



DESERT VIEW BIBLE CHURCH

HABAKKUK 3 • 3/26/2023

MAIN POINT

We can continue to put our hope in God regardless of our circumstances, knowing He can be trusted.

INTRODUCTION

When is a time you remember saying, “That’s not fair!”? What would have been more fair?

When have you been confused about why God allowed something to happen? Have you ever asked Him, “How long?” What was the issue for you?

The Book of Habakkuk starts with a complaint against God. It seemed to the prophet that God was doing nothing while sin increased in Judah. Habakkuk complained: “God, do something!” This study of Habakkuk will remind us that God can always be

trusted, and that it's not explanations we need from God, but a renewed vision of who He is.

UNDERSTANDING

In chapters 1–2, Habakkuk grapples with two mysteries: (1) Why does God allow evil to go unpunished in Judah? (2) How could God use Babylon to judge sin in Judah, since Babylon was more wicked than Judah? After gaining God's perspective on the problem, the prophecy concludes in chapter 3 with a hymn of praise. In spite of the difficult days ahead, Habakkuk would continue to praise the Lord, confident that God is God, He is holy, He does care, and He will do something—in His time and in His way.

READ HABAKKUK 1:2–4.

Habakkuk wrestled with a problem that every generation of believers faces: Why does God seem to be doing nothing to confront the problem of sin and evil?

Describe Habakkuk's tone or mood in these verses.

We can sense the deep frustration and perplexity in Habakkuk's words. His agony was real. His plea reminds us of laments found in the psalms (see Ps. 13:1 for an example).

What's the difference between doubting God and wanting to understand God's purposes? Is it wrong to question God?

Prayer that includes an element of questioning God may be a means of increasing one's faith and a gaining a greater understanding of God's ways. Expressing doubts and crying out about unjust situations in the world may show one's trust in God and one's confidence that God does have an answer to humanity's problems. We may question what God is doing, but we never need to question God's character and purpose. We can always trust His heart, even when we don't understand what His hand is doing.

READ HABAKKUK 1:5-6,12-13.

Habakkuk got an answer from the Lord beginning in verse 5, but not the answer he expected or wanted!

How did God answer Habakkuk's complaint?

God would deal with the sins of His people by raising up Babylonians who would invade their land, destroy the temple, and carry people away into exile.

How might God use ungodly people today to accomplish His purposes?

The Lord is sovereign over the nations. While He can use ungodly rulers to accomplish His purposes, He also holds them accountable for their own actions. God would use Babylon to judge Judah; He would then punish Babylon.

What did God reveal to Habakkuk (and us) about Himself in verses 12-13?

Habakkuk had no doubts concerning God's true nature. God is eternal and holy. While life is filled with mysteries, we can trust our holy and just God to act fairly and faithfully.

READ HABAKKUK 3:2,16-19.

How had Habakkuk's attitude changed from chapter 1? What changed him— was it more information or a change of heart?

In Habakkuk 3:3-15, Habakkuk presents several characteristics of God. Verses 3-7 describe God's great acts of the past, particularly those done in connection with the exodus; verses 8-15 portray the Lord as a warrior who would bring future deliverance (though still using some exodus terminology). In times of uncertainty, what we need is not explanation but revelation— a renewed view of God.

Why would Habakkuk rejoice even though there was bad news for God's people? What does this say to us about what it means to live by faith?

Habakkuk's faith didn't depend on God's answering his prayers in a certain way. He rejoiced that God was God, He was holy, He cared, and He would act in His way and in His time. The prophet continued to hope in the Lord, even though all earthly sources of security were taken away.

What do you do to keep your faith strong while you are waiting for an answer from God?

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

What effect does circumstance have on your faith in God?

Where are you still waiting for God to act? Are you ready to rejoice in the Lord anyway? Why or why not?

If all your earthly sources of security were taken away, how would you continue to hope in the Lord?

PRAYER

Ask God to give group members a renewed vision of who He is. Pray they would keep their focus on Him when they are tempted to fear life's circumstances, and that when they can't understand what He is doing they would trust His heart.

COMMENTARY

HABAKKUK 1:2-13

The Book of Habakkuk consists of a dialogue between the Lord and His prophet Habakkuk. This discussion was instigated by circumstances within Judah during the last part of the seventh century BC. Josiah had been among Judah's most capable rulers. Under his leadership the kingdom observed the instructions contained in the Law of Moses. For over a decade, a spiritual reformation characterized life in Judah.

However Josiah had died fighting trying to block the movement of Egyptian troops. With his death, the nation became a vassal state of Egypt. Large segments of the population abandoned the biblical principles that had steered Josiah's reign. Instead, sin was rampant. Idolatry was fashionable. Pagan altars were erected. False prophets were exalted, and priests served on their own authority (Jer. 5:31). Adultery was commonplace. Illicit sexual relations between neighbors were typical. Prostitution

flourished. People pursued every sexual impulse (Jer. 5:7-8). Mistreatment of helpless individuals was commonplace. Wealthy persons prospered at the expense of those who were poor.

1:2-4. As Habakkuk observed this scandalous behavior, he asked God why these sins went unpunished. Why was God so inactive while sin was increasing in Judah? Did God allow people to sin without experiencing judgment? The prophet recognized the relationship between sin and punishment. However, he wondered how long he must wait for the judgment of his people. He had waited a long time but nothing had happened. God appeared to be doing nothing about the prevalence of evil over righteousness in the nation.

