

Why Doesn't God Seem Fair?, or Where Are You, God?

Habakkuk 1:1-4 HCSB The oracle that Habakkuk the prophet saw. (2) How long, LORD, must I call for help and me to look at injustice? Why do You tolerate wrongdoing? Oppression and violence are You do not listen, or cry out to You about violence and You do not save? (3) Why do You force right in front of me. Strife is ongoing, and conflict escalates. (4) This is why the law is ineffective and justice never emerges. For the wicked restrict the righteous; therefore, justice comes out perverted.

Introduction: Habakkuk's driving question

The name of the book that we are about to study is Habakkuk. The driving question of the book Habakkuk is this:

WHY DOESN'T GOD SEEM FAIR?

- **Habakkuk 1:2-3 HCSB** How long, LORD, must I call for help and You do not listen, or cry out to You about violence and You do not save? (3) Why do You force me to look at injustice? Why do You tolerate wrongdoing? Oppression and violence are right in front of me. Strife is ongoing, and conflict escalates.

"Why doesn't God seem fair?" In fact, verses 2 and 3 of chapter 1, you see Habakkuk asking a version of this question. He wants to know,

- **Habakkuk 1:2-3 HCSB** How long, LORD, must I call for help and You do not listen, or cry out to You about violence and You do not save? (3) Why do You force me to look at injustice? Why do You tolerate wrongdoing? Oppression and violence are right in front of me. Strife is ongoing, and conflict escalates.

Maybe you've asked this before. You want to know, "Why doesn't God seem fair?" If you fast-forward from this Old Testament book to today, people ask these questions all the time,

- "God, why is it that the evil people seem to prosper, but the good people - all kinds of bad things happen to them?"
- "Why is it that I work hard at work and I'm honest, and then the jerk over there who's kissing up and all this stuff, that person gets promoted?"
- "Why is it that the person who gets into all sorts of bad stuff lives to be 102, but the great Christian father dies at the age of 42 of cancer? What's up with that?"
- "God, why is it that we tried to raise our kids according to Your word, and we really tried to do a good job, but now, our kids are messed up? And then, You look at their kids and they were not even involved, and their kids turned out okay? What's up with this, God?"
- "How come I try to do what Your word says and financially, I'm trying to do the right things, and I'm not being blessed, and then; someone else is out there, they're not even giving and they're being blessed? God, why is that?"
- "God, how come someone else prays, and when they pray, You seem to do things immediately, but when I pray, You don't do anything at all?"
- "How come I've got these headaches that don't go away?"
- "How come I'm battling with depression?"
- "How come someone I love is going through this?"
- "And God, it seems like You COULD do something, but You don't. Why? Why don't You seem fair?"

Now, as we study the book of Habakkuk, we are going to find that Habakkuk is asking questions like this, and you may think, "Well, it's obvious he wasn't a real deep, committed believer like I am. "

Actually, Habakkuk the prophet was incredibly in love with God. He had a very rich faith, but he, like so many people, had crashed head-on into a conundrum, and the things that he saw didn't line up with the things that he believed, and it was a very difficult season for him. Many of you may be able to relate.

What I'd like to do is set the context of the book of Habakkuk to bring a broader understanding. Let's just start with the basics.

There are twelve prophetic books in the Old Covenant - smaller books - called the "Minor Prophets". Habakkuk is one of those twelve.

Of the twelve, we know less about Habakkuk than any of the others. We don't know much at all. We know that he was most likely a temple musician, and that at some point, he became a priest and a prophet.

Now, you might wonder what a prophet is. A prophet is someone who speaks on behalf of God. God would say, "Okay, Habakkuk, here's what I want you to tell the people," and so Habakkuk would say, "Thus says the Lord," and he would speak whatever God told him.

Now, the book of Habakkuk was written about the year 600 BC, give or take a little bit. It was a time period where God's people were becoming very corrupt. There was violence. There was corruption. There were all sorts of fights. There was a lot of ungodliness, and you could say, really, it was a lot like the world we live in today. There were bad people doing bad things to good people, and even good people weren't so good.

So God spoke to the prophet and said, "These people that I love, they're becoming increasingly wicked. And for your own good, I am going to punish you. But what you need to understand is, I am going to take a far worse people, those who are much more evil than you, and I am going to use them to destroy you."

