

# **Habakkuk 2 - Habakkuk Questions God; God Answers (Cont'd); The Just Shall Live By Faith**

## I. Habakkuk's dialogue with God (Hab 1:1—2:20)

### (2) Second question and answer session (Hab 1:12—2:20)

(B) God's answer: Babylon was merely a divine instrument that would be divinely judged and Habakkuk should trust in the sovereignty of God who would rectify all things in His time and way (2:1-20)

(a) Habakkuk awaits God's answer (2:1)

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(ii) His teachability (2:1b)

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## **Habakkuk 2**

(B) God's answer: Babylon was merely a divine instrument that would be divinely judged and Habakkuk should trust in the sovereignty of God who would rectify all things in His time and way (2:1-20)

(a) Habakkuk awaits God's answer (2:1)

(i) His patience (2:1a)

(ii) His teachability (2:1b)

**1** I will stand at my guard post And station myself on the watchtower; And I will keep watch to see what He will say to me, And how I may reply when I am reprimanded.

**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.

**1** "I will stand at my guard post and station myself on a tower. I will wait and see what the LORD will say about me and what I will answer when he reprimands me."

**1** I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved.

- Habakkuk compared himself to a sentinel on a city wall who was watching the horizon for the approach of a horseman. He had lodged his complaint in his second dialogue (1:12-17), he announced that he intended to wait for an answer, however long it took.

— This was not a defensive tower in a city, but a tower in a field where a farmer would climb to oversee his crops just before harvest, to ensure that no one steals the crop

— The prophet/watchman could see, by God's enabling, things beyond the sight of other mortals

- Habakkuk purposed to watch and wait expectantly for the LORD to reply to this second question, as He had the first, so that he could report it to his people (Cf. 3:16)

— He prepared himself for a discussion with the LORD about the situation, as well as for the LORD's answer that he expected in a vision or dream (Cf. Job 13:3; 23:4)

Only by revelation can the genuine perplexities of God's dealings with human beings be comprehended.

Yahweh's response to those who inquire of him is never automatic. They must be willing to wait in order to hear 'what God the LORD will speak' (Ps 85:9).

Oh, if we would only give God time, so that He might prepare our minds for what He has to say!

(b) God tells Habakkuk to record the vision (2:2-3)

(i) The vision's perspicuity (2:2)

**2** Then the LORD answered me and said, "Write down the vision And inscribe *it* clearly on tablets, So that one who reads it may run.

**2** Then the LORD answered me and said, "Record the vision And inscribe *it* on tablets, That the one who reads it may run.

**2** When he answered, the LORD told me: "Write out the revelation, engraving it clearly on the tablets, so that a courier may run with it.

**2** And the LORD answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it.

- Same as in the first dialogue, God gave His answer in three segments: the vision (v2-3), the message (v4-5), and the taunting song (v6-20)
- Yahweh responded and told the prophet to write a permanent, easy-to-read record of the vision—which He would give him—on tablets (of clay, stone, or metal, Cf. Ex 31:18; 32:15-16; Deut 9:10; 27:8)
- Having received and recorded the vision, Habakkuk, and other messengers, should then "run" to tell their fellow citizens what God's answer was

(ii) The vision's certainty (2:3)

- 3 "For the vision is yet for the appointed time; It hurries toward the goal and it will not fail. Though it delays, wait for it; For it will certainly come, it will not delay *long*.
- 3 "For the vision is yet for the appointed time; It hastens toward the goal and it will not fail. Though it tarries, wait for it; For it will certainly come, it will not delay.
- 3 For the revelation pertains to an appointed time— it speaks truthfully about the end. Though it delays, wait for it, because it will surely come about— it will not be late!
- 3 For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry.
- The vision that Habakkuk was about to receive concerned events that would take place in the future. Though it was a prophecy that would not come to pass immediately, it would be fulfilled eventually.
- Habakkuk was to wait for its fulfillment, because it would indeed come at the LORD's appointed time (Cf. Dan 12:4)
- Just as in human life, the timing of certain actions and events is of crucial importance, so it is also in the divine scheme of things
- The apparent lack of divine action, which may cause faith to falter, is in reality only our inability to perceive the timing of divine action
- The writer of the Book of Hebrews quoted this verse (Heb 10:37) to encourage his readers to persevere in their commitment to Jesus Christ, since what God had predicted will eventually come to pass—which in the context of Hebrews will be the Lord Jesus' return

(c) Habakkuk exhorted to live by faith (2:4-5)

(i) The righteous (2:4)

- 4 "Behold, as for the impudent one, His soul is not right within him; But the righteous one will live by his faith.
- 4 "Behold, as for the proud one, His soul is not right within him; But the righteous will live by his faith.

