

How can God allow evil?

Habakkuk 1:12-2:20

1. Facing a crisis

On 7 February 2009 Joy and I were camped at Wilson's Promontory in Victoria. It was Black Saturday. The temperature was 45degrees right by the sea. That day 173 people died in the fires and 414 injured More than 2000 houses were destroyed.

We were safe where we were but imagine being in the path of the fire storm as it approached. There was dense choking smoke, strong wind, heat, and the noise of timber exploding and burning. It would be terrifying to be trapped with the fire rushing towards you.

Habakkuk's problem wasn't fire. It was the Babylonian army galloping towards Jerusalem.

But this would be just as terrifying. They are described as:

⁶ *A ruthless and impetuous people, who sweep across the whole earth to seize dwellings not their own.* ⁷ *They are a feared and dreaded people; they are a law to themselves*

⁸ *Their horses are swifter than leopards, fiercer than wolves at dusk. Their cavalry gallops headlong; their horsemen come from afar. They fly like an eagle swooping to devour;*

⁹ *they all come intent on violence. Their hordes advance like a desert wind and gather prisoners like sand. (1:6-9)*

It would just as terrifying as a fire racing towards a town in bush.

This army advances to crush Jerusalem. Can you imagine the terror and panic in the city?

If that wasn't bad enough God has told Habakkuk, *"I am raising up the Babylonians."* It is God who is sending the Babylonians to judge Israel for their evil ways.

2. A crisis for faith

This causes Habakkuk to question what he believes about God

¹³ *Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrongdoing. Why then do you tolerate the treacherous? Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves? (1:13)*

How can God allow evil things to happen? In this case, how can God even use such an evil nation?

It's like a surgeon all scrubbed up, in a theatre gown with his gloves on, all sterile, but then he picks us a rusty scalpel to operate on you! It seems all wrong!

How can Habakkuk believe in a God who is pure, fair, just, *"Who cannot tolerate wrong"* when God says he is sending this evil nation?

We may have crisis in life cause us to question God. It may be you see your doctor who says, "I am sorry I have bad news for you." Or your boss calls you into his office, "I'm afraid we are going to have to let you go." You have lost your job. How are you going to pay the mortgage, the school fees and meet your other financial commitments?

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Or you receive a call from the police, "Please come to station. We have your son here again. This time we are going to have to charge him." How will your faith stand up in a crisis like this? What questions does it raise for you? Can you still believe in a God of love, a God who hates evil? A God who is fair and just at times like this?

This book doesn't answer all our questions about suffering. I'm only looking at God's answers to Habakkuk. Let's see what we can learn for Habakkuk.

3. God will make everything right in the end

God's answer here is, "I am going to judge all evil." Judgment is proclaimed in a series of five "woes"

"Woe" means they are condemned. They are on God's death row, awaiting execution. God will destroy all evil.

God will judge - Stealing and extortion

⁶ *Woe to him who piles up stolen goods and makes himself wealthy by extortion!*

God will judge - Injustice

⁹ *Woe to him who builds his house by unjust gain*

God will judge - Violence

¹² *Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed and establishes a town by injustice!*

God will judge - Oppression

¹⁵ *"Woe to him who gives drink to his neighbours, pouring it from the wineskin till they are drunk, so that he can gaze on their naked bodies!"*

God will judge - Idolatry

¹⁹ *Woe to him who says to wood, 'Come to life!' Or to lifeless stone, 'Wake up!'*

4. Welcoming God's judgment

Often people have a negative view of God's judgment. A picture on the ceiling of the baptistery in Florence shows devils torturing the souls of the dead. The idea of the judgement has been used to create fear and frighten people into doing the right thing.



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In Bible the judgment is seen to be much more positive.

¹¹ *Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let the sea resound, and all that is in it.*

¹³ *Let all creation rejoice before the Lord, for he comes, he comes to judge the earth.*

He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his faithfulness. (Psalm 96:11, 13)

God's judgment is AGAINST his enemies, against those who oppress God's people. But judgment is FOR God's people, for the poor and oppressed.

⁶ *The Lord works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed. (Psalm 103:6)*

¹² *I know that the Lord secures justice for the poor and upholds the cause of the needy. (Psalm 104:12)*

In Revelation 19 there is a great shout of praise:

¹ *"Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God,*

² *for true and just are his judgments. He has condemned the great prostitute [Babylon] who corrupted the earth by her adulteries. He has avenged on her the blood of his servants."*

(Revelation 19:1-2)

At the judgment God's people will finally be saved from evil. Their faithfulness to God will be vindicated. In the present God's people suffer persecution, there are various competing religions and there are Atheists claiming that they are right. In the present it isn't clear who is right but at the judgment it will be seen by all that we are the people of the true God.

As verse 4 puts it, *"The righteous person will live by his faithfulness."* (2:4) We will be saved at the time of God's judgment. Faith is the key to our relationship with God, trusting the promises of his word, even if we can't see how God can achieve them.

This is a key verse quoted three times in the New Testament, *"The righteous will live by faith."* (Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38)

Above all the judgment will show that God is God; that he is King over all.

¹⁴ *For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. (2:14)*

²⁰ *The Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him. (2:20)* God will be honoured as Lord of all. His kingdom will be established.

At the judgment:

- Evil will all be destroyed
- We will be vindicated
- And God will be honoured as King - Hallelujah!!

5. Wait for God's judgment

Habakkuk is called to wait for that day - as we are.

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³ *For the revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay. (2:3)*

God's judgment is not like a Sydney train. It will come on time. We often want answers immediately but God has his own timetable. It is fixed and reliable. Waiting means trusting God's promise; he will judge all evil. It means faithfully following Jesus even when called to suffer. It means trusting that God is still in control.

Before he removes all evil he can still use it in his purposes. The greatest example is Jesus' death. The crucifixion is the greatest act of human evil: the betrayal, denial, desertion, the injustice of the trial, the violence of the mocking, scorn and death by crucifixion.

But God used all this evil according to his plan for salvation. He used it to bring the greatest good for us. While we may not understand how these two things can work together we can trust God *"That in all things God works for the good of those who love him."* (Romans 8:28)