And Habakkuk goes, "Huh? No, no, no, no, no, no. That doesn't seem fair to me at all." That's why, perhaps, Habakkuk's name means this:

Habakkuk means to "embrace" and to "wrestle."

According to many authorities¹, the name "Habakkuk" (Strong's #2665) means both "to embrace and to wrestle". So we are going to watch Habakkuk wrestle with God. We are going to watch him embrace God through some very difficult times.

What you are NOT going to get, let me tell you very, very clearly, is a "sitcom sermon". What happens in a TV sitcom is this. There'll be a little humor. There'll be some tension in the plot, and within thirty minutes, (including commercials) at the end, everything is neatly tied and every problem solved. A lot of people like sitcom sermons: a little humor, maybe a little bit of the tension at the end, a nice poem or a story that makes us cry and feel better. Everything's neatly tied up in a bow, and then you go on your life and everything is okay. You will not get that kind of message in Habakkuk. In fact, you are going to get the opposite, something more like, in my opinion, that which resembles real life: tension, drama, and plenty of unanswered questions.

With that foundation built, let's dive into the book of Habakkuk. We'll start in Chapter 1, verse 1, which reads as follows:

- **Habakkuk 1:1 HCSB** The oracle that Habakkuk the prophet saw.

What was it that Habakkuk the prophet received? Say it aloud. The ORACLE that Habakkuk the prophet received. Now, what is an oracle?

massa' (mas-saw'); an utterance, a doom, a burden.

¹ Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary p. 696a; Gesenius' Hebrew Chaldee Lexicon p. 258b; Young's Analytical Concordance to the Bible p. 441a

The Hebrew word for oracle is the word *massa*. Everybody say, “mas-saw”. This word, it means an utterance. It means a doom. It means a burden.

What God gave the prophet was a burden, a burdensome message, a dooming message, a message that made Habakkuk squirm and say, “God, I don’t want to tell them this, because I don’t like this. They’re not going to like this. I don’t see anything good in this.” In fact, he’s going to push back. He’s the only one of the twelve Minor Prophets that pushes back and argues with God, and he gets right up into God’s business in verse three, four, and five. He says this.

He says, “God, why do you make me look at injustice?”

He says, “Why do you tolerate wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict abounds.”

In other words, if you took it to our day and age, he could be saying,

- “Okay, God, I don’t get it. There was the drunk driver on his fourth drunk driving that crashed into a car and killed the innocent four-year-old. Huh? What do You have to say for that, God?”
- Okay, there’s that girl who keeps hopping from bed to bed to bed to bed, is pregnant time after again, and aborts the kids over and over and over again, and we’re a Godly couple and our only prayer is help us to have a child, and we can’t get pregnant. Huh? What do You have to say for Yourself, God?”
- Okay, our kids go to the school, and some angry fourteen-year-old came in with a gun and shot up eight of them. Innocent kids, God! ... Where were You in that, God?”
- There is corruption and even terrorism in the workplace ... God...God?”

Basically, that’s what he’s saying. He goes on in verse four and says,

- [Habakkuk 1:4 HCSB](#) This is why the law is ineffective and justice never emerges. For the wicked restrict the righteous; therefore, justice comes out perverted.

Fundamentally, Habakkuk has three major problems with God. Let’s summarize them.

HABAKKUK’S PROBLEMS WITH GOD

- 1) You don’t seem to care.**
- 2) You aren’t doing much when you could.**
- 3) What you are doing doesn’t seem fair.**

1. The first one, he’s saying, “God, basically number one, You don’t seem to care, okay? You’re letting all these things go on in the world that don’t seem fair. God, you must not even care.”
2. His second complaint to God is this. “You aren’t doing much when You could.” Now, there’s some respect in this, as if to say, “God, I know You could. You’re all powerful. I believe You could. You could do this one little thing that would change everything, God. I mean, if I were in Your shoes, I would do it. I don’t know why You won’t. You don’t seem to really care and You’re not doing much when You could.”
3. And number three, “What You ARE doing doesn’t seem fair.” In other words, what Habakkuk was saying is, “God, if I were in Your shoes, I would do things totally different.”

