

Pastor Jeremy M. Thomas
Fredericksburg Bible Church

107 East Austin

Fredericksburg, Texas 78624

830-997-8834 jthomas@fbgbible.org

C1217 – May 16, 2012 – Habakkuk 1:12-2:1
Will Evil Continue Endlessly?

We are studying a very puzzled prophet named Habakkuk who entered into a dialogue with God about 615-609BC. He had some very penetrating questions he wanted answered. And as he grows to trust that God has a reason for events in history which appear to be contradictory to what God has revealed of His character, we are growing to trust as well. Despite the atrocities and injustices that appear to prevail over goodness and righteousness, God is right now doing something about the situation, something we probably would not believe if someone else told us. But if God tells us we can believe it because God has said it, He is the authority. So may we be impressed by the revelation that God gave this prophet, allowing him to penetrate the divine perspective on history and see that indeed God is accomplishing much behind the scenes that we are unable to see and that ultimately it all fits together.

To review the basic outline of the book, chapters 1-2 record the dialogue that went on between Habakkuk and God. In 1:2-4 what puzzled Habakkuk? The fact that he has been made to see the extent of violence, abuse and injustice going on among the governing administration of Jerusalem and yet God wasn't doing anything about it. He cried out in prayer for a long time, asking God to help the righteous, asking God to save the remnant from the violent ways of the governing authorities and yet there was no answer, no response. It was as if God was not there. As if He was not hearing the prayer.

Finally God responds in 1:5-11 and the answer is that I am here and I am doing something about it. But what God was doing was so unbelievable Habakkuk would have a hard time believing it if someone told him. What was God doing? He was raising up the Babylonians to dominate the earth. At the time an incredible prospect. Who could imagine that a kingdom as insignificant as Babylon could rise in a mere 20 years to become a world

superpower? Yet that is what God was doing. Beginning with Nabopolassar in 625BC the Babylonians began to rise very rapidly. The Assyrian kingdom was still quite mighty but from the years 614-609 they were put out of commission and the attempt by Egypt to compete for the power vacuum was crushed by Babylon in 605 at the Battle of Carchemish. So the Babylonians were in charge now. And it was revealed to Habakkuk that the Judean kingdom was the next stop on King Nebuchadnezzar's storming conquest. These people were a very fierce and rash people who worshipped their own military might and they were coming to do violence against Jerusalem, to defeat and collect captives. They laughed at foreign kings, they made a mockery of them, they heaped up rubble and captured fortress cities, one by one. But God says they will merely sweep on to the stage of history like a tempest and pass on. And even though God raised them up, they would be held guilty for their violence for they put their trust in their own military strength and did not give thanks to God who gave them the victory.

And we can say a few more words about that. Last week we dealt with free will and compatibilism, two views of God's sovereignty and human freedom. The problem with free will is that it means the power of contrary choice or the power to choose contrary to one's nature. We have a will and a nature and Scripturally the will is controlled by the nature. For example, "No one can come to me" says Jesus. Why can't we come of our own strength? Because we have a sinful nature in Adam and our will will always choose in accordance with our nature. So no one can come to me, we're not going to come because the will only chooses sin. And that's what the Scriptures mean when they say "no one seeks God," it means we are all here with a sin nature and we're not seeking God, we're not looking for God, we're hiding from God like Adam, we're following the lusts of our little sin nature and if it were left in our hands we'll all go to hell, all of us would choose hell. So unless God does something to interfere with that course of life we'll never change course, so we read "unless the Father draws him" in which case we have God initiating a change of course. But left to ourselves, no, all fallen people with a sin nature in Adam always do what we want to do, which is sin, we are free to sin, free to go to hell anyway we want, but no unbeliever is free autonomously to choose God because that would require an act of the will over and against the nature which is impossible. So free will, the power of contrary choice is a bankrupt view of freedom. The closest person to ever having a free will in any sense was Adam before he fell and Jesus Christ as virgin born. But after the

