



## **Habakkuk 1:12-2:1 -- Adversity Leads to Legitimate Questions about God's Character**

- I'd like to begin our time by asking you a question...
  - what is the distance between when you are sinned against...and when you are asking how God can use the sins of others for His glory and your good?
  - now, you won't have to look back too far to think about a time where you were treated in a sinful fashion by someone else on this planet...or had to face the difficulties of living in a sin cursed world --- that's a given...
  - the question is – what happened next?...in your mind, and in your heart, and with your mouth, and with your hands?...and how much of that had anything to do with the place and presence of God?...
- would you agree with this premise – too often when God's people are sinned against, their response (our response) would give the impression that we believe God had nothing to do with the sinful way we were treated, and has nothing to do with the way we ought to respond in return?...
- so that takes us back to the first question -- what is the distance between when you are sinned against...and when you are asking how God can use the sins of others for His glory and your good?
- and assuming that the answer is – sometimes the distance is far wider than God would want...what happens in the intervening time instead?...
  - if you're not immediately factoring the Lord into the occasion of being sinned against...
  - then what are you doing, what are you thinking, what are you wanting, what are you saying?...
  - there are several potential answers to that question, isn't there?...
- 1. One answer is – plotting or seeking revenge.
  - vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith me...
  - I'll be the heavenly payroll clerk...no reason to bring a busy God into this minor skirmish...the person was evil to me, I'll be evil back, with a little additional force and then we'll be even...
  - that is why, in some homes – in some workplaces – in some friendships – in some dorm rooms --- in some e-mail exchanges...
    - its' just back and forth...back and forth...
    - like this ever expanding tennis match...
    - you hurt me, I'll hurt you back...you hurt me, I'll hurt you worse...
    - you said that on my face-book page...well get ready for this post...
      - and you watch all of that unfold and even for people who say they're Christians...they look an awful lot like the Psalm 10 man where God is not in all His thoughts...
- 2. Another response to being sinned against is self-pity...
  - and that is not to suggest that some of these situations can't be painful...

- sin by its very nature destroys and hurts...
  - even when it's just words...one of the goofiest statements ever spoken was...sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me...
  - that's not what Scripture says at all...
  - Proverbs 18:21 – Death and life are in the power of the tongue...
  - so what do you do when someone throws one of those “death word zingers” your way?...
  - start pouting...the cold shoulder...the pity party...poor me...
  - for some, this kind of game playing is an art form...self-pity...
3. Then there's worry and fear...
- if I was hurt like that once, when's it going to happen again?...
  - my last friend betrayed me so I'll just go into this self-protective cocoon so I won't risk being hurt by someone else...
  - or, when's the other shoe going to drop...
  - or what else is that person saying behind my back?...
  - it is amazing how paralyzing that can be...
4. Or how about this one – cynicism...
- one man fails you, so somehow that expands to “that's how all men are”...
  - how do we get to that place so quickly?...
  - you can't trust a woman...they're so this...they're so that...
  - I'm not sure I want to be judged by the worst behavior of another member of my gender, do you?...
  - and if you don't want to be judged in that way, why would you do it to someone else?...
  - there is no question that there are some very evil people in this world...does that mean it is true of everyone to the same degree?...
  - cynicism might be comfortable and safe but it's also stifling and untrue...
- and what's lacking in all of those responses and more is the presence and purpose of the God of heaven...
  - and maybe that's the core issue – do you believe that God can somehow use someone else's evil for your good and His glory without being in any way tainted by that evil Himself?...
  - here's some great news --- we're not the first persons who ever asked that question...
    - that's why we're so thankful for a man who for some (and perhaps many) is becoming a new found friend --- of course I'm talking about the man Habakkuk...let me invite you to open your Bible there...Habakkuk chapter 1 – page 664 of the front section of the Bible under the chair in front of you...

### - Seeking God's Plan in Adversity

#### Read Habakkuk 1:1-2:1

- we're talking about how adversity leads to legitimate questions about God's character...
- with the time we have remaining, let's look for **3 steps to take when you're being sinned against.**

#### I. Express Trust and Confidence in the Truths that You Know.

- when we started this study, we said that every person here could understand what this book is about...
- I realize that it is different – when God writes a book, you'd expect it to a bit different...

