

“MAJOR THEMES FROM THE MINOR PROPHETS: HABAKKUK.”

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Sermon Texts: Habakkuk 1:1-4; 2:1; 3:17-19

Introduction.

Why? Why, why, why? That's the deepest and hardest kind of question. Why do we ask why questions? We ask why questions because there's deeply ingrained in us a fundamental belief that somehow life on this planet should make sense. Something deep in our souls begs for meaning and purpose.

I got an e-mail recently from a fairly new Christian, someone who's just starting to learn and grow and ask questions about God and our world.

“God created all and arranged all. God loves people. Why did God kill all people except for Noah's family? Why did God allow terrorist to kill 3,000 people on 11/9? Why doesn't God eliminate all bad things and leave only good things for people?” (Robin's e-mail).

He is like us, searching for meaning, trying to make sense of things that don't make sense. Why does God allow bad things to happen to good people? Why does God allow bad things at all? Why?

Habakkuk is our brother, he's one of us. He asks why questions.

Habakkuk.

Habakkuk is unique among the prophetic writings for a couple of reasons.

First, Habakkuk contains no direct message from God to God's people.

The prophecy of Habakkuk reads like a prayer journal. Habakkuk looks at the problems of his day, the problems of his nation and his people, the struggles of life and he writes his questions, his prayers, his urgent pleadings with God and God's answers.

Second, Habakkuk and Jonah are unique among the prophetic books in that the content flows in exact order. It's not like a collection of different prophecies over a long period of ministry. There's a very clear sequential development of thought.

Also, Habakkuk is unique along with Jonah and Hosea in that he doesn't just speak his prophecy, he lives it. This is personal and real for him, God and he are the only two central characters.

The outline is very simple. Habakkuk asks a question, God answers. As a result of that answer, Habakkuk asks a second question and God gives a second answer. Then Habakkuk concludes with a prayer of praise and a confession of faith.

Habakkuk's first question and complaint, 1:1-4.

Why? Why does God allow wicked practices to continue in the land and go unpunished? Why does God allow evil to continue?

Habakkuk's pouring out a complaint to God. "How long, oh God?" Why aren't you listening and responding? Why aren't you doing anything?

As a prophet in Judah he isn't confronting Judah, he's confronting Judah's God. He's calling God to account and asking why God is doing nothing about all the evil and wickedness and violence and corruption and injustice and iniquity and perversion and immorality that are swirling all around in Judah. The courts and legal system are a total failure, perversion of justice is rampant, as are the perversion of morals and religion.

Habakkuk looked at his culture, at his nation, and saw the foundations being destroyed by unrighteousness and he vented his frustration to God. His country was in a serious spiritual recession.

People who say the OT or the Bible is irrelevant haven't read it. Habakkuk's prayer could be prayed by any American Christian. We have more knowledge and information about what is going on in our world and less power or hope of doing anything about it. We feel deeply the words of the Psalmist: "When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do?"

Habakkuk does the one thing we must all do, turn to God in earnest prayer and plead with Him as the sovereign Lord of the universe.

God's response to Habakkuk's complaint, 1:5-11.

Habakkuk 1:5-6 "Look among the nations, and see; wonder and be astounded.

For I am doing a work in your days that you would not believe if told.

⁶For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, who march through the breadth of the earth, to seize dwellings not their own.

"I am doing a work..." I am working. Incredible, what good news, what a reminder that God does hear and answer, He's at work. This sounds promising.

"Not only am I doing a work, but I am doing a work in your days." This is even better news. Not only is God at work, but he will live to see the fruit of it. Then comes even better news.

"I am doing a work in your days that you would not believe if told." This sounds just like God. He does things that go beyond normal human boundaries of belief. Above and beyond all we could ask or imagine.

"I am raising up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, who march through the breadth of the earth, to seize dwellings not their own."

What? Habakkuk can't believe his ears. This is beyond belief but in the wrong direction. No one living in Jerusalem would ever have dreamed this. This is beyond their worst nightmare.

Not only will the Chaldeans rise up, but God will be the one who raises them up, and they will be His instrument of judgment. The capital of the Chaldeans is Babylon. All through Scripture

Babylon is synonymous with evil and all that is wicked and sinful in the world (from the tower of Babel in Genesis 11 to the Whore of Babylon in Revelation 17-18).

They are the epitome of violence and brutality. This was God's answer to Habakkuk's prayer. It's enough to make a man reconsider ever praying again.

Habakkuk's second question and complaint, 1:12 – 2:1.

Habakkuk's second question is even more distressing than the first. It's bad enough in Habakkuk's mind that God allows evil to happen and to continue to happen. But now matters are even worse when he understands that God uses wicked people to do His work and will.

God's solution to the problem was worse than the problem he was complaining about.

Sure, it's true, the people of Israel had turned away from God and had turned to idolatry and sexual immorality. They had rebelled against God and not kept His Word and the covenant commandments.

Yes, they deserved punishment and correction and judgment, but from the Babylonians. The Babylonians were far worse than Israel. How can this be?

It's like Christians in America praying again and again for spiritual revival and renew and a restoration of righteousness and God hearing our prayers and answering saying that He will send a vast army of militant al-Qaeda terrorists to sweep in and overthrow our nation and kill and deport most of the Christians.

How do you correct unrighteousness by using the unrighteous? God should be punishing their unrighteousness, not using it.

This is honest wrestling. At some point in every Christians life there should be a season of honest wrestling over how to reconcile the sovereignty of God and the existence of rampant evil in our world.

Notice two things here. **First**, Habakkuk stays in prayer. He stays in relationship with God. Even though things don't make sense, he doesn't give up or turn away. He keeps talking to the only person who can make sense of this.

