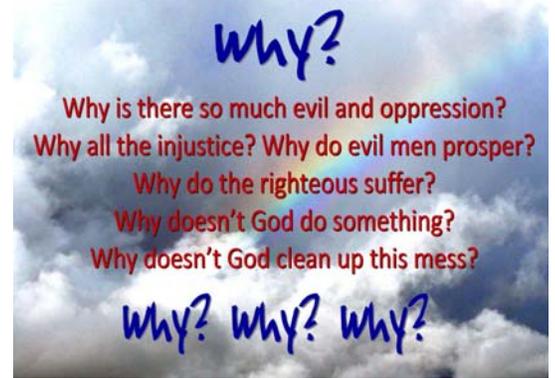


35 – Habakkuk: A Conversation with God About Judgment

- Habakkuk means **“to embrace.”** God wants us to embrace Him fully, and to be fully embraced by Him. Often that means to accept Him and His ways completely by faith, even though we don’t understand.
- Habakkuk is most likely a **contemporary of Jeremiah, Nahum and Zephaniah**, the time period before the destruction of Jerusalem and Babylonian captivity.
- This book is not like typical prophecy. God is responding to Habakkuk’s heart questions, which includes prophecy, but it was not intended as a message from God through a prophet for the people, though it did become this (as God commanded the prophet to write it down), and still is.
- Habakkuk is just like us, **with questions about why and how God does what He does**. Some people think that people of faith never question God, but we can and do. Our human vision and understanding is so limited, we have a hard time understanding these things, so this prophet took his questions to God, and God answered. This little book is a unique conversation between God and Habakkuk. How many times have we heard of things happening in our world like great suffering or great evil and wondered why God allows it, and doesn’t seem to hear our prayers? Habakkuk wondered these same things. This book answers so many of our WHY questions about God. **COMMENTARY:** *“In such a world of crisis and chaos, Habakkuk speaks with clarity. This little book is as contemporary as the morning newspaper.”* (Walvoord, & Zuck)
- The **theme of this little book is faith**, and it is very important to New Testament writings. Most scholars believe that this conversational book was used by Paul in developing the themes of Romans, Galatians and Hebrews, which all quote from Habakkuk. One piece of a verse in Habakkuk is the foundation for these three New Testament books, and is what Luther and other reformers used to bring people back to a position of faith: **“... But the just shall live by his faith.”** (2:4, quoted 3 times in these New Testament books: Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; and Hebrews 10:38.) What exactly is faith? Hebrews 11:1 gives us wonderful definition: **“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”** This verse essentially says faith is believing what we can’t see, and hoping (with certainty). It simply means we trust God in all things, for all life. Faithfulness is acting on that faith.



Highlights

Habakkuk Questions (1:2-4)	God Answers (1:5-11)	Habakkuk Responds (1:12-2:1)	God Answers (2:2-10)	Habakkuk Praises (3:1-19)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Why does God allow evil? ▪ Why doesn't He answer prayers? ▪ Why does He seem insensitive to sin and suffering? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ For a time, but even now He is raising up Babylon to use for His judgment on Judah ▪ God always judges evil, in His own time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Why would God allow His people to be punished by a people even more wicked? ▪ Why would God seemingly allow these evil people “a pass” ▪ Habakkuk waits for the answer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Clear and certain revelation: God shows two groups of people, one evil, moving toward destruction, the other by faith moving to God, an inevitable, part of the plan. ▪ Several “woes” (warnings) ▪ Babylon would in turn be destroyed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Pleads for mercy ▪ God rides His own awesome chariot of salvation, His great Presence and Majesty ▪ Habakkuk praises God’s ways ▪ Habakkuk will rejoice in God’s will, not matter what happens

- The **prophet wondered how God could look upon such great evil and not judge it**. He was speaking about his own people, the southern kingdom of Judah. When God answered Habakkuk’s attitude changed, however. God told him he wouldn’t believe how He was even now raising up a people (the Babylonians) to conquer Judah and take them out of the land. Now Habakkuk was surprised and a bit fearful and goes from wondering why God doesn’t judge, to pleading for mercy when He does.

