

Habakkuk 1:12-2:1: When the Lord's Answers Don't Make Sense

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[0 : 00] Again, that's Habakkuk chapter 1, verse 12, through chapter 2, verse 1. Please stand for the reading of God's word. Are you not from everlasting?

O Lord, my God, my Holy One, we shall not die. O Lord, you have ordained them as 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 look idly at traitors and remain silent when the wicked swallow 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.

[1 : 12] Is he then to keep on emptying his net and mercilessly killing nations forever? I will take my stand at my watch post 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.

This is the word of the Lord. Good afternoon to you.

It's good to be able to worship, to sit under God's word with you as a family, as those who are part of this household. Our Questions for God series continues on this afternoon with our third message from the book of Habakkuk.

Join me in prayer as we come before the Lord on today. Lord, you have given us a very small book that deals with very big issues.

Our prayer is that you would open the eyes of our hearts and enable us to see. We come, Lord Jesus, before you and your word.

[2 : 34] Lord, enlighten us and strengthen us is our prayer. In Jesus' name, amen. For ages, people have pondered the why do bad things happen to good people question.

The inability that we have to deliver clean, neat answers have varied impact on mankind.

Answers, however, have been so elusive that some have succumbed to unbelief or retreated further into their atheism.

What does one do when the Lord's answers to our questions really doesn't make sense?

Or at least his answers are not those that we would readily embrace. This past week, Yale Schoolmaker at our community group shared with us a posting of a friend on Facebook.

[3 : 54] This individual was having a conversation with an atheist. The atheist noted that if there is a God, he is not in Africa.

This person's assessment, given the reality of things like AIDS and famine and other scourges that have ravaged the continents, that was that person's estimate understanding.

If there's a God, he sure isn't in Africa, given the things that are going on there. A little over a week ago, a cruise ship with roughly 4,000 people ran aground off the coast of Italy.

The latest toll has 12 people dead and 21 people missing. Among those was a godly Christian couple who had raised four children and finally had the freedom, financially and otherwise, to take a dream trip, as it were.

A lot of bad things happened to people like Gerald and Barbara Heil. Questions. When answers elude us, some people find justification then for their unbelief and doubts about God.

[5 : 35] I told you. You see? And they point to various things, situations, circumstances to have grounds for their unbelief.

What about you? How do you respond to these kinds of things? What we've seen over the last couple of weeks in the book of Habakkuk, we notice that the Lord answers the prophet's questions when he did actually generate additional kinds of questions.

Habakkuk was a man with questions. We saw that in verses 1 through 4. And the Lord, verses 5 through 11, was a God with answers.

But the verses before us today lets us know that Habakkuk wasn't, Habakkuk wasn't quite ready to cosign the answers that God had given to him.

And so we have before us today a second complaint by the prophet to God. Notice the things that are before us. I want verses 12 through 14 tell us something about God.

[6 : 52] Verses 15 through 17 tell us something about the God-less. And then in chapter 2, verse 1, actually tells us something about the God-less.

God, the God-less, then the God-less. Why did Habakkuk cry out to the Lord for a second time?

Because according to verses 5 through 11, the Lord was going to use the bad boys of the Middle East, the ancient Near East, the Chaldeans, to discipline his wayward people.

That was his plan. That's what we heard on last week. these cruel conquerors that they were. And they were going to be the scourge that God was going to use to chastise and to correct his people.

And Habakkuk's response was, what, Lord? Convictions about God, we see them in verses 12 through 14. Let me just read that again for you.

[8 : 02] 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 pure 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, devours the man more righteous than he?

You make mankind like the fish of the sea, like the crawling things that have no ruler. Did you notice all of the second person pronouns that were there?

you, you, you, you, you have ordained, you who are pure eyes, you make, God is in focus in those verses.

Habakkuk's, Habakkuk's appeal to God is on the basis of his firm convictions about God. Huh? Are you not from everlasting?

[9 : 10] What were some of his convictions about God that come through in the text that are before us? Huh? Lord, you are the eternal God.

You see that? You are from everlasting. He is the God of eternity with an eternal kind of perspective.

perspective. Huh? He's always, always has been and always will be God, the supreme ruler of the universe. He has no beginning, has no ending.

Huh? But not only is he eternal, he's a personal God. He's the God who was worshipped by Habakkuk. He's my God and the God of God's people.

He claims his people and his people have laid claim to him. He is my Lord. He is my God. He is my Savior.

[10 : 16] He's eternal. He's personal. But he's the Holy One also, isn't he? Huh? He is unique and separate from all creation, all created beings.

He is in absolutely class of one. Set apart from humanity and all so-called gods. For thou, O Lord, art high above all the earth and you are exalted above all gods.

Huh? He's holy. Huh? He's the covenant keeping God. Look, we shall not die. Huh? Because he is the covenant keeping God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Huh? His people will not be annihilated because God has given promises that still had to be fulfilled. The Abrahamic covenant, the Davidic covenant.

Huh? So he's expressing his confidence in God who he knew who was. Hear the choice and there is a textual variegate here and some feel that because he's speaking about the you are from everlasting, everlasting.

