

Habakkuk's second complaint

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[0:00] Going on in Habakkuk, well, the structure of the book is quite straightforward, I think. It goes question, questions, and then answer. So Habakkuk has lots of questions to the Lord.

The Lord answers, and then questions, and then answers. And then in the final chapter, we've got Habakkuk's song, a great song, which I'm looking forward to getting to. It's a simple structure, but it is a profound book. Habakkuk is asking some really hard and deep questions of the Lord's. If you have a look there in chapter one and the early verses, Habakkuk cries out violence. He sees violence before him, but he doesn't see the Lord working amongst his people, where there is violence and injustice and wrongdoing. Lord, are you seeing this?

Are you looking? Are you hearing my cries for mercy and help? But then the Lord does answer. We saw that last time. Chapter five, look at the nations and watch and be utterly amazed.

I'm going to do something in your days that you would not believe even if you were told. And the big answer is, I am raising up the Babylonians. I am raising up a mighty army to come in judgment.

That's not the answer Habakkuk was probably looking for. It's not a comfortable answer for us to read. And so understandably, Habakkuk has more questions. Maybe he has more questions than he does answers. So we're going to have a look at Habakkuk's second lot of questions to the Lord. And when I say have a look, I really want you to get looking in the text for yourselves, particularly as we begin. Often on a Sunday evening, less of us, a bit more informal, we can do this kind of thing. We can chat with one another and it's okay. If you're uncomfortable to chat to someone, then that's okay to you. If you'd rather just sit and ponder on your own, that's okay. But for the next few minutes, read verse 12 and chat amongst yourselves. What do you learn about God? and how do you think those truths will help Habakkuk's faith in the situation that he's in? Have a chat amongst yourselves for the next few minutes.

[2:45] desde desde desde Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. I think I'm going to give you one more minute on this.

[5:34] Thank you.

Thank you. Let's come back together.

It would be good to hear from one another so it's not just all me talking. What do you learn about God here? Anyone want to grab the mic off me?

Yeah. Do you want to say? No. Okay, we've discovered that God is everlasting.

Yeah. He's the everlasting God, absolutely. Yeah. That's it. That's one thing. One thing we learn about God. We'll look at these, think about these things a bit more in detail in a moment.

[7:00] Yeah, I mean, it's a full verse. It's a very full verse, isn't it? Yeah. God is God who's faithful. He'll preserve his people.

Where do you see that? The next sentence. My God, my Holy One, we will not die. We will not die.

Yeah. I heard some chatter on that.

I think that's the right translation. We will not die. My new NIV, and maybe this has caught some other people out, says you will not die. But I really think it's we will not die.

He is saying your people. You're not going to just wipe them out. You're going to keep your promises.

You are faithful to your people, absolutely. Good spot. What else did people spot? Pass it over to Steve. Well, he talks about the rock, doesn't he?

[8:01] Presumably the most nearest thing to an everlasting thing you could think of. Yes. But he talks about my God, my Holy One, my rock. So he's not sort of dissociating himself from God.

He's saying you are my God, you're my rock. Yeah. But I still want to understand. Yeah. Definitely a man of faith. Absolutely. Maybe one or two other things, Jerome.

God is God who judges. Yeah. Where do you see that? What did you see? God is a God who judges. Oh, Lord, you have ordained them as a judgment.

Yeah. Yeah. And when you read verses two to four, you can see why God would be judging his people. They have not been following him at all.

That violent and just conflict abounds. God's word is paralyzed. Yeah. Anything else? Anything else? Maybe final shout?

[9:11] The fact that God has ordained the Babylonians and appointed them. Yeah. So he's using secondary causes or he's using someone else to execute his judgment.

Yeah. And the Babylonians aren't an accident or just inevitability of history. There's something that God, the everlasting God, has decided ought to happen.

And it's happening because he's making it happen. Absolutely. You have ordained them. Yeah.

Yeah. Thank you, Phil. Oh. God is merciful.

Where do you see that? He's marked them for correction. I can't hear you. He's marked them for correction. Mm. Because he's a...