Be honest. How many of you ever thought something like that? How many of you? But is that even legal? Are we allowed to think that? Isn’t that disrespectful? Is God going to punish us for feeling that way? Is it even appropriate to say, “God, I don’t understand? I’m not sure I like this.” Is that fair game, at all?

Listen to me. When you look at Scripture, it’s absolutely fair game to question God from time to time. In fact, not only is it fair game, but there are times where questioning God could become a significant part of your faith journey.

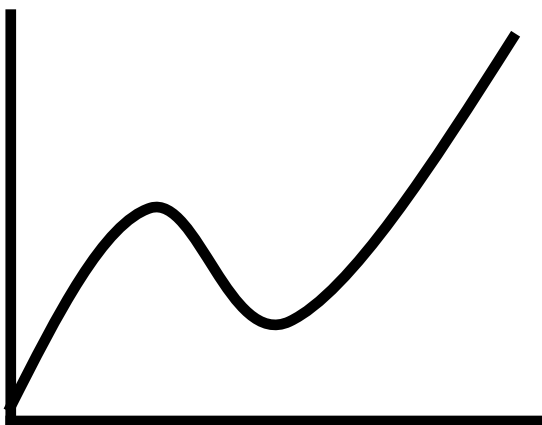
Read the Psalms sometime. Fully, one-third of the Psalms are written by people crying out to God, “What’s going on here? God, are You going to rescue me? God, are you leaving me here forever? God, is this any way to run the universe?”

Read the book of Job. Read the book of Lamentations. These are very Godly people who are crying out, “Have mercy. God, I thought I did everything You said, and now, what’s going on here?”

If you don’t believe that, skip over to the New Testament and look at Jesus when He was on the cross, completely obedient to His Father in every single way. Then, as He becomes sin, God pours out His wrath upon Jesus, and God turns away, and Jesus cries out, “My God ..., why? Why have You forsaken Me?” So many people are afraid to bring very sincere questions to God, but I would argue that sometimes a very important part of your faith journey would include taking your honest questions before God.

Here’s where a lot of people are. What do you do when what you see with your eyes is so different than what you believe in your heart? This, you see, was Habakkuk’s foundational challenge.

Let me explain it to you like this.



Okay, let’s say this represents our spiritual journey. Down at the bottom on the left is a person who is without Christ. Let’s just say that this is you right now, and you’re a person that God is doing something in your life, because the cool thing is, many of you are here because God is reaching out to you and you’re softening to him.

And then at some point, the Holy Spirit does something in you, and you’re going, “Okay. Okay, God, I believe you’re real, and okay, I believe your Son is the Son of God, and I surrender to you,” and at that point, boom! Your life changes. I mean it’s like that famous cook always says: “BAM!” Major changes! All of a sudden, you’re different and you sky rocket to this point of this spiritual high. I mean, you’re praying and God’s answered your prayers, and you’re having all these “God coincidences”, and all your friends are going, “You’re weird. What happened to you?” And, “You’re going to come back. Please. I hope.” You’re making changes in your life, and when you go to church the message is just for you. And you get in your car and your favorite song’s on the radio. Whoo, hoo! And you go to the mall and there’s a parking lot space right in the front. I mean EVERYTHING! You’re just “W hoohoo, Jesus!” Okay? So at this point you’re right here at that first peak.

Now, before long, you go to church, and the sermon doesn’t quite speak to you. You think “Hmm! Uh... that’s weird.” You get in your car, and you don’t like the song that’s playing. That’s weirder. You pray, and instead of God doing what you ask, the opposite happens. Uh, what’s going on here? And then one day, someone you love gets sick and doesn’t get better, or someone you care about gets in an accident and things don’t turn out the way you thought they would.

At this point you enter into what Henry Blackaby calls a crises of belief. “Huh? God, now, now, now, now, I thought we were here, and You’re messing things up! You know, I was trusting You, but now based on what I see, it is very different than what I thought. I’m not sure what I believe right now.”

Typically, when this happens, people go in one of two directions. One way is, they will naively deny reality and say, “I want to go right back where I was.” In other words, if the doctor says they’re sick, they’re the kind that say “No, no, no. I’m not going to have a negative confession. I’m healed. I’m going to just think I’m healed.” If they lost their job they’d say, “Oh, that doesn’t matter. I’m going to get a job. No way I’LL be unemployed. I’m just going to believe that God’s going to provide a job,” and they go into this almost reality denying, superpositive thinking. They say, “I’m going to go back to where I was.”