4 "Notice their arrogance— they have no inward uprightness— but the righteous will live by their faith.

4 Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith.

- Habakkuk now is told the basic guiding principles upon which the operation of divine government unalterably proceeds until the coming of that final appointed time

— Babylon was not right in doing what she did, but was puffed up with pride and evil passions. In contrast, the righteous person will live by his faith (Cf. Gen 15:6).

— By implication, Babylon, the unrighteous one, would not live, because she did not live by faith (trust in God), but by sight and might. She sought to gratify her ambitions by running over other people rather than by submitting to God's sovereignty.

— This is the key verse in Habakkuk, because it summarizes the difference between the proud Babylonians and their destruction, with the humble faith of the Israelites and their deliverance. The issue is trust in God.

### **An Impact on History**

In 1483 in Eisleben, Saxony, a baby boy was born to a poor coal miner. He decided to become a lawyer and, in 1501, entered the University of Erfurt, where he excelled in his studies. At the end of his schooling in 1504, a forceful storm caused him to take a vow if he survived; he entered an Augustinian monastery and earned a Doctorate of Theology degree. But the more he studied, the more he became distressed over sin. He indulged in extreme pious self-punishment and still could not find peace.

Finally, in 1509, he decided to make a pilgrimage to Rome by crossing the Alps. Almost dying of a high fever, a monastery nursed him back to health. While there, a wise monk insisted that he read the Book of Habakkuk. One verse captured Martin's imagination—Hab 2:4: *The just shall live by faith.* He couldn't get it out of his mind. Subsequently disillusioned with his experience in Rome, he returned to the University of Wittenberg, and went on to explore the revolutionary idea of "justification by faith."

He ultimately nailed his famous 95 theses to the door of the Wittenberg Castle Church, and started the movement known today as the Reformation—one of the most important events in modern history. At the Diet (council) of Worms (a town) they excommunicated Martin Luther as a heretic.

He went on to write commentaries that are classics today; hymns like, "A Mighty Fortress is our God"; and translated the entire Bible into German, a classic which remains a literary masterpiece in the Germanic tongue. [Source: Manuscript by his son, D. Paul Luther, preserved in the library at Rudolstadt, quoted by F.W. Boreham in *A Bunch of Everlastings or Texts That Made History*, Judson Press, Philadelphia, 1920, p. 20. Also, see Courson, p. 33-38.]

(ii) The self-righteous (2:5)

5 "Furthermore, wine betrays an arrogant man, So that he does not achieve his objective. He enlarges his appetite like **Sheol**, And he is like death, never satisfied. He also gathers to himself all the nations And collects to himself all the peoples.

5 "Furthermore, wine betrays the haughty man, So that he does not stay at home. He enlarges his appetite like Sheol, And he is like death, never satisfied. He also gathers to himself all nations And collects to himself all peoples.

5 Moreover, just as wine leads astray the proud and powerful man, he remains restless; he has expanded his appetite— like the afterlife or death itself, he is never satisfied. He gathers to himself all of the nations, taking captive all of the people for himself."

5 Yea also, because he transgresseth by wine, he is a proud man, neither keepeth at home, who enlargeth his desire as hell, and is as death, and cannot be satisfied, but gathereth unto him all nations, and heapeth unto him all people:

- When a person drinks too much wine, it leads him (or her) to reveal his pride publicly
- Here the arrogant man is a personification of Babylon. The Babylonians were known for their consumption of wine (i.e. Dan 5). Wine makes a person dissatisfied with his present situation and possessions, and he often leaves his home to find more elsewhere (Cf. Prov 23:31-32).
- The proud person is never satisfied—like death that consumes people every day and never stops.
- "...Sheol" - a personification of death, in which Habakkuk ascribed human actions to an inanimate object. Babylon was similar, opening wide its jaws to consume all peoples.
- The proud person also seeks to dominate others, and this, too, marked Babylon. These were the evidences of Babylon's pride, and the basis for Yahweh's indictment of this nation (Cf. 1:17).

(d) Five woes against Babylon (2:6-19)

(i) Stealing (2:6-8)

6 "Will all of these not take up a song of ridicule against him, Even a saying *and* insinuations against him And say, 'Woe to him who increases what is not his— For how long — And makes himself rich with debts!'

