

Another Complaint and Answer!

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[0 : 0 0] Okay, we're going to go back to Habakkuk for a little while and we're going to read from chapter 1 and verse 12.

There are Bibles there if you want them and it would be quite handy because I'm going to ask you a couple of questions just to keep you awake on this evening.

So if you remember last week, Corey looked at Habakkuk's first complaint and that was that Judah was desperately wicked and why was he allowing that, why was God allowing that to happen?

And God answered by saying, well, I'm going to judge them and I'm going to bring Babylon to be my means of judgment of the people of God.

And so in response to that, Habakkuk speaks in verse 12. Are you not from everlasting? Oh Lord, my God, my Holy One, we shall not die.

[1 : 0 0] Oh Lord, you have ordained them as judgment, as a judgment, and you, O Rock, have established them for reproof. You who are of purerized and to see evil and cannot look at wrong, why do you idly look at traitors and remain silent when the wicked swallows up the man more righteous than he?

You make mankind like the fish of the sea, like crawling things that have no ruler. He or it can be just translated the wicked there.

He brings all of them up with a hook. He drags them out of the net with his net. He gathers them in his dragnet so rejoices, so he rejoices in his glad.

For he sacrifices to his net and makes offerings to his dragnet. For by them he lives in luxury and his food is rich.

Is he then to keep on emptying his net and mercilessly killing nations forever? I will take my stand at my watch post and station myself on the tower and look out to see what he will say to me and what I will answer concerning my complaint.

[2 : 1 3] And then we're going to look at the first little bit of God's answer. I'm not going to look at it all tonight, next week. And the Lord answered me, write this vision, make it plain on tablets so he may run who reads it.

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.

Behold, his soul is puffed up with again. The wicked soul is puffed up. It is not upright within him, but the upright righteous shall live by his faith.

Moreover, wine is a traitor. An arrogant man who is never at rest. His greed is as wide as sheol. Like death he is never enough.

He gathers for himself all nations and collects as his own all peoples. And then he goes on to give some woes. So we'll look at this for a few minutes this evening and try and unpack it a little bit for ourselves to see what God is saying for today, for us.

[3 : 22] Because as I mentioned, this God's first answer about sending Babylon to bring Judah into captivity as part of God's judgment because of Judah's idolatry, that answer leads to Habakkuk's second complaint which we read together and we read half of God's answers.

You know, if the people of God were living unjustly as the first one, you know, why allow it God? And God's answer as well, you know, I'm going to send the Babylonians to enslave the people again because of judgment.

So we come to Habakkuk's second complaint. If an accursory reading of that second complaint verses 12 to the end of the chapter 17, what would you say, how would you summarize his second complaint?

If his first complaint was why in earth are you allowing Judah to be so evil and, you know, as God's people, why are you allowing injustice to flourish in the land and the laws not to be kept and idolatry to happen?

What's the second complaint you think? How would you summarize it in these verses? One thing that you think stands out a little bit in it.

[4 : 46] I know it's hard if you're just looking at it for the first time. If it's responding to his God's first answer, what do you think Habakkuk might be saying here?

Any ideas? Any thoughts at all? Yeah, that's very much part of it, isn't it?

It's similar but different to the first answer. He's still wondering what God is doing.

Anything else? Yeah, he's raising up the Babylonians.

Yeah, I think that probably is very much part of the summary. It's like as if he's complained about what's happening in Judah and God said, well, God answers his well.

[6 : 02] He's going to send this heathen nation, the Babylonians, who are not God's people, to judge them. Habakkuk's saying, secondly, the Babylonians, you're sending them?

How could you possibly do that? How could you use God's, a violent, idolatrous, evil people to execute your justice? So he's kind of even more gobsmacked by God's first answer and so he complains again.

I want to mention a couple of things about this complaint and it's a really strong complaint. He's saying, God, you're using an evil nation to do your will. You say you're a good God but you're using an evil nation and your evil things are happening as a result.

But there's two things I want to say briefly about that. The first is that the second complaint of Habakkuk, or prayer, it's a prayer as well, it's a cry that comes from faith.