Listen to me - that’s dangerous. It’s denying reality. It’s denying that God knows what He’s doing. It’s denying that He can do what He likes in this universe. It’s denying that He’s Boss and can give you the raw end of the deal if He feels like it.

Others, though, they get mad, and they might say something along the lines of, “Okay, God. I thought you were like such and such, but You’re not, so forget You,” and they go right back here, right back to the bottom left which represents unbelief. They say, “If this is going to be how it’s going to be, and You’re not going to do what I thought You would do, then You must not be who I thought You were, so forget it, God.”

Right about now, some of you may be thinking of someone who has reacted that way. Perhaps you have. Maybe something happened. You got hurt. Someone did something to you. Someone let you down. God didn’t answer your prayer. You say, “You know what? Forget about this,” and you go right here (back to beginning on chart).

The Choice

What do you do when what you see isn’t consistent with what you believe, and you’re not sure what to think about God? Well, you can go this way. You can go that way. Or, you can go the more difficult road, which is to say, “God, I’m going to still trust You.” And then God gets to take you on a journey.

Let me just tell you right now, it doesn’t mean that things are going to get better first. They might get worse, and things might get more painful, and you may even have more faith struggles, but if you continue to stick with God, no matter what He does around you, I can assure you that if you hold on to Him, at some point, He’s going to take your faith to a place of intimacy, trust, and security that you never, ever dreamed possible, if you’re willing to go through the season of doubt. We Adonaic Christians call that type of relationship “d’vekut” and I’m telling you that it’s well worth anything you may go through to obtain it.

In fact, everybody I know that is really, really intimate with God and really, really close with God, have universally been through this season. The New Testament says it this way:

- [James 1:2-4 HCSB](#) Consider it a great joy, my brothers, whenever you experience various trials, (3) knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. (4) But endurance must do its complete work, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing.

God may lovingly allow you to go through a season of doubts, questioning, fear, insecurities, and unanswered questions, because He’ll do something in you that He couldn’t do any other way.

Listen to me, we got our name as a people from a lone man facing a crisis, risking everything and wrestling with God through the night. His name was Jacob and through that crisis he gained the name of “Israel”.

“Isra” “El”

“one who contends with God”

Take the two syllables separately and you have “one who contends with God.” Our entire people took their name from this encounter. We are known as “Israel”, “those who wrestle

with God.” But the interesting thing is, when you put those two syllables back together, the combined word means “God prevails”. We may wrestle with God, but in the end He always wins. His way always turns out to be right – we just need to figure out our part in it.

Take your questions to God. He can handle them. Question him. Just wrestle with the question. Some of you here are at this point in your life. You are in the Habakkuk Chapter One of life and I want to encourage you. Many people - too many people, walk away from God in Chapter One. I want to encourage you in that this is a very important point in your life. You NEED to be shaken up. You NEED to question your basic understanding of “life, the universe and everything.” But let me warn you - God’s response to Habakkuk was not what Habakkuk wanted to hear.

Let’s look at God’s response in verse 5.

- **Habakkuk 1:5 HCSB** Look at the nations and observe--be utterly astounded! For something is taking place in your days that you will not believe when you hear about it.

God said, “Habakkuk, you want an answer? Okay, here it is. Look at the nations and watch – and be utterly astounded. For I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe, even if you were told.”

He said, “Look at the nations and watch – and be “tamahh”. This is the Hebrew word; it means a sudden, alarming amazement. It means to be astonished or to marvel. In other words, God’s saying, “When I tell you this, you’re going to respond with “No... What? God, are you sure?’ You’re going to be knocked off your feet, and you’re going to be utterly amazed.”

What was so amazing? Look at verse 6:

- **Habakkuk 1:6-11 HCSB** Look! I am raising up the Chaldeans, that bitter, impetuous nation that marches across the earth's open spaces to seize territories not its own. (7) They are fierce and terrifying; their views of justice and sovereignty stem from themselves. (8) Their horses are swifter than leopards and more fierce than wolves of the night. Their horsemen charge ahead; their horsemen come from distant *lands*. They fly like an eagle, swooping to devour. (9) All of them come to do violence; their faces are set in determination. They gather prisoners like sand. (10) They mock kings, and rulers are a joke to them. They laugh at every fortress and build siege ramps to capture it. (11) Then they sweep by like the wind and pass through. They are guilty; their strength is their god.

