

“Wait A Minute!”  
Habakkuk 1:12 – 2:1  
Series: Habakkuk [#3]  
Pastor Lyle L. Wahl  
October 19, 2008

## Introduction

This morning we return to our series in the Old Testament book of Habakkuk. Since we have been away from it for a few weeks, let’s review. This book was written by Habakkuk around the time the events took place, probably between the death of King Josiah in 609 B.C. and Babylon’s first invasion of Judah in 605 B.C. The Northern kingdom of Israel fell in 722 B.C. The people were carried away never to return to their land. Judah, in the south where Habakkuk was, fell in 586 B.C. The people were out of their land for seventy years before they returned. Habakkuk characterizes the times with the words *violence, iniquity, wickedness, destruction, strife* and *contention*. He is deeply concerned and takes the situation to God.

This three-chapter book is structured with two cycles of questions from Habakkuk to God and God’s answers in the first two chapters, and then a psalm in chapter 3. We walked through the first cycle in our first two weeks. Habakkuk starts with his questions.

- “Why is evil unrestrained?”
- “Why do the wicked have the upper hand?”
- “How can it be that wickedness and sin are the norms in God’s chosen people?”
- “Where is the restraint? Where is God’s discipline?”
- And, “Where are You, God? I’ve brought all these things to You for so long now, and You haven’t answered, You haven’t dealt with it!”

God’s answer is recorded in 1:5-11. He tells Habakkuk that judgment is coming, and it will be through the wicked, cruel Chaldeans.

That brings us to today and the second cycle of questions from Habakkuk beginning at verse 12 of chapter 1. When he heard God’s answer, he shouted, “*Wait a minute!*” “How can You do that? I don’t understand it!”

And so we begin,

## God Has Answered, But Habakkuk Doesn’t Understand The Answer.

The first thing to note here is that his response was far from unique. We see it in others in the Bible. For example, Abraham and Sarah didn’t understand, and even laughed at God’s statement that they would have a child in their old age (Genesis 17:17, 18:12). Now, Habakkuk was not laughing—it’s more likely that he was crying. But his basic response was

the same—he was dumbfounded. “Why? How can this be?” And, of course, we ourselves have read or heard truth in God’s Word and have not understood how it fits in our situation, in our world.

Habakkuk had two basic questions. His first question was: “God, how can you use such a wicked nation to punish Judah, Your own people?” Let’s pick it up at the middle of verse 12,

“You, O LORD, have appointed them to judge; and You, O Rock, have established them to correct. Your eyes are too pure to approve evil, and You can not look on wickedness with favor. Why do You look with favor on those who deal treacherously? Why are You silent when the wicked swallow up those more righteous than they?” (12b-13)

So again, his question, what he couldn’t understand, is “Why, how could God use *them*, those wicked, cruel Chaldeans to judge Judah’s sinful rebellion?”

His first line of thinking was, “Since God is the ‘Holy One,’ since in His purity He never will, never can approve evil, how can He use the wicked, heathen Babylonians as His instrument of judgment?” The Bible clearly establishes his premiss that God cannot approve evil. For example, Psalm 5:4-5,

“For You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness; no evil dwells with You. The boastful shall not stand before Your eyes; You hate all who do iniquity.”

On to the New Testament, James 1:13,

“Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am being tempted by God;’ for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone.”

God never approves evil. All things are under His control, and ultimately accomplish His purposes.

- Isaiah 45:7, “The One forming light and creating darkness, causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the LORD who does all these.”
- Isaiah 46:9-10, “Remember the former things long past, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things which have not been done, saying, ‘My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure.’”
- Romans 8:28, “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”

Habakkuk also could have looked back, and recalled God’s warning to Israel. As God gave the Law to them, in the section in Deuteronomy 28 there are over 50 verses of curses God promises to bring on them if they are not faithful to him. We pick it up at verse 49, “The

LORD will bring a nation against you from afar, from the end of the earth, as the eagle swoops down, a nation whose language you shall not understand, a nation of fierce countenance who will have no respect for the old, nor show favor to the young.” (49-50)

Then, Habakkuk’s second line of thinking was, “Why, how can God judge us for our sin by someone who is even more sinful than we are?” It is a natural, but flawed view. His view here is *comparative*. “They are much worse than we are.” This notion is more common than we sometimes think. Many people believe God *grades on the curve*, that as long as you are not below the cut off point, you are okay with Him and will make it to heaven while those who miss the cut off, who are worse than you are, will not.

