

Habakkuk

Introduction: As a child, I viewed bad things a lot differently than I do today. My sisters outnumbered me two to one, and usually that meant that when it came down to a vote, I lost. So when it came down to watch a movie before bedtime, I didn't often get my choice. So instead of watching *The Three Stooges* (my personal favorite), I had to watch *Snow White, or The Sleeping Beauty*, or heaven forbid, *Anne of Green Gables*. I never got to watch anything with explosions. My little mind often wondered why life was so unjust.

Now, as an adult, the lack of justice in this world seems overwhelming. It seems like evil often rules in our society, to the point where it seems unchecked. If we look around us, sin abounds with little consequences. Our country legally recognizes & celebrates homosexual marriages. It seems that if you have enough money and lawyers, you can literally avoid any type of punishment. I was looking up some statistics, and the average jail time for murder is between 4-12 years. Sometimes you wonder—exactly where is the justice for all these things gone wrong? It is interesting to know that we aren't the first person to ask that question.

--In a very small book buried in your Old Testament, Habakkuk asks these very same questions. You could even make the case that the stuff he was facing was far more troublesome than the state of our country today—and Habakkuk lived around 2,600 years ago. In the three chapters that make up this book, we find that Habakkuk discovers the answer. In a world filled with sin, you can confidently place your trust in God and rejoice in Him.

Historical Background: In order to understand Habakkuk, it is critical that you understand what he and his country were facing. Habakkuk wrote this message a little before 600 BC. At this time in the history of Judah, God's people were morally and spiritually corrupt. They were worshipping Baal, they were offering horses to the sun god, and they were even offering their own children as sacrifices to idols. It was a disgusting time to in which to live.

--Habakkuk's people were not even ruling themselves. God had allowed the Assyrians to rule them, and they had been doing so for about a hundred years. But the Assyrian empire was beginning to weaken, and changes were on the horizon. It was at this time, a time filled with evil and sin and corruption, that Habakkuk writes his message.

Transition: Habakkuk is also interesting because he doesn't really deliver a message to the people like you think most prophets would. Rather, he dialogues with God. So we get to see his conversation with the Lord. Habakkuk is also somewhat of a musician; although we won't go into this, he writes a good bit of the book much like the Psalms, in a poetical style. So we have Habakkuk, prophet and poet. **First of all, Habakkuk begins his conversation with a question (but it is really more of a complaint).**

I. Habakkuk's Question (or complaint) to God

Explanation: *Let's read the first four verses together.* As you can see, Habakkuk is angry, and he is complaining. He is asking God over and over again, why are you letting all these bad things happen? Habakkuk is confused. He doesn't understand. It doesn't make sense. Evil has the upper hand, and you aren't doing anything to stop it. Look at verse 4 again. It says, "*The law is paralyzed*"; that means the law is sluggish and faint. Habakkuk is convinced that God's laws have been neutralized; they are ineffective. God's laws don't work anymore. The verse continues to say that the wicked have surrounded the righteous, and wrong judgment is everywhere. Why doesn't God help?

It is not wrong to ask God questions. We often do not understand things. The Psalms are filled with questions to God that the author did not know. We are often faced with problems in this life that we do not comprehend. God wants us to come to Him and talk to Him. That is part of the special relationship that believers have with their Lord. We can speak with Him and hears our thoughts and concerns. Sometimes we have to ask the question "why?" to God.

Illustration: The prophet paints a bleak picture. Habakkuk describes a time that seems to be the same today, doesn't he? Evil runs rampant, justice seems to have disappeared. The children of Israel offer children to idols, and this country condones abortions so the mother and father don't have to deal with the consequences. The children of Israel sacrificed their possessions to the idols; our country today strives to gather possessions to live for the idol of pleasure. It seems that the biggest news story this past week was the iPhone announcement that their new phone wouldn't have a normal headphone jack. People were so upset that they wouldn't be able to use their old headphones. This is what's important now? You just might wonder – where exactly is God in all of this? What's He doing? Then God answers Habakkuk. *Let's read vs. 5.*

Explanation: God tells Habakkuk to look around because he is going to do a work so shocking that Habakkuk won't even believe Him if He tells him. God has not gone away. He hasn't stopped listening. In fact, He answers a pointed complaint from Habakkuk. God answers Habakkuk with a declaration the prophet does not anticipate. *Read vs. 6* – God is going to raise up a new empire, the Chaldeans (or the Babylonians) to punish Habakkuk's people. If Habakkuk thought his country was bad, then he hadn't seen anything yet.

Vs. 7 – They are terrible and dreadful.

Vs. 8 – They are quick and fast and ready to destroy.

Vs. 9 – They will not be stopped in their quest to control.

Vs. 10 – They are so strong no nation will stop them.

Vs. 11 – They are so powerful they believe they are their own god.

