

July 27, 2025

Return: Is God Fair?

Habakkuk 1:12-2:5

Vernon Advent Christian Church

Introduction...

Have you ever questioned God's fairness? Has something ever happened in your life, and you responded by saying, "God, that's just not fair!" The reality is, life is often unfair. It's something we learn as we go. But saying that life is unfair is very different from saying that God is unfair. We can live with life being unfair. After all, we realize we are all sinners and we live in a world that has been affected by sin. So with all of that going on, it makes sense that life is not always going to be fair. But when you ask, "Is God fair?" that is a very different question.

Last week we looked at the question, "Does God care?" Habakkuk looked around at all the violence and injustice in Judah, and he questioned whether God even noticed or cared about what was going on. God answered Habakkuk that yes, he does notice, yes, he does care, and that he was in process of raising up the Babylonians for this very purpose, to judge the people of Judah for their unrepentant sin.

But God's answer created a new problem for Habakkuk. Yes, Judah is sinful and unrepentant. But in Habakkuk's mind, the Babylonians are even worse! How can God use a more wicked nation to judge a less wicked nation? This is typical of how many people think of God even today. The two biggest questions people ask about God are: 1) "How could a loving God allow evil in the world?" (does God care?) and 2) "How could a loving God punish people for their sin?" (Is God fair?)

What people don't realize is that the second question actually answers the first. Yes, God is a loving God who cares about evil in the world. And the reason we know this is because God will, in fact, judge all evil and sin in the world. God is both loving and just. Which is another way of saying that God cares, and God is fair.

Habakkuk's situation was a little different, though. Habakkuk wasn't questioning God's right to judge sin. He was questioning God's method. I think, for the most part, we understand that God does care and that he will answer according to his will and in his time. However, when he does, then we question his methods!

How could God use the Babylonians to judge the people of Judah? The Babylonians were even more wicked than the people God was judging. Wouldn't it make more sense to judge the Babylonians? Was God being fair? So, let's take a look at Habakkuk's second complaint, and then we will look at God's response to Habakkuk's complaint. If you are able, please stand with me as I read from the word of God found in Habakkuk 1:12-2:5 [Read]

First of all, Habakkuk's second complaint, as stated already, "How can God use the Babylonians to punish the people of Judah?" Habakkuk brings his complaint forward in three stages and in these stages we find three truths that he is absolutely convinced of and yet he cannot see how all three could be true at the same time.

The first truth Habakkuk is convinced of is this: God is sovereign. In the Bible, God's sovereignty means He is the supreme authority, the ultimate ruler over all creation. This means that nothing happens outside of His knowledge and overarching plan.

Habakkuk demonstrates his conviction of this truth in two ways. First, Habakkuk believes that God is sovereign over the people of Israel. Look at the beginning of vs. 12 where Habakkuk speaks. [Read 12a]

It is kind of a strange verse at first glance. What does God's everlasting nature have to do with the people of Israel not dying? It has to do with God's sovereignty. God is everlasting. He is the first and the last. God had bound himself in a covenant relationship with his people, and so, as long as God continued, God's people would live on.

In fact, this is exactly what God told his people through the prophet Jeremiah: "Though I will completely destroy all the nations among which I scatter you, I will not completely destroy you. I will discipline you but only with justice; I will not let you go entirely unpunished." (Jeremiah 30:11) And so, Habakkuk firmly believed that God was sovereign over the nation of Israel.

But then he also believed that God was sovereign over all the other nations as well. Look at the second part of vs. 12. [Read 12b]

God had just told Habakkuk that he was sending the Babylonians to judge the people of Judah, and Habakkuk has no doubt that is exactly what God is going to do. The Babylonians are coming, and Habakkuk affirms that God is the one who has appointed and ordained them for this task. That's the first thing Habakkuk is convinced of: God is sovereign.

The second thing Habakkuk is convinced of is this: God is holy. Look vs. 13. [Read 13a]

This is one of the great teachings of Scripture: God is absolutely holy and pure. God's holiness is absolute and inherent, representing His perfect moral purity, righteousness, and complete separation from all that is evil. 1 John 1:5 tells us that "God is light; in him there is no darkness at all." (1 John 1:5) It means that God is perfectly holy, righteous and pure. There is no evil, sin or darkness in him at all.