Now, these are important truths for us. It's a cry that comes from faith because he starts in verse 12 by saying, are you not from everlasting, O Lord, my God, my Holy One, we shall not die?

[7 : 15] He says, O Lord, you have ordained them as judgment and you, O Rock, have established them for reproof. So he's coming from, he's not coming as we saw last week from a place of unbelief.

He's saying, I can't believe that kind of God. He's declaring in this prayer that God is the everlasting God. It's not really from a place of unbelief.

It's personal. He's saying, look, you're my God. I know you're my God and I know you're a good God. You're from everlasting. You're holy. You're pure. I know all these things. And I think that's really important for us because he's coming from this place of faith.

He knows God is from everlasting, even though, and we know that, but sometimes we recognize his ways are mysterious and there's things he doesn't reveal.

But he, for us as well, if we're believers, and we're believers tonight, he is the Holy One as well, isn't he? And if he's not, well, we're all doomed.

[8 : 24] Whatever's going to happen, it's hard for us to grasp his holy justice and his holy love that can come together and there's a mystery within that. But he's holy and he's from everlasting.

And he's the God who has promised we shall not die. That is in spiritual terms. And that's what he is reminding himself of here is the God of promises who said, we will not die, that death of separation that mentioned to the children on Sunday night.

So it's a cry from faith. That's very important to start with. The second thing is, it is a cry of bewilderment. He definitely is bewildered.

Verse 13, you are of purer eyes than to see evil. You cannot look at wrong. Why do you idly look at traitors and remain silent when the wicked swallows up the man more righteous than he?

So he's saying like, okay, Judah wasn't very righteous, but Judah's more righteous than Babylon. Why are you allowing that to happen? And there's bewilderment there.

[9 : 30] You remain silent. He doesn't know why. It seems that God's silent, even though God has spoken in the previous answer.

It's like Habakkuk saying, you're not really doing enough for my liking here, God. I don't understand. This is who you are, but you're allowing this to happen and you're allowing evil to overwhelm less evil as it were.

Babylon is even worse than Judah. And there's this picture of Babylon here, like a massive factory trawler, you know, these massive machine, trawlers that go in the sea and just scoop up everything.

And it talks about them there like, you know, you make mankind like the fish of the sea. And then the wicked bring up them up with a hook. He drags them with his net. He gathers them in his drag net. And there's this picture of Babylon just scooping up the whole of Judah and scooping up all the nations around it, swallowing everything in its wake.

And then idolizing its strength, it's pictured here as the kind of worshiping the net and the hook.

[10 : 39] The worshiping its military strength and being trusting in that and then enjoying the life of luxury that comes for by them. He lives in luxury and his food is rich.

And it seems relentless that this evil nation is going to destroy Judah and is going to, the evil seems to be flourishing and powerful and luxurious.

And I think that's probably one of the, that general question is one of the biggest questions we struggle with as Christians or one of the feelings we struggle most with as bewilderment.

It's not that we don't believe who God is. We believe who He says is. We believe He's our God. We've seen His salvation as Habakkuk did as well. But we're bewildered because we can't match up the character of God and what's happening in the world where evil seems to be flourishing.

We don't understand why God allows evil and unbelief to be so powerful, so relentless, so brutal and so unjust. I mean, I'm sure you struggle with these things as well.

[11 : 47] You know, in the world we live in, just now the secular philosophy of Western powers seems to be swamping politics and law and education and it's overwhelming.

And there's this great idolizing of might and power that we see maybe in what's happening in Ukraine and the luxury it brings, all the oligarchs that have benefited so much from this philosophy of power and the injustice of the world.

It's interesting, I know this is slightly out of date now, but the ten richest, and I think they're all men, ten richest people in the world, their wealth, all their accumulated wealth doubled during lockdown.

So there's this kind of inequity and inequality that we cry out and say, well, why is that the case? You know, why is it so much that evil and unbelief seems to flourish so much?

And I think the outstanding message of the complaint for us, if we are really applying it into our own lives today, is it's okay.

[13 : 00] It's okay to be bewildered. It's okay to look at the character and the promises and the nature of God and even our own salvation and wonder alongside that, why there's still so much evil and why we're so struggling with things in our own lives and in the world around us.