6 "Will not all of these take up a taunt-song against him, Even mockery *and* insinuations against him And say, 'Woe to him who increases what is not his— For how long— And makes himself rich with loans?'

6 "Will not all of these ridicule him with mocking scorn? They will say, 'Woe to the one who hordes for himself what isn't his. How long will you enrich yourself by extortion?'

6 Shall not all these take up a parable against him, and a taunting proverb against him, and say, Woe to him that increaseth that which is not his! how long? and to him that ladeth

himself with thick clay!

- Because of Babylon's sins, it was inevitable that the righteous would ridicule them
- They would pronounce "woe" on them for increasing what was not theirs just to have more, and for making themselves rich by charging exorbitant interest on loans. Gaining wealth by oppression and fraud are especially in view.
- How long would this go on?—they asked themselves (Cf. 1:2). When would God judge Babylon?

7 "Will your creditors not rise up suddenly, And those who collect from you awaken?  
Indeed, you will become plunder for them.

7 "Will not your creditors rise up suddenly, And those who collect from you awaken?  
Indeed, you will become plunder for them.

7 Won't your creditors revolt unexpectedly? Won't those who make you tremble wake up?  
As a result, you'll become their prey!

7 Shall they not rise up suddenly that shall bite thee, and awake that shall vex thee, and thou shalt be for booties unto them?

- Those from whom Babylon had stolen would surely rise up and rebel when they woke up to what was going on. Then they would turn the tables and Babylon would become plunder for them.

— This happened when the Medes and Persians rose up and overthrew Babylon in 539 BC

8 "Since you have looted many nations, All the rest of the peoples will loot you— Because of human bloodshed and violence done to the land, To the town and all its inhabitants.

8 "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.

8 Because you plundered many nations, all of their remnants will plunder you. Human blood has been shed, and violence has been done to the land, to the city, and to all who live in it."

8 Because thou hast spoiled many nations, all the remnant of the people shall spoil thee; because of men's blood, and for the violence of the land, of the city, and of all that dwell therein.

- Babylon would suffer the same punishment that it had inflicted on other nations (Cf. Prov 22:8; Gal 6:7) — Its survivors would loot it because it had looted many other peoples

— Babylon's pillaging had involved human bloodshed and violence—done to the land of Canaan and to the city of Jerusalem and its inhabitants

9 "Woe to him who makes evil profit for his household, To put his nest on high, To be saved from the hand of catastrophe!

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

9 "Woe to the one who amasses profit upon unjust profit in order to establish his household, so he can establish a secure place on the heights and escape from the power of evil.

9 Woe to him that coveteth an evil covetousness to his house, that he may set his nest on high, that he may be delivered from the power of evil!

- Babylon used its unjust acquisitions to build a secure government for itself that it thought would be safe from all calamity (Cf. Gen 11:4; see also Obadiah)

— It built a strong and rich dynasty ("household") so it would be self-sufficient

— Saving to protect oneself from large future expenses is not wrong in itself (Prov 21:20), but to build a fortune so one will not have to trust in God is saving with the wrong attitude (Cf. James 5:1-6)

10 "You have planned a shameful thing for your house By bringing many peoples to an end; So you are sinning against yourself.

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

10 You have brought shame to yourself by killing many people— you are forfeiting your own life.

10 Thou hast consulted shame to thy house by cutting off many people, and hast sinned against thy soul.

- It was shameful for the Babylonians to destroy many other peoples (Cf. v5,8)

— By doing so they were sinning against themselves. That is, they were doing something that would eventually bring destruction on themselves.

11 "For the stone will cry out from the wall, And the rafter will answer it from the framework.

11 "Surely the stone will cry out from the wall, And the rafter will answer it from the framework.

11 Indeed, the stone will cry out from the wall and the rafter will respond from the woodwork."

11 For the stone shall cry out of the wall, and the beam out of the timber shall answer it.

- The stones and woodwork, taken from other nations to build the Babylonians' fortresses and palaces, would serve as visual witnesses to the sinful invasions that brought these building material to Babylon

— They would testify to the guilt of the Babylonians in the day that Yahweh would bring Babylon to judgment

(iii) Violence (2:12-14)

12 "Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed, And founds a town with violence!

12 "Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed And founds a town with violence!

12 "Woe to the one who founds a city upon bloodshed, and constructs a city by lawlessness.

12 Woe to him that buildeth a town with blood, and establisheth a city by iniquity!

- The Babylonians could expect distress because they had built their cities at the expense of the lives of their enemies (Cf. Micah 3:10)

— We speak of "blood money" as money obtained by making others suffer, even shedding their blood. Babylon was built with "blood money" and the blood, sweat, and tears of enslaved people.