[11 : 29] The phrase we shall not die should actually be you shall not die which is in accord with God's eternity. Again, I think that this is a viable option that we have here before you and I've assumed or taken the one that the ESV text has given us.

He's eternal. He's personal. He's holy. He's the covenant keeping God but he's the God who's sovereign over all. Look at the last part of verse 12 as well as the first part of verse 14.

Notice what he says. You have ordained them. You have done that Lord as a judgment and you have established them for reproof.

It's something that God has done in his sovereignty in his sovereign choice but also look at verse 14. You make mankind like the fish of the sea.

Again, he's in control over all things. Huh? This is exactly what the prophet is reacting to.

[12 : 37] That God who is in control over all things has allowed or even ordained these kinds of things. Notice also he's the rock, the refuge and protector of his people.

A rock is a place for security and refuge. Huh? Such the Lord has been for his people of ages and thus the hymn writer could sing, rock of ages cleft from me let me hide myself in thee.

He's pure. You see that? He's up pure eyes. The character of God is so pure friends that evil certainly does offend him and repulses him. He can't look upon it with pleasure or approval.

But think of the eyes that things that you yourself turn your eyes from and then imagine the holy God and how he feels about those kinds of things and lesser kinds of things.

These were the convictions that Habakkuk had and it was because of these very convictions that he had about God that he was asking God these questions that we see.

[13 : 44] He raised them the questions because of his convictions. The statement of the Lord's purity of vision is followed by a question concerning the Lord looking at or seeing traitors.

You see that there? In verse 13, you who are pure eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong, why do you look idly or do nothing at traitors and remain silent when the wicked swallows!

The Lord's plan was to use these ancient Near Eastern terrorists to discipline his people because within the family of God's people there had been cruelty and injustice.

And Habakkuk also had a problem with that, but the Lord's corrective raised other questions for the prophet in our text today. here's what we have.

The Lord's actions could be likened to a parent in our day securing an outsider to come in and use extreme corporal punishment on children.

[15 : 04] Or like Chicago Police Department using ruthless gangs to punish lesser criminals. That's sort of the idea of what we're seeing here. How could the one who was described as not able to tolerate evil allow wicked, cruel, uncaring people to devour those who were less wicked, or who were less wicked, that is, his own people?

How can God allow such things? Reconciling our convictions about God with the circumstances that God allows things can indeed be so, so challenging.

These matters fall under the heading of what's known as theodicy from two words God and theos, God and dike, meaning to vindicate or to vindicate or to justify.

why? Why do bad things, cruel things, happen to people who are relatively good? Of course, according to the Romans, there's none good, no, not one.

Why does evil seemingly triumph over good? How can an all-wise God allow the reign of terror in this world?

[16 : 27] Are not these questions that you and I have today? Are these not the questions that theologians and philosophers and people in the pew and people in the street in the midst of pain and confusion, they pondered these kinds of things for years.

Scripture shapes our convictions about God's benevolence. We know that God is good because Scripture informs us of that truth, but not only that, we've also experienced that, but at the same time, you and I cannot ignore the presence of evil even in the most ideal situations.

Those are the realities, and those are the tensions, friends, that you and I face in our world. How can we reconcile these kinds of tensions or do we ever resolve them?

Perhaps a better question is this. Will you and I allow evil or less than the best earthly realities cause us to change our convictions about God?

We must not allow the things that we may not be able to fully understand to shake us from our biblical convictions about God.

[17 : 54] We must not allow that. We must not allow our understanding of God to be reshaped by our circumstances, whether they are good or whether they are evil.

That's a big temptation, isn't it? We must not be of the mindset that when all is good, God is good, but when everything is not good or well, he is still good.

When things aren't going well, well, he's not so good then. But notice what we have here in the text before us moves on to the metaphor of fishing in verses 14 through 17.

The Chaldeans are the fishermen and the cats that we see there are the peoples of the Middle East, the Middle Eastern nations of that day.

You, verse 14, make mankind like the fish of the sea, like the crawling things that have no ruler. He brings them up, all of them with a hook.

[19 : 09] He drags them out with his net. He gathers them in his drag net so he rejoices and is glad. Therefore he sacrifices to his net and makes offerings to his drag net for by them he lives in luxury and his food is rich.

The local nations like crawling things, hapless and helpless and hopeless without a leader. They are ripe for the catch, for the kill.

They are like fruit that's ripe to be picked. And there are those friends in view of what Habakkuk is saying here, that those of us that if we could we would vote God out as ultimate ruler and sovereign over all things.

You and I would point the finger at him, we would deem him incompetent and inept and inconsistent if we had that right.

But yet when you and I look at his resume, when you and I look at what we have here before us in this particular text, we must admit that there is absolutely none like him, is absolutely the only one and the best one to be in charge.

[20 : 27] The very things that Habakkuk points out are the things that help us to see the very fitness of God. He's holy. He's eternal.

Huh? And all of the other things that we've looked in the text. Huh? So Habakkuk's complaint rises out of the convictions. His convictions about God but his complaint also arises because of the conduct of the godless in verses 15 through 17.