It's okay to be bewildered because God is okaying it because He puts it in His Word here. God expects of us. It can't be any other way.

We are who we are. God is who He is. There's much we don't know. So He says, take your bewilderment to me and it's fine to react in this way.

And I think Habakkuk has given to us for our comfort because it's a reminder to us that God says, I know this and I want you to recognize it's quite okay to be bewildered.

And in fact, it couldn't be any other way because He is God and we are not. And there's much that we don't know. So the reminder is, I think, in something like this, even in the complaint, take our complaints to God, take our bewilderment, take our struggles, take our sense of injustice and our cries and struggles to Him because He says, this is the stamp of approval on it here, which is, I think, important.

[14 : 25] Now secondly, second thing briefly, we go on to God's... Or well, we go on to God's answer, which is from verse 2.

But Habakkuk waits for God's answer and that's important. I will take my stand at the watch post and station myself on the tower and look to see what He will say to me and what I will answer concerning my complaint.

And then He goes on and we've got God's answer there, or part of God's answer in verses 2 to 5. Is there anything in God's answer?

Can you summarize anything that's helpful in God's answer? What do you think that we might consider? What is God saying in His second answer?

Or at least first part of it? Correct? Yeah, absolutely.

[15 : 48] Again, we'll go through that. Anything else you might see in it?

Yep, so there's... He knows what He's doing, even if we don't, and He's got an appointed time.

Excellent, yeah, absolutely. So in verses 1 to 5, you do have that little link verse in verse 1 where Habakkuk waits for God's answer.

See, he takes this idea of...another image of standing on the tower waiting to see and looking out to see what God's answer will be.

And that's very important for us as well, is that when we are bewildered, we are to wait on the Lord for His answer. We're to listen for His answer.

[16 : 51] We're to look for His answers. But we're also to wait and be patient with God because God is so patient with us.

And He's so patient even with the wicked which kind of comes into this as well, the fact that He allows the wicked even to live. Great patience there. And so we're called to be patient, listening and waiting for God.

But then when He does speak, that response is not just for Habakkuk personally, but it's also for us. And He says a couple of things.

He says, first of all, write it down. Write the vision, make it plain on tablets so He may run who reads it or it could be the herald is to run with the message.

So it's written down because He wants us to know what He is going to reveal. It's important.

[17 : 54] The herald will run with it. And there is truth He wants us to know. There's things He will not tell us. Things maybe we'll never know. There's maybe things tonight that Heather knows that she didn't know before, as she's in the presence of the Lord.

We don't know, but nonetheless, we know He reveals some things and He hides other things. And I think one of the things that He reveals, and that it comes across actually a little bit more in the latter half of His answer, but also in His first answer, is that evil itself is not independent and it's not autonomous.

It's using the Babylonians who are an evil nation for His purposes. Now, there's great mystery in that, and in most cases there's great mystery.

But the principle is that God will harness evil to be the means by which He delivers judgment on occasion. So evil is not sovereign.

Evil is not victorious. This ultimate demise is certain, and it remains only because God's timing is being worked out.

[19 : 09] And so He's saying, even in how He's using the Babylonians, is that evil is under His sovereign control. And that's mysterious and difficult, but it's important.

And He talks about the appointed time. Now, there's various different interpretations of the appointed time. The part of that will be the appointed time for the Babylonians themselves to be judged.

And we know that happened as the Persians took over, and then the Persians were taken over by the Romans, and so it goes on that these evil powers, the kingdom of this world, they fall in God's timing.

And then He speaks in verse 3 about this promised answer, but still see the vision or the revelation. It could be translated revelation. Awaits its appointed time.

It hastens to the end. It will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it. It will surely come and not delay. So He's talking here about a future revelation. Many commentators believe that is the coming of the Messiah because it's the definite article associated with the vision.

[20 : 23] It's the vision or the revelation, and that could very probably point forward to the deliverance that comes through Jesus Christ.

Now, some commentators say there's kind of two layers. Part of the layer would be the deliverance that Cyrus brought to the people of Judah by destroying the Babylonians and allowing them to go back to Jerusalem, and that may be the case.

But ultimately, we see the answer and the appointed time and the deliverance being the coming of Jesus Christ in terms of His defeat of evil.