But Habakkuk goes even further here in verse 13. Not only is there no darkness or evil in God. His eyes are too pure even to look on evil. Now, this does not mean that God closes his eyes and ignores all the evil in the world. No, God sees every sin every person commits every day. When Habakkuk says, "Your eyes are too pure to look on evil," he means "God does not look at sin with any type of acceptance or approval."

When we look at sin in the world, we are sometimes horrified, often disgusted, but there are also times when we are tempted or attracted. [Adam and Eve, David and Bathsheba...O, be careful little eyes what you see]

Not so with God. God has only one reaction to sin. He is offended. All sin is a direct affront to his holiness. God cannot tolerate wrong. Were it not for his gracious love and forgiveness, his righteous wrath would destroy us all instantly. [more?]

Of course, the fact of God's holiness prompts some additional questions from Habakkuk. Look at the rest of verse 13 now where Habakkuk asks God. [Read 13b]

Habakkuk is trying to reconcile what he knows about God with what God has just told him about the Babylonians earlier in ch. 1. He cannot understand how God could use

the wicked Babylonians to punish those more righteous than themselves. Habakkuk knows that God is sovereign over the nations. He knows that God is holy and cannot tolerate evil. And yet there is also a third thing that Habakkuk is firmly convinced of, and that is this, that even though the Babylonians are evil and wicked, God is allowing them to prosper, and what seems worse, he is going to use them to judge Judah.

Look at vs. 14-17 where Habakkuk describes the Babylonians. In these verses, Habakkuk pictures Babylon as a fisherman and all the nations as helpless fish in the sea. And this fisherman is violent and cruel, pulling up the people of the nations with hooks and dragging them away in nets. Not only that, but he delights in their misery. He rejoices and is glad over those he captures. This phrase “rejoice and be glad” is usually used of worshiping God in the Bible, especially when the two words are paired together like this. Here Habakkuk uses the two words together to highlight how the Babylonians worship their own power and success.

The worship imagery continues in vs. 16 where we read how Babylon “sacrifices to his net and burns incense to his dragnet.” The words “sacrifice” and “burn incense” are used here in a form that almost always applies to idol worship rather than God. God is the one who has raised Babylon up. God is the one who has given Babylon its power and strength. And yet Babylon does not acknowledge God’s role in any of this. Instead, Babylon worships its own strength and “he lives in luxury and enjoys the choicest food.” In other words, Babylon is enjoying itself at the expense of the nations it conquers. And Habakkuk doesn’t see any end to this. It seems no one can stand up to them. Will the Babylonians continually destroy the nations without mercy?

Habakkuk doesn’t have a problem with any of these three things individually. He knows that God is sovereign. He knows that God is holy. And he knows that Babylon is wicked yet prospers. He is convinced that all three are true. He just cannot see how all three can be true at the same time. It doesn’t make any sense to him. It makes him question God’s justice. It makes him wonder, “Is God fair?”

I love the way Habakkuk deals with his questions and doubts. We saw last week when Habakkuk struggled with doubt, instead of walking away from God, he brought his questions and doubts to God. Now that Habakkuk has voiced his second complaint, let’s look at chapter two and see what he does next as we awaits and answer.

[Read 2:1] Habakkuk stubbornly clings to God even in the midst of his doubts. Habakkuk 2:1 is the Old Testament equivalent of Mark 9:24: “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!” (Mark 9:24) Habakkuk takes his stand upon the watchtower. He stations himself on the ramparts. He looks for God’s answer.

This is something we all need to learn to do. When you have questions or doubts, bring them to God. Take your stand, dig yourself in and wait upon the Lord. God will answer your questions in his time. Now, not always in the way we would want him to. But he will always give you himself, and he will always give you the measure of faith needed to carry on. Habakkuk takes his stand on the watchtower, and he looks for God’s answer.

And then God, in his faithfulness, answers him. And the first thing God tells Habakkuk is that the answer will come at the right time. Look at vs. 2-3. [Read]

God tells Habakkuk to write down the content of the revelation. These verses are a little difficult to translate, but the basic gist of it is that Habakkuk should write it down and

make it plain for all to see. There is an appointed time for its fulfillment, and when that time arrives the revelation will prove to be true. It won't happen right away, but Habakkuk should wait for its fulfillment in God's perfect timing. God's word is certain. The fulfillment of his promise will neither be early nor late. God's answer always comes at the perfect time.

