



Context

Author: Habakkuk

Date: Likely in the 7th Century BC

Recipient: Dialogue between Habakkuk and God

Theme and Purpose

The first two chapters are organized around Habakkuk's questions and the Lord's replies. Habakkuk saw Judah's rapid moral and spiritual decline, and this deeply troubled him. Yet God's response puzzled him even more. How could a good and just God use a more wicked nation (Babylon) to punish a less wicked one (Judah)? God makes it clear that both nations are to be judged and appropriately punished for their sin. Although Habakkuk may not fully understand, he has learned to rely totally on God's wisdom and justice. He knows God can resolve issues in ways he could never have imagined. This God is certainly worthy of Habakkuk's praise and worship, which is how the book ends.

Many of the righteous in Judah would have agreed with Habakkuk's words. They wondered what God was doing and struggled with the same issues as Habakkuk. God's words reassured them that he was in control and would deal appropriately with the nations.

- I. God is just and merciful, even though his people may not always understand his ways (2:4).
- II. Wickedness will eventually be punished, and the righteous will ultimately see God's justice (2:5–20).
- III. God uses some wicked nations to punish other wicked nations, but ultimately God will judge all nations (1:6; 2:5–20).
- IV. The key phrase "the righteous shall live by his faith" (2:4) summarizes God's plan for his people. It is quoted three times in the NT (Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38). Each time a different aspect of the phrase's meaning is highlighted.¹

¹ "Introduction to Habakkuk," ESV Bible, <https://www.esv.org/resources/esv-global-study-bible/introduction-to-habakku>

Outline of Habakkuk

****Note: Sermons on each passage will be preached on the Sunday following the reading****

Week of Monday, August 23, 2021	Habakkuk 1:1-4
Week of Monday, August 30, 2021	Habakkuk 1:5-11
Week of Monday, September 6, 2021	Habakkuk 1:12-17
Week of Monday, September 13, 2021	Habakkuk 2:1-5
Week of Monday, September 20, 2021	Habakkuk 2:6-20
Week of Monday, September 27, 2021	Habakkuk 3:1-19

Week of Monday, August 23, 2021

Habakkuk 1:1-4

1 The pronouncement that the prophet Habakkuk saw. 2 How long, Lord, must I call for help and you do not listen or cry out to you about violence and you do not save? 3 Why do you force me to look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrongdoing? Oppression and violence are right in front of me. Strife is ongoing, and conflict escalates. 4 This is why the law is ineffective and justice never emerges. For the wicked restrict the righteous; therefore, justice comes out perverted. -- Habakkuk 1:1-4 (CSB)

HOPE Journaling

H – Highlight what stands out to you

O – Observe what it teaches

P – Practice this in your life

E – Express this in your prayers

Weekly Devotional

“‘Elí, Elí, lemá sabachtháni?’ that is, ‘My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?’”

– Jesus, while on the cross (Mt. 27:46b)

When was the last time you cried out to God in pain, questioning His motives, His plans, or, even, His goodness? When was the last time that you cried out to God asking Him where He was and why you cannot feel His presence? I can say with confidence that, no matter when you are reading this, at some point in the last 12 months, I have. Likely, it was multiple times. There is this notion that going to God with complaints is a sinful thing that Christians should not partake in. I think that is a ridiculous notion. In fact, I think that our ability to lament directly to God and to question of Him are wonderful gifts from God. In fact, we see this type of refrain over and over again in the Psalms. On a regular basis, we read David crying out to God asking Him, “Where....? Why do you...? How long...?” Read this from Psalm 13. “How long, Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long will I store up anxious concerns within me, agony in my mind every day? How long will my enemy dominate me?” (Ps 13:1-2). That sounds an awful lot like what we are reading here at the introduction of Habakkuk.

However, there is something really unique about this passage. While this passage contains the lament and questions posed by Habakkuk, these questions actually are given to him by God Himself. God, through His Holy Spirit, is prompting Habakkuk to cry out in pain and lament. That is the unique nature of this prophecy. While most prophecy is God speaking through a prophet to His people, this is actually a prophecy that takes the form of a conversation between Habakkuk and God. Verse 1 says “The pronouncement that the prophet Habakkuk saw.” That pronouncement? Well, it’s a series of laments and questions from God through Habakkuk, that are posed directly back to God so that He can then answer the cries of the prophet.