So we're not annihilation. Yeah. Yeah. And he's going to preserve them, as Roger said, we will not die. Thanks, Pete.

[10:16] Oh, are Sem is disputing you? No. No. No. No. No. No. No. Can you grab the microphone and read out verse 12 in your Bible?

Because perhaps it just says it slightly differently. Well, at the end of verse 12, it says, Oh, rock, you have marked them for correction.

Okay. Yeah. Very different to some of our NIVs, which says, Oh, rock, you have ordained them to punish. That's interesting. Thank you.

It's established in the fruit. Yeah. It's closer. I think that probably is much closer. Thank you. Thank you.

Any thoughts on question two? How do you think those truths will help Habakkuk's faith? We'll have, I think, more in a moment. But interested to hear from you guys. Thank you. Where's the microphone?

[11:25] Where's the microphone? thank you thank you um it says um that he knows that god is ever from everlasting he's eternal and he his god is holy so um that must undergird his faith um because he knows the beginning from the beginning to the end yeah absolutely and um he he does everything right because he's holy great maybe one more thought on this if there is brenda he definitely um understands um god's sovereignty doesn't he yeah you lord have appointed them to execute judgment you my rock have ordained them to punish he he he's quite clear that that that is god's ability and prerogative and he doesn't at all doubt that it's going to happen yeah yeah he he trusts that that god is suffering and and will have his way yeah thank you um good good work um i'm just going to repeat what you've said really um i i think so split this passage up in in two parts firstly who god is um and secondly how the situation seems so um as we've rightly said god god is everlasting that's the first thing we see here um i i think when i was younger i i used to think my grandma was so old she must be everlasting um maybe she felt the same um and until a few years ago i looked at queen elizabeth and and thought maybe she's everlasting maybe she's not gonna die even though i knew she probably would die um but but no no person is everlasting but there is someone who has who is not has been is so someone who's been around since before this world began and that is god and when habakkuk says lord are

you not from everlasting notice it's a question but i don't think habakkuk's doubting that the lord is everlasting i think he's seeing the situation seeing god's answer to his questions and thinking that this can't be good from my finite human position i just see this as a terrible thing that you are doing to judah i i don't know how this can be good i don't know how you the good everlasting god but can be comfortable with this but i do know you are everlasting i do know that you are god and you sit on your throne forever you are higher than us greater than us bigger than us and you you know how this is going to be worked out habakkuk as we've said is also saying you are my god the babylonians their god is their own strength but habakkuk says you are my god the people that i live amongst judah they they may have forgotten you but but i'm saying you are my god

i i'm gonna live faithfully for you and you are my covenant keeping everlasting god we've spotted it already it's habakkuk says we will not die we your people are held safely in your hands we will not die habakkuk is confident that the god's people won't be wiped out on the across the face of the earth they won't be destroyed the babylonians cannot completely knock them down he is preserving his people preserving his faithful people we will not die his confidence in god's good keeping power his promises you are my god and you are my holy one though i am not holy and though i live among a people who are really not holy the the people of judah they're not living holy as you've called us to you are holy and as he says in verse 13 your eyes are too pure to look on evil you are so so holy complete and utter purity you are so how can you look at the babylonians and be pleased to see their wickedness and their wickedness and their evil plans flourish how how can this be your answer by raising up an even more sinful people we'll get to that question properly in a moment but nevertheless i know you are a holy god i know your complete perfection and purity and you are my rock this week i was completely surprised to hear that we're going to have a general election from rishi sunak i was fully expecting it to be in like november i'm a big fan of the a couple of political podcasts and i think it was george osborne said it's going to be the 14th of november it's not there's going to be another general election another change of government maybe another change in prime minister many political commentators are saying that the theme of this election is surely going to be change but in five years or 10 years 15 years time the government will change again and maybe again and again and again human leaders rise and fall and it it seems very quickly at the moment doesn't it where do we find stability we don't find it there but we can look up to god who is rock that's what habakkuk says you my rock unchanging and faithful he won't be knocked off his throne his faithfulness his love his goodness his justice will never ever change he is the same yesterday today and forever constant and faithful in a world which feels so full of change and for habakkuk and judah the situation with the babylonians being raised up and and taking the people out of the land it seems like a complete change and destabilizing times for the nation but habakkuk can look and cling to the rock who will never change and surely that's the same for us when there's situations that we face in our lives that just

