

Habakkuk

Habakkuk is next in our study of the minor prophets

As it is with many of the minor prophets, not much is known about them

- That is especially true of Habakkuk

We do know that Habakkuk's name means "to embrace" or "to cling"¹⁶

- His name is appropriate since he comes to embrace God's perspective rather than pushing his own agenda
- Whatever happens to the nation is inconsequential; the important matter is clinging to God¹⁷

Habakkuk will struggle with his own thoughts about God's ways

- But he will come to embrace God, trusting Him

Out of his own internal turmoil, Habakkuk will be able to minister to others, showing them how they need to embrace God as well

- That lesson is certainly applicable to us in the Church, isn't it?
- We need to learn to embrace and trust God as well, especially during times when we don't know exactly what God is doing

The Assyrian Empire has reached its zenith and is declining¹⁸

- As their power is declining, however, the Babylonians are rising
- They are the up-and-coming nation

In 612 B.C., the Babylonians destroyed the Assyrian city of Ninevah

- This was the message of Nahum that we just discussed

In 605 B.C., the Babylonians were under the leadership of Nebuchadnezzar

- It was this year that he deported thousands of Jewish leaders to Babylon

In 597 B.C., the second wave of deportation took place

Finally, in 586 B.C., Judah was destroyed by Babylon

- Judgment of God's people took place through this powerful, pagan nation

¹⁶ Charles L. Feinberg, *The Minor Prophets*, 205.

¹⁷ Bruce Wilkinson & Kenneth Boa, *Talk Thru the Bible*, 273.

¹⁸ Gerard Chrispin, *The Bible Panorama*, 381.

During this time, the nation of Judah has stubbornly refused to repent and change her sinful ways¹⁹

- God will not allow this situation to go on forever
- Hence, the prophecy of this book deals with God’s judgment for sin

Habakkuk is the last prophet sent by God to Judah before the Babylonian Captivity

- He is the last prophet to minister before the exile²⁰

Little does Habakkuk realize that God will use an outside nation to bring judgment upon Judah, His own people

- God will raise up the Babylonians to judge Judah
- *This announcement causes Habakkuk to struggle*

This is the third book that deals with the ultimate fate of a powerful nation

- Consider the following books and the nations that they deal with

Biblical book²¹	Deals with the fate of the nation of
Obadiah	Edom
Nahum	Assyria
Habakkuk	Babylon

If we are honest, there are many times when the circumstances of life appear to contradict God’s revelation of His plan and purpose

- Contradictory, of course, from our limited perspective
- Because we don’t know everything

Habakkuk struggled with this as well

- I think we will learn some valuable lessons as we continue to walk with the Lord

The book of Habakkuk breaks down into two major divisions²²

- Chapters 1-2 The prophet’s confusion
- Chapter 3 The prophet’s confession

I. Habakkuk’s confusion (chapters 1-2)

Chapter 1 opens with the words “the oracle”

- Some versions have “burden”

¹⁹ Wilkinson & Boa, 273.

²⁰ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Bible Handbook*, 256.

²¹ Dr. Alan B. Stringfellow, *Through the Bible in One Year*, 102.

²² Wilkinson & Boa, 275-76.

The first chapter of this prophecy is more like a complaint

- The prophet struggles to make sense out of his surroundings

The first part of this book is a dialogue between Habakkuk and the LORD

- The author takes his problems to God
- But the answers he receives are not the answers he expects

Habakkuk looks around him and notices that there is so much sin and violence

- It seems like the ungodly are not only progressing in their wins
- It seems like they are being rewarded for their efforts!

The prophet struggles to explain this

- How can a holy, righteous God allow this?
- How can God be just and seemingly turn a blind eye to this?

You can hear his heart in the opening few verses, “How long, O LORD, will I call for help, and You will not hear? I cry out to You, ‘Violence!’ yet You do not save. **3** Why do You make me see iniquity, and cause *me* to look on wickedness? Yes, destruction and violence are before me; strife exists and contention arises. **4** Therefore the law is ignored and justice is never upheld. For the wicked surround the righteous; therefore justice comes out perverted” (1:2-4)

Haven’t we all been there before?

- You look around you and see immorality, injustice, and wickedness abounding
- You pray and trust that God will resolve it
- Yet it seems that God’s timing is much later than we expect!