Secondly, God assures Habakkuk that the wicked will not go unpunished. Look at vs. 4-5. [Read]

God is using Babylon to bring judgment to Judah and the other nations, but that does not excuse Babylon's sin. Babylon is puffed up, unrighteous, drunk on its own power, arrogant, restless and greedy. Babylon conquers nations, not out of concern for God's justice, but because of his own arrogance and greed. And God tells Habakkuk that the Babylonians will also be judged for their sin, but all in God's timing. In fact, the rest of ch. 2 outlines Babylon's many sins and each of the many judgments that are coming because of those sins. But for right now, they were serving God's purpose.

This was the answer that Habakkuk needed to hear. God had made it clear that Babylon would be judged for its sin after all. Now Habakkuk knew that God was sovereign, holy and just, or fair. Babylon would be judged for its sin. Meanwhile, "as for you," God says, the righteous will live by faith, trusting God to act justly in his own time.

This one phrase right at the end of vs. 4, "the righteous will live by faith," is one of the most important verses in the whole Bible. It is quoted three times in the New Testament, in Rom. 1:17, Gal. 3:11 and Heb. 10:38. This is the verse that God used to reveal the gospel to Martin Luther and launch the entire Reformation.

For Habakkuk, this promise meant that he should live by faith while he waited for God's answer to come. The word "live" here is a confirmation of what he said earlier in ch. 1: "O LORD, are you not from everlasting? My God, my Holy One, we will not die." (Habakkuk 1:12) Why would the people of Judah live and not die?

Was it because of their own righteousness? Not a chance. The whole reason God was bringing the Babylonians was to judge the people of Judah for their sin. No, they would live because of their faith in God who had bound himself in a covenant relationship with his people. They would be made righteous by their faith, not by their own works.

The full implications of this verse are brought out later in the New Testament through the message of the gospel. The gospel says that even though we are sinners and deserve punishment for our sin, Jesus died on the cross and took our punishment that we might be forgiven for our sin and made righteous in God's sight.

That's why Paul writes in Romans 1: "I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.... For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written" – and then he quotes Habakkuk 2:4 – "The righteous will live by faith." (Romans 1:16-17)

It is not your righteousness that gives you life. It is the righteousness of Jesus that gives you life. Jesus gives you his righteousness when you put your faith in him and trust his death on the cross for you instead of your own works, even as Habakkuk put his faith in God's love and faithfulness.

So, how do we apply this passage to ourselves today? First of all, three things this passage tells us about God:

God is sovereign. He is active in the affairs of history. He uses entire nations to bring about his will whether those nations acknowledge him or not. This is good to remember when you look at all the conflict around the world even today. God is sovereign over the nations, and he will use their actions to accomplish his purposes. God is sovereign.

God is holy. He cannot tolerate any wrong. His eyes are too pure even to look upon evil. Because God is holy, we too should be holy in all we do.

And God is just. He will judge all evil in the world, including those whom he has used to judge others.

But there are also three things this passage says about us:

We are sinners, and therefore we are all subject to God's condemnation. Romans 3:23, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." We may think we are "better" than some others, even as the people of Judah thought they were "better" than the Babylonians, but compared to God's absolute holiness, we are all the same. Which leads to the next thing which is...

We cannot save ourselves by our works. Most people are deceived into thinking that they will get into heaven because they are a good person, when, in reality, that is not how it works. Our good works are just what we are supposed to do anyways. They do not earn us any merit. They do not cancel out any of our sins.

Therefore, the righteous will live by faith. It is only through faith that we can be made right with God and know eternal life rather than eternal condemnation.

Many times, people look at all the evil in the world and think, "God does not care." Then they learn that God will judge their sin, "God is not fair!" But God does care, and God is fair. God's loving care and perfect justice meet together at the cross. Jesus died on the cross for your sins so that if you will put your faith in him, you can be saved. Put your faith in Christ today, and receive his righteousness, because God tells us: "The righteous will live by faith." Let's pray.

Benediction: "May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." Amen. – 2 Corinthians 13:14