While that may be an unfamiliar form of prophecy to us, it should bring a great deal of comfort to us when we feel like we’ve got nowhere to go with our questions and complaints other than directly to God. There seems to be this open invitation from God to come to Him with these things. And, in that, God answers us. While we are not going to receive an answer from God in the exact same form as Habakkuk did, we know that God can reveal what He wants us to know directly from His already complete and inspired Word. What that means is that our cries of complaints and questions should not end with simply words from our hearts and mouths, but instead lead us to open the Bible and allow the Holy Spirit within us to bring enlightenment, knowledge, and peace. We must be like the prophet Habakkuk who cried out to God and then waited for a reply from God. He listened with open ears and an open heart to what God was going to tell him, regardless of the answer. And, as we will see in this book, it is not always going to be the answer we necessarily want, but it will be exactly what we need.

Read Also:

Habakkuk 1	[helps understand context of the book]
Psalms 13	[crying out to God and our response]
Psalms 22	[crying out to God and our response]
Matthew 27:45-50	[Jesus cries out a question of God]
Micah 7:1-7	[trusting God when we see nothing but corruption]
Psalms 119:121-128	[asking God to act against ineffective law & injustice]
Isaiah 55:8-9	[God's ways and thoughts are above our own]

Group Discussion Questions – Theological Considerations

- What is biblical lament?
- How does imago Dei speak to our desire to know more of the whats and whys of our world? How does the Fall explain why we find it so frustrating and ineffective?
- What is prophecy? How does this prophecy differ from others we see in Scripture?
- What is a prophet?
- What is Bible study?
- What is prayer?
- What is God's will?
- Define genre. What are different biblical genres?

Group Discussion Questions – Digging Deeper

- What is the difference between questioning God and asking God questions? Is one ok and the other not? Why or why not?
- What should the state of our hearts be when we approach God with questions and complaints?
- When is a time you have gone to God like we see Habakkuk do here? What did you learn?
- When we have these questions and complaints, what should we practically do aside from pray?
- When opening Scripture during times of lament, how should we approach it? How do we use Scripture wrong during these times?
- How do we practically seek to align our will with God's when we are facing incredible suffering or injustice?
- How does this passage express what so many are feeling in the world today? With this knowledge, how do we respond to those who might say that "The Bible is an ancient document that holds no relevance today"?
- How does knowing that God gives us the gifts of lament and questions comfort you?

Week of Monday, August 30, 2021

Habakkuk 1:5-11

5 Look at the nations and observe — be utterly astounded! For I am doing something in your days that you will not believe when you hear about it. 6 Look! I am raising up the Chaldeans, that bitter, impetuous nation that marches across the earth's open spaces to seize territories not its own. 7 They are fierce and terrifying; their views of justice and sovereignty stem from themselves. 8 Their horses are swifter than leopards and more fierce than wolves of the night. Their horsemen charge ahead; their horsemen come from distant lands. They fly like eagles, swooping to devour. 9 All of them come to do violence; their faces are set in determination. They gather prisoners like sand. 10 They mock kings, and rulers are a joke to them. They laugh at every fortress and build siege ramps to capture it. 11 Then they sweep by like the wind and pass through. They are guilty; their strength is their god. -- Habakkuk 1:5-11 (CSB)

HOPE Journaling

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Weekly Devotional

“God has not abandoned us any more than he abandoned Job. He never abandons anyone on whom he has set his love; nor does Christ, the good shepherd, ever lose track of his sheep.”

– J.I. Packer

Not long ago, I was reading an article in the Washington Post about a boy who was reunited with his family 24 years after having been kidnapped. I can only imagine that the boy spent several years with hopeful anticipation that “today will be the day that my parents come and take me home.” Day after day, the same hope. Night after night, the same prayer. Slowly, over time, that hope was likely to have faded and the prayers further and further between. It was likely the boy felt like his parents had abandoned him, given up the search, stopped loving him. I cannot imagine the sense of pain, betrayal, and grief he must of felt as he came to a likely bitter realization that his parents were no longer there for him; he was alone in an unjust world surrounded by people who were fueled by corruption and sold children for a living. What he did not know, truly could not have known, was that for 24 years, his father never once abandoned the search for him. Not for a single day did his father leave him to perish on his own in the darkness of an unjust place. It might have taken longer than the boy wanted, but he found justice and salvation from that dark place after 24 years.