God’s view of sin is not comparative.

- Paul reminds us, “There is none righteous, not even one.” Romans 3:10.
- And James adds, “For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all.” (2:10)

Now, I believe that just as there will be degrees of rewards for believers in heaven, there will also be degrees of punishment for those who refused to bow their knee and heart to Christ. But even though Babylon was more sinful than Judah, Habakkuk could not cry, “Foul! Unfair!” because Judah was sinful, guilty.

Habakkuk’s second question was, “God, will You look on while these wicked people go on like this forever?” This question starts in verse 13,

“Your eyes are too pure to approve evil, and You can not look on wickedness with favor. Why do You look with favor on those who deal treacherously? Why are You silent when the wicked swallow up those more righteous than they?”

That is, “God, are You just standing by doing nothing as they continue of their way?” Then, he gets to the heart of it in verse 17, “Will they therefore empty their net and continually slay nations without sparing?”

God never is inactive. Remember God’s first response to Habakkuk when it also seemed that God was inactive. Verse 5, “Look among the nations! Observe! Be astonished! Wonder! Because I am doing something in your days—you would not believe if you were told.” God ended that answer, in verse 11, by telling the prophet, “they [the Chaldeans] will be held guilty.” God is not sitting back unconcerned, distracted or unable to act. He is active. They will not go on like this forever. He will judge them and put an end to their evil.

These are Habakkuk’s questions. They did not come from unbelief or lack of trust in God. They came from his agony of trying to understand God and what He was doing. As he moves through this difficult time, Habakkuk moves forward toward understanding God and the world around him. In doing this, he is an example of some very important principles for moving forward to understanding our world.

## How To Move Forward To Understanding Your World.

There are three principles here we need to implement.

The first is *Perspective*—maintain a clear perspective of God. Perspective is important. An aboriginal pastor gave this illustration of perspective. “In the old days when Indians raided a village and killed some whites, it was called a massacre. When whites raided an Indian village and killed all the Indians, it was called a victory.” *Perspective*.

How do we keep a clear perspective of God when we have difficult, troubling questions? The foundational, essential starting place is seeing God as He reveals Himself to us in the Bible. Habakkuk did that.

Verse 12, “Are You not from everlasting, O LORD, my God, my Holy One?” This is a rhetorical question, and so is actually a statement of what he knows to be true. He is saying, “God You are...

- “from everlasting;”
- “the LORD”—Yahweh, the eternal, self-existent One;
- “my god”—because I have had placed my faith in God;
- “my Holy One,”—again in verse 13, he refers to God as “pure;”
- later here in verse 12, “Rock.”

All the qualities he mentions here are revealed throughout Scripture. Think about the description of God as the *Rock*.

- Moses, Deuteronomy 32, “For I proclaim the name of the LORD; ascribe greatness to our God! The Rock! His work is perfect, for all His ways are just; a God of faithfulness and without injustice, righteous and upright is He.” (3-4)
- David, Psalm 18:2, “The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge; my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.”

We also need to start with what God tells us about Himself in the Bible, and then look for and prove it in our own world. This perspective is essential to understanding what God wants us to know about our world, our joys, sorrows, troubles and celebrations. So, as you read your Bible, take note of the descriptions, statements, images and actions of God that tell us something about who He is, what He is like. For example, most of us have heard and read the account in Luke 15. Verse 1,

“Now all the tax collectors and the sinners were coming near [Jesus] to listen to Him. Both the Pharisees and the scribes began to grumble, saying, ‘This man receives sinners and eats with them.’ So [Jesus] told them this parable, saying, ‘What man among you, if he has a hundred

sheep and has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open pasture and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, "Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!" I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.'"

There are a number of truths in this parable, but think about what it tells us about sheep owner, or Jesus Himself—about His love, His searching for, finding and bringing back those who wander away.

Yes, we need to have, to keep a clear perspective of God, of what He is like.

Secondly, there are God's *Promises*, which we must depend on if we are to see and understand our world as it really is. In the middle of verse 12 Habakkuk says, "we will not die." Now, some versions read "You [God] will not die." This reading then, would be another reference to God being eternal. There are some textual variations and issues here, but we are accepting the majority view, "*we will not die.*"

So, what is Habakkuk saying? He is not referring to a certainty that they will escape death when the Babylonians come charging in, nor about everlasting life with God. He is stating, relying on the promise of God to Israel as His people.