1:5-6. Habakkuk had asked, "Why do you allow sin to go unpunished?" The Lord answered His prophet's prayer. The answer, however, was not what the prophet wanted to hear. Habakkuk wanted judgment, but he was not prepared for the manner in which the Lord would accomplish that judgment.

The Lord said, "Look at world events." He directed the prophet to the destruction of the Assyrian Empire and the rise of the Babylonians. Habakkuk had limited his vision to Judah. The Lord instructed him to look at the entire world. Whenever individuals restrict their view to a portion of the situation, they may only see the problem and fail to notice the Lord's solution. The Lord's solution included the Babylonian army. The people of Judah had deceived themselves into thinking that because they were God's people, God would not let them be defeated. Yet the Lord, who had chosen them, here chose others to discipline them.

Several reasons existed for Habakkuk not to believe what the Lord was doing. First, the Lord's prediction seemed incredible and conflicted with the will of the people. Second, the people of Judah probably considered Babylon a potential liberator. Third, the Lord's message was so radically different that many could not accept what He said. They clung to the false security that He would never allow Jerusalem to be destroyed because His temple was there. Finally, some people considered Egypt the stronger world power.

1:12-13. The rhetorical question that begins this verse does not reflect doubt. Rather, it conveys both assurance and entreaty. Habakkuk had no doubts concerning God's true nature. God is eternal and holy. The use of God's personal name Yahweh (translated LORD) recalls that a covenant relationship existed between Israel and God.

Judah would not be totally destroyed. The Babylonians had been chosen by God to punish, not to eradicate His people. God's response did not answer the prophet's question satisfactorily for his comprehension. Nevertheless, the prophet's faith in God remained solid. His use of the title Rock suggests that God provides constancy in an insecure age.

As Habakkuk considered the Lord's response to his initial question (v. 2), he found himself more perplexed (v. 13). Whereas Habakkuk recognized that his fellow countrymen had sinned, he considered the sins of the Babylonians as much more wicked. He knew that the Lord was holy. He also understood that the Babylonians were evil. They worshiped false gods and committed atrocities against humanity. Since the Lord's nature cannot abide evil in any form, His use of the Babylonians to punish Judah appeared to contradict God's essential character. To date, the Lord had failed to resolve this dilemma in the prophet's analysis. In his mind the Lord remained silent on this issue.

Sometimes the Lord's silence can be explained by people's sin and their failure to repent. However, nothing in the book suggests Habakkuk had unresolved sin in his life. Rather, God's silence allowed the bewildered prophet time for further reflection. Through this process Habakkuk would learn more about God and develop greater spiritual maturity.

HABAKKUK 3:2-19

3:2-15. In Habakkuk's prayer recorded in chapter 3, his argumentativeness has been replaced with absolute submission. The prophet no longer questioned God's action. He was awestruck with his new insight into what was taking place in the world. The Lord was God. He was governing the world with splendor and power.

The proper focus of worship must always be on God. Habakkuk praised God for His wondrous acts, particularly those during the exodus out of Egypt (3:2). The prophet did not experience these wonders firsthand but had heard of them from the Bible record. When Habakkuk considered all the great deeds of his God, he was overwhelmed.

As the prophet pondered the greatness of the Lord and how he had so mightily delivered Israel in times past by his wondrous deeds, he cried out for God to do it

again! Habakkuk had heard of God's wonders, but he longed to see them with his own eyes. We should not be content just to hear of the greatness of God; we should desire to have a personal encounter with him.

3:16-19. Habakkuk's conversation with the Lord had opened new insight into God's ways. The simple statement "I heard" sums up Habakkuk's response to God's disclosure. The verb involves understanding and acting on that which is heard. Here the sense is that God had resolved the prophet's difficulties.

A genuine encounter with God is far more than an intellectual exercise. The graphic description of Habakkuk's physical reaction to God's revelation corroborates this reality. Most occurrences of the word rendered "trembled" express agitation caused by some deeply rooted emotion. In this case the emotion is the sense of reverence the revelation of God's presence unleashed.

Habakkuk's sole recourse was to "wait." The prophet once questioned God's apparent failure to punish Judah's sins. Here he knew that punishment was coming. Yet he also realized two additional certainties. First, the punishment would not exterminate Judah. God would not abandon His people. Second, the wicked Babylonians would likewise be punished for their sins.

Habakkuk had gained an unshakable faith in the Lord. His new devotion was no longer contingent on external circumstances. Ancient Judah was an agrarian society. Figs, grapes, olives, and grain were primary crops. Sheep and cattle provided dairy products and meat. If these items disappeared, starvation inevitably would follow.

However, Habakkuk's faith rested in the Lord, not circumstances. He knew God could keep him from starving to death. But if God for some reason allowed him to die, that too was all right. The Lord was still the God of Habakkuk's salvation. Even in extremely dire circumstances, the prophet's relationship with God was cause for rejoicing.

In summary, Habakkuk declared his confident faith in the mighty God, leading to rejoicing. We need to respond to God's presence and work with awe. We can find security in God's complete and sure rule of all that is. We can rejoice regardless of our circumstances, knowing that God can be trusted.