That is such a wonderful picture of the truths found in this passage. As God responds to the lament of Habakkuk, He doesn’t do so with condemnation or correction, but instead with encouragement and promise. The first words from God’s mouth are also imperatives, commands to Habakkuk. “Look...observe...be utterly astounded.” These imperatives are not as simple as they may seem. They hold deeper meaning than we grasp initially from the English words. “Look” means to look upon and behold with discernment as to see things rightly, as God would see them. “Observe” means that we are not only to look upon things rightly, but also to look upon them thoughtfully and to contemplate them. “Be utterly astounded” is to take those two other commands and to be overwhelmed with amazement and wonder at how God is working behind the scenes to bring about His plans despite Habakkuk feeling like God has abandoned His people.

God hasn’t abandoned His people, nor has He forsaken justice and righteousness. Instead, God says is “I’m still at work doing something you just can’t understand!” He is telling Habakkuk to stop looking at the current situation in its current context as though God is not in control of what’s going on; to stop viewing things with such worldly eyes, but instead with an eternal vision. And that is what God calls us to today, as well. He calls us to look beyond our current circumstances, political climate, or cultural and societal changes and to truly see, with right vision, what it is that God is doing among us. God has promised that He will never abandon us. We have the promise that God’s perfect plans will be fulfilled. The way in which His plans and will are fulfilled may not be what we want. As we see in this passage, God often uses those outside His covenantal promises to bring about His plans. That means that, sometimes, the evil of the world is actually acting to accomplish His plans. God is sovereign over all things, even over those who do not know Him.

Read Also:

Habakkuk 2
Matthew 28:20
Acts 13:34-41
Job 38-41

[helps understand context of the book]
[God promises that He will never leave us]
[quotes this passage]
[God controls all things, is sovereign over all]

Group Discussion Questions – Theological Considerations

- Define sovereignty. What does it mean that God is sovereign?
- Define time. Discuss how God can be both eternal and outside of time, but also act within the time of man.
- Does God foresee all things that are happening and accomplish His plans through that? Or does God plan all things? What level of happenings or detail does God control?
- Define justice.
- Define righteousness.
- What is God's will?
- Define discernment.

Group Discussion Questions – Digging Deeper

- When have you experienced a time where you felt abandoned by God? How did you find comfort in those times?
- How has God shown you His sovereignty in ways that you did not expect?
- How can we comfort those who are experiencing these same feelings?
- What do you see in the world around you that makes you think that things are out of control? What does this passage teach us about how all those things are playing out?
- How do we seek truly biblical justice in a world that does not know God?
- How does the world pervert the concept of justice? What are some ways we have seen the world seek justice through unjust means or through unbiblical means?
- How can a good and loving God use evil people to accomplish His good and loving plans?
- How do the spiritual disciplines help us see the world as God sees it?
- Why is it that intellectual thought and reason are often seen as contradictory to Christianity? How do you practically balance reason and faith?

Week of Monday, September 6, 2021

Habakkuk 1:12-17

12 Are you not from eternity, Lord my God? My Holy One, you will not die. Lord, you appointed them to execute judgment; my Rock, you destined them to punish us. 13 Your eyes are too pure to look on evil, and you cannot tolerate wrongdoing. So why do you tolerate those who are treacherous? Why are you silent while one who is wicked swallows up one who is more righteous than himself? 14 You have made mankind like the fish of the sea, like marine creatures that have no ruler. 15 The Chaldeans pull them all up with a hook, catch them in their dragnet, and gather them in their fishing net; that is why they are glad and rejoice. 16 That is why they sacrifice to their dragnet and burn incense to their fishing net, for by these things their portion is rich and their food plentiful. 17 Will they therefore empty their net and continually slaughter nations without mercy? -- Habakkuk 1:12-2:17 (CSB)

HOPE Journaling

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Weekly Devotional

“The most tremendous judgment of God in this world is the hardening of hearts of men.”