- but it is also incredibly relevant...which is another evidence that God wrote it – because it applied perfectly to the children of Israel in 600 BC – but it addresses questions and problems that you and I faced last week..it’s almost like it’s supernatural in origin...
- but it is important now to begin being able to think our way through the book...
- the first 4 verses that we studied 2 weeks ago gave Habakkuk’s initial questions...
  - he was bothered that after godly King Josiah died, the people of the southern tribes went back to their evil ways...
  - and the prophet’s question is – how long are you going to let go, Lord?
  - how can you allow this iniquity, and violence, and strife and contention among your own people...it’s not right that people who call upon your name should be able to live this way and get away with it...
  - and we pointed how – those are fait questions --- we even made the point that in that sense, God is the friend of the honest doubter...
  - there’s a difference between talking about God, and talking to Him – he can handle your toughest questions...
- the real issue is – can you and I handle his forthright answers?...because that’s what we get in verses 5-11...
  - ...
  - what the Lord said would have taken their breath away...
    - He said, I am going to allow the Babylonians to come down and judge my people of the southern kingdom...Judah is going down...
    - just like God allowed the Assyrians to defeat the northern kingdom in 722 BC...
    - now, He’s going to allow the Babylonians the defeat the southern kingdom in 586...which is just a few years after this conversation recorded in chapter 1 would have taken place?...
- and it is almost like the Lord finishes that part of the conversation and looks at Habakkuk and says, did you have any other questions?...
- see, God does might yo9u asking Him things...as long as you don’t mind forthright answers...
- and I’m not suggesting that God is going to audibly and immediately answer you every time you ask...
  - but it is interesting how often He will peel back some element of His plan and let us see glimpses of His ways...
- and some of those answers are absolutely shocking...Isaiah finally just said it this way...
 

**Isaiah 55:8-9 - “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,” declares the LORD. “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts.**
- there is no greater proof of that proposition that the middle verses of Habakkuk chapter 1...God intended to use the wicked Babylonians in the accomplishment of His plan of purification with His own people...
- now, after Habakkuk caught his breath, and wiped the look of shock and incredulity off his face (and probably went down to the corner and had a Starbucks)...then He posed another set of questions...this time about God’s character...and I would propose to you that the logic that unfolds here can be a life-line to you and me when we are shocked by the sinful treatment of someone else...
- please focus in on **verse 12**
- see, what did He just do...and I would propose to you that this is an especially important piece of the puzzle...

- before launching into another set of questions...he gets his theological bearings again...
- he reminds himself of what he already knows...

#### **A. God is from everlasting.**

##### **- v. 12 - Are You not from everlasting**

- this news that God was going to use the wicked, cruel Babylonians would have been unbelievable to Him...
- but he reminded himself of who it was that was doing the talking...
- God wasn't on an internship here...this wasn't his first assignment...
- and Habakkuk was very wise to factor that into His thinking...
  - **Isaiah 45:21 - "Declare and set forth *your* case; Indeed, let them consult together. Who has announced this from of old? Who has long since declared it? Is it not I, the LORD? And there is no other God besides Me, A righteous God and a Savior; There is none except Me.**
  - **Isaiah 46:10 - Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, 'My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure';**
- there's a big difference between – "I don't understand this" and "I don't understand this therefore no one does..."...what else did Habakkuk bring into the conversation?...

#### **B. He's Jehovah.**

##### **- v. 12 - O LORD...**

- anytime you see the word Lord in all capital letters, it is a translation of the Hebrew word YAHWEH, or Jehovah...
- that is the way God introduced Himself – I am that I am...
- the all encompassing, all sufficient God...
- and that name came to be associated especially with His willingness to make promises with people, and His ability to faithfully keep them...
- and putting that in the mix is significant in this way...
  - Habakkuk knew how ruthless the Babylonians were...but he also know all the covenants and promises that God had made to His people...and though He had no idea how all of that could come together...He was confident God did...
  - another important emphasis is that...

#### **C. God is personal.**

##### **- v. 12 – My (used twice)**

- Habakkuk was a man who, in OT parlance, walked with God...
- and the personal nature of that relationship buoyed him in the middle of the storm...
- in fact, you get the sense, whether we're talking about Habakkuk and the people of Judah in 600 BC after hearing this shocking announcement...or you/me the last time someone harshly sinned against us...
  - that it like being in a tossing and going down into a vortex...and you've completely lost your balance and your bearings and you feel like you're going under...
  - and Habakkuk is looking for anything that is stable and trustworthy that he can grab onto and catch another deep breath before he continues...
  - wise people do that...,
    - what do I know about the person and work of God that I can remind myself of right now before I go any further in this struggle...
    - that is a mental discipline that has to be developed...

#### **D. God is Holy.**

##### **- v. 12 – my Holy One**

- this doesn't seem right, but that doesn't mean it isn't right.

## E. God is the Rock.

- v. 12 – And You, O Rock...

