

IV. Habakkuk in Biblical Perspective
A Prophet and His Conversation with God
“More Gleanings from the Harvest in Habakkuk.”

Habakkuk 2

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We will be taking a second look into Habakkuk 2 for this study and then we will spend the next two studies on Habakkuk 3. I grew up playing baseball and also under the idea that you had to have a date on Friday or Saturday night. Almost every Friday night after playing baseball I would come around 5pm and shower but my grandfather would be there waiting for my mom to get home so that my grandmother who had been watching my sisters could leave. Every Friday at 5pm was championship wrestling which my grandfather would be watching every time I got home. He would say to me ‘Son, you know this is all fake’ but then you would hear him say things like ‘Get him, get him, get him’ so he sure didn’t act like it was fake.

One of his favorite wrestlers was a man who had taken a name for wrestlers in which his stage name was ‘The Grappler’ and he was one mean looking dude. You would see this in headline news – the grapplers. That would actually be a good translation of Habakkuk’s name. He is the clasper, the wrestler for his very name is a prophetic statement of what his contribution is to us. He is grappling with God. Habakkuk’s book reminds me so much of the incident from Jacob’s life where he wrestled with the angel of the Lord – a Christophany. Habakkuk is wrestling with something that is absolutely overwhelming him.

Habakkuk begins with his first complaint. His complaint was that the people of God had gone into this death spiral of apostasy. Pagan worship has infiltrated the temple. Sexual immorality has been embraced. There is the loss of marital fidelity, false prophets with false teachings and there is even a movement back toward pagan gods such as Molech that would eventually lead to child sacrifices again in Israel’s history.

Molech was this large hideous idol with his arms extended made out of brass or iron that would be hollowed out and then filled with burning coals. In its less hideous form people would bring their first born and place them on its extended arms that had been filled with burning coals until the arms would sear the very flesh of the first born. This is what the Bible is referring to when it says ‘our children bear the marks of Molech.’ In its more hideous form the first born would be left on the idol until the burning coals had taken away the life of the first born rather than taken off with just the burning marks. Molech statues had even been placed around the temple mount. So it is those things that have laid hold of Habakkuk.

Habakkuk loves the holiness of God. He hates the sins of his people, God’s people. So Habakkuk calls out to the Lord in his opening prayer which starts out in Habakkuk 1:2, [2] *O LORD, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not hear?* This is the language of lament where he is lamenting before the Lord and we see that this is not a fly by night concern. This is something that has weighed down upon him and he is leaning into through his prayer life of calling upon God to discipline his people in this apostasy and all of its hideous forms that are taking place but God seemingly is not working so Habakkuk brings this complaint. He has interpreted this delay of the Lord as a disconnecting or denial or disinterest by the Lord.

God rapidly answers Habakkuk’s prayer by telling him this is not delay nor denial nor disconnect nor disinterest but if you look out into all the nations that is Me working but I’m about to tell you something that will cause you an even bigger complaint, an even bigger issue

which is that I am raising up the Babylonians to defeat the Assyrians to discipline the ten northern tribes. As Habakkuk writes this the onslaught of the Babylonian's three invasions are now about to take place. Habakkuk is ministering in the kingdom of Jehoiakim but as a contemporary with Jeremiah.

God is telling Habakkuk that He is doing something that he would not believe and it will astound him in which it does so Habakkuk comes back with a second complaint. Habakkuk basically says to God as he looks at God's attributes and actions, 'How can You with Your attributes of sovereignty, eternality, almighty and holy, use people more wicked than Your people to bring discipline and judgment upon Your people?' Habakkuk sees a disconnect and can't see how God will use more wicked people to promote holiness among His people.

This goes at the heart of all that you and I are constantly dealing with. The question of if God is sovereign, holy, and almighty how does He let sin in this world, is one we all eventually grapple with. If God authored the sin in this world in the name of His sovereignty then He can't be holy. If sin came into the world apart from His sovereignty then He can't be sovereign and man must be sovereign over God because he has introduced something that God is not sovereign over.

The answer is to bring two seeming contradictions of the sovereignty of God and the free moral agency of men to light. This is known as an antinomy. Here is an illustration of this. If we're in a room that looks like there are two parallel ropes hanging down from the ceiling and I go and pull one rope but the other rope goes up when I do that then I know that I don't actually have two ropes. I have one rope that is united beyond what I'm able to see and comprehend. Every time we touch who God is we are faced with antinomies.

We are constantly faced with something that is supra-rational not irrational, supra-natural, supra-logical for it only can be accomplished in the context of who God is and the resolution of it is beyond our capabilities. Paul says in Romans 11:33–36, [33] *Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!* [34] *“For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?”* [35] *“Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?”* [36] *For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.* This doesn't mean I can't examine God it just means I can't plummet the depths of God.