– John Owen

As Americans, we rely on the justice system to dole out punishment for those who are guilty of wrongdoing and to exonerate those who are innocent. However, brief conversations with just a handful of people you know will likely show that there are many who have personally experienced the brokenness of the system. Our justice system, from police and prisons to attorneys, juries, and judges, are wrong in their handling of justice more than we would care to admit. There are a lot of different stats when it comes to wrongful convictions with estimates being as low as 2 in 10000 to as high as 10%. Regardless, the rate of wrongful convictions, no matter how high or low it is, shows that we are imperfect judges.

As image bearers of God (*imago Dei*), we all carry the character and nature of God within us. However, because of the Fall, we all also carry a sin nature that stands in complete opposition to the nature in which we were created. That means that while we have an inherent desire to seek justice and righteousness, we distort those things into what they are not. Further, we believe, without even realizing it, that we can do these things better than God does. That is why we question whether God can truly be a loving and good Father when He allows the unrighteous to overrule and overrun the righteous; when the unholy in this life usurp the holy.

However, we must come to the understanding that God operates without the sinful nature that we carry, and His judgment is never wrong. However, we live in a world where hearts have been hardened. That means that, as Christians, we cannot fully comprehend or enjoy the nature that we carry as image bearers. And for non-Christians, it means they do not understand that they belong to the Prince of this World (Satan) and not to the Prince of Peace (Jesus Christ). Between those two states of living, we end up with a world where injustice abounds, no matter how hard we strive to judge rightly. So when Habakkuk hears that God intends to use the evil Chaldeans to dole out punishment against the covenantal people of God, Israel, he questions how a good God could do such a thing. Habakkuk, likely without even realizing it, is expressing an idea that all of us have had at some point in time, that we could do better. If we were God, we wouldn't do it that way, we would do it better and more justly. Be careful! That is the very same sin that had Satan cast out of Heaven in the first place. He thought he could do better.

As Christians, there is a constantly battle between the two natures within us. It is in our reliance on the Holy Spirit within us that will allow us to rightly and justly see the world and God's action in it. We have to know that God as the grand orchestrator of all things is at work and His plans are always good and just, even when we cannot see that ourselves.

Read Also:

Habakkuk 3	[helps understand context of the book]
Exodus 7:3-4; 9:12; 10:20, 27	[God hardens Pharaoh's heart]
Exodus 8:15, 32	[Pharaoh hardens his own heart]
Isaiah 14:12-18	[the sin that cast Satan out of Heaven]
Ezekiel 28:11-19	[the sin that cast Satan out of Heaven]
Micah 5:2	[with this passage confirms eternity of the Trinity]
Psalms 18	[God is the Rock on whom we can always rely]

Group Discussion Questions – Theological Considerations

- What is holiness?
- What is evil?
- Define judgment.
- Who will be judged?
- Define anthropomorphism. What are examples of this when it comes to God? Is judgment simply an anthropomorphism? Or is it a real experience that we will face?
- Man has dual natures of body and soul; sin and the image of God. How do we reconcile this?
- What is *coram Deo*? How does this inform the purpose of our lives? How is this similar to our response to the doctrine of *solus Deo gloria*?

Group Discussion Questions – Digging Deeper

- By using evil people to execute judgment against His covenant people, is God acting against His character and nature?
- What is the difference in the judgment seen here in this passage and the judgment that will take place upon the return of Christ?
- How is the hardening of hearts “the most tremendous judgment of God in this world” as said by John Owen?
- We see in Exodus 7-10 that God hardened Pharaoh's heart, but also that Pharaoh hardened his own heart. Is there a difference? Does it matter?
- How have you wrongly judged another? How have you been wrongly judged?
- What is something that you would like to see God “fix?” Do you believe that God is unfair or unjust by not fixing these things?
- How do we overcome our limited vision to seek to see things the way we are intended to?
- How can you trust that God is at work even when it seems He is not?

