

Hab. 1:5-2:4 A Recipe for Understanding (part 1)

Let's consider Habakkuk's quandary. He lives among the chosen people of God, the Nation of Israel. However, as God's people, they are very sinful. After the death of the great King Josiah, morality has declined considerably. There is violence, strife, contention, injustice, disobedience to the law of God. The wicked surround the righteous (vv. 2-4). And he has long been burdened with their sins. And he prays to God, "**How long**" will this continue before you do something? And then in v. 5 God answers. Look at vv. 5-6: "**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.**" God tells Habakkuk YOU AND THE PEOPLE WILL NOT BELIEVE WHAT I AM ABOUT TO TELL YOU. We often hear things that are unbelievable. Recently a 62 year-old man broke the world record for holding a plank at 8 hours and 15 minutes. NO WAY! And I wouldn't believe you unless you show me some proof. Well, God's answer to Habakkuk is more serious than breaking a plank record. Look at v. 6. "**For Behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation . . .**" *"The Babylonians are my tool of judgment!"*

In this world of great evil and sin, God does not answer as we think he should; we are often surprised at his answers. *"The Babylonians?" "God, Are you sure?"* Habakkuk must have questioned to himself, *"God, how did you arrive at this? How will bringing the Babylonians to our land to destroy us take care of the problem of sin and injustice among your people? I know you control the nations, but why would you want to use such an ungodly nation as a tool for justice? After all, they are more ungodly than us (v. 13). They need to be judged first, not us!"* I remember my 6th grade year from my neighborhood. All the kids gathered around this one really big, mean, kid. Everyone was scared of him, including me. He was always picking fights and influencing the other kids to follow him. And he was not a "righteous" little boy. He was a bully. In the same kind of way, Babylon was the big, powerful, bully.

Notice the description from vv. 6-11: "**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. They are dreaded and fearsome; their justice and dignity go forth from themselves. 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. They all come for violence, all their faces forward. They gather captives like sand. At kings they scoff, and at rulers they laugh. They laugh at every fortress, for they pile up earth and take it. Then they sweep by like the wind and go on, guilty men, whose own might is their god!**" Now, as we saw last week, Habakkuk is asking God to judge Judah. But, God's answer of the Babylonians is unimaginable. So what happens for the remainder of the book? Habakkuk asks questions, listens, and God answers. And great wisdom and peace and understanding follow. So here are a couple questions for us: *"How do we reconcile our understanding of God with what we see happening in this world?"* And, *"How can we find understanding from Habakkuk's example?"* I have three truths: 1) Appeal to the character of God; 2) Wait for his answer; and 3) Live by faith (next week).

1. Appeal to the character of God. Notice Habakkuk's FIRST response to God's surprising answer is to appeal to the character of God. Look at vv. 12-17: "**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. 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? You make mankind like the fish of the sea, like crawling things that have no ruler. 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. Therefore he sacrifices to his net and makes offerings to his dragnet; for by them he lives in luxury, and his food is rich. Is he then to keep on emptying his net and mercilessly killing nations forever?" Now, up to this point, I don't believe Habakkuk is satisfied yet. He is saying, *"God, I know you are eternal, holy, immovable, sovereign over the affairs of this world. And I know you are GOOD! This is why I don't understand your answer so far. However, I appeal to your character."*

This is often the example in the Bible. Do you remember Isaiah? His situation was similar to Habakkuk's, but a little earlier in Israel's history. He prophesied before the fall of the Northern Kingdom to Assyria and after. And He lived among a wicked people. And God tells him to go and preach. And Isaiah asks, "How long?" (which is very similar to Habakkuk in v. 2) And God says, **"Until cities lie waste without inhabitant, and houses without people, and the land is a desolate waste, and the LORD removes people far away, and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land."** In other words, judgment is coming, and on the whole, no one will listen to your message. So, how does Isaiah continue. He sees a vision of God. In Isaiah 6 we read: **"In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!"**

Beloved, when things don't make sense, when the sins of this world surround us, when injustice seems to rule supreme, when violence is widespread, when the unrighteous surround the righteous, when sickness overtakes our friends, our families, our loved ones, when the ungodly prosper, when it seems like the immorality of our society is heading down what seems to be an icy hill on a waxed sled, God is the immovable rock, eternal, holy, sovereign, good God, who is carrying out his plan for the nations and this world!

Application: A right understanding of God is essential for our worldview. He is eternal, holy, sovereign creator and Lord of all. And remember, He is the ROCK. He is immovable. Everything else in creation is movable. Everything else in creation is dependent on someone or something else, from the largest galaxy down to the smallest atom. We are all dependent! God is not! This means the difficult answers in life must come from HIM. **"In him we live and move and have our being"** (Acts 17:28). And, we can only find the right answers and find comfort in Him. We must cry out as King David in Ps. 61:1-3: **"Hear my cry, O God, listen to my prayer; from the end of the earth I call to you when my heart is faint. Lead me to the rock that is higher than I, for you have been my refuge, a strong tower against the enemy."**

2. Wait for his answer. I believe after Habakkuk receives God's answer to his first request that the Babylonians are coming, and then he appeals to God's character, he begins to wait to hear what God will say. We must remember that Habakkuk was a prophet with whom God spoke in a special way, so that he could tell the people. Look at 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."** The last word in this verse is often translated as "complaint" (ESV, RSV, NIV). But, it can also be translated as "reproof" or "rebuke." And based on the context, I think translation better captures the meaning. Think about it. Habakkuk is questioning God's answer in a very bold way to send the evil Babylonians. Look back in 1:12, **"Are you not from everlasting, O Lord my God, my Holy one? We shall not die."** I think he is saying, *"God, you have established a covenant with us. We cannot perish through such judgment. This is impossible. If you cannot die, and you have established your covenant with us, then we cannot die."* Well, we know God does not forget, nor does he forsake his covenant with his people. And even in the coming judgment, God will keep a remnant of faith as Isaiah reminds us in Is. 1:9: **"Except the LORD of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah."** I believe Habakkuk realizes his boldness and then says, *"I will now sit back and wait,"* fully expecting some kind of reproof or rebuke from God.