seem so full of change and unsettling we look to the god who cannot change our rock our faithful gods and finally he's the god who appoints and ordains habakkuk is is resting on many thoughts of god here that he is everlasting he is his god his people are safe in his hands he's the holy one the unchanging rock therefore with confidence he can know that this is under god's control he is the one who appoints and ordains you lord have appointed them to execute judgment you my rock have ordained them to punish god said himself chapter 1 verse 6 i am raising up the babylonians so therefore with great confidence habakkuk can know this is all under god's control human history is in god's hands some people say it's his story it is this arrangement may seem hard and the future for habakkuk and the people and the land it may seem rocky and uncertain but he is the big god he does not change he is appointed and ordained the babylonians to be used as tools in his big plan for his people and for his worlds you can chat amongst yourselves again when changing and troubling times come our way how can remembering who god is in verse 12 help us have a chat for the next few minutes thanks thanks

Thank you.

Thank you.

[22:40] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Brenda's got it. Does anyone want to share an answer on this? Share thoughts?

Jureme over the back.

Thank you. I think there's a danger that this can sound like a kind of pious platitude or an evangelical platitude, but I really do think what immediately came to mind for me was Romans 8.28.

[24:39] Can you read that for us? And we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good. For those who are called according to his purpose, I think for me there's that whole thing of, even though we are utterly perplexed, we don't understand what's going on, we ask why, but we can rest and trust in that it is for good.

Yeah. We can rest in that attribute of God in his goodness. And the other thing as well is his purpose. I think before coming to faith, if bad things happened, they would seem to have absolutely no purpose, be utterly random.

And that's an incredibly dark place to be. But I think in the midst of darkness, knowing that there is a purpose is a great comfort, even if we don't understand exactly what that purpose is.

Amen. Thanks, Jeremy. Just picking up on what Jeremy said at the beginning about pious platitude, I suppose another thing that this text does, it shows us that there is a real tension between God's holiness and blamelessness and what he allows and indeed ordains to happen.

I mean, I haven't got onto it yet, but the questions that follow, why do you tolerate the treacherous? Why are you silent? Is he to keep on emptying his net and destroy nations without mercy?

[26:17] So, I suppose it also says there's a rightness about sensing the tension of it. I suppose God doesn't expect us just to suffer and say, oh, well, that's God's will.

But it's something really to, perhaps to struggle with and be sensitive to the tension of it. Why isn't God answering prayer?

He's the sort of God who answers prayer. Why hasn't he done it? God is a God who loves righteousness. Why does he allow evil to flourish? I mean, it's full of the sense of the tension of it. I was just thinking if we were in Nazi Germany, we would be in agony about this, wouldn't we? Why is God allowing such evil people to flourish?

Why is God allowing such evil people to flourish if we were in Nazi Germany? And of course, people that we know would have been in Nazi Germany. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

[27:17] Yeah, we're going to come onto it properly in a moment. But yeah, he can't quite put what he knows about God together with what he sees. Trying to make sense of it.

Yeah. Asama. One of the things that... One of the things that... I find it very hard when I'm going through hard things.

But the truth is, nothing that happens to me takes God by surprise. Yeah.

Yeah. And that is a real comfort, but not while I'm going through it. Mm. Yeah. We're still going to have those questions and things aren't going to feel great still.

So how do we... God is a holy God. Mm. And we were saying that, does not the judge of the earth do right?

[28:19] Yeah. So that's somewhere else. Somewhere else in scripture, Genesis, definitely. Yeah, yeah. So we know that he's going to do right. Mm.

So that's comforting, isn't it, in itself? Yeah. However things look in the world. Mm. The various wars and things. Mm. Mm.

He's doing something, but we don't know exactly what it is. Yeah. Maybe punishing some people through other... Not righteous people, but through other people.

Mm. And then that nation might be punished as well. Mm. So just like here. Pete? And perhaps final comment as well.

