

Pastor Don Nelson

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**“HOW, LORD?”**  
**Habakkuk 1:2-2:20**

☑ You embody integrity in a corrupt workplace. God led you to this job, and you have been a light in the darkness. But now the Law is catching up with the company; and though you have always done what is right, you are falsely implicated in several felonies.

? ‘O Lord, how can you let this happen?!’

☑ God moves your family from Mayberry, USA to the worst neighborhood in the city. You are missionaries who meet deep needs, build relationships, and share the Gospel. One night an addict, whom you have helped, breaks in and shoots your wife.

? ‘O Lord, how can you do this?!’

☑ You love God with your whole being. You love your neighbor as yourself. You make disciples. But the culture is rotten with immorality, injustice, and idolatry, as is much of the Church. Then an enemy invades, a veritable tsunami of death, and the righteous suffer with the guilty.

? ‘O Lord, is this really your plan?!’

● In Habakkuk chapter 1 the prophet cries out,

**<sup>1</sup> How long, LORD, must I call for help,  
but you do not listen?**

**<sup>3</sup> Why do you make me look at injustice?  
Why do you tolerate wrongdoing?  
Destruction and violence are before me;  
there is strife, and conflict abounds.**

**<sup>4</sup> Therefore the law is paralyzed,  
and justice never prevails.  
The wicked hem in the righteous,  
so that justice is perverted.**

It sounds as if Habakkuk is complaining about our world. In fact, he is lamenting conditions in Judah between the years 608 B.C. and 597 B.C.

YHWH concurs. It is time to stop the injustice and sleaze, to end the discord and violence in Judah.

● In 1:6 he unveils his solution: **“I am raising up the Babylonians.”** This is tantamount to saying, ‘I am raising up the Nazis.’ ‘I am sending in the Soviets.’ ‘I unleashing ISIS.’

Habakkuk is shocked and dismayed. ‘We deserve punishment. But this is like cutting off your arm to stop an itch! It is like killing the patient to cure the disease!’

The prophet’s heart is broken by his people’s moral insanity. He longs to halt their self-destruction. So he asks, **“How long?”** and **“Why?”** But the LORD’s answer in 1:5-11 does not answer his urgent questions. To the contrary, it compounds them.

◆ In 1:13-2:1 Habakkuk cries out in complaint a second time. Please turn there with me.

■ Verse 13:

**Your eyes are too pure to look on evil;  
you cannot tolerate wrongdoing.**

{Is 6:3; Ex 15:11} **“Holy, holy, holy”** are you, **“LORD Almighty.”** **“Who is like you – majestic in holiness...?”**

{Jas 1:13} You are perfectly righteous. You **“cannot be tempted by evil, nor [do you] tempt anyone.”**

- Back to verse 13:

**Why then do you tolerate the treacherous?  
Why are you silent while the wicked  
swallow up those more righteous than  
themselves?**

? As bad as Judah is, Babylon is far worse! How can you stomach them, much less appoint them to accomplish your purpose? Is this consistent with your character?

- Verses 14-15:

**<sup>14</sup> You have made people like the fish in the sea,  
like the sea creatures that have no ruler.**

**<sup>15</sup> The wicked foe pulls... them up with hooks,  
and catches them in his net,  
he gathers them up in his dragnet;  
and so he rejoices and is glad.**

Babylon is a ravenous predator, and Judah is defenseless prey. They are eager to devour us. Are you really going to allow this?

- Not only are the Babylonians brutal tyrants, they are incurable idolaters. Verses 16-17:

**<sup>16</sup> 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.**

**<sup>17</sup> Is he to keep on emptying his net,  
destroying nations without mercy?**

We are not to visualize them bowing to a net. This is a metaphor for the false gods they rely on.

Like all ancient pagans, they make actual sacrifices to graven images. Yet the underlying object of worship is not the statue; it is power: military, political, and economic power.

This is the essence of idolatry: that we devote ourselves, not to the Living God, but to something else which we believe will provide what we crave the most: pleasure, wealth, or (as with Babylon) power. The statues and temples are secondary.

Babylonians worship their own strength. And wouldn't they? They enjoy security and success.

- {Hab 1:12} And now, Sovereign LORD, you

**have appointed them to execute judgment;  
you, my Rock, have ordained them to  
punish[?!]**

? O God, how can you let this happen? How can you do this? Is this really your plan?

★ This is not impertinent doubt. It is faith seeking understanding. It is anguish seeking solace.

■ And so in verse 12 Habakkuk launches into his complaint by saying,

**LORD, are you not from everlasting?  
My God, my Holy One, you will never  
die.**

The prophet strongly affirms that YHWH is God.