fall has occurred, apart from the virgin birth no one has free will, meaning no one can choose contrary to his sinful nature, he is only free to choose sin unless the Father draws him. This is what we call compatibilism, meaning we're all dead in Adam, dead in trespasses and sins and on a highway to hell. It's a big, wide highway and everybody's driving down it and we'll stay on that highway unless God so works in our life to efficaciously draw us, make us willing to believe, and He doesn't do that for every human being, if He did every human being would be saved. He may generally call through the gospel, there is a general call of the gospel, but not everyone even gets that, some people never hear the gospel. But the thing is they have creation, they know God through the creation. And another thing is He doesn't owe salvation to anyone; He doesn't owe anyone a dime and He is perfectly just in condemning the entire human race in Adam to the lake of fire. So the real question becomes why does He save anyone? Why does He rescue any of us out of our fallen condition? And the answer is it has nothing to do with anything in you or in me. It has to do with God's mercy. So you have a small group of people God sheds His mercy on, the rest of the human race is used for other purposes of God. For example, the Chaldeans. God raised them up to judge Judea. Were they held responsible for that? Yeah, they were doing just exactly as their sinful little hearts desired. No compulsion. And all unbelievers are going exactly where they want to go. They have no question what they want to do. But at the same time, when you came to Christ you were doing exactly what you wanted to do, no compulsion. But understand it was God who made you willing through His initiatory work, He was working in a manner compatible with human responsibility. It was His mercy and it was His gospel and it was His conviction in you and He worked so as to convince you to certainly believe the gospel. That's what we call compatibilism; it works for believers and unbelievers. And those who remain in unbelief are responsible for their unbelief, God didn't send them to hell, they sent themselves to hell. But those who believe the credit goes all to God because we never would have believed apart from His preparatory work inclining us to belief. He gets the credit, all of it, we didn't earn our way to heaven, God gave us heaven. Now that we're saved we have two natures, so our principle of life as Christians is unique in that we can follow the flesh and sin or we can follow the Spirit and do righteousness. So we're in a bit of a different situation now having two natures. But the principle of victory, generally speaking, is the Spirit.

But God is going to get the glory through all humans, no matter what side of the fence we are on. And everyone on earth right now is on the side of the fence they want to be on. Everyone always does what they most want to do. In the case of Pharaoh, he was on the side of the fence he wanted to be on and God raised up Pharaoh to demonstrate His power. The Israelites were on the other side of the fence and they wanted to be over there and they were vessels of God's mercy. So through both sides God reveals His character, if there were only one side you would only see God's power, but there are two sides so you see both His power and His mercy. So that's compatibilism and it's a way of thinking through numerous texts.

Tonight we come to 1:12-2:1 and Habakkuk is faced with a greater puzzle than before. Before it was simply what are you doing about the Judeans violence? I'm raising up the Chaldeans to deal with it. God always used foreign nations to discipline Israel. And at this point Habakkuk in verse 12 is processing God's first answer in light of what He knows about God. Is God's raising up of the Chaldeans consistent with God's character? So we have the attributes of God, SRJLOOOIE, that's our acronym for remembering the attributes. God is sovereign, righteous, just, loving, omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, immutable and eternal, that's not all the attributes of God but it's a good basic set to begin problem solving with. Habakkuk's problem is that He's trying to see how what God just said He was doing with the Babylonians gels with God's character? There seem to be some contradictions between who God is and what God said He was going to do. So how does what God said harmonize with who God is? That's his basic problem.

He's a puzzled prophet again. So in verse 12 he starts bringing out certain attributes. And he's questioning God but not in a belligerent way, he just wants to know. So let's follow his thoughts. **Are You not from everlasting**, from "antiquity" the Hebrew reads, **O LORD, my God**. What attribute? Eternality, God is eternal. What does this mean? If you don't have some firm definitions for these attributes you need to get some and memorize them because these are very handy, you always want to go back to the attributes of God when you get in a jam. So here's one, eternity. What does it mean? *God has no beginning or end; He is existence and the root and ground of all existence outside of Himself*. Now, this is a very good place for Habakkuk to start because if God is the root and ground of all existence outside of Himself then there is a plan for history. God has forever known this was going to

happen. History is not just marbles down here, molecules banging around, people banging around, nations banging around in a purposeless, meaningless sequence of events. No, there's a plan. So the first thing Habakkuk does is He says, I know who you are God and you are eternal, so everything in time is encompassed by your plan that you've had from all eternity. And you have a plan for our nation. You revealed that plan in the Abrahamic Covenant. I know what you promised our nation, I know what your plan is for our nation.

Now we can learn something here from Habakkuk. This is an excellent way to start thinking when you are confused about something because what you're doing is reaching as far back as you can to God who existed before time and who has a plan for time and that puts your problem inside God's plan. Otherwise, if you don't do this then you can get the impression that everything is chaos, there are no controls, my life is in shambles, there is no reason this is happening and you go to pieces. So the first thing Habakkuk does is exactly what every believer should do, go back to God is eternal, God has a plan, God is in control of history, so now my problem is encircled by God. And what that does for you, when you have that big picture of God is it brings your problem into focus, it cuts it down to size, it doesn't look so big anymore next to this big God. So that's the first attribute Habakkuk seizes, God is eternal and God obviously has plan from all eternity, a plan for His people.