Here’s the story, Habakkuk. “You’re kind of bad? They’re much worse, and I know, all of you hate them, but I’m going to use them to destroy you,” and Habakkuk’s stunned. I mean, if you put yourself in that story, you’d be crying out, “Hey! That’s not right!” But listen to Moses’ warning:

- **Deuteronomy 32:21 HCSB** They have provoked My jealousy with *their* so-called gods; they have enraged Me with their worthless idols. So I will provoke their jealousy with an inferior people; I will enrage them with a foolish nation.

So, here’s the deal. What do you do when you’re in the middle of Chapter One and you’re not sure what you believe? You want to believe, but you’ve got so many questions. Can you still be a deeply committed believer with a lot of questions?

Write this down. Here’s something I hope you will find liberating. A deeply committed believer can express simultaneous questions and faith. May that set you free. A deeply committed believer can simultaneously believe God and struggle with uncertainty.

As an example, please turn to Mark 9.

- **Mark 9:20-24 HCSB** So they brought him to Him. When the spirit saw Him, it immediately convulsed the boy. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth. (21) **"How long has this been happening to him?"** Jesus asked his father. "From childhood," he said. (22) "And many times it has thrown him into fire or water to destroy him. But if You can do anything, have compassion on us and help us." (23)

Then Jesus said to him, "If You can? Everything is possible to the one who believes."

(24) Immediately the father of the boy cried out, "I do believe! Help my unbelief."

When this distraught father saw Jesus, he begged, "Jesus! Can you do anything about this?" And Jesus' response was "Hey, I can do anything. All things are possible with me. Do you believe that?" The father responded "I do believe, sort of." He said, "I do believe. Help me overcome my unbelief."

And basically, Jesus implied, "Okay, that's good enough. That's faith as small as a grain of mustard seed but it's good enough. Now I'm going to do something that you're not going to believe, and it's going to be so amazing that you'll never doubt in that way again." But that man wouldn't have got there unless God had taken him through a crisis of belief. This is the same process God used on Habakkuk and it's the same process through which He'll occasionally take you and me.

Now go back to Habakkuk and let's finish today by looking at verses 12-13.

- **Habakkuk 1:12-13 HCSB** Are You not from eternity, Yahweh my God? My Holy One, You will not die. LORD, You appointed them to execute judgment; *my* Rock, You destined them to punish *us*. (13) *Your* eyes are too pure to look on evil, and You cannot tolerate wrongdoing. So why do You tolerate those who are treacherous? Why are You silent while one who is wicked swallows up one who is more righteous than himself?

Habakkuk recognized the difficulty of his situation. He didn't deny reality. He didn't try the power of positive thinking or wishful fantasies to create an alternate reality. He simply recognized the truth – ALL the truth. For not only did he recognize the difficulties and the confusion but he also recognized the eternity and sovereignty of God. He said "You are God. You will not die. You appointed this to happen for your good reasons."

Some of you right now, that's where you are. You're in chapter one. I've got bad news and good news for you. Chapter Two's not much better. Number one, you're wondering. Number two, you're waiting ... and waiting and waiting and waiting. But finally, in Chapter Three, if you continue to stick with God, you will come to a point where no matter what you see around you, you will worship God – not because of what you see with your eyes, but because of who you know Him to be. No matter what goes on around you, you will worship Him because of His character and His nature.

So, what do you do for those of you who are in Chapter One? You do what Habakkuk did: you determine that instead of walking away from God you're going to wrestle Him. Like Job you're going to bring your questions, your pain and your doubt to Him and ask Him "What are you doing? What is my part here?" You hold on. You wrestle back and forth, and you may even say, "I don't understand," but you embrace Him, and you never let go.

I can't promise you a better life necessarily, but I can promise you this - He will never let go of you. Habakkuk is no fairy tale, no sitcom. It doesn't have a nice story that is all summed up neatly in thirty minutes and the good guy gets the girl because sometimes, when you're in Chapter One, all you can do is wrestle and hang on.

Let's pray together.