

**IN WRATH REMEMBER MERCY . . .  
THE JUST SHALL LIVE BY FAITH --  
COMMENTARY ON THE BOOK OF HABAKKUK**

by Paul G. Apple, December 2006

**THE LONG TERM CONVICTION OF FAITH EXULTS IN THE GOD  
OF OUR SALVATION DESPITE THE PERPLEXING QUESTIONS  
OF THE PAIN AND APPARENT INJUSTICE OF OUR PRESENT  
CIRCUMSTANCES**

*“In wrath remember mercy.”  
“The just shall live by faith.”  
(Habakkuk 3:2; 2:4)*

For each section in the Book of Habakkuk:

- Thesis statement                   ... to focus on the big idea
- Analytical outline                 ... to guide the understanding
- Devotional questions            ... to encourage life application
- Representative quotations        ... to stimulate deeper insight

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Paul Apple, 304 N. Beechwood Ave., Baltimore MD 21228.

[www.bibleoutlines.com](http://www.bibleoutlines.com)

[paulgapple@gmail.com](mailto:paulgapple@gmail.com)

## BACKGROUND OF BOOK OF HABAKKUK

**Malick:** The surprising judgment which the Lord is going to bring upon wicked Judah through the evil, idolatrous Babylonians does not compromise His goodness, but engenders faith because He will one day also judge the Babylonians and deliver His people as their mighty warrior

**Stedman:** The prophet Habakkuk was a contemporary of the prophet Jeremiah, who is known to us as the weeping prophet, because he ministered to the Southern Kingdom of Judah in the darkest days of its national history, just before the Babylonians sacked Jerusalem and carried the people into captivity. Habakkuk (his name means, "the embracer") also was in Jerusalem at that time, so he too saw all that went on.

**Piper:** The situation which Habakkuk faces is the imminent invasion of the southern kingdom of Judah by the Chaldeans (who are the same as the Babylonians). This invasion eventually happened at the end of the sixth century B.C. and Jerusalem fell to Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C. The Lord revealed to Habakkuk beforehand that Judah was going to be punished for her sin by the Chaldeans. Unlike Joel and Zephaniah and Amos, Habakkuk does not even mention the possibility that destruction could be averted. He does not call for national repentance. It is too late. Instead, he predicts the destruction of Judah and beyond that the doom of the Chaldeans themselves. And he promises that the only way to preserve your life through the judgment is by faith. So even though destruction is decreed for the nation, there is hope for individuals who hold fast their confidence in God.

**Luther:** His name speaks as one who took his nation to his heart, comforted it and held it up, as one embraces and presses to his bosom a poor weeping child, calming and consoling it with good hope."

**McGee:** This little book opens in gloom and closes in glory. It begins with a question mark and closes with an exclamation point. Habakkuk is a big WHY? Why God permits evil is a question that every thoughtful mind has faced. I think that this book is the answer to that question. Will God straighten out the injustice of the world? This book answers that question. Is God doing anything about the wrongs of the world? This book says that He is. In my opinion it is possible to reduce the doubt of Thomas in the New Testament, of Habakkuk in the Old Testament, and of modern man into the one word: Why? It is the fundamental question of the human race.

### OUTLINE:

#### I. PERPLEXITY of the Prophet (Chap. 1)

##### 1. First Problem of the Prophet, 1:1-4

*Why does God permit evil?*

##### 2. God's Answer, 1:5-11

*God was raising up Chaldeans to punish Judah (v.6)*

3. Second Problem of the Prophet (greater than the first), 1:12-17  
*Why would God permit His people to be punished by a nation more wicked than they? Why did He not destroy the Chaldeans?*

## II. PERCEPTION of the Prophet (Chap. 2)

1. Practice of the Prophet, 2:1  
*He took the secret problem to the secret place.*
2. Patience of the Prophet, 2:2,3  
*He waited for the vision.*
3. Pageant for the Prophet, 2:4  
*The great divide in humanity: One group, which is crooked, is flowing toward destruction; the other group, by faith, is moving toward God. This is inevitable.*
4. Parable to the Prophet, 2:5-20  
*The application is self-evident from the vision. The Chaldeans, in turn, would be destroyed. God was moving among the nations.*

## III. PLEASURE of the Prophet (Chap. 3)

1. Prayer of the Prophet, 3:1,2  
*The prophet, who thought God was doing nothing about evil, now asks Him to remember to be merciful. Was he afraid that God was doing too much?*
2. Program of God, 3:3-17  
*God rides majestically in His own chariot of salvation (v.8)*
3. Position of the Prophet, 3:18-19  
*He will rejoice (v. 18). He has come from pain to pleasure.*

### McGee:

In the book of Judges there is put down a great principle of government, a principle which is also stated very clearly in the prophecy of Isaiah. All of the subsequent prophets simply bear out and apply this principle which has already been stated. The principle is this: There are three steps in the downfall of a nation. First of all, there is religious apostasy. The second step is moral awfulness. And the third step is political anarchy. These are the three steps by which nations pass off the stage of human history. That has always been the way that it has moved. You see, the primary problem never was political anarchy. The primary problem never was moral awfulness. As bad as these are, the root problem goes back to religious or spiritual apostasy, a turning away from the living and true God.

**Freeman:** The style of Habakkuk is unique. Instead of addressing the people directly as the Lord's spokesman, Habakkuk imparts his message as a dialogue between himself and

God based upon certain questions which perplex him. The prophecy is divided into two parts. The first part, consisting of chapters 1-2, is the dialogue between the prophet and God concerning the Lord's announcement of the approaching judgment upon sinful Judah at the hands of the Babylonians. The second section, chapter 3, is a prayer in the form of a psalm. The psalm is a remembrance of the mighty works of the Lord in the past for His people, and a prayer for the Lord to revive His work on behalf of Israel.

**Gaebelein:** There is profound significance in the fact that God gave one of the very greatest of all spiritual insights – *“the just shall live by his faith”* (Hab. 4:2b) – to a man who cried out to Him against injustice and violence. For Habakkuk there was no incompatibility between impassioned concern for social righteousness and the faith by which a man is justified. In this prophet's perplexity, God revealed to him the moral pattern of history that tyranny and oppression are self-destructing but that faith in the Lord is life-giving. God showed this concerned man how He would use the Babylonians as a scourge to punish the wickedness of His people and then how He would require the Babylonians for their cruelty. His ultimate response to Habakkuk's perplexity about the problem of evil came through the great theophany described in the third chapter of the book. In it God showed the prophet something we too need to know – that the divine logic in answering our profoundest problems transcends our human reason.

**Heflin:** It is better to live in faith than in rebellion, trusting God when answers are not to be found, living a life of faithfulness even when evil seems to have the upper hand. This approach to life is wise because God is the omnipotent ruler; He will ultimately prevail over evil.

Major Theological Themes:

The great issue with which Habakkuk struggles is theodicy. How could a just and holy God allow evil to exist? How could He remain inactive and silent in the face of brutality, injustice, and atrocious inhumanity? Though intellectual answers for the problem ultimately give way to experiential answers, Habakkuk does in fact learn several significant theological truths:

- 1) First, he learns that God and good will inevitably triumph. . . God's people must be a waiting people, living with the certain hope that eternity will clarify the issues, revealing the triumph of right.
- 2) Second, Habakkuk learns that evil contains the seed of destruction (2:4-20). Individuals and nations who live in pride, arrogance, and self-sufficiency find in the end these very attitudes are their undoing. Though on occasion evil appears to have the upper hand, it is really filled with death and destruction. It cannot and will not endure in God's moral universe. Its transitory nature is an unalterable fact of history.
- 3) Third, the prophet learns that those who are right with God are to live by their faithfulness (2:4).

4) Fourth, Habakkuk learns that while intellectual answers to the enigmas of history may not be available, God is good and He is enough. Accordingly, His people rejoice in His salvation and strength. They await with confidence the triumphant end, even in the midst of oppression and deprivation (3: 17-19).

**Michael Goodfellow:** What do we know about the prophet Habakkuk? Evidence seems to suggest that he wrote in the 7th century BC, just as the Babylonians were emerging as a world power. The Assyrians who had threatened Judah for so long were but a memory. And in Judah itself, a religious revival had begun, but in many ways it was only a superficial one. The high places and the idols were destroyed, but still there was injustice and there was an oppression of the powerless in society.

We have noted in the prophets so far that they are directing their words, or God's words, to the people. Now those people have been from Israel, Judah, Nineveh, and other places. But the direction of prophecy has always been words from God directed to the people, friends and enemies alike. But in Habakkuk we see a different dynamic. In chapter one of the book, the dialogue is in a different manner. The chapter is a discussion between the prophet and God. Habakkuk is a skeptic prophet. He looks around his society, he looks upward to God, raises his hands, and offers his complaint.

