

Questions About God And Evil
Habakkuk 1:12-2:1

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Have you ever asked yourself these kinds of questions on an international level? Why does God allow evil nations to conquer apparently good nations? Why are the Communists so successful when their system is so evil? Have you asked these questions on a national level? Why do the poor get poorer while the rich get richer? Why do dishonest men seem to get ahead while the righteous suffer? Why do liberals in the church prosper when they have such bad theology while evangelicals languish for funds when their theology is straight? Perhaps you have asked these same kinds of questions on a personal level. Why did I lose my job for being honest when a scheming person misrepresented me and kept his job? Why does a godly woman have to suffer in a divorce when her ungodly husband seems to prosper? Why does the student who cheats on an exam get an “A” when I am honest and get a “C”? Doesn’t God care? Is He playing games with us? Can God’s promises really be trusted?
- B. The prophet Habakkuk was going through the same kind of reasoning process. He was asking, “How can a holy God use an unholy instrument like the Babylonians to discipline Israel, God’s elect people?” In frustration, the prophet cried out, “Doesn’t God care? Does He really know what He is doing? Is He some kind of a capricious God who is toying with us?”
- C. By way of background, the prophet Habakkuk lived through a period of national revival in Judah during the reign of King Josiah. Then he watched the nation under King Jehoiakim go into a period of spiritual, moral, social and political decline. Habakkuk cried out to God about the deplorable conditions in Judah, and thought that God was silent on the issue. God answered Habakkuk’s prayer, stating He was sending the godless, cruel Babylonians to be an agent of judgment on Judah. This was not what Habakkuk wanted to hear, for he was looking for another revival, but God’s patience had worn thin, and His plan for Judah was severe discipline at the hands of the unbelieving Babylonians. When the prophet heard God was going to use the Babylonians to correct Israel, this raised a deeper theological question for him. How could God use an unholy instrument like Babylon to correct a more holy nation like Judah? This was a question about God and evil, about His character and the way He deals with the world and His people.

II. HOW CAN A HOLY GOD USE AN EVIL INSTRUMENT? (1:12, 13): ***“O LORD, are you not from everlasting? My God, my Holy One, we will not die. O LORD, you have appointed them to execute judgment; O Rock you have ordained them to punish. Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong. Why then do you tolerate the treacherous? Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?”***

- A. Habakkuk recognized that Judah needed chastisement for its sin but it was unbelievable to him that God would use the wicked Babylonians to do the correction. He acknowledged God ordained and appointed the Babylonians to be the instrument of discipline but it was incredible to him. He had a time reconciling

God's actions with God's moral standards. God was holy and could not tolerate wrong or even look on evil. Yet, He would use Babylon, a less righteous nation, to punish Judah, a more righteous nation. With all its failures, Israel was more righteous than Babylon. NOTE: This would be comparable to true believers in Christ in America crying out to God about the visible church in this country – its liberalism, its smugness, its pride, its wealth, its indifference, its coldness, its lack of concern for the lost, its lack of concern for the poor, its slavish commitment to tradition, its lack of Bible preaching, its self-righteous legalism, its tolerance of sexual immorality and a hundred other negative factors. We pray for God to bring revival and expect it. But what if God would give the answer that He is going to destroy the organized church in America by an invasion of the Communists. Would we not begin to argue with God because this doesn't seem right? The church may be in a deplorable state but it does not seem right that America and the organized, visible church in it should be destroyed by an utterly godless system like Communism. We would begin to say, "Why do you tolerate the wrong? Why do you allow the wicked to swallow up those more righteous than themselves?" NOTE: We pray God will bring revival to the church in America, but God may choose to destroy America because of its wickedness. God expects more from America because America has had much more light than any nation in the world. An invasion would mean the destruction of the organized church but not the destruction of the true church. The true church would continue to survive as it does in Communist countries today. It would be tough. It would be almost unbearable (and we should do all we can to avoid it) but if it comes, the church will continue. In fact, in some ways it will grow stronger because the dead wood in the church will be flushed out. The church in America today is large, rich and powerful, but if we are disciplined, the church will grow smaller, poorer and stronger.

ILLUSTRATION: Two Lutheran pastors in East Germany.

- B. In Habakkuk's complaint, he never denies the existence of God. He knows God is real. He just doesn't understand His methods. Notice carefully, the prophet affirms his faith in God. He says, "**O LORD, are you not from everlasting?**" He is not complaining out of unbelief but belief. NOTE: What a contrast with the wicked Babylonians. In **1:11**, it says of the Babylonians, "**whose own strength is their god.**" They rejoiced in their might. They trusted in their armed forces. Their god was their own strength. However, the strength of Habakkuk and the believing remnant in Israel was Jehovah-God. The prophet believed in a supernatural working God. He questioned why God wasn't working but did not question His existence. The prophet knew to depend on one's own strength, to depend on one's own talents, skills, bank rolls, or armies was foolishness. The only hope of the nation was total dependence on God. Woe to the nation which trusts in their armed forces, their nuclear power, their star wars system or whatever. If they forget God, they are destined for disappointment. Woe be to that individual or nation which says, "I am master of my fate. I am the captain of my soul!"
- C. Habakkuk turned to God. Even though he did not understand, he turned to God in faith. He acknowledged God as the Self-existent One, for he says, "**O LORD**" (O Jehovah). Jehovah is absolutely independent of men and everything outside of Himself. He acknowledges God as the Everlasting One, for he says, "**My God**" (my Eloheim); that is, the Creator who is strong to do the impossible. He acknowledges God as the Holy One; that is, the one who is separate from all, totally able to back up His promises with His holy character. He acknowledges Him as the "Rock" or