Notice the picture of Habakkuk's waiting. He says, **"I will take my stand at my watchpost."** Who is the watchman and what does he do? This person is a soldier, one appointed to constantly keep watch out over the horizon for any danger that might come into the city. And if the watchman sees the opposing army coming, he must immediately give the alarm. Kids, have you ever played capture the flag and been assigned the task of guarding the flag? I think of Josiah's story of playing capture the flag through the night and early into the morning. Much of the time is waiting for the other team to come. And then, when they begin to come, alert your team mates to help. Well, in the same kind of way, Habakkuk is Judah's watchman, waiting to hear from God so he can reveal truth (even if the truth is judgment) to God's people. Now, the watchman's job is two-fold: wait and warn.

Quick Application: As we wait we are not in control of the answer (from God), nor are we in control of the response (from the world). But, we must WARN. I know I am focusing on the "waiting," but let me briefly address the "warning." Our responsibility in this world is to **"make disciples"** (Matt. 28:18-20). And we cannot make disciples if we do not warn! This means we tell people the truth about judgment and about the answer to judgment, which is the good news of Jesus Christ. We give the gospel. We tell them John 3:16: **"For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life."** We tell them that judgment is coming. For the wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23). We tell them, *"The one who sins will die."* As Ezekiel, another watchman says, **"But when a righteous person turns away from his righteousness and does injustice and does the same abominations that the wicked person does, shall he live? None of the righteous deeds that he has done shall be remembered; for the treachery of which he is guilty and the sin he has committed, for them he shall die"** (Ezek. 18:24).

Brothers and sisters, I know it is difficult to talk about sin and judgment. But, it is through judgment that God chooses to save. You might think, “*What do you mean?*” “*Doesn't God just accept us all?*” No, God accepts those who come to Jesus. And even here, you might say, “*Ok, I get it, but what does Jesus have to do with judgment?*” Well, think about the cross. The cross is a place of JUDGMENT where a convicted convict is killed for his/her crimes. All of us deserve judgment for our sins. This is the reason for the cross! Jesus lived a holy life, COMPLETELY! He obeyed God in both his actions and his motives, never sinning. Yet, he laid down his life and died. WHY? He did it to save those who fall under God's judgment. He laid down his life as a sacrifice in the place of sinners. He received the judgment of God (Is. 53:10). And for those who trust, believe, receive Him, he takes away their judgment. And, he gives his righteousness. John 5:24 says: “**Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.**” Salvation comes through judgment! If you are not a Christian, you do not have to perish. Come to Christ! Believe on Him! Bring your sins to Him and by faith know they have been laid upon Christ. And there will be no more condemnation.

Now, back to my primary point. Understanding comes as we wait for God's answers. Though we are not “prophets” in the same way as Habakkuk, in principle, we do the same thing. In the midst of our questions about all the mysteries of life in a sinful world, we rely upon God, we wait for him, and little by little, understanding comes to us. How does this happen? It happens as we read the Word, trust the Word, meditate upon the Word. Habakkuk's situation was different. Yes, he had the Law of Moses, and the words of the prophets before him, but he did not have what we have, the full canon of Scripture. He waited for God to speak and give him an answer. Brothers and sisters, we have the answers. We know the end. And everything we need for NOW, is found in the Bible. And as Habakkuk will receive God's answer, God's reproof, so in the Bible, we know what God says. 2 Tim. 3:16 says, “**All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of may be complete, equipped for every good work.**” With this, let me end with some applications.

Application: There is a sharp contrast between those who wait for God and those who rely upon their own understanding. Prov. 3:5-6 comes to my mind. It says, “**Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.**” Habakkuk had a particular understanding, and it didn't make sense to him. But, he knew his place; he was a mere man, not God. And he did not “lean” on his own understanding. He acknowledged God as the one who will one day make sense of it all. (Part 2 of this sermon: to live by faith.) There is a very important verse found in Heb. 11:6 that addresses how we approach God. It says: “**And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.**” This is simple faith: coming to God in trust, knowing He knows what is best.

Application: We wait for both the good and the bad. Look at 3:16 after Habakkuk realizes God's answer of judgment through the Babylonians is final. “**I hear, and my body trembles; my lips quiver at the sound; rottenness enters into my bones; my legs tremble beneath me. Yet I will quietly wait for the day of trouble to come upon people who invade us.**” How can he do

this? Knowing God's decision to send the Babylonians, then to sit back and wait for their destruction. Well, there are a lot of reasons. 1) He trusts God's answer. 2) He knows God's ways are not his ways, even as difficult as they can be. 3) I believe he knows that salvation comes through judgment. 4) He knows that his home is heaven. And those things he values in this life are nothing compared to what God has prepared for him. I think of Phil. 3:8. And with this I will close. The Apostle Paul says: **"Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ"** (Phil. 3:8).

In the end, Brothers and Sisters, Understanding comes as we trust the character of God and wait for his answers. (Again, live by faith in the meantime will come in part 2).