Final comment. No pressure. Yeah. Okay. Yeah, continuation from Phil. So we were thinking, well, if we were atheist, bad things happen in this world, and that would be the end when we die.

[29:25] But with God, there is a justice. Mm. And in that, although it's a tough thing to think about, but in that we should have comfort. Mm.

Yeah, in that there is comfort. Yeah, absolutely. Thank you. Let's, yeah, let's move on. And I think Phil's teed it up really nicely for us, actually.

So Habakkuk looks at how the situation actually is. So he's spoken about God, lots of true and wonderful things, but then he looks at how this situation seems.

Look at verse 13. Habakkuk says, Your eyes are too pure to look on evil. You cannot tolerate wrongdoing. So why then do you tolerate the treacherous?

Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves? Lord, you're completely and utterly holy.

[30:35] How then can you look at this wrongdoing? And just seems to sit idly by. Habakkuk's asking, why do you allow evil?

But actually, I want to take it further than that. Habakkuk is saying, if God is good, if his eyes are too pure to look on evil, why does he allow evil?

He's trying to make sense of it. And he says, he's very honest with how he sees the situation.

Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves? It feels like Babylonians are far more wicked than Judah.

There are at least some faithful followers of you in this land. How can you just let them swallow us all up? Why are you tolerating those who are treacherous?

[31:36] They're traitors. They don't follow you. And don't look at... They don't see your hand in this. Why do you allow this, God?

So to try and make sense of this, he tends to fish. Have a look at verse 14.

You have made people like the fish in the sea. Like the sea creatures who have no ruler. I would take Habakkuk aside when he says that.

If he said that in our meeting and I'd say to him, actually, Habakkuk, God said, let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky.

But Habakkuk says, that's not what it feels like. It feels like you have made people like the fish in the sea, like the sea creatures that have no ruler.

[32:45] God, you don't seem to be in charge here. It seems like you've just left us to do as we please. And it's a mess. Remember what he said early in chapter 1.

The law is paralysed. Your word has no effect here in the land. Nobody's listening. No one seems to be in command.

What's going on here, Lord? And perhaps we can identify with how Habakkuk feels. We look at our world and we see lots of people living for themselves.

Self is king. God and his word doesn't matter. Be he you want to be. Live out your own truth. That kind of thing.

So perhaps as Habakkuk says, verse 14, we can kind of understand how he's feeling. We can have sympathy. Just to note and aside really, interesting that Habakkuk uses fish imagery.

[33:50] Zephaniah 1, verse 10 says this, On that day, declares the Lord, a cry will go up from the fish gate, wailing from the new quarter, and a loud crash from the hills.

Apparently the people were taken out of Jerusalem into exile through the fish gate. So I'm told. That's an interesting aside, that he's got fish in the mind.

Anyway, we return to Habakkuk. Verse 15 says this, The wicked foe pulls all of them up with hooks. He catches them in his net. He gathers them in his dragnet. And so he rejoices in his glads. He talks first about the enemies using a hook, grabbing helpless and defenseless fish.

It's quite an image. And then it goes further, and he talks about a net. The Babylonians catching the Israelites in their net, gathering them up.

[34:55] They're mine. I've caught them. And a net in Habakkuk's world was a symbol of absolute power and control and of ultimate world dominion.

So interesting that Habakkuk should use this image of a net and a dragnet. The Babylonians are becoming a huge superpower.

And fish are just entering into their net so quickly that they're being gathered in under their rule and regime.

And Habakkuk takes this image further and says this in verse 16, Therefore he sacrifices to his net and burns incense to his dragnet. In other words, they're worshipping their own nets.

They're worshipping what they have to bring in these people. Worshipping their weapons. Worshipping their strength, we were told in verse 11.

[36:05] That's where these people are at. And Habakkuk says it's so annoying because they're living in luxury. Verse 16, For by his net he lives in luxury and enjoys the choicest food.

They're enjoying a fine life. Enjoying the riches and the pleasures of this world. It just feels so unfair, God. They've got the nicest food, they've got the nicest houses and they're leaving our land devastated.