This was the empire that was aiming to take over Habakkuk's land. Habakkuk is shocked, just like God said he would be. He complains that God isn't doing His job, and things seemingly get worse! Habakkuk can't believe the Lord's response, so he issues another complaint to God. *Let's read vs. 13.* Habakkuk can't believe that God would send another people *worse than they were* to punish and discipline Judah? How can you use these wicked people? Aren't you again ignoring these sins? In verses 15-17, Habakkuk likens the Babylonians to fishermen. They capture all these helpless fish (that's the Hebrews), empty their nets, and go at capturing again? He wonders when God will stop their greed.

Application: Now we are probably thinking, Habakkuk might want to be careful. He is complaining and yelling at God? But the thing is, when things go wrong, our response is often exactly like his. What about even the little things? When that slow car pulls out in front of you (as they often do in the roundabouts of Medford), how fast does that complaint come flying out of your mouth? Teenagers, when your mom or dad doesn't let you do something you really want to do this weekend, what's the response? Husbands, when your wife asks you to pick up something at the store or help out with some chore, what's the response? When you are complaining about your circumstances, you are really complaining about the God that has put you in those circumstances. Even if you are complaining to someone else, you are really complaining about God. Habakkuk is confused and angry.

Transition: However, in spite of Habakkuk's complaints, we see God, like a perfect Father, lovingly point His angry child toward truth. God issues His perfect response. **We see secondly...**

II. God's Calming Answer to Habakkuk (chapter 2)

Explanation: Read verse 1, we see Habakkuk rightly longing to hear God's response. He was ready to hear what the Lord had to say; in fact, Habakkuk might have been ready to hear some correction regarding his complaint.

The Lord makes two things very clear in the next couple of verses.

--In verse 2, God tells Habakkuk to write this down. I am glad Habakkuk did. We don't want to forget what God had to say.

--In verse 3, we see that God's plan will come to pass. It may take time, it may not be as fast as we want it, but it will happen. God's plans for you may seem delayed or missing, but they will come to pass, as Habakkuk is about to find out.

--God is in control. God's ultimate plan where he will one day rule over all and every knee will bow—it seems like it has been a long time in coming—but God's kingdom will happen.

--So after being very clear about God's plan and the fact that it will happen, God gives Habakkuk the answer to His question with a response that is the defining moment in the book, and the response will be used hundreds of years later throughout the New Testament and is one of the most well-known verses in the Old Testament. *Let's read vs. 4.*

"Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him, but the righteous shall live by his faith.

The first part of the verse is referring to the Babylonians. As we described them in chapter one, these guys are proud (lifted up) and they are not upright. We have seen how wicked they actually are. Who are the righteous? The Bible says that no one is righteous of their own doing. These are people that God has made righteous – they are made just by God when they repented of their sins and turned to Him. These righteous are believers. The just, the righteous, the one who believes lives by his faith and his trust in God. Now this verse is surrounded by verses describing wickedness and evil; one commentator said that the verse "sparkles like a diamond in a pile of soot." The Lord simply tells Habakkuk how to live his life. Not by worrying or complaining about his surroundings like he did in chapter 1, but trusting in God's perfect plan to come into his life as He wills it. There is a confident

trust that is implied in verse 4. Those who believe will live their lives trusting God and following after Him.

--The rest of chapter 2, God explains some of his plan to Habakkuk. The Babylonians will *eventually* be destroyed. They will be punished for their wickedness—in God’s timing. Habakkuk issues a series of woes to the Babylonians that indicate that God will have the ultimate victory. And guess what? History tells us that God’s plan happens. The Babylonian empire eventually crumbles as various empires rise and fall—all apart of God’s plan.

Transition: The Lord has spoken, and as we go into the final chapter, Habakkuk is a different person. He has been changed by the Lord’s answer to his complaints. In chapter 1, he was giving God a few tips on how to run the universe, and after God’s mighty answer in chapter 2, Habakkuk can only utter praise and adoration for the Lord. The difference from the first chapter to the last chapter is amazing. Habakkuk focuses on God’s mighty power and He praises the Lord.

III. Habakkuk’s Confident Response of Joy

Explanation: Habakkuk has heard God’s report. The Babylonians are coming. No longer is he complaining, but He is in awe of the Lord’s power. The Lord is delivering justice. Look at verse 2. He asks for two things—he asks for God’s power to be shown (“revive the work”) and God’s mercy to be implemented.

--From verses 3-15 in chapter 3, Habakkuk writes a psalm of praise as he recalls the times back in the days of Moses when the Lord’s amazing power took the children of Israel through the wilderness. Habakkuk knows that if God led His children through the parting of the Red Sea and through years of wilderness wanderings and through many victories of enemies with seeming advantages in power and military might, Habakkuk knows God can take care of His people through Babylon.

--Look at verse 13. God was going to save His people.

--Look at verse 15. Habakkuk remembered the utter destruction of the Egyptian (who were wicked and persecuting God’s people) in the Red Sea.