Stable One because He is a stable God who never changes and is true to His promises. He cannot be moved from His Word. He acknowledges God as the Faithful One because he says, ***“We shall not die.”*** Habakkuk knew his Old Testament and understood God had entered into covenant with Israel, promising they would be a people forever. Over and over again, God said, ***“I will be their God and they shall be my people.”*** Jehovah-God was as close to the people of God as His covenant with them. Even if He disciplined them, He would be faithful to them. He was a faithful God. He gave His Word and He would not break it. They would not die. They would not cease to exist as a nation no matter what the Babylonians might do to them. ILLUSTRATION: Charles Spurgeon tells the story of a woman who was in a discussion over the assurance of salvation with one of her neighbors. The neighbor was a very skeptical man and loved to poke fun at her. Finally, one day when she had spoken on eternal security and how she belonged to the Lord – her future being totally in God’s hands – he said to her, “How do you know that?” She said, “God tells me that a hundred times in His Word,” and she started quoting verses to him. Finally, he said, “Suppose God doesn’t keep His Word?” she quickly answered, “His loss would be greater than mine. I would lose my soul, that’s true, but God would lose His honor.” Behind the promises of God stands the character of God.

III. HOW CAN GOD PERMIT WICKED ONES TO CAPTURE RIGHTEOUS ONES? (1:14, 15): ***“You have made men like fish in the sea, like sea creatures that have no ruler. The wicked foe pulls all of them up with hooks, he catches them in his net, he gathers them up in his dragnet; and so he rejoices and is glad.”***

- A. Judah was like fish, helpless, defenseless, easy prey for the Babylonians, and the prophet wants to know why God would allow His elect people, who are more righteous than the Babylonians, to go into captivity. It did not seem fair. It seemed inconsistent with the holy character of God.
- B. Historically, the Babylonians literally put hooks in the jaws of their captives and dragged them off to Babylon to be slaves. What a ruthless people these Babylonians were! One of the symbols of the Babylonians depicting their great victories was a dragnet. All the major Babylonian deities (Ningirus, Shamash, Enlil and Marduk) are pictured holding or dragging a net in which the captured enemies squirm helplessly.

IV. HOW CAN GOD ALLOW THE WICKED TO GLORIFY THEMSELVES? (1:16, 17): ***“Therefore he sacrifices to his net and burns incense to his dragnet, for by his net he lives in luxury and enjoys the choicest food. Is he to keep on emptying his net, destroying nations without mercy?”***

- A. It was an ancient custom to sacrifice to the means which made something possible. For instance, the Sythians made their swords symbols of Mars and sacrificed to their swords. The sword being the strength and means to victory. The Babylonians sacrificed to their dragnets which were symbolic of sovereign power, pulling in enemies like defenseless fish. They praised their dragnets as their god. In essence, they were sacrificing to their own might, power and strength. They were glorifying themselves. If God allowed this to go on, people might conclude the Babylonian gods were more powerful than Jehovah-God. Then they would receive glory rather than the true God. But how can this be when God said, ***“I will not give (yield, share) my glory with another” (Isa. 48:11)?*** The Babylonians claim to self-deity

appeared to be robbing God of glory. God didn't seem to be doing anything about it.

- B. Habakkuk, while trusting God, was frustrated, confused, disturbed and maybe a little disgusted with the methods of God. He didn't understand and he wanted an answer to this spiritual problem.

V. THE PROPHET SEEKS AN ANSWER (2:1): ***“I will stand at my watch and station myself on the ramparts; I will look to see what he will say to me, and what answer I am going to give to this complaint.”***

- A. The prophet wants an answer so he goes off to pray. He may have gone to a fortress with a military watch-tower to pray, but most commentators take this to be symbolic language. The point is that Habakkuk got off by himself and waited for God to give him an answer to prayer. He got away from the mundane affairs of being a prophet to seek an answer from God. NOTE: We all need daily to get off with God alone to read, meditate and pray. Sometimes we need to take a half-day or two or three days or longer to be alone with God. Sometimes we need to fast as well as pray. In solitude, God can speak to us through His Word better than when we are caught up in a flurry of activities. It seems as though in twentieth century America, we have gotten away from the art of being alone with God.
- B. Habakkuk had a strong motivation to pray. As a prophet, he had to tell Israel what God's answer to his complaint was. He had questioned God's justice and needs an answer for the people and for himself.