The second attribute he turns to, he says, **my Holy One?** It's stated as a question, **are You my Holy One?** But the Hebrew requires a positive answer. Oh yes, He is eternal and O yes, He is holy. So the second attribute that comes to his mind is holiness. What is holiness? Fundamentally the word just means "set apart," but in the Scriptures, to give a better picture, this word is almost always associated with two other attributes, righteousness and justice. So if we know what righteousness and justice are, we know what holiness is, because it's those two attributes together. So righteousness, *righteousness means that God's character is the standard for what is right and wrong in the cosmos at all times and all places.* He is the standard. The standard is not something outside of God to which God says, that is right and that is wrong, things are not right or wrong in and of themselves, the reason something is right or wrong is because His nature demands it. Then justice, what is justice? *Justice means that God's attitude*

toward evil is uncompromising no matter who may be involved. God doesn't compromise and play favorites. It doesn't matter if you are a Judean or a Chaldean. God cannot look upon evil with partiality. Evil is evil no matter who is doing it because His nature demands an attitude of judgment upon it.

So taking these two basic attributes Habakkuk interprets in the middle of verse 12, **We will not die.** This is his conclusion, logically then, the nation Israel will not be destroyed completely from the stage of history. It may be severely punished, but it will not be annihilated. Now why would he conclude this? Because of the first attribute here, God is eternal and from all eternity God has a plan and the plan for Israel is revealed in the Abrahamic Covenant. So since the covenant nation Israel is promised to remain forever, she can never be destroyed. So that's an excellent logical conclusion from the attribute of eternality, **we will not die.**

Then a second conclusion he comes to, at the end of verse 12, **You, O LORD, have appointed them to judge; And You, O Rock, have established them to correct.** In other words, Your holiness does demand that you judge evil, and we Judeans have violated Your holiness, so you will judge us, but, in light of the fact that we are your covenant people, Your judgment is simply to correct, it's not to destroy, it's a disciplinary judgment to correct us. So do you see how in verse 12 Habakkuk is taking these two attributes and using them to interpret what God said about the coming Chaldean invasion? He's cutting the immensity of the threat down to size; yes, holiness demands that He judge us, but his eternality assures us we still have a place in His plan.

So then Habakkuk's conclusion of verse 12 is that the judgment is disciplinary in nature, not destructive. It may be severe discipline and it is. We read last week how the women will go psychologically insane and eat their own afterbirth, how the fathers will starve their children. So the discipline is severe. But the purpose of the discipline is not to destroy, it is **to correct.** And the title **Rock** in verse 12 means "a shelter, a refuge, a place of protection," so there is still in Habakkuk's eyes the idea that God is a shelter to us, ultimately we will survive as a nation.

Now verse 13 and we come to the great difficulty in Habakkuk's mind. So far he has thought through the logic of two of God's attributes and concluded that all the Chaldeans are is a rod in the Lord's hand, to discipline us. And

he's doing exactly what every Christian should do in a difficult situation, cut the problem down to size by turning to God's character. But in verse 13 he has the dilemma. **Your eyes are too pure to approve evil, And You cannot look on wickedness with favor.** What's he doing there? All he's doing is stating the definition of God's holiness which we already stated, **You're eyes are too pure to approve evil,** you can't tolerate it, it doesn't matter who's involved, you can't approve of evil. **And You cannot look on wickedness with favor,** you're impartial when it comes to evil, you have to judge it. So here's my problem says Habakkuk, **Why do You look with favor On those who deal treacherously?** Why are you being partial to the Chaldeans? Why are you blessing them with military conquest? Why are you giving them all the goodies? Why are you building their empire? Their riches? Their military strength? Why? They are treacherous people. Why are you favoring them? Aren't you compromising your principle of impartiality here God? I thought you judged all evil God. I didn't think you played favorites. This does not seem fair at all. I don't get it God. I really don't see here how your character meshes too good with what you're doing. Where is your holiness? It seems like you are acting outside the bounds of your character. And now we've got the problem of an arbitrary God. The idea that God sits in the heavens and does whatever He wishes without respect to His nature. Now, that's wrong, God does not do that, He always operates in accordance with His nature, that's what we call immutability. But that's the problem Habakkuk is presenting. It seems that by favoring a less righteous people over a more righteous people that God is playing favorites, that He's acting outside the bounds of His character.