Let's go back to God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 17. In verses 7 and 8 God told him,

"I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an *everlasting* covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you. I will give to you and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an *everlasting* possession; and I will be their God."

Then, much later, God told King David in 2 Samuel 7 that his son Solomon would "... build a house for My name [the temple], and I will establish the throne of His kingdom *forever*" (13). God went on to tell David, "Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me *forever*, and your throne shall be established *forever*" (16).

And, yet later, God through Isaiah said of the Messiah, of Christ,

"There will be *no end* to the increase of His government or peace, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and *forevermore*" (9:7).

With all the wickedness prevailing in Judah and the certainty that the Babylonians would come to powerfully and cruelly punish them, Habakkuk was clinging to, depending on the promises of God. That helped him see the world around him as it really was.

To make sense of our world, we too need to depend on the promises of God. Peter tells us that God "... has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises ..." (2 Peter 1:4). God has given us many precious and magnificent promises. Think about some that come to your mind now. ... Let's share a few of them with each other. [... ... ...]

Read God's word noting His promises, and live by them.

Then, in addition to *Perspective* and God's *Promises*, to understand our world we also need *Patience*. We need to expect and wait for God to answer in His time. Drop down to the first verse of chapter 2 where Habakkuk says,

"I will stand on my guard post and station myself on the rampart; and I will keep watch to see what He will speak to me, and how I may reply when I am reproved."

He is not ...

- demanding an immediate answer from God;
- nor pulling his hair out as he anxiously paces back and forth;
- nor yet is he going off to pout, as Jonah did at one point.

He is expecting God to answer in His own time. He knows God will speak, but not when. He knows God will continue to guide him through this maze of difficulties and questions. And so, he is, like a soldier, going to be alert, on duty; to keep his eyes open and ears listening so he will be ready to receive what God tells him.

He also knows that he doesn't understand everything perfectly and that God will reprove or correct those misunderstandings. He is ready for that, even, I think, longing for the certainty that will bring. And so he waits patiently and expectantly for God. There is no other way, no other source of the truth that will help him understand his world.

To understand our world we also need *Patience*. We need to expect and wait for God to answer in His time. We cry out, as Habakkuk did, "How long, O LORD, will I call for help, and You will not hear?" (1:2).

Sometimes we have a question or problem, but don't really expect God to answer us. At other times we expect an answer and want, or even demand it right now. F.B. Meyer, a pastor and writer in England in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries observed on this verse,

"... Too often we ask questions, and do not wait for replies; shoot prayer-arrows into the air, without stopping to see where they alight, or what quarry they strike. We are in too great a hurry to take time and trouble for climbing the watch-tower, and awaiting the Divine reply. ...

"How often God's answers come, and find us gone! We have waited for awhile, and, thinking there was no answer, we have gone our way;

but as we have turned the first corner the post has come in. God's ships touch at our wharves; but there is no one to unload them. His letters lie at the office; but no one calls for them. It is not enough to direct your prayer unto God; look up, and look out, until the blessing alights on your head. When we ask what is according to his will, we receive while we pray."

"Yes," you may say, "but I am *not* a patient person!" You may not be, but God is in the business of making impatient people patient people. Paul wrote, "... the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, *patience*, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control..." (Galatians 5:22) *Patience*.

And God builds patience within us as we face difficult questions and problems. In Colossians chapter 1 Paul wrote that he prayed for believers to "walk in a manner worthy of the Lord" (10) ... being "strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and *patience*..." (11)

To move forward to understanding your world you need ...

- *Perspective*. To maintain a clear perspective of who God is.
- *Promises*. To depend on God's promises. And ...
- *Patience*. To expect and wait for God to answer in His time.

## **Conclusion.**

When you don't understand what God is saying and doing, move forward with *perspective*, *promises* and *patience*. Habakkuk is moving forward, but there are still a few cobwebs to be cleared as he waits for God. Wherever you are at today, follow his example. In the next quiet moments with God,

- Bring your questions and problems to Him once again.
- Thank Him for being the great and good God He is.
- Ask Him to help you to remember and to cling to His promises.
- Confess any lack of faith that He will answer or work as well as any rushing ahead of Him.
- Thank Him that the Holy Spirit uses His unlimited power, His glorious might to build patience in you.

© 2008. Lyle L. Wahl

Scripture, unless otherwise noted, taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.