So Christ came at God's appointed time. There was hundreds of years before the promise in Genesis 3 to the coming of Christ in the ancient Near East.

But it was exactly the right time as His return will be exactly the right time. And we know in the New Testament, some of the Christians in the early church were saying or those who were scoffing at the early church say, no, you always talk about the coming of the...

[21 : 33] Where is this coming that He's promised? And we may be still of the same people scoffing, same attitudes of people scoffing at us, but He will return as He has come the first time.

He will return. It seems slow, wait for it. It will surely come. It will not delay. God knows exactly when Christ is to return.

And we're to take great comfort from that. And the third part of that answer, so Christ is really the answer, the ultimate answer to the problem of evil in the sense that... or God's answer to the problem of dealing with evil.

In the coming, we may struggle with the reality of evil in our lives and around us we may struggle with. But the answer to the defeat and the justice of God is in the person of Christ.

And He goes on and the second half of His answer, we'll look at this next week to give five woes, five curses, five judgments upon evil doing.

[22 : 36] And it's just a reminder, is it where, that God is saying, okay, it may not look like evil is defeated and it may not look like evil is being judged and it may not look like justice is being done.

But God is saying that no evil, not one sin will escape His punishment. And that's important for us to remember today. Justice delayed is not justice ignored.

And every single evil act indeed will be punished either in Jesus, if we trust in Him as our Savior or we'll be dealt with on that last great day by God.

So that there is ultimate justice and there will be ultimate justice. And that's important for us, I think, to know. And we too are to be patient and to wait and believe in the promises of God that it will come.

Because there's only two responses to God in His Word. And verse 4 really kind of sums up talking about the evil person or kind of personifying the wicked as a one person.

[23 : 43] Behold, His soul is puffed up, it is not upright within Him, but the righteous shall live by faith. And that's the response, that's the two responses we have to the mystery of evil, the darkness of events, the questioning of God, not knowing and being baffled by what God is doing or not or what we think He's not doing.

We're called not to reject God or to ignore Him but to live by faith. And that's really the essence of faith, isn't it? It's trusting when we don't necessarily know the next step.

We trust in the one who does know it. And that's our calling. To reject evil, to reject in our own hearts, to fight against it, to resist it, to seek the Holy Spirit's cleansing and help to overcome it personally, but also to be patient in the world in which we've... And that's... The world is a dark place just now.

It's as dark as it's ever been, maybe, or maybe we always think that. But it's difficult to see God's hand. It's difficult to recognize what God is doing.

But we're called to remember that these promises up till within Scripture has come true. The Babylonians did come as God promised.

[25 : 01] They did judge Judah as God promised. They with themselves were judged by Cyrus. And we've seen that God's promises have been outworked in His time. And of course, we see it in the coming of Jesus.

So two quotes to finish with, a biblical one and then one from a great professor of our own church. The first is from Saint Corinthians 5, for while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling.

So that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. Now, the one who has fashioned us for this very purpose is God, who has given us the Spirit as a deposit guaranteeing what is to come.

Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body, we are away from the Lord for we live by faith and not by sight. And that's an important reminder to us tonight that we have the Spirit.

He is the deposit. He is the promise that better things are still to come. And that's important. And then John L, who is my Old Testament professor in the Free Church College and who wrote a really good commentary on the Minor Prophets.

[26 : 18] I think Corey mentioned him last week as well. He says a really helpful, I think it's a very helpful thing. He says, it is in the tension of the historical process in which God is at work to redeem, not to exterminate, that the continued existence of evil in a warped world poses a problem until the final resolution when the risen Christ has destroyed all dominion, authority and power for He must reign until He puts all His enemies under His feet.

So I think that it's a helpful one, isn't it? That He says there is a tension in history because God's at working to redeem, not to exterminate.

And that's why the continued existence of evil creates a problem for us. But there is a final resolution and we must take comfort and hope from that this evening.

So that's a quick dip into Habakkuk. Sometimes you think the Minor Prophets are really kind of difficult and maybe at first glance you think they're irrelevant and they're dealing with a historical situation but when you unpack them a bit they're tremendously relevant I think to ourselves today.