Week of Monday, September 13, 2021

Habakkuk 2:1-5

1 I will stand at my guard post and station myself on the lookout tower. I will watch to see what he will say to me and what I should reply about my complaint. 2 The Lord answered me: Write down this vision; clearly inscribe it on tablets so one may easily read it. 3 For the vision is yet for the appointed time; it testifies about the end and will not lie. Though it delays, wait for it, since it will certainly come and not be late. 4 Look, his ego is inflated; he is without integrity. But the righteous one will live by his faith. 5 Moreover, wine betrays; an arrogant man is never at rest. He enlarges his appetite like Sheol, and like Death he is never satisfied. He gathers all the nations to himself; he collects all the peoples for himself. -- Habakkuk 2:1-5 (CSB)

HOPE Journaling

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Weekly Devotional

“In life, you learn lessons. Sometimes, you learn them the hard way. Sometimes, you learn them too late.”
– Taylor Swift

Have you ever done something that you kinda knew you shouldn't have been doing? Something that turned out terribly wrong and you ended up paying the price for your own stupidity? Did you ever do that thing again? And again? Kate and I learned this lesson the hard way. A couple years ago, we sold the house we had been living in for 7 years. As you know if you've ever sold a home, the process of getting the house back in like-new condition can be both frustrating and eye-opening. We went around repairing and replacing all the things we put off for years. The vast majority of these things were minor and took very little time, effort, and money. However, when combined with a few dozen other minor things, it all became overwhelming and stressful. You would think we would've learned our lesson from that experience and kept up with those minor projects as we went in our next home. But...sometimes people are stubborn and slow on the uptake. So, we have recently sold our last home. The only thing that made this last sale process easier was that we were only there for 19 months. That means we only had 19 months of deferred maintenance to catch up on rather than 7+ years of backlogged items. Here's to doing better in the new house!

That is the nature of sin in our lives. Paul, in Romans 7, speaks of knowing the right things and desiring to do the right things. However, despite his desires, he continues to make the same sinful decisions over and over again. He says, “For I do not do the good that I want to do, but I practice the evil that I do not want to do” (v.19). Due to the competition in our hearts between the image of God in which we are made and the sinful nature in which we are born, we often find this in our own lives. That leads to us sinning over and over again, often in the same frustrating ways. That leads to shame and guilt and, sometimes even, depression, as we can fall into a view that we must not be truly saved, or we wouldn't keep doing these same stupid things. However, I would argue that is a sign of our salvation. The sign is that conviction that leads us to feel an innate sense that what we are doing is sinful and that there is a better life intended for us.

The people of Israel have taken God's grace and covenants for granted time and time again throughout history and they are doing so again. They are, again, no longer paying attention to the holiness which God commands, but, at the same time, see themselves better than those evil Chaldeans. They are placing pride in their own status as God's people and measuring themselves against others as the marker rather than measuring themselves against the standards of God. So God tells Habakkuk to write this prophecy down in such a way that even those who are not paying attention could not miss what He is saying. God is going to exact a measure of wrath on the Israelites because of their sin. They are going to have to learn the lesson the hard way. That lesson? That the righteous live by faith, contrasting the lack of integrity with which Chaldeans live and the Israelites have been living. God says, we can know with certainty that God's plans are going to take place, just as He promised, in His appointed time. Let us hold on to the promises that come with a life of holiness and faith so that we never have to experience the promises that come with a life lived without integrity or truth. His promises will be fulfilled either way, in their appointed time.

Read Also:

Romans 7:14-8:11	[sin in us vs the grace of God]
Psalms 85	[asking God to return His favor to His people]
Isaiah 30:8	[preserving prophecy to confirm fulfillment later]
Psalms 27:13-14	[trusting in and waiting for God's promises/timing]
Lamentations 3:25-26	[trusting in and waiting for God's promises/timing]
Psalms 130	[trusting in and waiting for God's promises/timing]
Romans 1:16-17	[quotes from this passage]
Hebrews 10:37-39	[quotes from this passage]
Galatians 3:11	[quotes from this passage]
1 John 5:5-13	[certainty of God's testimony]

Group Discussion Questions – Theological Considerations

- What is *sola scriptura*? How does this truth inform our faith?
- What is a righteous man?
- Define integrity. How does this interact with faith? What does “blameless” mean in Scripture?
- What is *sola fide*? What does this tell us about salvation? What does it tell us about how we are to live as a righteous people?
- What does it mean that God transcends time?