After his conversation with God and recalling God’s amazing power, Habakkuk is weak. Look at verse 16. But he can quietly rest in the Lord *even* as the Babylonians come to take over.

--Habakkuk then realizes what could happen when the enemy comes in verse 17. Crops are going to fail, there will be little food, cattle and material possessions could be gone. **Everything that is important from a physical standpoint for a person in those days would disappear, yet Habakkuk rises and rejoices in the Lord.** He will not just endure the lack of material things, he will joy in the Lord. He will have little, yet his circumstances do not influence his spiritual state. How does he have this joy? The last verse in the book explains it. God is his strength; he will live by his faith, and nothing, not even an invading army, can shake his faith in God. Although Habakkuk does not explain it in his book, we know what happens next. The Babylonians do come as a part of God’s judgment on his unbelieving people. Many of the Hebrews are deported from their land, one of which was Daniel. God’s plan was in motion.

Application: What he is saying at the end of chapter 3 very much has a modern-day equivalent. If I lose my job, if I lose my house, if I lose my friends, if something I greatly treasure is lost, I can still rejoice in God because my faith is not in those things, my faith is in God. Melissa and I have a goal—we would like to buy a house in the next year. It’s fun to imagine a nice house to live in that we would own, but that house—it’s not my joy. If I live in that little apartment for the next twenty years, that’s okay. If I am still driving the same Korean Hyundai when I am fifty, that’s okay too. If my circumstances totally change, I don’t have to worry. Those things don’t matter. In reality, we don’t know what the rest of 2016 will bring, or even tomorrow. **But I can guarantee, based on the promises of God’s holy Word, you can have rejoice tomorrow and next year, if you live by your faith (knowing His Word, having a relationship with him) and allowing God to be your strength.**

Conclusion: You might say, “George, that sounds good, but you don’t know my situation and my circumstances.” I want to show you a picture. These are good friends of mine – Luke and Charlotte. They are missionaries at an orphanage in Africa. They work with children that are facing extraordinarily difficult situations – and they are able to teach them of God. The second son Wesley (on the left) has spent most of his childhood growing up in Africa. They recently posted that one of Wesley’s first phrases he has learned is the phrase “Water’s out!” – meaning there is no running water for them that day at the Ivory Coast. I didn’t think much about it until later when I realized they thought that was funny. No running water? That was just life in Africa. To be able to rejoice - it wasn’t wrapped up in their conveniences and their things – it’s wrapped up in their faith. I complain when the water isn’t instantly warm for my shower in the morning, or when we run out of milk before breakfast,

or when the cable goes out. Because let's be honest, if we place our hope of satisfaction in that bigger home, or the newer car, or the boat, or the bank account, or an education, or that friendship, we are never going to be satisfied. What scares me is that sometimes on a Sunday, I will be happier that my team won than what God showed me from His word that morning at worship. The righteous *live* by their faith - not by their circumstances. For the believer, living by your faith is not a one-time thing; it is in continual motion. You didn't just believe in God back then; you believe in God now. This is living by your faith. That even in your current, often confusing circumstances, you can trust God. The Christian doesn't live for the things around him; he lives for the God above Him. Don't understand how life works here on earth? Live by your faith and trust the God that does understand. When you wonder why on earth the situation with your spouse, your children, your job or your health that you are dealing with is happening to you, rejoice in the God of your salvation and patiently cling to Him. I need this truth because far too often I grumble and complain and bemoan my circumstance rather than remembering I am a child of God, with an eternity with Jesus that has already, just barely begun.

What's the result from living this way? One, it gives you *freedom*. You are no longer tied to the world's idea of living. While the rest of the world struggles to make a life that pleases them, or to make a name for themselves, or to leave their mark on the world, you live by your faith. You live by God's word. Secondly, it gives you a *focus*. The believer who lives by their faith – they know where to spend their time and their resources. They know where to invest their lives to make a difference. I am grateful for so many volunteers at FBC that realize that their faith is so critical that this is where they place their energies – relying on him for strength and proclaiming his name. Lastly, it gives you an *answer*. While those that don't know Jesus go from job to job or thrill to thrill or relationship to relationship looking for happiness, the believer knows the source of true joy.

We just read about a man who was facing the loss of every physical possession and lived in a nation that was about to lose all freedoms, and he faced physical harm. Yet he could rejoice in his faith. If you want that joy, you can find it Jesus Christ. He offers a free gift of salvation to all who turn from their sins and trust in him by faith. He has paid the penalty of all your sins, and he desires to have a relationship with you. I would invite you to know Him today. The child of God, like Habakkuk, can rejoice in his faith, because this life is not the end, rather it is just the beginning.

Believer, how do you respond to hardships? Do complaints fly from your lips when hardships come? When you have it bad, do you rush to speak with your family and friends and declare that you have it worse than anyone else? Or do you rejoice in the God of your faith? When you are discouraged and hurt and when difficult times plunge you into confusion, do you cling to God?