Sometimes I find myself comparing myself with a friend who I was at college with, studying IT. He's now got a job earning over £50,000 a year, a luxury apartment, a fancy car.

I'm trying to live faithfully for the Lord and where is that for me? And yet I know Jesus' words are true. Could gain the whole world and yet forfeit my soul.

These Babylonians are enjoying the riches of their success, but they're not going to stand in the judgment unless they turn to the Lord, are they? Yes. And verse 17.

[37:29] And verse 17. Habakkuk says, is he to keep on emptying his net, destroying nations without mercy? Another fishing image.

They keep emptying their nets. They keep emptying out their nets and if fish aren't returned immediately to water, they're going to die, aren't they? They're destroying nations, the Babylonians. And I kind of read that question and feel like Habakkuk is kind of saying, will this just carry on forever?

Where's the end? It feels like, God, you're indifferent to the evil that is going on. It feels like you're just sitting idly by.

Will this just carry on forever? But if God is good, why does he allow evil? Well, remember what Habakkuk said of the Lord in verse 12.

[38:37] He is everlasting. When I was a child, I absolutely hated going to the dentist. On multiple occasions, I would refuse to sit in the dentist's chair and I would be in tears and wonder why my mum would make me go to the dentist.

But my mum was older and wiser than I am and she knew that it was for my good that I went there, even if it was unpleasant.

God is the everlasting God. He is far older and wiser than the people of Judah. He is far older and wiser than Habakkuk.

And his plans are for his people's good. Remember what Jerome shared from Romans. But why this?

Why this way? This is judgment and it feels devastating. What else did we learn about God? In verse 12, he is the holy one.

[39:49] In verse 13, your eyes are too pure to look on evil. God is holy and he must deal with sin. And the people of Judah, they are violent, they are unjust, they are wicked, they do wrong.

They don't listen to God's words. God is holy and he must deal with sin. We'll see next week that God will deal with the Babylonians but first he's dealing with his people's sin.

And we know that God continues to do that through the Bible. and then we get to his son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And 1 John 3 verse 8, halfway through that verse, John says, the reason the son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work. The devil, the wicked one, the evil one.

God has dealt with sin in his son who came to destroy the devil's work. But perhaps now we're sitting here and we're getting uncomfortable ourselves because, well hang on Daniel, I sin.

[41:14] I do evil. I've been violent. I've done wrong. I've been unjust. I've ignored God's word. And many other things. And I know that my God is holy and I know that I should be holy too but I know all too often I am not.

Will I end up in this net of judgment? In a passage in Ephesians 4 all about how we need to be living holy lives, Paul writes this.

And do not grieve the Spirit of God with whom you were sealed for the day of adoption. Okay, so we can grieve the Spirit. We can do wrong things.

But, we are sealed by the Spirit. He's not going to depart from us. Jesus has paid in full for our sins at the cross.

Habakkuk is right. The Lord is everlasting and his plans for his world and for his people are being worked out. and they're being worked out for his people's good.

[42:33] His promises are being worked out. His promises which are yes and amen in Jesus Christ. And so we can say with Habakkuk, you are my God, you are my Holy One, we will never die.

And so for Habakkuk and all the righteous people in the land who feel that they are poor in spirit, how blessed are they for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

For Habakkuk and those following their God rather than themselves, they lament the situation among God's people. they mourn over sin. But as they mourn, they are blessed for they will be comforted.

And for Habakkuk and all those in the land who hunger and thirst for righteousness, they are blessed. They will be filled. For Habakkuk and those who are pure in heart, they will be blessed for they will see their God.

They will not die but have everlasting life and their everlasting God. We believe that when God's word is read and preached, God is speaking to our hearts.

[43:58] And God has, I'm sure, been speaking this evening. For some of us, maybe he's convicted us of some sort of sin in our lives.

For others of us, he's assured us that he is the unchanging and eternal God who we can trust in changing and troubling times. And for others, if it's maybe he's spoken to us in other ways.

Instead of rushing on to sing our next song and enjoy a bank holiday Monday, let's pause now and just quietly respond to God in our hearts. And then I'll lead us in a prayer and then we'll sing.

Thank you.