Group Discussion Questions – Digging Deeper

- William Temple said, “The only thing of my very own that I can contribute to my redemption is the sin from which I need to be redeemed.” JC Ryle wrote that a man brings nothing to salvation but for “a sinful soul. He gives nothing, contributes nothing, pays nothing, performs nothing.” What are your thoughts on these quotes?
- What is something that you have a hard time waiting for? How has culture shaped this impatience? How does this differ from what God expects of us?
- What do you think about the saying “the best things in life are worth waiting for”? How have you experienced this in your life? How can this be applied to God's promises and His timing?
- Knowing that God is outside of time as we understand time, how can we know that His promises are true and that we can trust that His yet-to-be-fulfilled promises will come to pass?
- Would you like to see Jesus return in your lifetime? Why or why not? How does the promise of His return create urgency in the Great Commission?
- Revelation 22:20 asks Jesus to “come quickly.” Knowing that Jesus' return means that many will fall under the eternal wrath and judgment of God, is it ok for Christians to call on Him to return soon?

Week of Monday, September 20, 2021

Habakkuk 2:6-20

6 Won't all of these take up a taunt against him, with mockery and riddles about him? They will say: "Woe to him who amasses what is not his — how much longer? — and loads himself with goods taken in pledge." 7 Won't your creditors suddenly arise, and those who disturb you wake up? Then you will become spoil for them. 8 Since you have plundered many nations, all the peoples who remain will plunder you — because of human bloodshed and violence against lands, cities, and all who live in them. 9 Woe to him who dishonestly makes wealth for his house to place his nest on high, to escape the grasp of disaster! 10 You have planned shame for your house by wiping out many peoples and sinning against your own self. 11 For the stones will cry out from the wall, and the rafters will answer them from the woodwork. 12 Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed and founds a town with injustice! 13 Is it not from the Lord of Armies that the peoples labor only to fuel the fire and countries exhaust themselves for nothing? 14 For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord's glory, as the water covers the sea. 15 Woe to him who gives his neighbors drink, pouring out your wrath and even making them drunk, in order to look at their nakedness! 16 You will be filled with disgrace instead of glory. You also — drink, and expose your uncircumcision! The cup in the Lord's right hand will come around to you, and utter disgrace will cover your glory. 17 For your violence against Lebanon will overwhelm you; the destruction of animals will terrify you because of your human bloodshed and violence against lands, cities, and all who live in them. 18 What use is a carved idol after its craftsman carves it? It is only a cast image, a teacher of lies. For the one who crafts its shape trusts in it and makes worthless idols that cannot speak. 19 Woe to him who says to wood: Wake up! or to mute stone: Come alive! Can it teach? Look! It may be plated with gold and silver, yet there is no breath in it at all. 20 But the Lord is in his holy temple; let the whole earth be silent in his presence. -- Habakkuk 2:6-20 (CSB)

HOPE Journaling

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Weekly Devotional

“I like America, just as everybody does. I love America. I gotta say that. But America will be judged.”

– Bob Dylan

It is easy to look at America today and come to the conclusion that we are facing the judgment of God for allowing our nation to fall into such depravity and to use evil means to pursue such wicked ends. As Christians, we might find this judgment in the form authoritarianism that rejects the authority of God. We might find it on social media where the idea of truth is individualized and espoused without regard to absolute truth found in Scripture. We might find it in our neighborhoods where sexual freedom is pushed as ethical and right while renouncing biblical views of marriage and sexuality as archaic, hateful, and, increasingly, violence. We see these things overtaking our nation that was founded on Christian principles. We see them infiltrating our systems, schools, and governments. We see them being codified in our laws and upheld in our courts. We can look at these things and believe that God has found it right to judge our nation. We also tend to look at those responsible for the perpetuation of these things and hope that God will judge them. We look upon ourselves and judge ourselves against those we see as more sinful than we are and wonder why God would allow even more evil to prevail over a lesser evil; or, if we are honest regarding our pride, over a holy and righteous people.

That is what Habbakuk is thinking here as well. He sees the nation of Israel and he sees the wicked acts they have normalized. He sees injustice all around him. When Habbakuk calls on God to correct the evil and sin in their midst, God tells him that He is going to do just that. He is going to use an even more evil nation, the Chaldeans (aka Babylonians) to exact judgment on the Judeans. Habbakuk is rightly confused as to how God would do such a thing. The Babylonians are, after all, an even more wicked nation than Judea. But God assures Habbakuk that this judgment for Judea will only be more heavily carried out against the Babylonians at a later time.