Habakkuk's words are perhaps the most truly human of all the prophets. Habakkuk recognizes the difficulties of belief in troubling times. He looks around and sees all the problems that plagued his prophetic predecessors. Moral outrage, oppressive leadership, religious superficiality, strife and violence are on every corner. And Habakkuk lifts his voice to God and says, "O Lord how long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen? Or cry to you "Violence!" and you will not save? Why do you make me see wrongdoing and look at trouble? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise. So the law becomes slack and justice never prevails. The wicked surround the righteous – therefore judgment comes forth perverted." How long? That is Habakkuk's basic message to God, how long?

And that is a proper question. It is a question we have all faced and tried to deal with. How long, O Lord, will injustice reign? How long, O lord, will sin rule in the world? How long, O Lord, will we be faced with pain, and trial, and temptation? How long must we bear the burden of suffering? How long will the righteous be overcome by the wicked? And with each time the question is asked, it seems as though it is left unanswered. And Habakkuk's anger wells up as he raises his hands to God. Will you not listen? Will you not save? We wonder about the Lord's indifference. There are some who think we should not question God. There are those who think God should not be prayed to in anger and complaint. But Habakkuk's prayers are not from anger, but from anguish.

**Keathley:** Warren Wiersbe entitles his book on Habakkuk as "From Worry to Worship." Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones calls his, "From Fear to Faith." While Habakkuk begins by wondering or worrying about the world around him and God's seeming indifference, he ends by worshipping God. When he heard who was coming 3:16 says he trembled, but

he certainly ends up expressing faith by the end of the book. What they are trying to capture in the titles of their books is the progression Habakkuk makes from questioning God to trusting God.

**Morgan:** Today there are two principles of life in the world and only two. The principle of the “puffed-up,” who are self-centered and conditioned by circumstance; and the principle of the righteous by faith, who are God-centered and God-circumferenced. Centered in God and circumferenced of God? Yes, for He is the sphere in which you live and move and have your being. That is the truth about the life of faith. When a man has his faith in God, God is at the center of his being and is at the circumference of his being. He is everywhere. Men who are self-centered and circumstance-conditioned may seem to succeed, and the men who are God-centered and God-circumstanced often seem to be in extremis. How often for the saints the fig tree has not blossomed, and there has been no herd in the stall! How often the wicked has been seen spreading himself like a green bay tree! But this book teaches us that the true viewpoint is that obtained when the discussion of these problems is carried into the presence of God, giving to Him the opportunity to tell us His secrets; then we shall find that in the green bay tree is the worm that dieth not which is already sapping away its life, and also that in the barrenness of today’s outlook for the people of God are the fertilizing forces that will bring a harvest for tomorrow. You cannot be a man of faith and live in a day. You do not live in a day if you are a man of faith. When Habakkuk tried living in a day, he wailed, “O God, you are doing nothing!” But when he began to breathe the sub-consciousness of eternity and touched the infinitude of deity, then he said: “God is doing everything, and if I have any one fear it is lest his wrath which is to overwhelm is too terrible. O Lord, remember mercy.” The problems of faith must be submitted to God for His answer; and whenever a soul does that, there will come such revelations as shall create a song of triumph even while the heart abides in the presence of a present sadness.

**Constable:** The people to whom Habakkuk ministered were Judeans who apparently lived under the reign of King Jehoiakim. During his reign the Israelites were looking for help in the wrong places, Egypt and Assyria, in view of growing Babylonian power. They should have been looking to the Lord primarily, and their failure to do so was one of the burdens of Jeremiah, Habakkuk's contemporary. Habakkuk's concerns were more philosophical, however. What disturbed him was that the sovereign Lord was not responding to Habakkuk's evil generation and its internal injustices. He voiced his concern to Yahweh in prayer (1:2-4). The Lord replied that He was working. He was raising up a nation that would punish His people for their covenant unfaithfulness (1:5-11). This raised another problem for Habakkuk, which he also took to the Lord in prayer. How could He use a wicked nation than Judah to punish God's chosen people (1:12—2:1)? The Lord explained that He would eventually punish the Babylonians for their wickedness too (2:2-20). The final chapter is a hymn of praise extolling Yahweh for His wise ways. The purpose of the book, then, was to vindicate the justice of God so God's people would have hope and encouragement.

**Baxter:** This prophecy of Habakkuk puts into words a struggle and triumph of faith which took place in the soul of the prophet himself. It begins with a sob, and ends with a

song; and it is in the process from the one to the other that the little book discloses the heart of its meaning to us.

Ch. I. A “BURDEN”: FAITH GRAPPLING WITH PROBLEM.

Ch. II. A “VISION”: FAITH GRASPING THE SOLUTION.

Ch. III. A “PRAYER”: FAITH GLORYING IN ASSURANCE.

The key verse to Habakkuk is chapter ii. 4 – *“The just shall live by his faith”*; and around this truth precious lessons for faith are written. The living message of the little book is clear. Faith has still its problems. If Habakkuk’s days seemed draped with dark enigmas, even more do our own. But this book tells us not to judge merely by the appearances of the hour. God has given us great promises, and is working out great purposes. He cannot tell us the whole in so many words; but He has revealed enough to make faith intelligent, and to give it scope for development.

**Boice:** But for the most part the questions have shifted, and the problems bothering most thinking people today are what we would call personal and historical. They boil down to the individual’s involvement in history. On the personal level, they express themselves in such questions as: Who am I? Why am I here? What is the meaning of life? On the historical level, they emerge as: What is the meaning of history? What is God’s involvement with history? Why is there evil in history? Why doesn’t God do something about wickedness? How can I believe in a loving, personal God when He allows bad things to happen to me?

Habakkuk raises these questions too. He asks, “Is God in charge of history?” and, “If He is, why do things happen as they do?” In dealing with these questions he speaks as directly to our own times as any comparable portion of the Word of God.

[Quoting the four lessons from **D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones**:]

- 1) First, history (regardless of how it seems to us) is under God’s control.
- 2) Second, history follows a divine plan.
- 3) Third, history follows a divine timetable.
- 4) Fourth, history is bound up with the divine kingdom.

[Quoting poem about the end of Chap. 3 composed by William Cowper, English poet who suffered from acute mental distress and illness]

Though vine nor fig tree neither  
Their wonted fruits should bear,  
Though all the fields should wither,  
Nor flocks nor herds be there;  
Yet, God the same abiding,  
His praise shall tune my voice;  
For, while in him confiding,  
I cannot but rejoice.

# OUTLINE OF HABAKKUK

## IN WRATH REMEMBER MERCY . . . THE JUST SHALL LIVE BY FAITH

**THE LONG TERM CONVICTION OF FAITH EXULTS IN THE GOD OF OUR SALVATION DESPITE THE PERPLEXING QUESTIONS OF THE PAIN AND APPARENT INJUSTICE OF OUR PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES**

### **I. PERPLEXING PARADOX -- PERVERTED JUSTICE?? (CHAP. 1)**

**THE PROPHET WRESTLES WITH THE APPROPRIATENESS OF GOD USING THE WICKED CHALDEANS TO JUDGE HIS OWN PEOPLE -- DIVINE DISCIPLINE CAN BE PACKAGED IN STRANGE WAYS**

#### **(:1) INTRODUCTION:**

- The Message – Description of the Content
- The Messenger -- Identification of the Prophet
- The Medium of Revelation

#### **A. (:2-4) COMPLAINT OF THE PROPHET -- DELAY OF THE LORD IN RESTORING JUSTICE TO THE LAND – THE LAMENT OF A DISTURBED SOUL**

1. (:2) Delay in Deliverance Disturbs the Soul
2. (:3) Culture of Corruption Disturbs the Soul
3. (:4) Perversion of Justice Disturbs the Soul

#### **B. (:5-11) CONSTERNATION OF THE PROPHET -- DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD BY USING CRUEL CHALDEANS AS INSTRUMENT OF JUDGMENT – THE ASTONISHMENT OF A SHOCKED PROPHET**

1. (:5) Unexpected Discipline Strategy
2. (:6-10) Unrestrained Cruelty of the Chaldeans
3. (:11) Ultimate Accountability – the Chaldeans Will Be Judged Themselves

#### **C. (:12-17) COMFORT/CONFUSION OF THE PROPHET – DEPENDENCE ON THE LORD DESPITE PERPLEXITY OF INCOMPREHENSIBLE TACTICS -- THE HOPE OF A PERPLEXED PROPHET**

1. (:12) Perspective Based on Eternity
2. (:13) Perspective Based on Holiness -- Paradox
3. (:14-17) Perspective Clouded by Unrestrained Cruelty of the Chaldeans
4. (2:1) Waiting for a More Definitive Answer