— It was a town founded on injustice, and without injustice it could not have become what it had become

13 "Is it not indeed from the LORD of armies That peoples labor *merely* for fire, And nations become weary for nothing?

13 "Is it not indeed from the LORD of hosts That peoples toil for fire, And nations grow weary for nothing?

13 Is it not because of the LORD of the Heavenly Armies that people grow tired putting out fires, and nations weary themselves over nothing?

13 Behold, is it not of the LORD of hosts that the people shall labour in the very fire, and the people shall weary themselves for very vanity?

- This verse is the center of this taunt song structurally

— It is significant that it focuses on the LORD of armies: the Judge and Executioner

— His assessment was that the Babylonians' hard work was in vain; all their labor would amount to nothing. Their works would turn out to be fuel for fire that would burn them up: the fire of His judgment (Cf. Jer 51:58).

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

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

14 Indeed, the earth will be filled with knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as water fills the sea."

14 For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.

- Rather than the earth being filled with the glory of Babylon, it will one day be filled with the knowledge of God's glory, as comprehensively as the waters cover the sea (Cf. Num 14:21; Ps 72:19; Is 6:3; 11:9; Jer 31:34)

— This prediction refers to the ultimate destruction of Babylon in the eschatological (far distant) future (Cf. Rev 16:19—18:24)

The Babylon in view in the Book of Habakkuk was mainly the Neo-Babylonian Empire, but ever since Babel (Gen 11:1-9), the name Babylon has had a symbolic meaning as well as a literal one. Symbolically, it represented all ungodly peoples who rose up, in self-reliance, to glorify themselves and reach heaven by their own works. God destroyed the Neo-Babylonian Empire in 539 BC, but what Babylon represents will continue until God destroys it—when Jesus Christ returns to the earth to set up His new order on earth in the Millennium (Cf. Rev 17-18).

#### (iv) Drunkenness leading to immorality (2:15-17)

15 "Woe to him who makes his neighbor drink; To you who mix in your venom even to make *your neighbors* drunk, So as to look at their genitalia!

15 "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!

15 "Woe to the one who supplies his neighbor with a drink! You are forcing your bottle on him, making him drunk so you can see them naked.

15 Woe unto him that giveth his neighbour drink, that puttest thy bottle to him, and makest him drunken also, that thou mayest look on their nakedness!

- God would judge Babylon because they had deceived their neighbor nations, with the result that they were able to take advantage of them

— The Babylonians had behaved like a man who gets a woman drunk so she will lose her self-control, and he can then undress her

— That the Babylonians took advantage of their victims sexually is implied in the illustration, as is their love for wine

16 "You will be filled with disgrace rather than honor. Drink, you yourself, and expose your own foreskin! The cup in **the LORD'S right hand** will come around to you, And utter disgrace *will come* upon your glory.

16 "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.

16 You are filled with dishonor instead of glory. So go ahead, drink and be naked! The LORD will turn against you, and utter disgrace will debase your reputation.

16 Thou art filled with shame for glory: drink thou also, and let thy foreskin be uncovered: the cup of the LORD'S right hand shall be turned unto thee, and shameful spewing shall be on thy glory.

- As they had made their neighbors drunk, so the LORD would give them a cup of judgment that would make them drunk

- "...the LORD's right hand" - Yahweh's right hand is a figure (an anthropomorphism) for His strong personal retribution: giving back in kind what the person being judged had given (Cf. Is 51:17-23; Jer 25:15-17; Lam 4:21; Matt 20:22; 26:42; 1 Cor 11:29)

— Having swallowed the cup's contents, the Babylonians would disgrace themselves, rather than honoring and glorifying themselves as they did presently

— Babylon's future disgrace contrasts with Yahweh's future glory (v14). They would expose their own nakedness, just as they had exposed the nakedness of others (v15). The Hebrew text is graphic and literally reads, "Drink, yes you, and expose your foreskin," namely, show yourself to be uncircumcised.

— Nakedness involves vulnerability as well as shame (Cf. Gen 9:21-25). The LORD pictured Babylon as a contemptible, naked drunk who had lost his self-control and the respect of everyone, including himself.

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

17 "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.

17 Indeed, the violence done to Lebanon will overtake you, and the destruction of the beasts will terrorize you— because you shed human blood and did violence to the land, to the city, and to all who live in it."

17 For the violence of Lebanon shall cover thee, and the spoil of beasts, which made them afraid, because of men's blood, and for the violence of the land, of the city, and of all that dwell therein.