We cannot possibly understand fully the ways in which God works or His timing or how He intends to fulfill His plans. So, in our limited knowledge and view, we look at the evil around us and judge ourselves against that rather than against the standard of holiness and wonder how God would judge us by using greater evils. We must instead pursue God and the holiness that is our standard. We cannot judge ourselves against those around us, because they are not our standard. Our standard is Jesus. That pursuit of holiness will drive us to cling to the promises of God that we find in Scripture. The promise that one day we will no longer experience a single side effect of the Fall. The promise that God is working ALL things to the good of those who call Him Lord. We can know that God will one day pour the fullness of His wrath on those who mock Him and practice abject evil. In the meantime, may it be our mission to share the good news of the gospel so that none would have to experience that wrath. Let us pursue holiness and “help people find and follow Jesus!”

Read Also:

Romans 8:18-30	[God's plans are good, suffering is temporary]
1 Peter 1:13-25	[living holy]
Leviticus 11:44; 19:2; 20:7	[be holy]
Psalms 51	[picture of repentance]
1 John 1:5-10	[God makes sinners righteous through repentance]
John 9	[God uses individual suffering for His glory]
1 John 2	[living holy]

Group Discussion Questions – Theological Considerations

- Define persecution. Are there varying degrees of persecution?
- Is current judgment against man the same as the final judgment all will face?
- Is the final judgment different for believers and non-believers?
- Define suffering.
- Practice in your group transitioning from a variety of common conversations to a gospel conversation. Be sure to include conversations that might be hot button or current event issues.

Group Discussion Questions – Digging Deeper

- Are we seeing God's judgment on America? Explain your thoughts.
- Do you believe that the persecution of American Christians is being minimized or understated? Overstated? How do we rightly view persecution generally and also in America when put in contrast with persecution of Christians worldwide?
- Does God still judge nations the way He so often judged Israel? Explain.
- What does it practically look like to be a holy person? How do we practically pursue holiness?
- How can a good and loving God plan or use the suffering of an individual in order to bring Himself glory?
- Should we fear the judgment of God? Are there different types of fear? How does fear grow or hinder our faith?
- Is it ok to ask for God's judgment or wrath to be poured out on someone? If so, how does this interact our call to the Great Commission? If not, how do we view portions of Scripture that set an example of this?
- How do you respond to someone who identifies as Christian but condemns someone to Hell? When are examples of times you have seen or heard this?

Week of Monday, September 27, 2021

Habakkuk 3:1-19

1 A prayer of the prophet Habakkuk. According to 'Shigionoth'. 2 Lord, I have heard the report about you; Lord, I stand in awe of your deeds. Revive your work in these years; make it known in these years. In your wrath remember mercy! 3 God comes from Teman, the Holy One from Mount Paran. 'Selah' His splendor covers the heavens, and the earth is full of his praise. 4 His brilliance is like light; rays are flashing from his hand. This is where his power is hidden. 5 Plague goes before him, and pestilence follows in his steps. 6 He stands and shakes the earth; he looks and startles the nations. The age-old mountains break apart; the ancient hills sink down. His pathways are ancient. 7 I see the tents of Cushan in distress; the tent curtains of the land of Midian tremble. 8 Are you angry at the rivers, Lord? Is your wrath against the rivers? Or is your fury against the sea when you ride on your horses, your victorious chariot? 9 You took the sheath from your bow; the arrows are ready to be used with an oath. 'Selah' You split the earth with rivers. 10 The mountains see you and shudder; a downpour of water sweeps by. The deep roars with its voice and lifts its waves high. 11 Sun and moon stand still in their lofty residence, at the flash of your flying arrows, at the brightness of your shining spear. 12 You march across the earth with indignation; you trample down the nations in wrath. 13 You come out to save your people, to save your anointed. You crush the leader of the house of the wicked and strip him from foot to neck. 'Selah' 14 You pierce his head with his own spears; his warriors storm out to scatter us, gloating as if ready to secretly devour the weak. 15 You tread the sea with your horses, stirring up the vast water. 16 I heard, and I trembled within; my lips quivered at the sound. Rottenness entered my bones; I trembled where I stood. Now I must quietly wait for the day of distress to come against the people invading us. 17 Though the fig tree does not bud and there is no fruit on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though the flocks disappear from the pen and there are no herds in the stalls, 18 yet I will celebrate in the Lord; I will rejoice in the God of my salvation! 19 The Lord my Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like those of a deer and enables me to walk on mountain heights! For the choir director: on stringed instruments. -- Habakkuk 3:1-19 (CSB)