God’s answer, however, did not bring comfort to Habakkuk

- “Look among the nations! Observe! Be astonished! Wonder! Because / am doing something in your days – you would not believe if you were told. ⁶ For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans, that fierce and impetuous people who march throughout the earth to seize dwelling places which are not theirs” (1:5-6)

God says, in essence, “Even if I told you what I am about to do, it wouldn’t make sense to you! I will raise up an enemy of Judah to bring about their judgment”

Habakkuk struggles to reconcile this action of God with His character

- “Are You not from everlasting, O LORD, my God, my Holy One? We will not die. You, O LORD, have appointed them to judge; and You, O Rock, have established them to correct. **13** Your eyes are too pure to approve evil, and You cannot look on wickedness with favor. Why do You look with favor on those who deal treacherously? Why are You silent when the wicked swallow up those more righteous than they?” (1:12-13)

Part of Habakkuk’s complaint is that Babylon is more wicked than Judah!

- How can God use a wicked nation to bring about judgment on His own people?

Habakkuk learns that God is so sovereign that He can take and use even those who sin against His Word

- All of this is a part of God's will and plan
- Throughout all of this, God is not the author of sin!

A good NT reference that is similar to this situation is Acts 2:23

- This verse reminds us that Jesus Christ was “**delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.**”

Who was responsible for Jesus' death?

- God the Father, yes
- Godless men, yes

God displayed His sovereignty, even in the most heinous of crimes where the God-Man died²³

In the opening verse of chapter 2, the prophet states, “**I will stand on my guard post and station myself on the rampart; and I will keep watch to see what He will speak to me, and how I may reply when I am reproved**” (2:1)

- The prophet will wait for God's answer
- The prophet is already thinking of what to say when God speaks

How does the LORD answer His servant?

- Look at 2:4
- This famous and familiar passage is given in 2:4, “**but the righteous will live by his faith**”

This phrase is repeated three times in the NT (Rom 1:17; Gal 3:11; Heb 10:38)

Habakkuk strikes us a man of faith

- In just three short chapters, he comes at us with engaging questions and concerns for God
- However, he walks away more confused by the answers
- Yet he trusts God!

But God is not about to allow Babylon to escape without their own judgment

- God outlines five (5) judgments which will come upon this powerful nation²⁴
 - o 2:6 – greed, “**Woe to him who increases what is not his – for how long – and makes himself rich with loans?**”
 - o 2:9 – exploitation and extortion, “**Woe to him who gets evil gain for his house to put his nest on high, to be delivered from the hand of calamity!**”

²³ Chrispin, 381.

²⁴ Wilkinson & Boa, 276.

- 2:12 – violence, “Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed and founds a town with violence!”
- 2:15 – immorality, “Woe to you who make your neighbors drink, who mix in your venom even to make *them* drunk so as to look on their nakedness!”
- 2:19 – idolatry, “Woe to him who says to a *piece of wood*, ‘Awake!’ To a mute stone, ‘Arise!’ And that is *your* teacher? Behold, it is overlaid with gold and silver, and there is no breath at all inside it.”

The Babylonian nation was powerful and strong

- But God would make an end of their strength
- God would display His sovereignty even to the point of frustrating the plans of this nation

After listing these five (5) woes which will come upon the Babylonians, Habakkuk interjects this one-liner about God, “But the LORD is in His holy temple. Let all the earth be silent before Him” (2:20)

The right response for the nations at that time – and our time as well – is to be silent and submit to the LORD

- God is sovereign over nature
- God is sovereign over kings
- God is sovereign over kingdoms

The first two chapters deal with Habakkuk’s confusion

- But his perspective changes in chapter three

II. Habakkuk’s confession (chapter 3)

The first verse of the third chapter of Habakkuk records these words, “A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, according to Shigionoth” (3:1)

This third chapter of Habakkuk is written in beautiful Hebrew poetry²⁵

- It is thoroughly God-centered and God-saturated
- The prophet meditates deeply on the knowledge of God

This prayer is a desire for revival

- It is an expression of praise for the LORD’s work

²⁵ Feinberg, 206.

In 3:2, the prophet prays to the LORD, “in wrath remember mercy”

- Isn't that a beautiful act of submission?
- The prophet knows that judgment is coming, but he also asks God to remember His covenant promises

In 3:3-15, the prophet reminds himself of God's past dealings

- He had rescued His people from Egypt
- He had allowed His people to conquer Canaan

In light of this, Habakkuk reminds himself that God will also bring about future redemption for His people

- *Even though it didn't seem like it at the time!*

In 3:16-19, the prophet Habakkuk comes to a place of submission and trust in the LORD

- These are important verses for us to consider this afternoon

The prophet had questioned how God could use a wicked, pagan nation like Babylon to judge His own people

- In these closing verses, Habakkuk trusts that God's ways are best

Verse 17 is a “even if” scenario for Habakkuk

- Even if there was no fruit on the vine
- Even if the olive didn't produce oil
- Even if the fields didn't produce food
- Even if there were no cattle in the stalls

Notice his words in verse 18, “Yet I will exult in the LORD, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation”

- Habakkuk comes to place of praise
- Regardless of circumstances, he has determined to trust and praise the LORD

Verse 19 is a picture of stability and security

- God would make the prophet like a sure-footed deer that could scale the mountains without slipping²⁶

Think of how the prophet ends this letter²⁷

- Burden to blessing
- Wondering to worship
- Restlessness to rest
- Complaint to consolation
- Hopeless to hopeful

²⁶ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Bible Commentary*, 1035.

