

### The Answers to Habakkuk's Second Question

#### Habakkuk 2:1-4

Habakkuk 2:1-4: *"I will stand my watch and set myself on the rampart, and watch to see what He will say to me, and what I will answer when I am corrected." <sup>2</sup> Then the Lord answered me and said: "Write the vision and make it plain on tablets, that he may run who reads it. <sup>3</sup> For the vision is yet for an appointed time; but at the end it will speak, and it will not lie. Though it tarries, wait for it; because it will surely come. It will not tarry. <sup>4</sup> "Behold the proud! His soul is not upright in him; but the just shall live by his faith."*

#### Background Notes

Did you ever get an answer from the Lord that you didn't expect, or that you didn't like? That's happened to me a number of times, in regard to both ministry and doctrine. And that certainly happened to Habakkuk.

Habakkuk was a prophet who lived in Judah in the 7<sup>th</sup> Century BC. As he looked around him, he saw iniquity and violence on every hand. Wicked people were prospering while taking advantage of righteous people. Righteous people were suffering, and wicked people were getting away with sin. Where was God? Why didn't He do something?

Habakkuk cried out to the Lord for an answer, and God answered him - but it was an answer that Habakkuk didn't expect or appreciate! God told Habakkuk that He **was** going to do something about the iniquity and violence in Judah. He was going to allow the pagan Babylonians to invade the land and punish the people of Judah for their evil ways. Babylon was already on the move. In 612 BC they had overthrown Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian Empire. They would soon defeat Egypt in the Battle of Carchemish in 605 BC. And it wouldn't be long before the Babylonian armies were at the gates of Jerusalem.

Habakkuk was "thrown for a loop" by God's answer. He hadn't expected an answer like that! So Habakkuk's second question was, "Lord, how can You allow the pagan Babylonians, a nation that's even more wicked than Judah, to overthrow and punish God's people?" That would be like God telling us that He was going to allow a godless communist nation to invade our country in order to punish the sins of America!

At the beginning of chapter 2, Habakkuk said he would wait for God's answer. *"I will stand my watch and set myself on the rampart, and watch to see what He will say to me, and what I will answer when I am corrected" (v1).*

Habakkuk had the right attitude. He didn't get angry with God. He didn't criticize God. He didn't doubt God. And he didn't tell God that He was doing wrong the wrong thing! Habakkuk just didn't understand, and he needed answers. Habakkuk was sensitive to sin and evil, and rightly so. So Habakkuk went to his watchtower (figuratively speaking) to watch and wait for God's answer.

This is essentially what the psalmist Asaph did when he had the same questions about the existence of evil and the prosperity of the wicked. In Psalm 73:16-17 Asaph said, "*When I thought how to understand this, it was too painful for me— until I went into the sanctuary of God. Then I understood their final destiny.*"

To watch and wait on God is good advice for all of us when we need answers, especially answers for the hard questions. The watchtower and sanctuary are where we should go when we need answers. We go to God and we wait on Him. We humbly ask questions of God, and we patiently wait for His answers.

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. Evil is scheduled for termination.

In verses 2-4 God begins to answer Habakkuk's second question. Because it is an answer that discusses the existence of evil, it's called a "*theodicy*." A theodicy is a vindication of God in light of - and in spite of - the existence of suffering and evil in the world. In fact, the entire book of Habakkuk is a theodicy.

God told Habakkuk to write or engrave God's answer on clay tablets and publicize it: "*Write the vision and make it plain on tablets*" (v2). Maybe Habakkuk set the tablets up in a public square in Jerusalem so that everyone could read God's answer. God wanted His message publicized, and He wanted those who read it to run: "*That he may run who reads it.*"

What a lesson for all of us! God wants us to read His Word - including prophecy like the prophetic book of Habakkuk - and then run with it. Read and run. "Read and run" doesn't mean you should have your devotions on the run! No, it means we should read the Word of God, and then run to share the message with others. I hope you'll do that with what you learn from Habakkuk.

