

BIBLE SURVEY - HABAKKUK

"For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." Habakkuk 2:14

Habakkuk is of great relevance to us today. It deals with difficult questions:

Why do the innocent suffer?

Why do the guilty go free?

Why doesn't God punish the wicked?

How can a Holy God overlook the wickedness all around us?

Who was Habakkuk?

Habakkuk means *one who embraces*, it is a wrestling term. Habakkuk worked in the Temple in Jerusalem. He was a contemporary of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and Zephaniah.

When Did Habakkuk Minister?

Habakkuk prophesied during the final days of the Assyrian Empire and at the beginning of the rise of Babylon. Habakkuk had lived through the Reforms of king Josiah (2 Kings 22 & 23), who had abolished many of the idolatrous practices of his father, Amon, and grandfather, Manasseh (2 Kings 21:11-22). The Empire of Assyria had fallen, just as Nahum had prophesied. Egypt and Babylon were contending for dominance. In 605 B.C., the good king Josiah had been killed at the battle of Carchemish. The burden of Habakkuk was published during the early years of the reign of king Jehoiakim (609 – 598 B.C.).

A Time of Apostasy

It was a time of increasing moral and spiritual deterioration in Judah. The evil reign of Jehoiakim was a sad contrast to the days before him, under his father, king Josiah (Jeremiah 22-26).

Interrogatory Prayer

The Book of Habakkuk is set in dialogue form (as is Job). Habakkuk believed in interrogatory prayer. Intercessory prayer is when we ask God for things. Interrogatory prayer is when we ask God questions. Habakkuk complains to God about the *"violence... iniquity... trouble... plundering..."* (1:2-3). Malicious wickedness by those who are meant to be God's people demand action from God. *"The law is powerless, and justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous; therefore perverse judgment proceeds."* (1:4).

Why?

Habakkuk had trouble reconciling his faith in a good, righteous, just and all-powerful God with the prevalent wickedness in Jerusalem. He was troubled with an eternal: **"Why?"**

Why does a Holy God allow such terrible crimes to go unchecked?

Why do the wicked prosper?

Why does God seem to be silent in times of disaster?

The Structure of Habakkuk

Chapter 1: **Grappling with the problems of wickedness.**

Chapter 2: **Grasping the significance of God's Judgment.**

Chapter 3: **Glorying in God's Sovereignty.**

Grappling with Grievous Evil

Habakkuk was confused and bewildered. He had lived during the days of the great Reformation under king Josiah. He had seen the evil empire of Assyria collapse. But now he was seeing the rise of another wicked power, Babylon. The world seemed to be in upheaval. Violence was

abounding. Lawlessness was prevalent. God's people were being oppressed. Blatant idolatry was replacing the worship of the one true God. Justice was being subverted and *"therefore perverse judgement proceeds..."*

A Terrifying Judgment

God responds to the prophet Habakkuk: *"Look among the nations and watch - be utterly astounded! For I will work a work in your days, which you will not believe, though it were told you. For indeed I am raising up the Chaldeans... terrible and dreadful... fierce... they all come for violence"* (Habakkuk 1:5-9).

How Can God Allow Wicked Nations to Prevail?

Habakkuk is astounded and dismayed. But the Babylonians seem even worse than the Assyrians! *"Are you not from everlasting, O Lord My God, my Holy One... You are of purer eyes than to behold evil..."* (1:12-13). Habakkuk was burdened with his backslidden people and broken world, he knew that God must judge evil, but how could a Holy God use such wicked people as the Babylonians to fulfil His purposes? How could a Holy God use such a wicked nation as the Chaldeans to judge the nation like Judah, which was not nearly as bad as they who *"continue to slay nations without pity"* (1:17).

Waiting on the Watchtower

Habakkuk declares that he will go up to the watchtower and stand on the ramparts to await the answer of the Lord *"to see what He will say to me, and what I will answer when I am corrected"* (2:1).

Write and Warn

The Lord responds, commanding Habakkuk to: *"write the vision and make it plain on tablets..."* (2:2). God tells Habakkuk that he is achieving nothing by sitting on the watchtower. He needs to go down into the streets and write what God has told him for passers-by to read it. Habakkuk needs to be warning the people, not sitting at a distance to watch and see whether God will do what He has promised.