## **II. PERMANENT PRINCIPLE – GOD IS A RIGHTEOUS JUDGE (CHAP. 2)**

**(MAKE NO MISTAKE: THE WICKED WILL BE PUNISHED)  
PERPLEXITY REGARDING GOD’S WAYS AND GOD’S TIMING SHOULD  
NEVER SHAKE OUR FAITH IN GOD’S RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENTS OR  
FAITHFULNESS TO HIS PROMISES**

### **(:1) INTRODUCTION: THE PROPHET WAITS FOR A RESPONSE**

**A. (:2-3) DON’T BE SHORT-SIGHTED OR IMPATIENT REGARDING THE  
LORD’S LONG TERM PROGRAM –  
PROPHETIC REVELATION PROMISES THE CERTAINTY OF  
FULFILLMENT ACCORDING TO GOD’S TIMETABLE**

1. (:2) The Lord Goes on Record
2. (:3) The Prophecies Will Not Fail

**B. (:4-5) KEY PRINCIPLE: GOD WILL ALWAYS MAKE A DISTINCTION  
BETWEEN THE PROUD AND THE RIGHTEOUS**

1. (:4a) The Unbelieving Proud – Needs a Soul Adjustment
2. (:4b) The Believing Righteous – Needs to Stick to His Guns

## **III. PERSEVERING PERSPECTIVE – GOD WILL DELIVER HIS PEOPLE (CHAP. 3)**

**THE PERSEVERING PERSPECTIVE COMBINES THE SHORT TERM PAIN  
OF DISCIPLINE WITH THE TRIUMPHANT RESOLVE TO REJOICE IN  
GOD’S LONG TERM DELIVERANCE**

**A. (:1-2) CHANGED PERSPECTIVE OF THE PROPHET –  
COMBINES ACCEPTANCE OF DISCIPLINE WITH HOPE FOR THE FUTURE**

1. (:1) Posture of Prayer
2. (:2) Plea for Revival and Mercy

**B. (:3-15) HISTORICAL REMEMBRANCES OF GOD IN HIS MAJESTIC  
GLORY AND SOVEREIGN POWER –  
COMBINES THE OUTPOURING OF GOD’S WRATH WITH THE REPEATED  
DELIVERANCE OF HIS PEOPLE**

1. (:3-5) Vision of the Glory and Power of the God of Wrath
2. (:6-11) The Outpouring of God’s Wrath
3. (:12-15) God’s Wrath Set in the Context of God’s Mercy and Deliverance

**C. (:16-19) TRIUMPHANT RESOLVE OF THE PROPHET –  
COMBINES THE ACCEPTANCE OF THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD WITH  
THE UPLIFTING RESOURCES OF THE JOY AND STRENGTH OF THE LORD**

1. (:16A) Foundational Attitude of Fear of the Lord = the Beginning of Wisdom
2. (:16B-17) Persevering Acceptance of the Discipline of the Lord
3. (:18-19) Abiding Confidence in the Sufficiency of the Joy and Strength of the Lord

TEXT: Habakkuk 1:1 – 2:1

TITLE: PERPLEXING PARADOX -- PERVERTED JUSTICE??

**BIG IDEA:**

**THE PROPHET WRESTLES WITH THE APPROPRIATENESS OF GOD USING THE WICKED CHALDEANS TO JUDGE HIS OWN PEOPLE -- DIVINE DISCIPLINE CAN BE PACKAGED IN STRANGE WAYS**

**(:1) INTRODUCTION:**

A. The Message – Description of the Content

*“The oracle”*

B. The Messenger -- Identification of the Prophet

*“which Habakkuk the prophet”*

C. The Medium of Revelation

*“saw”*

**Copeland:** Concerning his MESSAGE: the book easily falls into three sections

1) A "burden" - **Hab 1:1-2:1**

2) A "vision" - **Hab 2:2-20**

3) A "prayer" - **Hab 3:1-19**

**I. (:2-4) COMPLAINT OF THE PROPHET -- DELAY OF THE LORD IN RESTORING JUSTICE TO THE LAND – THE LAMENT OF A DISTURBED SOUL**

A. (:2) Delay in Deliverance Disturbs the Soul

1. When Will the Lord Hear?

*“How long, O Lord, will I call for help, And you will not hear?”*

**MacArthur:** The phrase, reflecting the prophet’s impatience, is frequently used by the psalmist to express similar thoughts of perplexity (cf. Pss 13:1,2; 62:3; Jer 14:9; Mt 27:46).

2. When Will the Lord Deliver?

*“I cry out to you, ‘Violence!’ Yet you do not save.”*

B. (:3) Culture of Corruption Disturbs the Soul

1. Pervasive Corruption

*“Why do you make me see iniquity,  
And cause me to look on wickedness?”*

2. Escalating Conflict

*“Yes, destruction and violence are before me;  
Strife exists and contention arises.”*

C. (:4) Perversion of Justice Disturbs the Soul

1. Disregard for Covenant Standards

*“Therefore the law is ignored And justice is never upheld.”*

2. The Righteous End Up the Victims

*“For the wicked surround the righteous;  
Therefore justice comes out perverted.”*

**II. (:5-11) CONSTERNATION OF THE PROPHET -- DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD BY USING CRUEL CHALDEANS AS INSTRUMENT OF JUDGMENT – THE ASTONISHMENT OF A SHOCKED PROPHET**

A. (:5) Unexpected Discipline Strategy

1. Amazing

*“Look among the nations! Observe! Be Astonished! Wonder!”*

**MacArthur**: The series of commands is plural, indicating that the wider community of Judah and Jerusalem was to take note of this imminent invasion. Paul quotes this text in Ac 13:41.

2. Unbelievable

*“Because I am doing something in your days –  
You would not believe if you were told.”*

B. (:6-10) Unrestrained Cruelty of the Chaldeans

1. (:6-7) Summary Qualifications of the Chaldeans for This Mission

a. Divinely Appointed for Instrument of Discipline

*“For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans,”*

Main qualification = chosen by God for the task

b. Proven Aggressiveness of Spirit

*“That fierce and impetuous people”*

c. Unquenchable Appetite for Conquering New Territory

*“Who march throughout the earth  
To seize dwelling places which are not theirs.”*

d. Reputation Acknowledged – Strike fear in the hearts of their enemies

*“They are dreaded and feared;”*

Ruthless, barbaric

e. Completely Autonomous – Don’t care what other nations think

*“Their justice and authority originate with themselves.”*

2. (:8) Superior Military Resources

a. Their Horses

*“Their horses are swifter than leopards  
And keener than wolves in the evening.”*

**Blue:** Both leopards and wolves are fierce, fast, and excellent hunters. At dusk, wolves are hungry and ready to pounce on prey. The Babylonians’ voracious speed in conquest was also likened to a vulture swooping to devour.

b. Their Horsemen

*“Their horsemen come galloping,  
Their horsemen come from afar;  
They fly like an eagle swooping down to devour.”*

3. (:9-10) Swaggering Confidence in Victory

a. Bent on Violence

*“All of them come for violence.”*

b. United in Aggression

*“Their horde of faces moves forward.”*

c. Merciless in Enslavement

*“They collect captives like sand.”*

d. Brazen in Arrogance

1) Mock at Any Royal Authority

*“They mock at kings  
And rulers are a laughing matter to them.”*

2) Make Fun of Any Feeble Defense

*“They laugh at every fortress  
And heap up rubble to capture it.”*

C. (:11) Ultimate Accountability – the Chaldeans Will Be Judged Themselves

1. Their Dominance will only be Temporary

*“Then they will sweep through like the wind and pass on.”*

2. Their Cruelty will be Condemned

*“But they will be held guilty,”*

3. Their Idolatry will be Exposed

*“They whose strength is their god.”*

**MacArthur:** Though the Chaldeans were God’s instruments of judgment, their self-sufficiency and self-adulation planted the seeds for their own destruction (described in 2:2-20), as they stood guilty of idolatry and blasphemy before the sovereign Lord.

### **III. (:12-17) COMFORT/CONFUSION OF THE PROPHET – DEPENDENCE ON THE LORD DESPITE PERPLEXITY OF INCOMPREHENSIBLE TACTICS -- THE HOPE OF A PERPLEXED PROPHET**

#### A. (:12) Perspective Based on Eternity

##### 1. Character of God

*“Are You not from everlasting,  
O Lord, my God, my Holy One?”*

**Keathley:** He began in verse 12 by claiming that God is eternal. I think the idea of immutability, that God does not change, is included here. The fact that God does not change is important because it means God keeps His promises and He has made promises to Israel. Habakkuk knows that God will not totally destroy Israel because of his covenantal promises. That is why he says, “We will not die.”