So he states this by parallelism at the end of verse 13, **Why are You silent when the wicked swallow up Those more righteous than they?** Why aren't you doing anything about it? I don't see why? I don't see how that's consistent with your character. It would seem like God would use the more righteous to judge the wicked. So everything seems out of balance here with the character of God. Why the inequity?

Now we all have this same question over and over in life. Sometimes we see a kingdom rising like Iran or North Korea today and it just doesn't make sense because some less wicked nation, like America over here is going down the tubes. Or we see a wicked person, some city council member, who is a manipulative, deceptive, evil person and they prosper, they advance, they get

all kinds of notoriety, and other people, more righteous than they are in poverty, lose their job, get cancer, die young, what is going on? Where is justice God? Where are you? How can you do this? It doesn't fit!

Then to make matters worse he comes in verse 14 with an additional question, and this has to do with the innocent, righteous people that get caught up in the wake of judgment. And they get swept away with the wicked? How is that fair? What about your remnant of believing Jews? Why are they going to be caught in the judgment? Why don't you distinguish between the righteous and unrighteous? I thought you did that at Sodom and Gomorrah. I thought you did that at the Exodus. Are you saying here you are not going to do that? And we know he did not end up doing that because Daniel was taken into captivity. Was Daniel a righteous man? Absolutely. Ezekiel was taken. Was he a righteous man? Yes he was. So it seems that the righteous were taken in the judgment along with the wicked. So why no distinction?

He presents it by way of a figure of speech. If you remember language arts in High School hopefully they taught you some figures of speech. If they didn't and you hang around here long enough you'll pick some up. See if you can catch what figure of speech this is as we read vv 14-17, **Why have You made men like the fish of the sea, Like creeping things without a ruler over them? ¹⁵The Chaldeans bring all of them up with a hook, Drag them away with their net, And gather them together in their fishing net. Therefore they rejoice and are glad. ¹⁶Therefore they offer a sacrifice to their net and burn incense to their fishing net; Because through these things their catch is large, And their food is plentiful. ¹⁷Will they therefore empty their net And continually slay nations without sparing?** He almost ends in despair there but what's the figure of speech he uses to introduce this problem? The key words are in verse 14. Whenever you see the words "like" or "as" what figure of speech is being used? A simile. What's a simile? It's a comparison between two objects that share something in common. So you're looking for something men and fish share in common. I know men like to fish but how are men like fish? The key is at the end of verse 14. Neither have **a ruler over them**. What does he mean by that? Fish don't have a ruler over them in the sense of anything to protect them; they are at the mercy of the tyrant fisherman. And men he says are like that when it comes to the tyrant Chaldeans, they have no one to

protect them, they are at the mercy of the tyrant Chaldeans, helpless. And Habakkuk has a real problem with this because there's no distinction between the righteous and the unrighteous just like there's no distinction when a fisherman fishes, he catches all kinds of fish. And the Chaldeans bring them all up, it doesn't matter who you are. And this seems to be contrary to God's justice. Where is God's justice in all this?

So we have this simile, let's look at the details, verse 14, **Why have you made men like the fish of the sea, Like creeping things**, or you might translate that **marine animals without a ruler over them**, the two expressions are Hebrew parallelism and you are going to see a lot of Hebrew parallelism in these verses. What's Hebrew parallelism? It's Hebrew poetry where two thoughts are running parallel, in most of these its synonymous parallelism meaning the two thoughts mean the same thing but there are other kinds of parallelism, there's contrast parallelism, there's completion parallelism, there's figurative parallelism and we'll see a few different ones but the point is it's a poetic pattern used by Hebrew poets to express a point dramatically. And the drama here is this is a lament, Habakkuk is weeping about this apparent injustice that the just would be caught up with the unjust just as fish are indiscriminately caught in a fisherman's net. So watch for the parallelisms.

Why have you made men like the fish of the sea, Like marine animals without a ruler over them? 15The Chaldeans bring all of them up with a hook, you'll notice a couple of ways they go fishing here, one way is by the **hook** and that's how you catch one fish at a time, maybe two or three, but usually just one. These he says they say **Drag them away with their net**, there are also two kinds of nets here, this first one is a throw net. And the throw net would be used by a fisherman standing on the shore and he'd throw his net into the water and it had weighted edges so it would sink to the bottom and then he holds the line and just pull it up which would cinch the opening closed and he'd catch all the fish inside. So one method to catch is **with a hook** and **drag them away** in a throw net. Then we have a different net in the middle of verse 15, **And gather them together in their fishing net**. This is actually another device for catching fish, it's a dragnet and it should be translated **When He catches them in his dragnet**. These were great large nets that you would use from the boat and it would drag the bottom and catch large amounts of fish. That's why the end of the verse says;