This is the doctrine of God where we have one God who dwells in Three Persons. So is that one God or three Gods? He is one God who sometimes appears as Father, sometimes as Son and sometimes as Holy Spirit. He one God who dwells in Three Persons but not three Gods. He is one God in substance who exists eternally, infinite, and His being is wisdom, justice, holiness and truth. Whenever we get to these things we have to do something theologically that Habakkuk is grappling with God to learn.

We have to do something that is called knowledge by negation. That is you state a truth that has been revealed by God and that truth is beyond our rational, logical capabilities but it's not irrational or illogical. The only way we can come close to understanding it is to do knowledge by negation. So we make a propositional statement revealed in the Word of God that our God is one God who dwells in Three Persons equal in substance and glory. Then you have to step on the one side and say what you are not saying. He is not three Gods but one God. Then you go back to the other side and say not one God with three different modes of appearance but one God who exists in three distinct Persons yet One in essence.

The same thing is true with the sovereignty of God and the free moral agency of man. God sovereignly throughout the Scripture affirms He has sovereignly ordained all that is in the

world. He is sovereign over all. There is ‘not one atom in all of the universe that God sovereignly does not say ‘it is Mine’’ and is in sovereign control over all of it. Yet He is very clear He is not the author of sin. While He ordered its presence He did not author it. Sin has been authored by the fall of Satan and the fall of humanity. Please notice I did not say free will of man but free moral agency. Man is a free moral agent but our will is under the bondage of our sin nature.

Romans 3:10–18 says [10] *as it is written: “None is righteous, no, not one; [11] no one understands; no one seeks for God. [12] All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.” [13] “Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive.” “The venom of asps is under their lips.” [14] “Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.” [15] “Their feet are swift to shed blood; [16] in their paths are ruin and misery, [17] and the way of peace they have not known.” [18] “There is no fear of God before their eyes.”*

Genesis 6:5 says [5] *The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.* So we freely choose according to our nature which is in the bondage of sin. That is why Jesus says to Nicodemus in John 3:5, [5] *Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”* The new birth is not the reward when you come to your senses but it’s the act of God’s grace that gives you your senses so that you can see, believe and repent.

We tend to think that if God is sovereign then man must be a robot. That’s the Greek concept of fatalism. God does not bestow a fate for God is sovereign over everything working through man’s choices rationally, emotionally, and volitionally. That’s why there is a Judgment Seat for we are responsible for what we do.

Ultimately it comes back to why didn’t God just sovereignly overrule the moral agency of man and not let him sin and this is where Habakkuk gets the answer from God in the text. I want to identify something here that I think is very important. God saved you to have an intimate, personal relationship with you and that should not be turned into individualism because your relationship personally with God always takes place in the context of the body of Christ, the bride of Christ, His church. We are members of His body connected to one another, not individuals, but God does save us which enables us to draw near to Him and He draws near to us.

You might think you have a lot of big questions for God and I have good news for you. One of the reasons God has these challenges for us is to draw you to Himself, to seek Him and grapple with Him in a personal, intimate relationship working through the hard providences of God, the challenging dynamics of living in a broken world. Hear the words of Peter in John 6:68–69 which says [68] *Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, [69] and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.”* You are fully saved in Christ but not yet delivered to the fullness of that salvation. Part of the ordained purposes of God is to draw you into intimacy with Him.

Habakkuk is doing this in a way that I think can help me and you. Habakkuk 2:1 says [1] *I will take my stand at my watchpost and station myself on the tower, and look out to see what he will say to me, and what I will answer concerning my complaint.* I want you to see what Habakkuk has done and I want to commend it to you so that you have intimate, personal, honest dealings with God. I want to give you five things that I think will be helpful that comes from this second complaint of Habakkuk.

First of all, what is the process of your intimacy with the Lord? You start by affirming what you know about God from His Word. When I have an appointment with someone I enjoy doing some research on them before we meet. Who am I going to talk with? Where did they go to school? What is their history at Briarwood? Etc. and if that's true in our personal relationships that should be true with God. God is light and He has revealed who He is. So in the process of your relationship with Him begin with what you know about Him.

Then assess your questions, your petitions and the praise you are bringing to God in light of who He is. I hear people say 'God, please rescue us for we live in a culture that has kicked You out of the classroom.' As I read my Bible we don't kick God out of anything for that doesn't match my theology. We may not invite Him into the classroom or want to recognize Him or forbid others to do so but no one kicks God out of anything. When God shows up He shows up and He doesn't need our permission. So you need to know who God is by what He does, affirming that and then assess your prayer requests, questions, complaints and praise.

Thirdly, then assure yourself that God will always be consistent with His character. He never acts outside of His character. You do praise God for what He has done because everything God does is consistent with who He is and who He is, is revealed by what He does as well as in His Word.