##### 2. Confidence in Deliverance

*“We will not die.”*

##### 3. Control of the Discipline

*“You, O Lord, have appointed them to judge;  
And You, O Rock, have established them to correct.”*

#### B. (:13) Perspective Based on Holiness -- Paradox

##### 1. You Don't Approve of Wickedness

*“Your eyes are too pure to approve evil,  
And you can not look on wickedness with favor.”*

##### 2. You Seem to be Favoring the Wicked over the Less Wicked

*“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?”*

#### C. (:14-17) Perspective Clouded by Unrestrained Cruelty of the Chaldeans

##### 1. (:14) Vulnerability of Men to Such Unrestrained Cruelty

*“Why have you made men like the fish of the sea,  
Like creeping things without a ruler over them?”*

##### 2. (:15a) Vultures Take Advantage of Such Vulnerability

*“The Chaldeans bring all of them up with a hook,  
Drag them away with their net,  
And gather them together in their fishing net.”*

##### 3. (:15b-16) Victory Celebrations of the Wicked are Especially Galling

*“Therefore they rejoice and are glad.  
Therefore they offer a sacrifice to their net*

*And burn incense to their fishing net;  
Because through these things their catch is large,  
And their food is plentiful.”*

4. (:17) Vexing Question: How Long?? (back to question of vs 2)  
*“Will they therefore empty their net  
And continually slay nations without sparing?”*

**Blue:** The action depicted signified a seemingly perpetual operation. They emptied their net so they could fill it again, again, and again. When would God put a stop to the Babylonians’ greed for conquest? How could He let a people continue in power when they so openly worshiped that very power as their god? Habakkuk was confused.

- D. (2:1) Waiting for a More Definitive Answer  
*“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.”*

\* \* \* \* \*

#### DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Is God in control of all of the seemingly bad things that happen to God’s people?  
*“God is still in control, Almighty God is He;  
And He cares for His own through all eternity . . .”*
- 2) Does God get angry with us for expressing our true emotions and wrestling with Him in our prayers with all of our doubts and perplexities?
- 3) How would you compare the wickedness of Judah with that of the Chaldeans? Was there really a distinction between the righteous and the wicked in this context?
- 4) What events in our life or in current world affairs have evoked these same types of questions from our hearts?

\* \* \* \* \*

#### QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

**Stedman:** History is in God’s Hands --  
Habakkuk, the embracer, is embracing the people of Judah, who are suffering under the injustice of the government of that day. He is crying out in protest against the apparent inactivity of God. . .

Now God answered Habakkuk, but not in the way the prophet thought he would. I'm

not sure what he did expect. He probably expected a change of heart in the governing powers in his land, or some rising tide of concern that would deal compassionately with the problems they were facing. God's answer, however, was totally unexpected. . .

Now Habakkuk really has a problem. And this time it is not with God's inactivity, but, rather, with God's inconsistency. How can a holy God let this kind of thing happen? Habakkuk wonders, "How can God use a ruthless and morally degraded people to punish a more righteous people?"

In the rest of Chapter 1, the prophet goes on to compare these Chaldeans to a greedy fisherman who sweeps through the seas and brings in a net full of fish. He has caught all he needs, but he is not satisfied. He casts his net again and again and brings back more and more fish and stacks them on the bank until they rot in the sun. That is the way Habakkuk sees the Chaldeans acting. They conquer people after people, country after country. Nothing stands in their way. . .

What do you do when God does not act the way you think he ought to? That is one of the hardest problems we face as Christians. And, especially, what do you do when he uses somebody whom you don't like to correct you? . .

When you face a problem in your life where you do not understand what God is doing, do not do what so many do, and say, "Oh, I've tried faith and it doesn't work," or, "I've tried God but that doesn't work," or, "I've tried prayer and it doesn't work." People who say those things really don't understand what they are saying, because what they are actually saying is, "God is a liar. There is no real God." What they are saying is, "The Word of God is not true, the Bible is a fraud. It ought to be thrown out." They are declaring that God is faithless to his own promises. But God cannot ever be faithless to his word. The problem is not God -- though we so often blame it on him -- the problem is us. We are so ignorant, we see so little, we understand such a minute fraction of the scope of any problem. We ought to do as Habakkuk did -- get out on the watchtower and wait to see what God is going to say. If we ask him, God will help us to understand something of what we are going through. That is what Habakkuk did, because he expected an answer.

### **Freddy Fritz:** Making Sense of Today's News

Among the questions that Habakkuk raised are these: "Is God in charge of today's news?" and, "If he is, why do things happen the way they do?" In dealing with these questions, the prophet Habakkuk speaks directly to our own times in light of today's news. . .

#### I. God's Ways Are Often Mysterious (1:2a, 5-6)

A. God's Inaction (1:2a)

B. God's Unexpected Providences (1:5-6)

C. God's Unusual Instruments (1:6)

#### II. God's Ways Are Often Misunderstood



- A. By Careless Christians (1:5)
- B. By Non-Christians (1:11)
- C. By the Prophet Himself (1:2-4)

Today's news is bound up with God's kingdom. The key to the history of the world is the kingdom of God. The story of the nations in the Bible is only relevant as it bears upon Christ's Church. What really matters is God's kingdom.

**Paul Decker:** A SIGHING FAITH (Habakkuk 1:1-2:1)

Where is God when things go wrong?

WAIT ON GOD WHEN YOU DO NOT UNDERSTAND HIM.

We will find three complaints that Habakkuk has about God.

God is:

I. INDIFFERENT (2)

II. INACTIVE (3-4)

III. INCONSISTENT (12-17)

**Ken Gehrels:** It means - "*to embrace.*" Only, not the sort of embrace that one finds in affection. It's a wrestler's grip - hanging on and twisting in the hopes of winning. Habakkuk is the prophet who wrestled with God. . . .

James Dobson says that it's the confusion over "why" that so often shreds a person's faith to bits. He's right.

[Dobson, *When God Doesn't Make Sense*]

**Piper:** In chapter one, then, Habakkuk protests first against the violence and injustice of his countrymen in Judah (1:1-4), and then against the violence and injustice of the Chaldeans whom God is sending to punish Judah.

**Keathley:** Warren Wiersbe entitles his book on Habakkuk as *From Worry to Worship*. Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones calls his, *From Fear to Faith*. While Habakkuk begins by wondering or worrying about the world around him and God's seeming indifference, he ends by worshipping God. [http://www.bible.org/page.php?page\\_id=975 - P12\\_1367#P12\\_1367](http://www.bible.org/page.php?page_id=975 - P12_1367#P12_1367) When he heard who was coming 3:16 says he trembled, but he certainly ends up expressing faith by the end of the book. What they are trying to capture in the titles of their books is the progression Habakkuk makes from questioning God to trusting God. .

When you are talking with someone who has just experienced a tragedy, don't just tell them "God is good. He loves you and He will work things out for the best and quote Romans 8:28-29." I think it is okay, maybe even necessary to cry with them, hurt with them, question with them. Help them work through the pain, not ignore it. Of course you don't want to stay there indefinitely, but it is part of the process. Too often, Christians think the questioning part of the process is wrong.

**Deffinbaugh:** But Habakkuk's logic is wrong. The use of foreign nations as a chastening rod was not inconsistent with His character, and it was not something new. God had foretold this in the Mosaic Covenant:

36 The Lord will force you and your king whom you will appoint over you to go to a people whom you and your ancestors have not known and you will serve other gods of wood and stone there. 37 You will become an occasion of horror, a proverb, and an object of ridicule to all the people among whom the Lord will drive you... 49 The Lord will raise up a distant nation against you, one from the other side of the earth as the eagle flies, a nation whose language you will not understand, 50 a nation of stern appearance that will have no regard for the elderly or consideration for the young (Deuteronomy 28: 36-37, 49-50).

The Book of Judges is filled with examples of God's use of foreign nations as His chastening rod:

13 They [Israel] abandoned the Lord and worshiped Baal and the Ashtars. 14 The Lord was furious with Israel and handed them over to robbers who plundered them. He turned them over to their enemies who lived around them. They could not withstand their enemies' attacks (Judges 2: 13-14),

God is morally just in using the wicked to achieve His purposes:

For the wrath of man shall praise You;  
With a remnant of wrath You will gird Yourself (Psalm 76: 10, NAU).

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 (Romans 8:28, NAU).

God is righteous, and He is also sovereign. He is able to use the wicked, and even their wicked deeds to accomplish His purposes. For the moment, I will cite only one example – Pharaoh:

For the scripture says to Pharaoh: "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may demonstrate my power in you, and that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth" (Romans 9: 17).

Pharaoh's oppression of God's people, and his refusal to let God's people go, became an occasion of blessing for the Israelite nation. It resulted in their release from slavery and their possession of the land of Canaan. Nevertheless, they did suffer under the hand of Pharaoh for a number of years. God used the wicked to accomplish His purposes. God used Pharaoh to bring Himself glory and to produce good for His people, Israel. Habakkuk was wrong. A righteous God can use wicked men to achieve His purposes.

