing repentance today?

3. When we go through trials, do we consider them pure joy, as in James 1?
 - Do we regret it when the LORD seeks to develop us into something better?
 - Can we as the pottery really despise our Potter, who has good intentions to break us and mold us and sculpt us into a beautiful work?

4. Do we have any idols in our own lives that we need to take care of?
 - The LORD is a jealous God – He wants us to have no one else in His rightful place. Note that the First Commandment was against idolatry!
 - Are we loving the LORD our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, as in Matthew 22:37? This is the First and Greatest Commandment according to Jesus.

5. Is the LORD crying, ‘*How Long?*’ in your life, seeking you to come to Him or to return to Him?
 - Draw near to God and He will draw near to you (James 4:8)
 - Joel’s call for the people to repent –
Joel 2:12-13
12 "Yet even now," declares the LORD, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;
13 and rend your hearts and not your garments." Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster.

6. Seeing the LORD’s faithfulness, even to the point of Him giving His Son Jesus as the sacrifice for our sins, will you repent of any sin in your life and come to Him today?
 - Repent – confess and turn away from your sin. Any area of life that you do not obey Him fully and any area of life that you haven’t committed fully to Him needs to be confessed and given to Him.
 - Pray that the LORD would forgive you of your sins. We have forgiveness through Jesus Christ and His work on the Cross – dying in place of us for our sins. He also raised from the dead, showing us that He has power over death and that we can one day be raised to life through Him in the Last Day (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:54-57, Romans 8:11)!
 - Commit your life to Jesus. Ask Him to be your Savior, and accept His gift on the Cross for you.

Know that the LORD is faithful. Even (and especially) in our struggles, He seeks to develop us, to comfort us, and to carry us. Let us walk in that faith and knowledge today.

BENEDICTION

Hebrews 13:20-21

20 Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant,

21 equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

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