HOPE Journaling

H – Highlight what stands out to you

O – Observe what it teaches

P – Practice this in your life

E – Express this in your prayers

Weekly Devotional

“...and confessed in his heart that this was the proudest moment of his life.”

– Tom Sawyer

Not long ago I had watched a documentary that followed a man with an incurable and terminal illness. The film followed him as he wrestled with the life he could no longer fully live and the disease that made him yearn for death. In the midst of it, he and his family held a celebration of life where he was honored. This scene is becoming increasingly common in America and around the world. They are called “living funerals.” It is, in most regards, like any other funeral with the notable exception that the honoree is still alive and in attendance. Family and friends gather to roast and toast the honoree, share memories, sing, pray, and offer eulogies. It is a celebration of the life the honoree had lived and a temporary respite from the fear of the future, even as certain as it is for most honorees. Each of these men and women are living with terminal diseases that are currently incurable. While each of them understand that the worst is yet to come, they celebrate anyway. They let go of the fear of certain, impending death and celebrate what they still have.

Many of us have probably been faced with a choice like those who have living funerals. Maybe you got some bad news during a routine exam that your unborn baby has a potentially fatal genetic illness. Perhaps you have received news that your cancer has returned and there is nothing the doctors can do. Maybe it is not news that you are going to experience some loss of life, but instead that you are going to be losing your job and your income due to budget cutbacks or company closures. You likely felt lost and out of control. You probably went through many of the stages of grief; denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Perhaps still today you are in the middle of one of those stages. And in the midst of all that, you had to ultimately make a choice, would you take this new understanding and allow it to drive you to a place of despair or would you take this new, strangely certain future and celebrate despite it? Are you going to give God glory anyway?

That’s where we find Habakkuk in this final chapter in the prophecy. He ends the prophecy with a song of rejoicing. He stands before God with a new understanding of God’s work in the world to bring about His will. He rejoices in this revelation of God’s sovereignty. He is not rejoicing that the people will be overtaken by the Chaldeans. He is not rejoicing in belief that God will change His mind. He is rejoicing because he recognizes his limited vision does not allow him to see all that God is doing and he trusts that God will bring good from it just as He promised. He is rejoicing despite the circumstances and despite his ability to change anything. Habakkuk is simply responding with rejoicing to the promise that God’s plan and that God is just and righteous. He is trusting God to exact His judgment and His mercy exactly as He sees fit for the good of His people.

Read Also:

Philippians 1:3-11	[God will complete His work]
Lamentations 3:31-33	[God's love and compassion are abundant]
Isaiah 60:10	[God perfectly balances wrath and mercy]
Psalms 148	[all of Creation praises God]
Haggai 2	[similar theme, wording as parts of this passage]
Psalms 77	[confidence in God in crisis]

Group Discussion Questions – Theological Considerations

- What does it mean that all of Creation praises God? Or that the mountains see God and shudder?
- What is the work of God in this world?
- What is the balance of mercy and wrath?
- What does Selah mean?
- Does God enact our salvation on earth or in eternity?
- Define the following types of grace: common, prevenient, irresistible, sovereign, & preparatory.

Group Discussion Questions – Digging Deeper

- What does it mean to rejoice?
- Why do we struggle to rejoice in suffering?
- What is a time of suffering or uncertainty you look back at now with new understanding of God's plans? How would you have responded differently or similarly in that time if you had that understanding then? How should this prompt us to rejoicing when we face new struggles or fears?
- How do you know when it's time to quietly wait or when it's time to do something? How do we know the difference between our own sinful desires to action and the prompting of the Holy Spirit to action?
- Does God ever leave man to their own devices without His intervention?
- Does the "silence of God" mean that He is truly silent? What typically stands in the way of us hearing from God?
- Why does God allow those who are not elect to live and thrive in this world?