Not only so, Habakkuk emphasizes his personal surrender, worship, and dependence on YHWH by speaking in intimate terms. He calls the LORD **“My God, my Holy One,”** and **“my Rock.”**

■ And in 2:1 the prophet concludes his complaint in the conviction that the Almighty will answer him, though he fears that he has crossed the line:

**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 to give to this  
complaint.**

This Hebrew in this last phrase is ambiguous, which is why the NIV has a text note: *Or, **and what to answer when I am rebuked.*** I believe this is the better translation. Habakkuk expects a tongue-lashing.

◆ In 2:2-19 Holy God replies, not with a rebuke; rather, with a promise that justice will be served.

■ In verses 4-5 he summarizes Babylonian evil:

<sup>4</sup> **“he is puffed up,  
his desires are not upright –  
<sup>5</sup> .... he is arrogant and never at rest.  
Because he is as greedy as the grave  
and like death is never satisfied,  
he gathers to himself all the nations  
and takes captive all the peoples.**

■ **“Like death”** he **“is never satisfied.”** And thus, verse 8,

**you have shed human blood;  
you have destroyed lands and cities  
and everyone in them.**

■ And again in verse 17,

**you have shed human blood;  
you have destroyed lands and cities  
and everyone in them.**

■ Next, in verses 6-19 God catalogues Babylon’s sins and announces punishments proportionate to their atrocities. These are the Five Woes.

☠ Woe Number 1, verses 6-8:

**“Woe to him who piles up stolen goods  
and makes himself wealthy by extortion! ....**

You will be plundered in turn.

☠ Woe Number 2, verses 9-11:

<sup>9</sup> **“Woe to him who builds his house by  
unjust gain....**

Your ill-gotten wealth condemns you. It is a witness for the prosecution and it will demand your life.

☠ Woe Number 3, verses 12-14:

<sup>12</sup> **“Woe to him who builds a city with  
bloodshed  
and establishes a town by injustice!**

Your empire will burn. Your scheming and organizing and war-mongering will be for naught.

☠ Woe Number 4, verses 15-17:

<sup>15</sup> **“Woe to him who [gets] his neighbors...drunk,  
so that he can gaze on their naked bodies!**

(This is metaphor for inflicting shame. The Babylonians do not peddle liquor; they exult in humiliating their victims.) You will be made a laughingstock.

☠ Woe Number 5, verses 18-19:

<sup>19</sup> **Woe to him who says to wood, ‘Come to life!’  
Or to lifeless stone, ‘Wake up!’**

Your idols will fail you, with fatal results.

■ As a result of the judgment of Judah, and even more the downfall of Babylon, the holiness and omnipotence of the YHWH, the Living God, will be revealed to those who have eyes to see. Verse 14: **“The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.”**

● In 1:2-3 Habakkuk pleads for justice:

<sup>2</sup> **How long, LORD, must I call for help...?**

<sup>3</sup> **Why do you tolerate wrongdoing?”**

In response, God announces that he is sending Babylon to punish the Judahites.

■ The prophet does not know what to do with this. In verse 13 he complains,

**Why are you silent while the wicked  
swallow up those more righteous...?**

In reply, God promises that Babylon will also be punished for its own immorality, injustice, and idolatry.

The LORD is perfectly candid in his answers (not to mention patient)! Still, the relationship between divine dominion and human evil is not entirely clear.

❓ How are we to live in this tension?

❓ What are we to do when Sovereign God uses the wicked to punish those who are less sinful?

✍ First, in 2:4 Holy God declares,

**the righteous will live by  
their faithfulness –**

or, **“by their faith.”** The Hebrew can be read either way.

{Eph 2:8} And truly it is both, is it not? We **“live by... faith”** in that we receive salvation **“by grace through faith”** and continue to trust in God even when we cannot understand what he is doing.

{Eph 2:10; Jas 2:26} We **“live by... faithfulness”** in that obedience and good works are the substance and sign of a living faith. **“We are... created in Christ Jesus to do good works”** and **“faith without deeds is dead.”**

✍ Second, in 2:20 the Almighty proclaims:

**The LORD is in his holy temple;  
let all the earth be silent before him.**

To those of us who are in covenant with the Almighty this is a call to reverence and peace.

If we are falsely implicated or suffer violence in service to Jesus – still the Father, Son, and Spirit is worthy of total adoration, the devotion of our bodies, minds, and spirits, in this sanctuary, in the community, in the workplace, and in our homes.

{Php 4:7} And if Sovereign God allows ISIS to punish this nation and believers are martyred – even then we are called not to be consumed by fear. Rather, we are to allow **“the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, [to] guard our hearts and... minds in Christ Jesus.”**

? O Lord, how can you let this happen?!

? O Lord, how can you do this?!

? O Lord, is this really your plan?!

We might well ask these questions.

But in Christ Jesus we shall live by faith and faithfulness. By his grace we shall be reverent and at peace before the Living God.

Habakkuk 1:12-2:20 is the word of the Lord.