Fourthly, you await His answer. Be still and know that He is the Lord (Psalm 46:10). This is exactly what Habakkuk does. He has affirmed who God is, assessed the situation, assured himself that God will act according to His character with His actions that His attitude and actions will be consistent with His attributes and then I take my stand, look and await His answer.

Be assured that He is going to answer. His answer maybe 'no,' 'yes' or keep waiting and praying. His timing is always right. He is never too late, too early for at the right time Christ dies for the ungodly and does His work in our life. In Habakkuk 2:1 we learn that when God answers that becomes Habakkuk's answer to his complaint. So when God answers that becomes our answer. Now let's move from process in your time with the Lord to perspective.

You need to get a good perspective. Notice that Habakkuk is not going to wait in the streets or as one preacher said 'in the marketplaces.' God told Habakkuk to look and see what He was doing in the nations. So according to Habakkuk 2:1 he gets in a position so that his perspective is as advantageous as possible. He gets up to the watchpost in the tower and there he takes his stand, looks and listens.

I do not believe the creation of worship space like this church is a waste of resources. We are not abstract people. The places built to worship God are not built to house God but to facilitate the worship of God's people and they either speak of God appropriately or they don't. God needs no place to dwell for He is dwelling in His people. Our environment affects us. I believe what is true of corporate worship is also true of personal worship.

I strongly encourage you to have sacred time. Identify sacred space and have a sacred place. The point isn't that God can't meet you anywhere but it's for you to know that when you go to that sacred place you go to meet Him. There is the place of worship and refuge with the Lord. Protect that time and place with Him. That is the place where you talk and listen to the Lord. One of my friends says 'we're going to read the Bible, sing the Bible, pray the Bible and preach the Bible' and the same thing is true privately when you are going to meet the God of the Word. Have that watchpost to grapple, praise, call upon and meet with God and see what He is doing, just like Habakkuk. There you will take your stand, be refreshed, look, and listen in that place.

You also have a posture and that is a posture of a listener, a looker, a worshipper of the Lord even with tough questions. Lord, I brought my complaint, I await Your answer which will then take the place of my complaint. Be a learner from the Lord. You do not engage in a man-made religion built upon the imaginations of men. You engage in a relationship with God through the Gospel of saving grace and everything about that God and serving Him is foundational does not come from our imagination but from His Divine revelation. God make me a man or woman of the Book. I want to take the posture of a learner.

Finally, you have a purpose and that purpose is not to change God but for God to change you. I sit down and reason with God all the time about things. This last week I grappled with Him on something and He actually answered it the way I requested He answer it but by no means did I think that I changed God but my God is personal and I am personal. God wants that conversational time. Draw near to God and He draws near to you. Go read Moses or David and you will see them reasoning with God about various things but they don't reason from their will. They make their will known but they reason from God's revealed will.

Moses will say 'God You can't do that' but the rest of the sentence says 'because You said...'. So there is that true engagement with God as a learner but the whole point is God changing you. God change me. God refresh me. God renew me. There are a few other things that God shows us through Habakkuk here as we look at the woes. God will use the Chaldeans but He will also hold them accountable for all of their evil. So He pronounces five woes upon them. Let's start by looking at the first woe.

Habakkuk 2:6–8 says [6] *Shall not all these take up their taunt against him, with scoffing and riddles for him, and say,*

*“Woe to him who heaps up what is not his own—
for how long?—*

and loads himself with pledges!”

[7] *Will not your debtors suddenly arise,
and those awake who will make you tremble?*

Then you will be spoil for them.

[8] *Because you have plundered many nations,
all the remnant of the peoples shall plunder you,
for the blood of man and violence to the earth,
to cities and all who dwell in them.*

This is a woe that is His judgment upon imperialism. Personal imperialism is where you try to control other people. National imperialism is where they mount up and try to control the nations. The very people they have oppressed will become the people God will use to bring judgment upon them.

The second woe is the woe against injustice. Habakkuk 2:9–11 says [9] *“Woe to him who gets evil gain for his house,*

*to set his nest on high,
to be safe from the reach of harm!*

[10] *You have devised shame for your house
by cutting off many peoples;
you have forfeited your life.*

[11] *For the stone will cry out from the wall,
and the beam from the woodwork respond.*

Those who have used evil and injustice to get gain God will bring judgment and justice upon them. The soul that sinneth shall surely die.

The third woe is a woe against iniquity, crookedness, perversity. Habakkuk 2:12–14 says

[12] *“Woe to him who builds a town with blood
and founds a city on iniquity!*

[13] *Behold, is it not from the LORD of hosts
that peoples labor merely for fire,
and nations weary themselves for nothing?*

[14] *For the earth will be filled
with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD
as the waters cover the sea.*

Here they only have one hope and that is to be washed in the blood of Jesus, repent of their sins and come to Him for grace and mercy in the name of Him who would take their justice for them. He will bring that justice upon that iniquity and as He does it He peels back the curtain to answer our problem of why God sovereignly allow men to freely sin. It is for His glory. It is so that the glory of God will cover the earth even as the waters cover the sea.