- **Psalm 18:2 - The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, My God, my rock, in whom I take refuge; My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.**

- I don't get it, but that doesn't mean it can't be gotten...
- by the way, that is a great way to describe the salvation process...and if you are here this morning and you have never trusted Christ as your savior and Lord, you won't be able to handle being sinned against in the way we're studying this morning...
- you need the focus and power of Christ to do this...
- the Psalmist said it this way... **Psalm 40:1-3 - I waited patiently for the LORD; And He inclined to me and heard my cry. He brought me up out of the pit of destruction, out of the miry clay, and He set my feet upon a rock making my footsteps firm. He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God; many will see and fear and will trust in the LORD.**
- so Habakkuk was reeling, but he was also looking...for the Rock...
- and he didn't stop there – he didn't just think about the character of God – he connected the dots...

## F. Apply these to your situation.

### 1. We will not die.

- in other words, this nation will not be snuffed out...

### 2. You have appointed them to judge and correct.

- **John MacArthur – “Although the prophet could not fully comprehend the sovereign workings of His righteous God, He expressed his complete faith and trust. As he rehearsed the unchangeable character of God as eternal, sovereign, and holy, he became assured that Judah would not be completely destroyed. Under the faithful hand of God, he realized the Babylonians were coming to correct, not annihilate.”**

- now, let's go back to the question we asked at the very beginning... what is the distance between when you are sinned against...and when you are asking how God can use the sins of others for His glory and your good?
- see, how skilled are you at doing what Habakkuk is doing in this verse...
  - someone has just sinned against me...
  - and it hurts...and there are all sorts of temptations to respond in sinful ways...
  - you're knocked off your equilibrium...
    - but then you practice the mental discipline of quickly factoring what you already know about the Person and work of God into the situation before going any further...
      - yes, I might have some questions in a minute...but first I'm going to get my bearings...
      - I'm not starting from ground zero...where the rock?...let me climb up on the truths that I already know and survey this situation from a more God-involved and God-centered perspective...
- [by the way – this is where good Christian music can help you (music that is more about the lyrics than it is about the tune...) – that is why it is so important to be in church, that is why it so important to surround yourself with godly friends...]
- another good example of this is found in the book of Job...in chapter 19 Job's friends are just beating him down with their evil counsel...and that is exactly what their words were...

- they kept saying that reason he lost his wealth, and his children, and his physical well-being was because of His own sin and because God was judging Him...we know that wasn't the case because we have information from reading the book about what was really happening that Job nor his so-called friends did not possess at the time...
- and as you read through chapter 19 you can see Job sinking lower and lower and finally he just blurts out...
- **Job 19:25-26 - As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, And at the last He will take His stand on the earth. Even after my skin is destroyed, Yet from my flesh I shall see God;**

- now, what did Habakkuk do next?...

## II. Formulate and Respectfully Express Your Ongoing Questions.

- the flow of thought is very important here...
- the book started with questions – hard ones/direct/substantive – from Habakkuk to God Himself...
- and then there were answers – honest/authentic/shocking...
- then this testimonial pause...this rehearsing of what you already know...finding your theological bearings...then some more questions...
- and that's an important paradigm...
- please don't view the Christian life as...I ask all my questions once...and then I get all my answers once...and that's it...
- it's a process...and you will never get to a place with the Lord where he will say to you – I am sorry but you have used up your coupons...I've had enough of you...
- I think some people view God as the Wizard of OZ...a lot of noise and steam and not many substantive answers and if you scratch around too much He'll order you out of the room...
- take heart in this...**James 1:5 - But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.**

- now, let's take the questions right from the text, but along the way offer some answers from our perspective of NT theology...

### A. How can you use those who are more sinful to mold your imperfect people?

**Habakkuk 1:13 - Your eyes are too pure to approve evil, And You cannot look on wickedness with favor. 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?**

- Habakkuk has no problem acknowledging that God's people need to be judged – what he doesn't get is how God could use the Babylonians, who were even more godless to be the instruments of judgment...
- doesn't that make Him complicit in their evil?...
- no, that makes Him sovereign in His plan...
- God is wise enough and powerful enough to use (not cause) the evil of others for His good and right purposes in you...
- **Romans 8:28-29 - 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. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren;**
- when you factor it into the way you're living in real time...IT MAKES A HUGE DIFFERENCE
- so let's go back to the last time you were sinned against...

- the focus should not be on their sin, or your hurt, but God's purposes...
- so what is the distance between that person saying whatever they said, or doing whatever they did --- and you saying – how could God use their evil to help me grow?