I believe that Habakkuk's second argument is further flawed in that it is based upon the very questionable assumption that the people of Judah are more righteous than the Chaldeans.

You are too just to tolerate evil;  
you are unable to condone wrongdoing.  
So why do you put up with such treacherous people?  
Why do you say nothing **when the wicked devour those who are relatively innocent?**  
(Habakkuk 1: 13, emphasis mine)

The NAU translates the last part of verse 13 quite literally,

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?** (NAU, emphasis mine)

This is a very dangerous argument, in my opinion, and one that almost all of us have employed at one time or another. We know that certain things are sin, but we generally have different categories of sin. The Jews of Jesus' day found Jesus guilty of blasphemy, an unpardonable sin to them, and yet they were self-righteous and greedy. They found ways to avoid their responsibilities to their parents and, according to Jesus, they stole widows' houses. They oppressed the poor in the process of making themselves rich.

**Blue:** A Dialogue with God: Habakkuk Previewed God's Discipline of Judah

- A. Habakkuk's distress (1:1-4)
  - 1. Why is God indifferent to supplication? (1:1-2)
  - 2. Why is God insensitive to sin and suffering? (1:3-4)
- B. God's disclosure (1:5-11)
  - 1. God's intention of discipline (1:5)
  - 2. God's instrument of discipline (1:6-11)
- C. Habakkuk's dilemma (1:12-17)
  - 1. Why would God employ a people of iniquity? (1:12-13)
  - 2. Why would God endorse a people of injustice? (1:14-15)
  - 3. Why would God excuse a people of idolatry? (1:16-17)

**Boice:** [tracing the thought process of Habakkuk]

If God is the everlasting God – if He was here before anything we know came into existence and will be here after all our problems and enemies have faded away – then the Babylonian invasion is not His last word, however final that invasion may seem. His relationship to us is more important and more lasting. Again, if God is holy, as I know Him to be, then the outcome of this invasion (since it is being caused by God) will not be evil but good in the final analysis. It will accomplish some good purpose. If God is sovereign, then the invasion is not the result of mere chance. God is still in control. Finally, if God is faithful, then the victory of the Babylonian armies must be for the good of God's people. It does not indicate that God has changed His mind. He has not abandoned us. We are still His people.

TEXT: Habakkuk 2:1-20

TITLE: PERMANENT PRINCIPLE – GOD IS A RIGHTEOUS JUDGE  
(MAKE NO MISTAKE: THE WICKED WILL BE PUNISHED)

**BIG IDEA:**

**PERPLEXITY REGARDING GOD’S WAYS AND GOD’S TIMING SHOULD NEVER SHAKE OUR FAITH IN GOD’S RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENTS OR FAITHFULNESS TO HIS PROMISES**

**(:1) INTRODUCTION: THE PROPHET WAITS FOR A RESPONSE**

*“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.”*

Question: How can the Lord be a righteous Judge and allow the wicked Chaldeans to be used as an instrument of discipline against His own people?

Today we have unbelieving skeptics and mockers who question the reality of the Second Coming of Christ. Peter warned us of their proud boastings:

*“Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts, and saying, ‘Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation.’ For when they maintain this, it escapes their notice that by the word of God the heavens existed long ago and the earth was formed out of water and by water, through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water. But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.”*

**I. (:2-3) DON’T BE SHORT-SIGHTED OR IMPATIENT REGARDING THE LORD’S LONG TERM PROGRAM –  
PROPHETIC REVELATION PROMISES THE CERTAINTY OF  
FULFILLMENT ACCORDING TO GOD’S TIMETABLE**

**A. (:2) The Lord Goes on Record**

**1. Charge to Faithfully Record God’s Revelation**

*“Then the Lord answered me and said, ‘Record the vision and inscribe it on tablets,’”*

**MacArthur:** Habakkuk was to record the vision to preserve it for posterity, so that all

who read it would know of the certainty of its fulfillment (cf. similar language in Da 12:4, 9). The prophecy had lasting relevance and thus had to be preserved. Although a period of time would occur before its fulfillment, all were to know that it would occur at God's "appointed time" (cf. Is 13; Jer 50, 51). Babylon would fall to the Medo-Persian kingdom of Cyrus ca. 539 B.C. (cf Da 5).

2. Charge to Faithfully Communicate that Revelation to Others  
*"that the one who reads it may run."*

**Blue:** the point is that the messenger [herald] would read it and then run to spread the news to others.

B. (:3) The Prophecies Will Not Fail

1. The Deadline Has Not Passed

*"For the vision is yet for the appointed time,"*

2. Rapid Progress is being Made (from God's Perspective)

*"It hastens toward the goal"*

3. Fulfillment is Certain

*"and it will not fail."*

4. Patience is Needed (Because there is an appearance of delay)

*"Though it tarries, wait for it;"*

5. Fulfillment is Certain (In actuality there is no delay)

*"For it will certainly come, it will not delay."*

**II. (:4-5) KEY PRINCIPLE: GOD WILL ALWAYS MAKE A DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE PROUD AND THE RIGHTEOUS**

A. (:4a) The Unbelieving Proud – Needs a Soul Adjustment

*"Behold, as for the proud one,  
His soul is not right within him"*

B. (:4b) The Believing Righteous – Needs to Stick to His Guns

*"But the righteous will live by his faith."*

\* \* \* \* \*

**Stedman:** It is interesting that in Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews there is a kind of divine commentary on this verse:

1. Romans stresses what it means to be "righteous." There we are told that the righteousness of Christ is imparted to us by the gift of God. Righteousness is handed to us. We don't earn it; we have it the minute we believe.

2. Then the words, "shall live," are interpreted in Chapter 5 of Galatians, the great

chapter on the life in the Spirit. What does "to live" mean? It means to walk in love, and joy, and peace, and longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and self-control.

3. Then the words, "*by faith*," are interpreted in Hebrews, the great letter on faith. What does it mean to have faith? It means to trust that the invisible God is working, despite present appearances.

\* \* \* \* \*

**MacArthur**: The emphasis in both Habakkuk and the NT references goes beyond the act of faith to include the continuity of faith. Faith is not a one-time act, but a way of life. The true believer, declared righteous by God, will persevere in faith as the pattern of his life (cf Col 1:22, 23; Heb 3:12-14).

C. (:5) Three Summary Charges Against the Proud Chaldeans

1. Deceived into Discontentment by Strong Drink

*"Furthermore, wine betrays the haughty man,  
So that he does not stay at home."*

**Blue**: The treachery of wine is described in Proverbs 23:31-32. It looks so inviting in the glass but "*in the end it bites like a snake and poisons like a viper.*"

2. Devoted to Greed and Covetousness

*"He enlarges his appetite like Sheol,  
And he is like death, never satisfied."*

3. Driven by Ambition and Lust for Conquest

*"He also gathers to himself all nations  
And collects to himself all peoples."*

### **III. (:6-20) PRONOUNCEMENT OF FIVE WOES AGAINST THE PROUD CHALDEANS**

**MacArthur**: Five woes, in the form of a taunt song, were pronounced upon the Chaldeans in anticipation of their eventual judgment. Presented in 5 stanzas of 3 verses each, the 5 woes were directed at 5 different classes of evildoers.

**Blue**: Woe is an interjection of distress pronounced in the face of disaster or in view of coming judgment (e.g., Isa. 3:11; 5:11; 10:5) because of certain sins.

A. (:6-8) Woe #1 – Extortion -- The Looter Will Be Looted

1. Pronouncement of Woe – Extreme Usury

*"Woe to him who increases what is not his – For how long –  
And makes himself rich with loans?"*

2. Painful Taunt Song

*“Will not all of these take up a taunt-song against him,  
Even mockery and insinuations against him”*

3. Promise of Retribution – The Looter Will Be Looted

*“Will not your creditors rise up suddenly,  
And those who collect from you awaken?  
Indeed, you will become plunder for them.  
Because you have looted many nations,  
All the remainder of the peoples will loot you –  
Because of human bloodshed and violence done to the land,  
To the town and all its inhabitants.”*

**Laetsch:** The first woe refers to the rapacity of the Chaldean, his eagerness to enrich himself at the expense of others by conquest of their home countries, making vassals of the nations, extorting from them huge contributions of materials, money, and men, bleeding them white.

B. (:9-11) Woe #2 – Exploitation -- Ill-Gotten Gains Will Cry Out Against You

1. Pronouncement of Woe – False Security

*“Woe to him who gets evil gain for his house  
To put his nest on high,  
To be delivered from the hand of calamity!”*

2. Painful Taunt Song

*“Surely the stone will cry out from the wall,  
And the rafter will answer it from the framework.”*

**Blue:** Even if every single enemy were exterminated, the very stones and lumber would testify against the rapacious and cruel hands of the Babylonians that had fashioned these building materials to show off their empire’s strength and glory. The stones and timber with which the houses and palaces were built had been obtained through plunder and injustice.