Five Woes on Babylon

God declares five woes upon the Chaldeans:

- 1. Injustice** - plundering nations by extortion, looting the fruits of other people's labours. *"Who increases what is not his."* God hates theft and robbery. Unjust weights and measures are an abomination to Him.
- 2. Covetousness** - *"Woe to him who covets evil gain..."*, *"you give shameful counsel to your house, cutting off many peoples, and sin against your soul."* Greed and envy will reap judgement, *"because he enlarges his desire as hell and he is like death and cannot be satisfied"* (2:5).
- 3. Bloodshed** - *"Woe to him who builds a town with bloodshed, who establishes a city by iniquity!"* Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people.
- 4. Drunkenness** - *"Woe to him who gives drink to his neighbour, pressing him to your bottle, even to make him drunk..."*, *"for the violence done to Lebanon will cover you, and the plunder of beasts which made them afraid, because of men's blood and the violence of the land and the city, and of all who dwell in it"* (2:17). The destruction of the forests of Lebanon and the mass killing of animals for ivory, tusks and skins, the Lord will call men to account. The Lord has forbidden the chopping down of fruit trees during times of war. Drunkenness, debauchery and destruction of God's forests and creatures will be judged.

5. **Idolatry** - Those who worship man-made idols carved out of wood, stone and metal are ignoring the one true God. Idolatry is the most condemned sin in the Bible.

"But the Lord is in His Holy Temple, let all the earth keep silence before Him." Habakkuk 2:20

Babylon Will Be Judged

Raising up the Babylonians to judge His wicked people does not mean that God will allow them to get away with their evil. Make no mistake, Babylon will be judged. But first God is going to use Babylon to judge Judah and Jerusalem.

Woes Pronounced by Christ Jesus

On the shores of Galilee, our Lord Jesus Christ pronounced a curse on three of the towns: *"Woe to you Capernaum", "Woe to you Bethsaida", "Woe to you Korazin"*. However, the Lord did not pronounce any woe against Tiberias. If you go to the Lake of Galilee today, you will have to stay in Tiberias, because the other towns that Jesus declared woes against, have all disappeared.

Babylon will be Covered in Shame, But the Earth will be Covered with God's Glory

Babylon's glory will be covered with shame, because of their drunken debauchery, shameful conduct, ruthless exploitation, plundering nations, extorting people and destroying the forests and wildlife. God will cover Babylon with shame and utterly destroy them. But ***"the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea"*** (2:14).

The Just Shall Live by Faith

"Behold the proud, his soul is not upright in him; but the just shall live by his faith." Habakkuk 2:4. The proud trusts in himself. However, the righteous trust in God. The just shall live by faith. The Apostle Paul uses Habakkuk 2:4, as a foundational text for the proclamation of the Gospel. *"For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to Salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith. As it is written, the just shall live by faith."* Romans 1:16-17

How Can a Holy God Allow Sinful People into His Heaven

True saving faith is supernatural, a gracious gift of God that He produces in the regenerate heart. Only by means of God's grace, received by faith, can a person appropriate and experience true righteousness. Sin is incompatible with God's Holiness. How can a Holy God allow sinful people, like you and I, into His Heaven? Only by Divine intervention. The Cross of Christ and the final Judgment are fulfillments of this Revelation in Habakkuk.

Justification by Faith

Habakkuk can be called a forerunner of the Reformation. This verse in Habakkuk 2:4, as explained by the Apostle Paul, deeply influenced the Reformers, Dr. Martin Luther and John Calvin. ***"The just shall live by faith"*** became watchwords and battle cries of the Reformation, proclaiming the foundational doctrine of Justification by Faith.

Perseverance of the Faithful

The word in Hebrew used for Faith, in Habakkuk 2:4, also means faithfulness, indicating an ongoing condition of walking and living by faith. Faith is plainly not a one-time act of token commitment, but a way of life. A true believer will habitually persevere in faith throughout his life.