What is the glory of God? It is the outshining of all of the majesty of His attributes. Without sin I would have never have known God’s grace. Where sin abounds grace does much more abound. Without sin I would not have known of His patience, His mercy and His true justice. Because of God’s sovereign allowing and ordering of man’s free choice to sin then in light of this God has sovereignly secured His glory that shall cover the creation even as the waters cover the sea.

The fourth woe is in Habakkuk 2:15–17 which says [15] *“Woe to him who makes his neighbors drink— you pour out your wrath and make them drunk,
in order to gaze at their nakedness!*

[16] *You will have your fill of shame instead of glory.*

Drink, yourself, and show your uncircumcision!

*The cup in the LORD's right hand
will come around to you,
and utter shame will come upon your glory!*

[17] *The violence done to Lebanon will overwhelm you,
as will the destruction of the beasts that terrified them,
for the blood of man and violence to the earth,
to cities and all who dwell in them.*

Here is the judgment upon immorality.

The fifth woe is what undergirds all sin and that is idolatry. Habakkuk 2:18–20 says

[18] *“What profit is an idol
when its maker has shaped it,
a metal image, a teacher of lies?*

*For its maker trusts in his own creation
when he makes speechless idols!*

[19] *Woe to him who says to a wooden thing, Awake;
to a silent stone, Arise!*

Can this teach?

*Behold, it is overlaid with gold and silver,
and there is no breath at all in it.*

*[20] But the LORD is in his holy temple;
let all the earth keep silence before him.”*

The Lord of glory has now answered that He is going to use these wicked people and He will bring judgment on them for their wickedness with these five judgments, with the last one being idolatry. Oh the senselessness of idolatry!

The young men of this culture have been so heavy upon my heart. I was talking with our church planter in Fairfield, Alabama and he said to me ‘If you could only do one thing to destroy the lives of others what would you do?’ Take away their fathers. We demean fatherhood. We have destroyed fatherhood and now when we think of fatherhood there is no mechanism to think of the glory and majesty of our heavenly Father because of what has happened all around us. I was thinking of all these young men who have grown up in broken homes and without a father and how all of them are looking to fame, glory, money and party.

I want to tell them ‘where do you find what you think is going to make your life’ and that’s what an idol is. It is something that you’re convinced is going to make your life. If I were to take you to the capital of entertainment and fame in Hollywood or the capital of power in Washington D. C. or the capital of possessions in New York, why do they all need therapists and why are the suicide rates the highest in those places? We keep making the idols that not only can’t deliver but destroy.

We have the great privilege to share with people from the Word of God, the glory and majesty of a Savior who loves sinners and will deliver us from the judgment of our oppression, injustice, iniquity, immorality and idolatry. He will save us by His grace, cover us with His blood and grant us His perfect righteousness.

In closing I want to share a few thoughts from Habakkuk 2:2–3 which says *[2] And the LORD answered me:*

*“Write the vision;
make it plain on tablets,
so he may run who reads it.*

[3] For still the vision awaits its appointed time;

it hastens to the end—it will not lie.

If it seems slow, wait for it;

it will surely come; it will not delay.

You can always be assured that God will always be on time – the coming of Christ, His work in your life. It may not be our timetable but His is perfect. Trust Him. So that you can know Him He has given this instruction – take what I have revealed, write it down, and make it plain. Aren’t you glad God gives us His word? It’s tough enough to test if these preachers and teachers are of the Word but what if you were in a position of trying to figure out who was giving us the Word? You have the Word of God. It has been recorded for you to read and has been designed to be preached.

A man said to me one time ‘Pastor, when did you all decide what belongs in the Bible?’ I said ‘Well, I did not get the memo. They didn’t ask me.’ He said ‘But somebody decided what would be in the Bible so when did the church decide that?’ I said ‘We didn’t’ and praise God for the Reformation that went back to the Prophets and Apostles. The church does not make the Word of God. It received the Word that God has recorded for us and therefore we have Habakkuk who grappled with God. We find out something about ourselves as we look at Habakkuk and we find out so much about our God.

Go get a place, a time and meet with Him so that His life changing Word will be at work within you. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word. I thank You so much for the privilege to speak to so many about what I have the privilege to talk about in Your Word that we have received the Word of God from God, in that Word we can know our God and we can make known to our God our hearts freely because we're not saved by how brilliant we are or how righteous we are. We are saved by His grace so we can speak freely to Him. We certainly will speak reverently. We certainly speak to learn and to praise our God so teach us to grapple with God. God, You keep winning the victory in the grappling match and change us from faith to faith, in Jesus' Name, Amen.