Here is the instrument, the scourge in God's hand, the instrument, the nation, the person that he's using to chastise his people. The activities of these godless Chaldeans are in view in verses 15 and 16.

He's on a fishing expedition and he's successful. He hooks them and drags them and gathers them and then rejoices over his catch.

Not only that, he worships, he idolizes warfare and might and weapons. His might is his god as we've seen in chapter 1 verse 11.

[21 : 34] In view of these realities, the third question comes into view in verse 17. Is he then to keep on emptying his net and mercilessly killing nations forever?

Huh? Is there an end of his reign of terror? Huh? But notice also, convictions about God, conduct of the godless, but also we see the confidence of the godly.

Chapter 2 verse 1. Look there with me. I will take my stand at my watch post 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.

Huh? How does one position himself or herself as a person with convictions about God while at the same time living in a world where wickedness is apparent?

Notice the actions of Habakkuk there in view and perhaps his actions are instructive for you and me here today. He assumes the posture or the position of a watchman.

[22 : 55] A city watchman would take his station to look out for danger or to keep watch of what was going on within his sight or who saw that someone was coming and warned the people of God.

That's what the prophets were also described in the Old Testament as watchmen who could see and warn people in view of what they saw. Habakkuk looks and he waits.

He waits with confidence to see what the Lord will say. He has confidence in God. He's waiting on him to respond.

You pray. Now what? Getting ready for the answer. Don't be surprised by the answer. An answer that could even mean a correction in the perspective that you and I have.

So what does one do when the Lord's answers don't quite make sense? Three things that I want to tell you that may help you to put your hands and heart around I believe what we have in this text.

[24 : 10] First thing renew your convictions. When the convictions that you have about God are challenged by circumstances hold on to them.

don't allow life's crises to change your scripture informed convictions.

Don't allow yourself to be blown all across the map so to speak because of the kind of winds that are blowing in the atmospheric conditions of the world at large but in your life in particular.

We must be reminded of God's character and even appeal to it. We must trust God's character even when his conduct seems to conflict with his character.

We must remember that his indeed is an eternal perspective and prayerfully come to scripture again and if necessary again and be reminded and be strengthened and have your convictions renewed by what we see in the written word of God.

[25 : 34] Psalms is a great place to do that because they deal with all of the varied circumstances of life. I think of the psalmist in Psalm 73 who was so so discouraged when he saw what was going on around him but then we see in verse 16 there is a change when's the change come?

When he comes into the presence of God and then he gains the right kind of perspective on the circumstances of life in the presence of God so renew your convictions but here's another thing re-examine the cross fresh fresh perspective friends can be gained by re-examining the cross of Christ when I survey the wondrous cross on which the prince of glory died my richest gain I count but loss loss and poor contempt on all my pride surveying the cross helps me to put the sufferings of this world the challenges of this world in fresh perspective Acts chapter 3 verses 23 through 25 says this listen

Jesus delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God again this is from the upper side again in the sovereignty of God his son is the payment for our sins but on the underside what what Peter preaching on the day of Pentecost says you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men huh but God raised him up loosing the pangs of death because it was not possible for him to be held by it here's the deal God who did not prevent the cruelest evil in human history huh but he redeemed it huh can certainly allow and eventually redeemed the ugly in this world it was at the cross the sovereign

God and his eternal planning and wisdom allow the most cruel act in human history the crucifixion of his son huh reexamine renew reexamine the cross and all that that meant and God in heaven and what happened on earth under his very ordination and under his ah huh when the Lord says don't make sense take a seat at the foot of the cross and look at what happens there the psalmist psalm 73 he went to the sanctuary of God I encourage you to do things at the foot of the cross and allow that to shape your perspective and your understanding one final thing according to and it's in a card with what we see in chapter 2 verse 1 resolve to watch and to wait huh after pouring out your heart wait huh those who have confidence in the

Lord can wait huh pouring out your heart to God wait to hear what the Lord has to say don't rush to judgment but wait so what am I saying today simply this when convictions about God are challenged by the circumstances in life we must hold on to these convictions about God and resolve ourselves to watching and waiting to see how he will work things out in a way or what exactly it is he will say put your confidence in God that would be my encouragement that would be my exhortation to you and the God in whom you have the most firm biblical convictions about him Psalm 121 reminds us that ultimately it is the Lord who is our source of help and may we with questions and all these things find ourselves waiting on him the one who is ultimately and eternally the one who guards us regardless of what happens right down here as we look to the one in whom is our help and is our hope pray with me would you please heavenly father we rejoice!

[30 : 37] we rejoice in what we see here and lord you know all under the sound of my voice and you know where each of us might be stretched and challenged and even our convictions about you challenged by reason of what's happening in the world or perhaps in our worlds individually so may we have our convictions strengthened may we examine life in view of the shadow of the cross and all that was done there and the cruel evil that was done there and your ordination of it and your watching over it but your redeeming it may we find hope and strengthen these things and may we be strengthened in Christ's name is our prayer amen