

GOD WITH US
Part 7: Kings & Prophets to Exile and Return
Judah's Fall and God's Faithfulness

Message 7 – Habakkuk: Questions for God

Introduction

Habakkuk, like Jeremiah, lived and ministered in the years prior to the Babylonian invasion of Judah. However, Habakkuk was not primarily concerned with *forecasting* the judgment of God upon the nation. Rather, he was “the questioning prophet,” asking God questions about how/when He would deal with injustice, both within Judah and in the wider world. The first two chapters of the Book of Habakkuk are composed in a dialogue form where Habakkuk poses questions and God answers. The final chapter is a responsive prayer intended for use in public worship. The core issue that Habakkuk was wrestling with was the *justice of God in light of the presence of unchecked evil in the world*. Many of us struggle with the same question today. Why does God allow so much evil to go unchecked? When will He act to confront evil and stop it? Habakkuk gives us *some* answers while inviting us to *live by faith* in the character of our holy and just God.

Question 1: Why does God allow evil to exist in Judah? 1:1-4

The question/answer format makes Habakkuk unique among the prophets. The opening question has to do with his troubling observation that *evil seemed to be going unchecked in his own country of Judah*. He felt as if God was being complacent in allowing such evil to continue.

“How long, LORD, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, “Violence!” but you do not save? Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrongdoing?” (1:2,3)

Answer 1: Here come the Babylonians! 1:5-11

God assured Habakkuk that He would punish the evil in Judah. He was raising up the Babylonians as His rod of discipline. A description of the Babylonians is given (1:6-10) with emphasis on their terrifying fierceness. This struck fear in the heart of Habakkuk (see 3:16).

“Look at the nations and watch—and be utterly amazed. For I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe, even if you were told. I am raising up the Babylonians, that ruthless and impetuous people, who sweep across the whole earth to seize dwellings not their own” (1:5,6).

It is encouraging to see that God welcomed and answered the deep questions of Habakkuk. It is good to bring our deepest questions and doubts to God in prayer. We may not receive a direct answer as the prophet did; but God hears our sincere questions and prayers and He chooses to answer us in His own time and His own way. Habakkuk did not particularly like God's answer that the Babylonians were being raised up to punish Judah for its wickedness (see below). But the point is that God does have His way of dealing with both our questions and the issues involved in those questions. If we ask God sincere questions about the things that concern us, we must also allow Him to answer however He pleases, even if His answer leaves us “utterly amazed,” as it did Habakkuk!

Question 2: Aren't they more evil than we are? 1:12-2:1

God's answer solved one problem but raised another. How could God punish evil in Judah by using a nation that was *more evil* than Judah? The Babylonians had no regard for Yahweh whatsoever. They were idolaters who “*offered sacrifices to their nets*” (i.e., they worshipped their military prowess and their ‘gods of war’). How could a holy and just God use such evil people as His instruments of discipline upon the people of Judah?

“You, LORD, have appointed them to execute judgment; you, my Rock, have ordained them to punish. 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? (1:12,13).

Answer 2: God will judge the Babylonians also! 2:2-20

Habakkuk waited for an answer (2:1) and was rewarded with a vision from God. He was told to “*record the vision on tablets*” The vision is *certain to be fulfilled*, even if not immediately. God's future judgment on the haughty Babylonian empire is depicted (2:4-17). The futility of their idol worship is called out and set in contrast to the supreme dignity of Yahweh (2:18-20).

“Because you (Babylonians) have plundered many nations, the

peoples who are left will plunder you. For you have shed human blood; you have destroyed lands and cities and everyone in them” (2:8).

You will be filled with shame instead of glory. Now it is your turn! Drink and let your nakedness be exposed! The cup from the LORD’s right hand is coming around to you, and disgrace will cover your glory” (2:16).

The vision of ch.2 ends with a definitive statement concerning the sovereignty of God over *all the affairs of men and nations*:

“The LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him” (2:20).

There is no injustice that escapes the notice of God. When He raised up foreign nations to discipline His people, Israel, He was watching very closely to see if they went one inch further than He intended for them to go. There are many passages in the Old Testament where God brings condemnation upon Israel’s neighbors for “going too far.” The Lord watches everything from His holy temple. Perhaps you have suffered some injustice at the hands of people or institutions. Take heart – God sees, God knows, and God will call them to account. All the earth will be silent in the courtroom of God’s all-seeing justice.

Note: **Habakkuk 2:4b** is quoted 3 times in the New Testament (Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38). ***“But the righteous person will live by faith” (2:4b).*** Each time it is quoted, it is used to point to an unchanging principle in the way that God requires us to relate with Him: *Faith (trust) in Him is always the basis for right standing before Him.*

Responsive Prayer, Vision and Confidence: 3:1-19

The musical notations at the beginning and end of this section indicate that it was intended for use in public worship. Verse 2 is a short prayer uttered by Habakkuk in response to the revelation God has given concerning the future. The prayer reflects a humble submission to the sovereign will of God, as well as a plea that God remember mercy in the midst of judgment.

A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet. On shigionoth. “LORD, I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds, LORD. Repeat them in our day, in our time make them known; in wrath remember mercy” (3:1,2).

Habakkuk then experienced a vision where God was seen intervening powerfully on behalf of His people, Israel. The vision evokes memories of Israel's exodus out of Egypt. A future redemption is pictured under figures from a past redemption.

“Sun and moon stood still in the heavens at the glint of your flying arrows, at the lightning of your flashing spear. In wrath you strode through the earth and in anger you threshed the nations. You came out to deliver your people, to save your anointed one” (3:11-13).

Habakkuk was terrified both by the vision and by the reminder that the Babylonian invasion was imminent. He determined to wait for the unfolding plan of God's justice (and mercy) for all nations.

***“I heard and my heart pounded, my lips quivered at the sound; decay crept into my bones, and my legs trembled. Yet I will wait patiently for the day of calamity to come on the nation invading us. Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior. The Sovereign LORD is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to tread on the heights.”
For the director of music. On my stringed instruments (3:16-19).***

The book of Habakkuk has come full circle. It began with questions and doubts, and ends on a note of sublime confidence in the wisdom and sovereignty of God. The circumstances of life had not changed, but the perspective of Habakkuk had changed as a result of his dialogue and encounter with God. Though a terrifying judgment is impending, he determined to “exult in the Lord” and to “rejoice in the God of his salvation” (3:18). The justice of God will ultimately prevail throughout the whole world.

Discussion Questions

1. If you could ask God one question right now, what would it be?
2. The *situation did not change* for Habakkuk; but his *perspective changed*. What has Habakkuk taught you about seeking God's perspective when things seem unclear to you?
3. We see a lot of seemingly unchecked evil in our world today. How does the book of Habakkuk impact the way you view such evil in our world? What hope does his message give to you?