Second, notice a subtle shift in the prayer from why to who, to who God is. What is there about this God that I don't understand but must seek to know? Who is this God who can even use the likes of the pagan Babylonians to do His perfect will?

"God, you are eternal, you are holy, you are sovereign and just, you are pure and you can do no wrong. You alone are faithful and always act in integrity. How can this be?"

Having boldly complained to God He waits.

Habakkuk 2:1 I will take my stand at my watchpost and station myself on the tower, and look out to see what he will say to me, and what I will answer concerning my complaint.

It's hard to tell if this is defiant arrogance or confident trust. Is he demanding an answer or is he patiently waiting for an answer?

Can we trust a God whose ways are so far above our ways and whose thoughts are so far above our thoughts that He might even do the very opposite of what we think is good or right?

God's response to Habakkuk's second complaint, 2:2-20.

God tells Habakkuk to write this down because it isn't just for Habakkuk, it's for all of us to read. God wants it to be remembered, we are going to have to come back to it again and again.

God's answer to Habakkuk's second complaint has *three parts*.

First, God will spare the righteous, 2:4.

Hab. 2:4 is very important and it is quoted three times in the NT. Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38. It's the second most quoted OT verse in the NT (Only Psalm 110 is quoted more frequently).

The just shall live by faith.

When God seems absent and silent and unresponsive, has He abandoned them or us? No, the justified live by faith. Those who trust in God will see His salvation.

II Corinthians 4:8-9 We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair;⁹ persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed.

II Corinthians 4:16-18 So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.¹⁷ For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison,¹⁸ as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

No matter what happens, no matter how bad things get, God is working in all things even in our day doing a thing that no one could image, and causing all things to work for His glory and our good. The righteous live by faith.

Second, God will bring judgment even on those He uses to bring judgment.

God answers Habakkuk that He will also bring His fierce judgment down on the Babylonians which He announced in the form of five woes or curses in verses 6-15.

But here is the problem we all have. We have to wait for the promise. Waiting is hard. Living in the gap between the promise and the fulfillment is hard to do. It tests and tries our faith. And faith is what we need to live in that gap.

All of this would come to pass soon enough. The Persian rose up and destroyed Babylon in 539BC, just 50 years after Babylon had destroyed Judah.

Third, trust God. He is the final and sovereign ruler of the universe and of all the history of mankind.

Habakkuk 2:20 “But the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him.”

The Lord of heaven and earth will act, He will carry out His perfect will.

Notice something very important in this little book. It is very strategic and important in what it reveals to us about God. It plays a very important part in redemptive history and in our history.

God is utterly and absolutely sovereign over all the world and over all world history. God is completely in control of all things, of when good things happen and when bad things happen.

Habakkuk’s final response of praise, 3:1-19.

After his two complaints, after his frustration over unmet expectations, Habakkuk hears the response of God and comes to his senses. He gets back the right perspective. He gets his spiritual bearing and gets back on course.

Habakkuk spends the entire last chapter remembering and reaffirming the truth about God and the world. The light of God’s sun breaks through the clouds of confusion and despair.

Good theology always leads to soaring doxology. Good teaching always leads to good singing. The revelation of God’s glory is always cause to praise God for His glory.

Habakkuk ends with one of the most beautiful expressions of faith in the Bible.

Judah was still a mess, Babylon was on the way, but God is on the throne.

Hebrews 11:1 “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”

Hear his absolute confidence in God no matter what might be happening all around him. Even when every single earthly means for hope is gone, the Lord God Almighty is Lord, He is my strength, my hope, my confidence.

Application and conclusion.

This world of ours is a dark and scary and unpredictable place. Bad things happen all the time. The question before us is can God be trusted? And is our faith in Him strong enough for the hardest trial?

Habakkuk got one thing absolutely right from the beginning. He brought all his concerns and issues and frustrations and anxieties to God, to the only person who could do anything about them.

“Cast all your anxiety on him because He cares for you” (I Peter 5:7).

Our hope is a living hope and it is secured for us in heaven (I Peter 1:3-9).

God will take us out of our comfort zones to show us our comfort can only be in Him. God will pull out from under us the props we have been leaning on so that we will lean only on Him. God will take away all that we hold dear in this life so that we will hold most dear what's secured for us in the life to come.

There's the old saying, these are times that try men's souls. These are times that try men's faith. Trying times test our faith, test our trust, test our confidence.

How else does our faith grow, expect when challenged and stretched and tried and put in the fire and pressed down. Living by faith means learning to walk in the dark and even through the valley of the shadow of death and fear no evil.

The righteous live by faith.

Thank God for the cloud of witnesses that show us the way, that show us how to persevere. Abraham, Moses, Elijah, David, Habakkuk, Paul, Emma Gibson, Dick DeWaard, John Scholten and Case Vander Stelt.

Do we struggle and sometimes fail and fall short? Of course. So did the disciples. Remember the storm when they cried out, "Lord, don't you care that we are perishing?" Jesus replied, "You of little faith, why are you afraid?" (Mark 4:40).

The good news of the gospel is that our survival doesn't depend on us alone or on our own faith, but on the faithfulness of Him in whom we have faith.

II Timothy 1:12 I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me.

Our comfort in this life is not found in circumstance, but in God. In a world full of evil and trouble God is our only comfort in life and in death. No matter how dark the night, the sun still shines. And the best is yet to come.

Our comfort is not found in our own understanding or in how other people act or in having things turn out the way we expect or want. Our comfort and confidence is found only in the unchanging, never failing perfect wisdom and will of our heavenly Father.

Habakkuk 3:17-19 Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines,
the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food,
the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls,
¹⁸ yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will take joy in the God of my salvation.
¹⁹ God, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the deer's;
he makes me tread on my high places.