3. Promise of Retribution – Turning the Tables on Their Pride and Sin

*“You have devised a shameful thing for your house  
By cutting off many peoples;  
So you are sinning against yourself.”*

C. (:12-14) Woe #3 – Exaltation -- Ruthless Kingdom Building Will Be Frustrated By the Dominion of the Messiah

1. Pronouncement of Woe – Malicious Power Play

*“Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed  
And founds a town with violence!”*

2. Painful Taunt Song

*“Is it not indeed from the Lord of hosts*

*That peoples toil for fire,  
And nations grow weary for nothing?"*

**MacArthur:** Like a fire that burns everything given to it, their labors would all be futile, having no lasting value (v. 13; cf. Mic 3:10).

3. Promise of Retribution – Kingdom Reversal

*"For the earth will be filled  
With the knowledge of the glory of the Lord,  
As the waters cover the sea."*

D. (:15-17) Woe #4 – Excessive Debauchery – The Shamers Will Be Exposed to Public Shame

1. Pronouncement of Woe – Shameful Exploitation

*"Woe to you who make your neighbors drink,  
Who mix in your venom even to make them drunk  
So as to look on their nakedness."*

2. Painful Taunt Song

*"You will be filled with disgrace rather than honor.  
Now you yourself drink and expose your own nakedness.  
The cup in the Lord's right hand will come around to you,  
And utter disgrace will come upon your glory."*

3. Promise of Retribution – Reaping Violence and Devastation

*"For the violence done to Lebanon will overwhelm you,  
And the devastation of its beasts by which you terrified them,  
Because of human bloodshed and violence done to the land,  
To the town and all its inhabitants."*

**Ryrie:** The violence done to Lebanon by several rulers in cutting down its great forests and killing its cattle would be done to Judah (see Isa. 14:7-8).

E. (:18-20) Woe #5 – Extreme Idolatry – The Worshipers of Idols Will Be Mocked

1. Pronouncement of Woe – Foolish Loyalty

*"Woe to him who says to a piece of wood, 'Awake!'  
To a mute stone, 'Arise!'  
And that is your teacher?  
Behold, it is overlaid with gold and silver,  
And there is no breath at all inside it."*

**MacArthur:** Compare the sarcasm with that of Elijah's words to the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel (1 Ki 18:27; cf. Jer 2:27).

2. Painful Taunt Song

*"What profit is the idol when its maker has carved it,*



*Or an image, a teacher of falsehood?  
For its maker trusts in his own handiwork  
When he fashions speechless idols.”*

3. Promise of Retribution – Conclusion --  
Stand in Awe of the Lord of History  
Who Judges Righteously From His Holy Temple  
*“But the Lord is in His holy temple.  
Let all the earth be silent before Him.”*

\* \* \* \* \*

#### DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Does God entertain our doubts and questions and the wrestlings of our faith or does He expect us to squelch all such tension?
- 2) How is our perspective altered when we understand that God’s ways and God’s timing are vastly different than ours?
- 3) What is the basis for our confidence that we will be able to persevere in living by faith?
- 4) What is our response to the revelation that “*the Lord is in His holy temple?*”

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#### QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

**Stedman:** The man who thinks he has it in himself to live by his own abilities, his wits, his education, his own strength, etc., is the one who appears to be successful, but we are reminded that he will fail. He has the seeds of his own destruction within himself.

The rest of Chapter 2 is a picture of how five different forms of pride by which men seek to live are shown to be self-destructive:

- The ambitious man (Verses 7-8) will be destroyed by his own ambition;
- The greedy man who overreaches (Verses 9-11) will try to reach too far and will lose everything;
- The violent man (Verses 12-14) will accomplish nothing; his own violence will turn people against him;
- The insolent man (Verses 15-17) becomes sated with his own contempt for others and loses everything; and
- The idolator (Verses 18-19) begins to trust his own creation, and so, in the hour of desperation, he has no redeemer, no helper.

Thus the man of pride will fall apart, but the man of faith has present power to live. Not only will he wind up a victor, but even now he will live by his faith. That is the great lesson of this book.

**Piper:** the great power of the Chaldeans will, in the end, come to nought. The nations weary themselves in vain to fill the earth with their fame and power. Why? Because (as 2:14 says), "The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the water covers the sea." Habakkuk need not fear that a rebellious nation will have the last say. The earth is the Lord's and he will fill it with his glory. The chapter closes with these awesome words in verse 20: "*The Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him.*" Let all the nations be still and know that he is God. His glory will fill the earth, not the glory of the Chaldeans.

So in answer to Habakkuk's protests, God assures him that the pride of the Chaldeans will come to a woeful end (2:6-20) and that any in Judah who humbly trusts God will gain his life. "*The just shall live by his faith.*" (2:4).

**David Sylvester:** WHEN TRAGEDY HITS HOME (1:12 – 2:4)

I. WHEN TRAGEDY HITS HOME WE MAY ALWAYS QUESTION GOD'S FAIRNESS

II. WHEN TRAGEDY HITS HOME WE MAY BE ATTEMPTED TO ASSUME THAT GOD ENDORSES EVIL

III. WHEN TRAGEDY STRIKES HOME WE MAY WAIT FOR AN ANSWER

IV. WHEN TRAGEDY HITS HOME WE MUST SEEK GOD'S FACE

[www.todayspulpit.com](http://www.todayspulpit.com)

**Michael Goodfellow:** The Lord's answer is a call to duty. The first is "write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so that a runner may read it." God gave Habakkuk a vision that needed to be repeated. Such too is our call, a call to repeat the vision which we have received. And God says make it plain. I am as guilty as anyone of trying to complicate the gospel. We attach so many things to the records of Scripture, to the records of God's speaking to us, his people. We come to scripture with agendas, conservative or liberal, with the idea of inclusivity and political correctness, and we blindly build walls around scripture, walls to protect, not to protect scripture, mind you, but to protect from scripture. And does that make it plain? How can we reach the truth of God's vision, if we must travel a maze, hedged in on all sides by the judgments of the world? How can we stand and allow such a maze and hedge to grow around the plain vision of God.

The second duty called upon by God is the duty to wait. "For there is still a vision for the appointed time; it speaks of the end, and does not lie. If it seems to tarry, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay." God does not say wait in vain. God still has a vision. In the darkness, it is the vision of light. In coldness, it is the vision of warmth. In the depths of despair, it is the vision of joy. In death, it is the vision of life. In defeat, it is the vision of victory. He knows it may seem to tarry, but he says it will surely come. This is the promise which reaches its fulfillment in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ has made God's vision visible to us. He is the light. He is the warmth. He is the fount of joy. He is

the giver of life. He is the victor over death, sin and the powers of hell. We must wait for the final fulfillment, but in God's own words, the promise which he makes that there is a vision, that promise is enough to make our waiting seem as nothing at all.

The third duty is the duty of faith. *"Look at the proud! Their spirit is not right in them, but the righteous live by their faith."* This passage was quoted in St. Paul, and through those words, "the righteous live by their faith," the reformation of Martin Luther began in earnest. The dread opposition between the proud and the righteous. The two are not the same. It all boils down to this statement. Do you live in the power of the world, or do you live in the power of faith in God? Do you put your trust in money, in property, in friendships, in health, in exercise, in diet? These are so many things that draw our attention, and they draw our passion. And oh, if only half that passion was spent in our faith. Jesus said if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you can move mountains. We have planted our mustard seeds in too many parts of our lives, and it is time to uproot them from the world, and offer them again to almighty God.

It is time for us to take our places at the watch. To stand upon the tower and hold fast to the truth that we expect our God to answer, even that our God has already answered, answered in Jesus Christ. Are we prepared to take our place and fulfill our duties? Are we prepared to make record of the great things God has done, in history and in the pages of Scripture, in the lives of each and every one of us here? To make record of the fact that we have been delivered by God. Delivered in Jesus Christ. Are we prepared to wait for that which God is surely going to show us, a vision of a kingdom ruled by Christ, a vision of conquered sin, a vision of life eternal, a vision of saints gathered praising at the throne of God? Are we prepared to turn our backs on that which rules this world, turn our backs on those things which would hold us down, turn our backs on the darkness that draws us in, and say the righteous live by their faith? Live by your faith. Live in that power. And let us move the mountains that stand before us, between us and the kingdom, the vision of God. AMEN and AMEN.