VI. STEPS TO SOLVING SPIRITUAL PROBLEMS

- A. Habakkuk went through a Biblical problem solving process. When we have problems, it is important that we too follow this process. However, not all people do. Sometimes when things go wrong, people withdraw. They drop out of church and Christian activities and say, “God doesn't care. He has been mean to me. He hasn't done what I wanted Him to do.” Others, when things go wrong, repudiate their past beliefs about God. They say, “God is dead. My former beliefs about God were wrong. Disregard anything I have previously said about God.” Still others stay in church and sulk. They take their anger against God out on the preacher or the Session or the congregation. But there is a right way to solve spiritual problems.
- B. Recognition. Acknowledge your doubt. Face up to the fact you have a problem. Don't rationalize your situation. Get whatever is bothering you out on the table. Habakkuk got his problem out in the open. He said, ***“Why do you tolerate the treacherous? Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?”*** The prophet was not timid. He acknowledged the problem.
- C. Meditation. Think honestly about the problem. Don't panic. Don't get upset. Don't start talking to everyone. Think through the problem. Habakkuk was thinking through his problems as he brought his complaints to God. The Bible says in ***James 1:19*** that we should be ***“quick to listen and slow to speak.”*** When we get quiet and think, we begin to sort things out and allow God to shed some light on the situation.
- D. Reflection. Remind yourself of who God is. When we have a problem, we must remember who God is and how powerful He is to solve the problem. We go back to the basics of the attributes of God. Habakkuk, in all of his confusion, went right back to God saying, “You are the Self-existent One. You are the Strong One. You

are the Everlasting One. You are the Holy One. You are the Faithful One who keeps His promises.” He reminded himself that God is sovereign, omnipotent and immutable. He is independent of history. He preceded history. He created history. His throne is outside of time and space. God is in control of everything. Therefore, He is in control of my particular problem.

- E. Action. Commit the problem to the Lord. Habakkuk got off alone with the Lord and committed the whole situation to Him in prayer. In solving problems, we must give the problem to the Lord not depending on anyone or anything. We must not give the problem over to a friend, thinking that a friend has more answers than God. We must not give the problem over to the Lord and take it back again, continuing to worry about it. If we do that we just as well never have prayed in the first place. We must not give the problem to the Lord and then continue to scheme on our own to get it accomplished. Once we have taken our problem to the Lord, we should cease to concern ourselves about it. We should turn our backs on it and center our attention on God for an answer. ILLUSTRATION: It is so easy to scheme when we are trying to find God’s will for our lives. We are all guilty of doing it from time to time. We are so often like the pastor and his wife who were candidating for one of the largest local churches in the state. They finally got word from the church that they were accepted. The pastor said to his wife, “Honey, you go upstairs and pack while I stay down here and pray whether it is God’s will for us to accept this church.”
- F. Relaxation. Wait upon the Lord. It is not enough to pray, to think, to commit, and to cast our burden on the Lord. We must also wait. We must wait patiently for God to give us an answer, and He will. It may not be the answer we want but it will be the one God wants and that is what is best for us in the long run. As we wait, we must anticipate God will answer. In fact, we may even thank Him for the answer before we have it. Habakkuk went away and patiently waited for God to give an answer to his complaint. ILLUSTRATION: Anticipating God’s answer to prayer reminds me of a story. There was this cranky little old lady who was not invited to the church picnic. There had been an oversight. On the day of the picnic, the church realized that this lady had been overlooked. So they sent a young man over to her house to invite her to the picnic and bring her to the fun and festivities. She said to the young man, “It’s too late. I’ve already prayed for rain.” Now that is faith! That is true anticipation!

VI. CONCLUSION

- A. Saved. What lessons does God want the Christian to learn from this section of Scripture? First, God is our strength and we are not to trust in the arm of the flesh as did the Babylonians. Second, only God has the real answers to our spiritual problems; therefore, we must go to Him for the answers. Third, God can use whatever instrument He wants to discipline us and that discipline is always for our own good. Fourth, we all need to get alone with God so He can speak to us through His Word and prayer. Fifth, where reason ends, faith begins. Sixth, waiting on God to answer our prayers is the most difficult thing for a Christian to do, but when we learn how to wait, we unlock the door to real spiritual victory.
- B. Unsaved.
1. Are you a person who sees life as a problem? Do you sense that there is no real meaning to existence? God has an answer to your problem. The answer is Jesus Christ.

2. Trust in Christ. Go to Christ for forgiveness of your sins. Bow to Christ as your Lord, giving Him the right to rule in your life. Then Christ will begin to unravel the mystery of life. Christ will tie you in with the Self-existent One, the Strong One, the Eternal One, the Holy One, the Stable One, the Faithful One. You will find the answers to life in Christ. Jesus said, ***“I am the Way, the Truth and the Life: no man comes to the Father except through Me.” (Jn. 14:6)***