Salvation Comes Through Christ and is Received by Faith

In Galatians, the Apostle Paul refers again to this key verse in Habakkuk: ***"For as many as are of the works of the Law are under the curse; for it is written, cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the Book of the Law, to do them, but that no one is justified by the Law in the sight of God is evident, for the just shall live by faith... Now to***

Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He does not say, unto seeds, as of many, but as of one, and to your Seed, who is Christ. And this I say, that the Law, which was 430 years later, cannot allow the Covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ, that it should make the promise of no effect. For if the inheritance is of the Law, it is no longer of promise; but God gave it to Abraham by a promise." Galatians 3:10-18

"Therefore the Law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith." Galatians 3:24

The Wicked are Doomed to Destruction - But the Righteous Will Flourish

The Chaldeans, drunk with the blood of nations they have plundered, shall, in time, be destroyed. Yet God's people will flourish and the glory of the Lord will fill the earth. The wicked are doomed. However, for God's people, there is a glorious future. What man means for evil, God can use for good. *"All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose."* God's thoughts are higher than our thoughts, and His ways above our ways. (Isaiah 55:9).

Ask the Tough Questions

Habakkuk confirms that yes, the world is full of suffering and evil. We live in a fallen world. However, it is not wrong to ask hard questions of God. It is good to think through our Faith and face up to the difficult questions which life throws at us. Although we may not always understand what God is doing behind the scenes, we can be absolutely confident in His eternal purposes. **We may not understand God's will, but we can trust it!**

Injustice on Earth Demands Judgement in Heaven

Much of man's wickedness fails to receive justice on earth, in this life. However, the problem of suffering points us beyond this life to the next. There is a Day of Judgment coming. The Eternal Creator, our Eternal Judge, will call all to account and will put all things right at the end.

God in Habakkuk

Habakkuk reveals much about the character of God. God is Holy (1:12,13; 3:3), Just (1:12), Sovereign (2:20; 3:19), Unchanging (1:12; 3:6), Merciful (3:2), The Saviour (3:13,18), The Judge (2:13,16; 3:3-15), and The Revealer of Truth (2:2). Jesus is: **"the God of My Salvation"** (3:18).

A Prayer for Revival

The Prophet responds to God's Revelation with a heartfelt prayer for Revival: *"O Lord, I have heard your speech and was afraid; O Lord revive Your work in the midst of the years! In the midst of the years make it known, in wrath, remember mercy"* (3:2).

A Psalm Set to Music

The third chapter is a prophesy set to music. Moses, Deborah, Samuel, Saul, Elijah, Ezekiel and David, also set Psalms to music, but this is fairly rare amongst the prophets.

Contrasts in Habakkuk

There is a tremendous change between chapters 1, 2 of Habakkuk and of chapter 3.

Chapters 1 – 2

Wrestling with God
Miserable
Shouting
Prayer
Impatient
Asks for Justice
Depressed

Chapter 3

Resting in God
Joyful
Singing
Praise
Patient
Asks for Mercy
Rejoicing

God is apparently inactive

God is active in the past and future

Celebrating God's Wrath, Justice and Power

Habakkuk 3 ends with a hymn of praise and trust in the Lord and a Doxology. The glory and brightness of God's light is celebrated. His power is recognised - even in pestilences, fevers, afflictions, in His anger and wrath. The weapons of God are recognised in His bow and arrows, in His chariots of Salvation, his spears, earthquakes, floods, the trampling of nations in anger, through the whirlwind and *"You walked through the sea", "That I might rest in the day of trouble when He comes up to the people, He will invade them with His troops"* (3:16).

Yet Will I Rejoice in the Lord

"Though the fig tree may not blossom, nor fruit be on the vine; though the labour 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." Habakkuk 3:17-19. Joy is a choice in spite of our circumstances.

"Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy. He who continually goes forth weeping, bearing seed for sowing, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him." Psalm 126:5-6

Confidence in our Creator

Even if everything that was normal and predictable collapses, the prophet will still rejoice in God, for **who** He is, not only for **what** He does. Even on precipitous mountain heights we can trust God to make our feet as sure footed as a deer. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. God imparts strength, skill and steadfastness to His servants.

Hebrews Quotes Habakkuk

"For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise; for yet a little while, and He who is coming will come and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith; but if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him. But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul." Hebrews 10:36-39

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