**Warren Bird:** Importantly, Habakkuk doesn't let his confusion dictate his theology. He realizes that we know God by what He reveals to us, not by our own speculation about things and so he decides to patiently wait for what God will say to him about the situation. There's a lesson for all of us in And what God reveals is that because of His holiness, the Babylonians will themselves be punished. Five woes are declared against the Babylonians, on account of their:

- Greed – in verses 6-8, God condemns them for making their wealth by extortion and promises that they will be plundered
- Arrogant self-assertion – in verses 9-11, God condemns them for setting their nest on high and promises that shame will ultimately come to them
- Violence – in verses 12-14, God condemns them for their resort to bloodshed and promises that what they build by bloodshed will only fuel their own destruction
- Inhumanity – in verses 15-17, God condemns them for treating people disgracefully and promises that this will come back to haunt them
- Idolatry – in verses 18-20, God condemns them for failing to bow to the one true God

and promises that their idols will fail them.

In the midst of these clear denunciations of evil, and His promise that *“the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of God”*, is a very significant statement. In verse 4 God tells Habakkuk that *“the righteous will live by his faith”*. No matter what is going on in the world around him, the person who puts their trust in God and who faithfully seeks to maintain a morally and spiritually steadfast life, will make it through; the person who believes that God will always be true to His character no matter how things are going in our lives or the world around us.

**Ken Gehrels:** The Lord says to Habakkuk – I want you to put faith in me. The rest of chapter two faces the issue of injustice and evil head-on. The Lord tells Habakkuk that’s He’s not lost control. The reins of the Cosmos have not slipped out of His holy hands. He’s still on course.

You may not understand it, Habakkuk.

You may not see the full picture.

You’ll have to trust me on this one.

**Deffinbaugh:** God Silences a Protesting Prophet

It looked to Habakkuk as though the Babylonian victory would be the end of all God’s people and of His promises to them. The vision Habakkuk received was a promise that God would judge those who were proud and arrogant, and who were sinners. What Habakkuk should also have known is that God’s promises to His people would be fulfilled. God would save a remnant of the righteous, as other prophets had indicated. Habakkuk had to believe this by faith, and he needed to endure the days ahead by walking in obedience to God’s Word.

**Blue:** For Habakkuk, the message was clear. Stop complaining! Stop doubting! God is not indifferent to sin. He is not insensitive to suffering. The Lord is neither inactive nor impervious. He is in control. In His perfect time Yahweh will accomplish His divine purpose. Habakkuk was to stand in humble silence, a hushed expectancy of God’s intervention.

**Boice:** The challenge presented to us in this chapter is that choice. Will it be the world’s way, the way of the ungodly with its emptiness, frustration, and eventual ruin? Or will it be God’s way, the way of faith in Him who alone is worthy of that faith? . . . Though the world should rise up against us, the righteous will live by faith. It is by faith in the righteous God alone that we can stand against it.

**Freeman:** Thus, the revelation unfolds a universal, spiritual principle, which is applicable to all men in every dispensation. The essence of sin is pride, especially as it expresses itself in self-exaltation and arrogant self-confidence; as in the case of the ruthless and powerful Chaldean Empire under Nebuchadnezzar, whom God used to punish Judah. Daniel records how that God humbled the great king, who boasted, *“Is not this great Babylon, which I have built for the royal dwelling-place, by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?”* (Dan 4:30). Divine judgment fell upon the

king, humbling and abasing him, until he was compelled to acknowledge that God ruled in the kingdoms of the earth, as well as in heaven, and that “*those that walk in pride he is able to abase*” (Dan 4:37).

TEXT: Habakkuk 3:1-19

TITLE: PERSEVERING PERSPECTIVE – GOD WILL DELIVER HIS PEOPLE

**BIG IDEA:**

**THE PERSEVERING PERSPECTIVE COMBINES THE SHORT TERM PAIN OF DISCIPLINE WITH THE TRIUMPHANT RESOLVE TO REJOICE IN GOD'S LONG TERM DELIVERANCE**

**REVIEW:**

We have seen the prophet wrestle honestly with the **perplexing paradox** of How could a righteous God use a wicked nation as His instrument of discipline against His own people? (Chapter 1)

We have seen God answer by reinforcing the **permanent principle** that God is a righteous Judge and the wicked will by no means escape Judgment. (Chapter 2)

Now we see the prophet resting triumphantly in the **persevering perspective** that The joy and strength of the Lord can sustain the prophet through the short term pain of discipline in anticipation of God's long term deliverance. (Chapter 3)

**I. (:1-2) CHANGED PERSPECTIVE OF THE PROPHET – COMBINES ACCEPTANCE OF DISCIPLINE WITH HOPE FOR THE FUTURE**

A. (:1) Posture of Prayer

*“A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, according to Shigionoth.”*  
No longer arguing and complaining because of his perplexities

**MacArthur:** The precise meaning is unknown (its singular form occurs in the heading to Ps 7). In light of the musical notation at the end of chap. 3, it is thought that it has a musical-liturgical significance, and that this chapter was sung.

B. (:2) Plea for Revival and Mercy

1. Foundational Attitude of Fear of the Lord = The Beginning of Wisdom  
*“Lord, I have heard the report about You and I fear.”*

2. Plea for Revival

*“O Lord, revive Your work in the midst of the years,  
In the midst of the years make it known;”*

3. Plea for Mercy – While Accepting Discipline

*“In wrath remember mercy.”*

One of the key phrases in the book

## **II. (:3-15) HISTORICAL REMEMBRANCES OF GOD IN HIS MAJESTIC GLORY AND SOVEREIGN POWER – COMBINES THE OUTPOURING OF GOD’S WRATH WITH THE REPEATED DELIVERANCE OF HIS PEOPLE**

(Primarily looking at God’s Deliverance of His People From Egypt and the giving of the Law)

### A. (:3-5) Vision of the Glory and Power of the God of Wrath

#### 1. His Coming

*“God comes from Teman,  
And the Holy One from Mount Paran. Selah.”*

**MacArthur:** Teman, named after a grandson of Esau, was an Edomite city (Am 1:12; Ob 9). Mount Paran was located in the Sinai peninsula. Both allude to the theater in which God displayed great power when He brought Israel into the land of Canaan (cf. Dt 33:2; Jdg 5:4).

#### 2. His Manifest Glory

*“His splendor covers the heavens,  
And the earth is full of His praise.  
His radiance is like the sunlight;  
He has rays flashing from His hand,”*

#### 3. His Hidden Power Demonstrated in Wrath

*“And there is the hiding of His power.  
Before Him goes pestilence,  
And plague comes after Him.”*

### B. (:6-11) The Outpouring of God’s Wrath

#### 1. (:6A) His Piercing Gaze

*“He stood and surveyed the earth;  
He looked and startled the nations.”*

#### 2. (:6B) His Eternality Contrasted with Mortal Fragility

*“Yes, the perpetual mountains were shattered,  
The ancient hills collapsed.  
His ways are everlasting.”*

#### 2. (:7) His Terrified Witnesses – En Route to the Promised Land

*“I saw the tents of Cushan under distress,  
The tent curtains of the land of Midian were trembling.”*

#### 3. (:8-11) His Power Demonstrated in Nature – But His Wrath Not Directed Against Nature

##### a. (:8) Waters of Turmoil – But Goal of Bringing Deliverance

*“Did the Lord rage against the rivers,*

*Or was your anger against the rivers,  
Or was your wrath against the sea,  
That you rode on your horses, on your chariots of salvation?"*

b. (:9) Weapons of Wrath

*"Your bow was made bare,  
The rods of chastisement were sworn. Selah.  
You cleaved the earth with rivers."*

c. (:10-11) Witnesses of Destruction

*"The mountains saw You and quaked;  
The downpour of waters swept by.  
The deep uttered forth its voice,  
It lifted high its hands.  
Sun and moon stood in their places;  
They went away at the light of your arrows,  
At the radiance of your gleaming spear."*

C. (:12-15) God's Wrath Set in the Context of God's Mercy and Deliverance

1. (:12) Mission of Wrath Against the Nations

*"In indignation You marched through the earth;  
In anger You trampled the nations."*

2. (:13A) Goal of Deliverance for God's People

*"You went forth for the salvation of Your people;  
For the salvation of Your anointed."*

3. (:13B-15) Execution of the Wicked Who Had Oppressed God's People

*"You struck the head of the house of the evil  
To lay him open from thigh to neck. Selah.  
You pierced with his own spears the head of his throngs.  
They stormed in to scatter us;  
Their exultation was like those who devour the oppressed in secret.  
You trampled on the sea with Your horses,  
On the surge of many waters."*

**III. (:16-19) TRIUMPHANT RESOLVE OF THE PROPHET –  
COMBINES THE ACCEPTANCE OF THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD WITH  
THE UPLIFTING RESOURCES OF THE JOY AND STRENGTH OF THE LORD**

A. (:16A) Foundational Attitude of Fear of the Lord = the Beginning of Wisdom

*"I heard and my inward parts trembled,  
At the sound my lips quivered.  
Decay enters my bones,  
And in my place I tremble."*



- B. (:16B-17) Persevering Acceptance of the Discipline of the Lord
1. (:16B) Expectation of the Inevitability of the Discipline of the Lord  
*“Because I must wait quietly for the day of distress,  
 For the people to arise who will invade us.”*
  
  2. (:17) Anticipation of the Bleakest of Times
    - a. No Food From the Fields  
*“Though the fig tree should not blossom  
 And there be no fruit on the vines,  
 Though the yield of the olive should fail  
 And the fields produce no food,”*
  
    - b. No Food From the Flocks  
*“Though the flock should be cut off from the fold  
 And there be no cattle in the stalls”*
- C. (:18-19) Abiding Confidence in the Sufficiency of the Joy and Strength of the Lord
1. (:18) The Joy of the Lord  
*“Yet I will exult in the Lord,  
 I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.”*
  
  2. (:19A) The Strength of the Lord  
*“The Lord God is my strength,”*
  
  3. (:19B) Victory in the Lord  
*“And He has made my feet like hinds’ feet,  
 And makes me walk on my high places.”*

\* \* \* \* \*

### DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How can we expand our perspective in times of difficulty and hardship so that we are looking at the long term purposes of God rather than at our short term pain and perplexity?
  