- Habakkuk also **doesn't understand why and how God would allow a people even more evil than Judah to be used by Him in their judgment.** God essentially answers not to worry about the Babylonians, their time of judgment will come.
- Habakkuk **was frustrated by continuing and increasing sin**, wickedness, destruction and violence, no justice in the courts, and the wicked outnumbering the righteous. In 1:4 Habakkuk says *"...the law is powerless, And justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous; Therefore perverse judgment proceeds."* God's word was no longer the standard. Does this sound like our world today? As with most of the prophetic books, God's prophets were disturbed by all of these things, which continue even in our society today. God's answers then are His answers today.
- God's answer to Habakkuk's first questioning is a little alarming to him. God is raising up a powerful even more wicked nation to overcome them (Babylon). *"For indeed I am raising up the Chaldeans, A bitter and hasty nation which marches through the breadth of the earth, To possess dwelling places that are not theirs. They are terrible and dreadful; Their judgment and their dignity proceed from themselves."* (1:6-7) But he reminds the prophet they will not escape judgment either. **GOOD QUESTION:** If we put ourselves in the prophet's place, how would we feel about our nation being overcome by some other even more evil nation, killing and destroying our culture, and imprisoning us? Would we feel that God answered our prayers about this nation? There is a very important principle to learn here. **God does not always give us the answers to prayers that we want, or expect.**
- Habakkuk accepts God's answer, but he doesn't like it much! But he does acknowledge that God is eternal and supreme, and he also remembers God's covenants with Israel and knows He will not obliterate them. The prophet doesn't fully understand God's answer, he doesn't know why God would punish them with others more evil. He awaits God's response to his next set of questions. God patiently tells him not to worry about the Babylonians. In our vernacular, *"Don't worry, they'll get theirs too!"*
- God **compares Babylon to a drunkard who always wants more wine, never satisfied.** This was actually true of the Babylonians, both in wine and in kingdom. They tried to conquer more and more.
- A **series of "woes"** are presented in chapter 2. These are warnings to those who practice these things: Woe to the Proud (2:4-5); Woe to the Greedy (2:6-8); Woe to the Dishonest (2:9-11); Woe to the Violent (2:12-14); Woe to the Sensual (and those who entice others to shame) (2:15-17); Woe to the Idolater (2:18-20)
- The **final passages are intended as a magnificent poetic praise song.** The book opens in gloomy tones and closes in praise and glory. It starts with questions and ends with exclamation. Some titled commentaries to this book as *"From Fear to Faith"* or *"From Worry to Worship."* Both are apt titles for the book of Habakkuk. The book of Habakkuk steadily progresses upward toward God. He begins low, and ends high. In chapter 3, Habakkuk praises God and pleads for mercy in His judgment. He now knows what is coming and fears it, but still praises God for his majesty and power. He promises he will, despite what he knows is coming, wait on God. The last three verses are incredible and a good reminder for us: *"Though the fig tree may not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines; though the labor of the olive may fail, and the fields yield no food; though the flock may be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stalls— Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The LORD God is my strength; He will make my feet like deer's feet, And He will make me walk on my high hills."* (3:17-19) This passage is a fitting end to this book of questioning.

**"YET,
I will rejoice
in the LORD!"**

BASIC PRINCIPLES OF HABAKKUK SUMMARIZED:

- 1) God might seem not to be active and in control or involved, but He is.
- 2) God is holy and cannot and will not tolerate evil, even though it seems He does.
- 3) Even if it seems God may not be answering our prayers, He does, in His own time and His own way.
- 4) God often provides unexpected answers to our prayers (not what we thought or even wanted).
- 5) God is just and good. He will judge the wicked (always) and have compassion on the righteous (always).
- 6) The righteous live by faith, and act in faithfulness. We believe God, and live accordingly.