- Babylon's violence (ethical and moral injustice) would come back to overwhelm him, because he had rapaciously stripped Lebanon of its vegetation and animals

— However, bloodshed in Lebanon's main town, and the slaughter of its inhabitants, was an even more serious crime

— Lebanon is probably a synecdoche for all Israel, as it is elsewhere (Cf. 2 Kings 14:9; Jer 22:6,23), and "the town" most likely refers to Jerusalem

(v) Idolatry (2:18-19)

**18** "What benefit is a carved image when its maker has carved it, *Or a cast metal image, a teacher of falsehood? For its maker trusts in his own handiwork When he fashions speechless idols.*

**18** "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.*

18 "Where is the benefit in owning a carved image, that motivates its maker to carve it? It is only a cast image— a teacher that lies— because the engraver entrusts himself to his carving, crafting speechless idols.

18 What profiteth the graven image that the maker thereof hath graven it; the molten image, and a teacher of lies, that the maker of his work trusteth therein, to make dumb idols?

- Habakkuk, like other prophets, saw through the folly of idolatry and exposed it (Cf. Is 41:7; 44:9-20; 45:16,20; 46:1-2,6-7; Jer 10:8-16)

— An idol, carved by human hands, cannot help its maker, because anyone who creates something is always greater than his or her creation

— Images in fact become teachers of falsehood, since their existence implies a lie, namely, that they can help humans

— An idol-carver trusts in his own handiwork. Idols cannot even speak, much less provide help (Cf. Rom 1:22-25)

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

19 "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.

19 "Woe to the one who says to a tree, 'Wake up!' or 'Arise!' to a speechless stone. Idols like this can't teach, can they? Look, even though it is overlaid with gold and silver, there's no breath in it at all."

19 Woe unto him that saith to the wood, Awake; to the dumb stone, Arise, it shall teach! Behold, it is laid over with gold and silver, and there is no breath at all in the midst of it.

- The LORD pronounced "woe" on those who ignorantly tried to coax their mute idols— wood or stone, perhaps overlaid with gold or silver—to speak (Cf. 1 Kings 18:26-29)

— No matter what they looked like, or what material they were made out of, they were still only lifeless objects of art. How foolish it was to look to one of these as one's teacher or guide!

Modern people in their sophistications may regard themselves as free from the obvious folly of idolatry. What educated, self-respecting person would be deluded into expecting special powers to emanate from the form of an antiquated Idol? Yet the new covenant Scriptures make it plain that covetousness is idolatry (Eph 5:5). Whenever a person's desire looks to the creature rather than the Creator, he is guilty of the same kind of foolishness. An insatiable desire for things not rightly possessed assumes that things can satisfy rather than God himself. Whenever a person sets his priorities on the things made rather than on the Maker of things, he is guilty of idolatry.

Social position can be an idol and so can vocation achievement. For some people, their god is their appetite (Phil 3:19; Rom 16:18); and they live only to experience carnal pleasures [including following their favorite sports?]. Intellectual ability can be a terrible idol (2 Cor 10:5) as people worship their IQ and refuse to submit to God's Word.

(e) Concluding exhortation: worship God (2:20)

20 "But the LORD is in His holy temple. Let all the earth be silent before Him."

20 "But the LORD is in His holy temple. Let all the earth be silent before Him."

20 "The LORD is in his holy Temple. All the earth—be quiet in his presence."

20 But the LORD is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him.

- In contrast to lifeless idols stands the living and true God. Yahweh lived in His heavenly, holy temple, not in the works of human hands.

— Therefore all the earth, everything in it, should be quiet before Him out of respect and awe (fear; Cf. v1; 3:16). There is no need to try and coax Him to come to life or to speak (Cf. v19).

HABAKKUK'S FIVE WOES (2:6-20)					
Element	First	Second	Third	Fourth	Fifth
<i>Invective:</i>	v. 6	v. 9	v. 12	v. 15	v. 19a
<b>Woe to the ...</b>	Plunderer	Plotter	Pillager	Perverter	Polytheist
<i>Threat:</i>	v. 7	v. 11	v. 13	v. 16	v. 19b
<b>He will be ...</b>	Despoiled	Denounced	Destroyed	Disgraced	Deserted
<i>Criticism:</i>	v. 8	v. 10	v. 14	v. 17	vv. 18, 20
<b>Grounded in ...</b>	Spoiling of the nations	Scheming against peoples	Surety of the knowledge of God	Stripping of man/nature	Supremacy of God