- 2) What type of balance have we experienced in our own life between God’s discipline and His mercy?
  
- 3) How can we renew our vision of God’s majestic glory and His sovereign power? We appreciate the simplicity and spontaneity of prayer. Do we also recognize that prayer can be formal and carefully structured (as this prayer is)?
  
- 4) Are we living in the joy and strength of the Lord with that tone of confidence and ultimate triumph?

\* \* \* \* \*

## QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

**Stedman:** This prayer is one of the most remarkably beautiful, poetic passages in all the Scriptures. Read it and see how the prophet is doing nothing more or less than going back and remembering what God has done in the past. That is what convinces Habakkuk that God can be trusted. He rests upon events that have already occurred, events which cannot be questioned or taken away or shaken in any way; the great fact that God has already moved in human history. And this is where faith must rest. We do not live by blind faith. We live with a God who has acted in time and space, who has done something, who has indelibly recorded his will in the progress of human events.

**Chestnut:** When you are through questioning God and you still aren't satisfied, what then? How will you respond in your life when terrible things happen and you don't understand what God is doing?

**Holwick:** "YET I WILL REJOICE IN THE LORD" Habakkuk 3:17-18  
I. Obscurity of Habakkuk.

### II. His important and relevant message.

- A. Habakkuk was confused, even irritated, with God.
  - 1) His way of doing things did not make sense.
  - 2) It did not seem just. 1:2-3
  - 3) The Jews of his time were corrupt and God did nothing.
  
- B. God tells him what he will do about it. 1:6
  - 1) The Babylonians (Iraq) will smash Judah.
  
- C. Habakkuk becomes more angry. 1:13
  - 1) His sharp-edged response to God:  
"Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those  
more righteous than themselves?" 1:13
  - 2) Babylonians were far worse than Jews.
  - 3) Absence of justice was bad; unjust justice is worse.

### III. How people get angry with God.

- A. Some conclude God isn't a good God after all
  
- B. Honest look at life leads to hard questions.
  
- C. Habakkuk makes no decision on matter, except to wait for God. 2:1

### IV. God's answer.

- A. His judgment is selective.

- 1) Those who trust in God will be spared. 2:4
- B. His "instruments" of judgment will be judged themselves. 2:16
  - 1) The Babylonians thought they were following their own agenda.
  - 2) They were wrong.
- C. God is still in charge. 2:20
  - 1) Even when events seem out of control, God can be trusted.
  - 2) God is the ruler of history.
    - a) Not everything that happens is good.
    - b) But God can take everything that happens and turn it for good.
- D. Faith is required on our part. 3:16
  - 1) Sometimes we will see our vindication, sometimes not.
  - 2) God often works in round-about ways. (Babylonians)
- V. Habakkuk never got to see the results of his prophecy.
  - A. Israel kept on sinning and Babylonians came.
    - 1) Only years later did the Babylonians get theirs.
    - 2) In the end, the Jews came out purer and more dedicated to God.
  - B. Nevertheless, Habakkuk was at peace with God.
    - 1) Genuine faith doesn't require loose ends to be tied up.
    - 2) Peace even in the midst of trouble. 3:17
    - 3) He was able to rejoice in God. 3:18
  - C. Do we only believe when it "works"? 3:17-18
  - D. With salvation, nothing should be able to stop us from rejoicing in God.
    - 1) We don't thank God for hard times.
    - 2) We thank God that he can bring good out of them.
      - a) Even if he hasn't done it yet!
  - E. When God seems distant, he is often the closest.

**Keathley:** Habakkuk now understands and offers a prayer of praise because God is in control.

- He pleads for mercy in the midst of the judgment (1-2).  
He is afraid of what is coming. He knows it will be awful. Undoubtedly He will suffer too. Maybe personally, but at least through witnessing the death and destruction of those around him.
- He praises God's majesty and power (3-15).
- He promises to wait on the Lord (16-19).

What is coming is frightening, but he commits himself to wait and trust in God.

At the beginning of the book I mentioned that Habakkuk's name meant "embrace" or "wrestle." We've see him wrestle with the tough questions, but what is his final response? To embrace God and trust in Him.

**Shawn Drake:** CHANGE OF ATTITUDE -- Habakkuk 3:1-19

Introduction:

1. We have heard Habakkuk's 2 complaints and God's 2 replies.
2. Habakkuk started in a valley, but he ended on a mountaintop.
3. Habakkuk went from watching and waiting to worshipping and witnessing.
4. How is this possible? -- Habakkuk 2:4
5. Look with me at the change in Habakkuk's attitude.

From Complaining To Praying -- Habakkuk 3:1-2

3 focuses of his prayer:

1. God's Word (Keyword: "awe").
2. God's Work (Keyword: "renew").
3. God's Wrath (Keyword: "mercy").

From Considering To Pondering -- Habakkuk 3:3-15

3 stanzas of his song:

1. God came (Habakkuk 3:3-5).
2. God stood (Habakkuk 3:6-7).
3. God marched (Habakkuk 3:8-15).

From Crying To Praising -- Habakkuk 3:16-19

3 praises from his experience:

1. I will rest in God.
2. I will rejoice in God.
3. I will rely on God.

Conclusion:

1. Focus on what God is doing!
2. Remember Who we follow.
3. Give God all your praise!

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**Jan Johnson:** The details are the same as at the giving of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 19:16-19): thunder, lightning, a thick cloud over the mountain, a loud trumpet blast, everyone in camp trembling, Mt. Sinai covered with smoke, God descending in fire, mountain shaking violently, trumpet getting louder and louder. Cushan was a Midianite or Arabian tribe, and probably one of the nearby nations that was thrown into fear at God's mighty acts, especially the crossing of the Red Sea. If someone asks about Teman and Mt. Paran, they were both located in Edomite territory adjacent to Mt. Sinai.

**Boice:** (quoting Lloyd-Jones)

Our problems can nearly all be traced to our persistence in looking at the immediate problems themselves, instead of looking at them in the light of God. So long as Habakkuk was looking at Israel and the Chaldeans, he was troubled. Now he has forgotten Israel as such, and the Chaldeans, and his eyes are on God. He has returned to the realm of spiritual truth – the holiness of God, sin in man and in the world – and so he is able to see things in an entirely new light. He is now concerned for the glory of God and for nothing else.

**Boice:** [Contrast the victory of faith of Habakkuk with the world's approaches to fearful situations]

One of the world's reactions is resignation. A person will say, "If this is going to happen to me, I suppose there is just nothing that can be done about it. . . This may be better than screaming in the face of misfortune, but it is not the Christian way. At best it is a grim Stoicism.

A second reaction of the world is detachment. A person will say, "I don't want to think about such things. Every time I think about them I get depressed – when I think about my own personal future, when I think about the future of the country. . . A person who reacts this way may try to fill his life with amusements or even work hard to keep his mind occupied. But this view refuses to face reality, and reality, whether we like it or not, is still there. Moreover, it usually leaves its impact anyway. We try to detach ourselves from our problems, but they remain with us subconsciously and inevitably disturb the activities we are using to escape them.

A third approach is sheer bravado. People will tell us, "Pull yourselves together and face this with your chins up. Don't let the future depress you. Don't let anything get you down." That would be all right if we could do it, for in the situations I am talking about our knees are already knocking together and our lips are quivering. Nobody would be in this state if he or she could help it. When you are terrified, all the pep talks in the world avail little.

The Christian way of dealing with fear is to rejoice in the God of salvation. . . When we rejoice in God, we are placing our confidence in one who acts powerfully and effectively on our behalf.

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Paul Decker.

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Shawn Drake.

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Freddy Fritz.

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