²⁷ Wilkinson & Boa, 275.

Habakkuk is much like Job

- Both wrestle with God about matters outside their control
- The response from both of them was to be humbled at the mighty nature and ability of God

Isaiah 55 records these words, “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways,’ declares the LORD. ⁹ ‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts’” (55:8-9)

I am grateful for this little book for what it teaches us

- Circumstances don’t dictate our joy or happiness
- We can trust in God even when things around us don’t go according to our plan or don’t make sense

Habakkuk is refreshing in his approach to prayer

- He freely makes his requests known to God
- He voices his concerns to God

But Habakkuk is also refreshing in how he responds to God’s answers

- The prophet is content to accept God’s purposes
- Even though unable to explain why God does what He does, the prophet still trusts God

Like Habakkuk, we can learn to place our burdens before the LORD and wait

- He doesn’t have to give us answers to our questions
- Most of the time, His answers would totally boggle our minds anyway

Martyn Lloyd-Jones, a 20th century pastor, wrote these encouraging words

- “Have you realized that most of your unhappiness in life is due to the fact that you are listening to yourself instead of talking to yourself?”²⁸

If we merely listen to ourselves, we will be prone to doubt, discouragement, and endless questions

- But when we talk to ourselves, reminding ourselves of the truths of God’s Word, we will move to a place of hope, encouragement, and stability

The hymn, “It is well with my soul” captures the meaning of Habakkuk²⁹

- As you know, Horatio Spafford was a successful businessman
- But a fire took place in Chicago in October 1871, which ruined him financially

²⁸ Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Spiritual Depression* (1965; repr., Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000), 20.

²⁹ <http://www.cyberhymnal.org/htm/i/t/i/itiswell.htm>

Horatio's wife and four daughters were crossing the Atlantic Ocean when their ship went down

- All four of his daughters were killed
- Only the wife survived

When Horatio's ship passed over the same spot where his daughters were killed, it is said that he penned the words to the famous hymn

When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou has taught me to say,
It is well, it is well, with my soul.

Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,
Let this blest assurance control,
That Christ has regarded my helpless estate,
And hath shed His own blood for my soul.

My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!
My sin, not in part but the whole,
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!

For me, be it Christ, be it Christ hence to live:
If Jordan above me shall roll,
No pang shall be mine, for in death as in life
Thou wilt whisper Thy peace to my soul.

But, Lord, 'tis for Thee, for Thy coming we wait,
The sky, not the grave, is our goal;
Oh trump of the angel! Oh voice of the Lord!
Blessed hope, blessed rest of my soul!

And Lord, haste the day when my faith shall be sight,
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll;
The trump shall resound, and the Lord shall descend,
Even so, it is well with my soul.

Refrain

*It is well, with my soul,
It is well, with my soul,
It is well, it is well, with my soul.*

Isn't that the message of Habakkuk?

- Circumstances around us sometimes seem contrary to God's Word
- Satan is tempting us to despair and doubt
- It is at that time that God displays His faithfulness

As Spafford could say after learning of the death of his four daughters, "It is well with my soul"

Though the events of your life are different than Habakkuk and Horatio Spafford, God still calls you to trust Him in times of difficulty

- He has the answers
- We can trust Him, even when the answers don't make sense to us

Many years ago, I heard someone say this

- When you can't trace the hand of God, trust the heart of God

Every believer is called to live by faith, not by sight

- We can't always see what is ahead of us
- We can't always understand what God is teaching us

Christians are to live by faith

- Not just a one-time event in the past, "I believed" or "I used to believe in Jesus"
- But a continuous commitment and trust, "I believe"

We also learn from this book the need to pray

- Habakkuk didn't just talk about problems in society
- He actually took those matters to God in prayer

It is very easy to complain about our circumstances

- But do you take the time to pray?
- Do you take even your complaints to the Lord?

Let's be honest

- Sometimes it is easier to complain to men rather than to pray to God

Imagine if all of us lived lives like Habakkuk

- Imagine if we lived by faith
- Imagine if we took our concerns to God
- Imagine if we trusted God with the answers, even if they didn't make sense to us

We can only live that way if we are real

- Real with God
- Real with one another
- Real about living a life of faith