Our doctrinal point, "Evil is scheduled for termination," is found in verse 3: "*For the vision is yet for an appointed time; but at the end it will speak, and it will not lie. Though it tarries, wait for it, because it will surely come. It will not tarry.*"

In the rest of chapter 2, God revealed to Habakkuk that the Babylonian Empire would eventually be judged for its evil ways. Although God would allow pagan Babylon to invade Judah in order to punish and correct and discipline His people,

Babylon would not get away with its wickedness. Babylon's evil would be terminated. In fact, ***all evil will eventually be terminated!***

*“For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea” (v14).* If the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, all evil must have been brought to an end. So *“at the end”* in verse 3 is not just the end of Babylon's evil – it's speaking of the termination of ***all evil***. Aren't you glad? And it will happen right on God's time schedule! That's the point of verse 3. The Lord told Habakkuk that God's revelation about the termination of evil ***will*** come to pass - make no mistake about it. And the termination will happen right on schedule – God's schedule.

God's termination of evil may seem delayed from Habakkuk's viewpoint - and from ours as well - but we must wait for it, for it will surely come. It will not tarry. God's train is never late. God's schedule is always right on time. Evil will not exist forever - it is scheduled for termination!

## **2. Evil is scheduled for judgment.**

All evil will surely end, and all evil will be judged. *“For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.”* The earth can't be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord if evil is still not judged. Verse 3 is quoted in Hebrews 10:37, and when it's quoted there, the *“it”* is changed to *“He”*: *“For yet a little while and He who is coming will come and will not tarry.”* In other words, when the Lord comes back, evil will be terminated and judged.

So when the Lord spoke of *“the end”* (v3), He was not referring only to the end of Babylon – He was speaking of the end of time, when all evil will have run its course and have been judged. Then the Lord's glorious kingdom on earth will merge into the New Heavens and the New Earth of God's eternal future. What a wonderful prophecy!

The same thought is found in the vision of Zechariah 5, where two angels were carrying a woman in a large basket. The basket's lid was lifted, *“and this is a woman sitting inside the basket.”* Then he said, *“This is Wickedness!”* And he thrust her down into the basket, and threw the lead cover over its mouth.” Then the angels carried the woman in the basket to the land of Shinar (another name for Babylon). *“So I said to the angel who talked with me, “Where are they carrying the basket?”* And he said to me, *“To build a house for it in the land of Shinar; when it is ready, the basket will be set there on its base.”* The meaning of that vision is that wickedness will have run its full course, and then it will be judged. And this is exactly the same teaching in Habakkuk 2. Evil is scheduled for judgment.

Revelation 17-18 reveals the destruction and judgment of the Babylon of the End Times. There's no doubt that Habakkuk's prophecy about the judgment of Babylon includes much more than just the Babylon of Habakkuk's day. His prophetic message will carry on to the end, when all evil will be judged and *“the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.”* Evil is scheduled for judgment!

## Practical Application

### Let's live by faith in the midst of evil.

Our practical application comes from one of the most familiar verses in the Bible. Habakkuk 2:4 – “***The just shall live by faith.***” This verse is quoted three times in the New Testament, and in each case the context of the verse leads us to emphasize a different word.

In Romans 1:17, the word “*just*” is emphasized - “the **just** shall live by faith.” In Hebrews 10:38, the emphasis is on the word “*live*” - “the just shall **live** by faith.” And in Galatians 3:11 the emphasis is on “*faith*” – “the just shall live by **faith.**” As you study these books, you will see that the context of the book brings a fresh emphasis to the different words of this verse.

“*The just shall live by faith*” has been called the motto or the “watch verse” of Christianity. It was Habakkuk 2:4, as quoted by Paul in Romans 1:17, that God used to open the spiritual eyes of Martin Luther to see that individuals are justified before God ***by faith alone!***

In the context of Habakkuk 2, this verse has a very practical application for all us: “Let's live by faith in the midst of evil.” That really is the point of the verse, in its context. As iniquity and violence of every sort surrounded Habakkuk, so we are surrounded by evil. Arrogant and wicked people prosper, while humble and righteous people suffer. This is not right - but the situation will be corrected one day.

It's only a matter of time until all evil will ultimately be terminated and judged, and I can't wait! I can't wait for evil to be terminated and eliminated, and for the earth to be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea! In the meantime - and this is the main point - the just shall live by faith. It's not always easy, especially as treachery, evil and violence increase. Sadly, sometimes the prevalence of evil causes us to become desensitized to certain sins.

When we see unjudged cruelty, wickedness and evil around us, we often wonder, “Where is God? Why doesn't He do something about it?” Well, what does the book of Habakkuk teach us about these questions? God ***is*** doing something about it! Eventually all evil will be terminated and judged. But in the meantime, “*the just shall live by faith.*” That is what we're called to do.

Let's live by faith in the midst of evil.