Therefore they rejoice and are glad, because you catch a lot of fish at the same time in a dragnet. So some they catch one by one on a **hook**, they're put in the throw net and dragged away. Others are caught in the dragnet, large groups at one time, and over these there is great rejoicing. The point by comparison is what? Not that the Judeans are caught on hooks or fishing nets but they represent all the Chaldean implements of war and how the captives are drug away into captivity, into exile. Isn't the Bible a colorful book? This is masterpiece literature, this is fantastic imagery. Just as fish are indiscriminately caught by the fisherman and dragged away so the righteous and the unrighteous are indiscriminately defeated by the Chaldeans and taken into exile.

Verse 16, **Therefore they offer a sacrifice to their net and burn incense to their fishing net; Because through these things their catch is large, And their food is plentiful.** Look at all the parallelism. What are they doing here? They're worshipping their implements of war. They are giving credit to their military implements for giving them victory in battle. That's like a fisherman worshipping his throw nets and his dragnets because he caught a lot of fish with them. But it's the fallacy of confusing the implement with the God behind the implement who gave you the victory. And it's worshipping the creation rather than the creator. So we have idolatry in verse 16, a confusion of the Creator with the creation, the Babylonians worship the creation.

Then his question, verse 17, **Will they therefore empty their net And continually slay nations without sparing?** This is a completion parallelism, the first thought is incomplete, the second thought completes it. What is he asking? Will the Chaldeans **empty their net** of one nation, go out and fill their nets once more and **continually** do this over and over and over until they have global conquest? Will evil persist forever and ever? If so, where is your justice? What will you do, O God, you say you cannot overlook evil? Are you just going to let this go on and on and on? Why? How long? What about your character God?

So then we come to the conclusion of the very perplexed prophet's dilemma. And he says in 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 replay when I am reproved, when I am corrected.**

Something's not right; I have to have my thoughts corrected. Now the comparison here, notice, this is not a simile, it does not use "like" or "as." But you can still make a comparison without "like" or "as." What do you call that figure of speech? A metaphor. So here we have a metaphor and the imagery comes from the watchman on the wall. In the ancient world they didn't have satellites hovering in space sending intelligence data, they had watchmen, stationed high above the city on the wall. His job was to watch for messengers or danger approaching the city and report. Now Habakkuk is not actually going to go get up on the wall and stare off into heaven waiting for a message. That's not the point. When Habakkuk says **I will stand on my guard post And station myself on the rampart.** It's a metaphor. He just means I'm going to wait eagerly for the message like the watchman. He wants to know how God will respond to this apparent paradox. Then he gives more parallelism, **And I will keep watch to see what He will speak in me,** not to me, **in me.** And it's this little difference in pronoun that gives insight into the mode of revelation. God has many modes of revelation, dreams, visions, dictation, personal research, but this one He **speaks in me** is very interesting. He says I am going to **keep watch to see,** meaning I'm going to pay very close attention to the inner recesses of my mind. I'm going to focus on the thought process portion of my mind. Why? Because that is where the vision is seen, that is where God answers. **to see what He will speak in me,** that is, in my mind, God would speak inside the prophets mind. So the prophet may be walking down the streets of Jerusalem in broad daylight and suddenly he's seeing a vision in his mind and yet nobody outside sees anything, they just keep on buying bananas. So in the visionary mode of divine revelation, God placed an audio video message inside the mind of the prophet totally unseen by anyone outside the prophet. And somehow it got embedded in such a way that it was branded on his memory, down to the very letter.

And the prophet recognizes that I have to pay close attention, I have to keep watch because there are other thoughts that occur in that location and when the Lord answers I want to be finely attuned to His message and how to respond, **And how I may reply** he says, **when I am reproved,** when I am corrected. And don't you think it's interesting that he knew he was wrong, he knew something was incorrect in his thinking process, so he's not coming with an attitude, he's coming wanting to be reproved, wanting God to reveal to him the missing piece. What am I missing here God? And then he says, I

may know how to reply. If I'm still confused I can ask more questions, if I'm satisfied then I can praise. And chapter 3 is what? A psalm of praise. So God's answer will satisfy Habakkuk and he replies with praise. But that's the approach of faith, how does this work out God, I don't understand, I want to understand, I just don't have all the information to understand. But I do know that You understand. And if You want to share that with me, fine, I'd like to know, that's the approach of faith. Help me sort this out God and correct me if I'm out of it.

[Back To The Top](#)

Copyright (c) Fredericksburg Bible Church 2012