- try having a brawl in your home if that's your focus...
- try conjuring up a good pity party after taking this step first...
- theology takes all the fun out of sinning...

- then he asks...

## **B. Why do you leave your people without leaders?**

- **Habakkuk 1:14 - Why have You made men like the fish of the sea, like creeping things without a ruler over them?**

- that's an interesting issue for anyone from the nation of Israel to raise...
- perhaps the Lord could answer back...

### **1. So, how do you like your experiment?**

- do you remember how all of this "we have to have a king to be like the other nations business" started?...
  - it was back in the days of the prophet Samuel...
  - **1 Samuel 8:7 - The LORD said to Samuel, "Listen to the voice of the people in regard to all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being king over them."**
  - God just gave them what they demanded [be careful about the requests you take before the Lord] and it went so poorly that they felt like they didn't have any leader at all...
  - I've seen that happen on a number of occasions where someone has said...I have to have that person as my friend, I have to date that person, I have to marry that person...
  - sometimes God granting your request is not a sign of His blessing, it's a sign of His displeasure...
  - and when the dust settles, there's no spiritual leadership there at all...
- we've mentioned several times that these words occurred about 10-12 years after the death of a very godly king of Judah named Josiah...
  - you say – who's the king now?...everyone in Judah would hang their head on that one because the answer is Josiah's wicked son Jehoiakim...also known in Scripture as Shallum...
  - here's what the prophet Jeremiah said about him...

**Jeremiah 22:11-19 - For thus says the LORD in regard to Shallum the son of Josiah, king of Judah, who became king in the place of Josiah his father, who went forth from this place, "He will never return there; but in the place where they led him captive, there he will die and not see this land again. "Woe to him who builds his house without righteousness and his upper rooms without justice, Who uses his neighbor's services without pay And does not give him his wages, Who says, 'I will build myself a roomy house With spacious upper rooms, And cut out its windows, Paneling it with cedar and painting it bright red.' "Do you become a king because you are competing in cedar? Did not your father eat and drink And do justice and righteousness? Then it was well with him. "He pled the cause of the afflicted and needy; Then it was well. Is not that what it means to know Me?" Declares the LORD. "But your eyes and**

your heart Are *intent* only upon your own dishonest gain, And on shedding innocent blood And on practicing oppression and extortion.” Therefore thus says the LORD in regard to Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, “They will not lament for him: ‘Alas, my brother!’ or, ‘Alas, sister!’ They will not lament for him: ‘Alas for the master!’ or, ‘Alas for his splendor!’ “He will be buried with a donkey’s burial, Dragged off and thrown out beyond the gates of Jerusalem.

- Habakkuk and the children of Judah say -- Lord, you’ve left us without a leader...
- to which God might say back...

## 2. What did you do with the godly leader you were given?

- they had Josiah...a godly leader and a wonderful example...
- it wasn’t that they didn’t have it, it was that they wouldn’t follow it...
- how many young people have been given godly parents but they won’t submit to them, and they won’t learn from them...
  - what are you going to do when the Babylonians come?...
  - those pot head friends might seem pretty cool – just wait...
- how many people have had godly pastors or church leaders and they wouldn’t even join the church, or submit themselves to any kind of spiritual leadership in their life?...they’re looking for a Jehoiakim instead of looking for a Josiah...

## 3. Ultimately, God stands ready to lead.

- Titus and the worship team sang a beautiful song a couple of weeks ago...
- **I will lift my eyes to the Maker of the mountains I can’t climb**
- **I will lift my eyes to the Calmer of the oceans raging wild.**
- **I will lift my eyes to the Healer of the hurt I hold inside**
- **I will lift my eyes, lift my eyes to You**
- and you might be here this morning and would say, some of the adversity is of my own making...I rebelled against the godly leadership the Lord placed in my life...
- the good news is – there’s always room to turn that around...
- **Psalm 121:1 - I will lift up my eyes to the mountains; from where shall my help come?**

- Habakkuk leaves us in a very good place this morning...

## III. Wait Patiently with the Firm Expectation that God may Understand your Situation Better than You.

- **Habakkuk 2:1 - 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.**
- what is the distance between when you are sinned against...and when you are asking how God can use the sins of others for His glory and your good?
- I realize you might say – but why did I need Babylon sized adversity?...why did I have to be treated in that evil a fashion?...
- I can think of at least 2 possible answers...one better than the other...
  1. Some of us are a bit stubborn, and it takes a pretty good whack to jar us from our pedestal.
  2. Some are mature enough spiritual to be able to handle industrial sized adversity as a way to bring God unusually significant glory to God.