

WHEN GOD DOESN'T



THE BOOK OF HABAKKUK



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Habakkuk 1

1) When have you faced a difficult time that caused you to question God?

2) Habakkuk looks at the circumstances around him (Babylon is threatening Judah) and complains that a) God does not listen b) God does not save c) God does not act for justice d) God tolerates wrong (1:2 – 4).

Is it appropriate that the people of God have concerns about the problem of evil and injustice in the world?

To what extent does the seeming passivity and inaction of God give cause for complaint against God?

3) The cry, “How long, O Lord” (1:2) is echoed by Jeremiah, Habakkuk’s contemporary (Jeremiah 12:1 – 4) all the way to the end times (Revelation 6:9, 10). What do you think are some of the reasons why it may seem that God remains indifferent and inactive?

4) God's initial response is that He is using the Babylonians to accomplish His purposes (1:5 – 11). At the same time, the Babylonians will be held "guilty", responsible for their actions. When have you seen the purposes of God prevail despite, and through, sinful actions?

5) Habakkuk responds that he does not understand and his second complaint is that God's tolerance promotes unrighteousness and (1:13 – 15) and results in idolatry (1:16 – 17). How can God allow the wicked (Judah) to be punished by the wicked (Babylon)? He is going to take his stance and wait to see what God will say (2:1). Notice that when Habakkuk has a problem with God he does not go to the writings of philosophers or to the ungodly for advice. He takes it to God in prayer and chooses to wait for God's response/revelation. How does this speak to you? What can you learn from it?

Praying Together: Choose to name before God the matters that concern you and decide to wait for God to answer you. (Hint: See Hab 2:1 How will you actively position yourself to wait and to listen for God's response?)

Habakkuk 2

1) Think back to Study 1 and to the discussions and questions that you raised. As you waited on God this week, what has God revealed to you? What remains unclear?

2) In chapter 1, Habakkuk focusses on his immediate circumstances. It appeared to Habakkuk that God was indifferent (1:2), inactive (1:3, 4), and inconsistent (1:12 – 17). God is most fully revealed to us in Jesus. Briefly, how does your faith in Jesus place you in a different position to Habakkuk?

3) Read Hab 2:2, 3. These verses indicate that there can sometimes be a long time between Revelation of truth and Fulfillment of truth. In the end, there is a right time/an appointed time. Most of us don't find waiting easy. How can you learn and grow through periods of waiting?

4) It is difficult to overstate the importance of Hab 2:4b in Christian history. It is this verse that resulted in the conversion of Martin Luther and the start of the Protestant Reformation. The revelation that righteousness with God comes through faith not works, and that this faith comes through grace and is a gift of God transformed the Apostle Paul and is central to his teaching in Romans and Galatians (see Rom 1:17; Gal 3:11). What does "justification by grace through faith" mean to you personally?

5) The actions of powerful Babylon are contrasted with the faith of the believers in Judah (2:4 – 20).

Self-sufficient, godless Babylon is indicted with five woes (2:6, 9, 12, 15, 19). Briefly note the key charge against Babylon in each woe. What are some corresponding, contemporary sins that we (our society) can be charged with today?

By contrast, three powerful and eternal truths are stated in this passage to guide the life of the believer (2:4b, 14, 20). Reflect upon how these revelations (2:2, 3) would have comforted and guided Habakkuk and the believers in Judah, and how they comfort and guide you/us today.

2:4b

2:14

2:20

Praying Together: Give thanks for God's revelation through Jesus and through the Scriptures, and give thanks that your life can be lived in the light of the assurance of God's Grace (2:4b), God's Glory (2:14) and God's Government (2:20).

Habakkuk 3

1) Habakkuk has moved from worry and wondering (chapter 1) to waiting and watching (chapter 2); he now turns to worship and witness (chapter 3). Think of a time when you started in the valley but ended on the mountain top (3:19). What made the difference?

2) Habakkuk's prayer (3:1, 2) begins with a remembrance of God's fame and a recognition of God's mighty deeds in the past. But it moves to the present with a call to do it again! How do God's actions in the past bring you comfort and confidence today?

3) "In wrath remember mercy" (3:2). Habakkuk wrote 600 years before the coming of Jesus. He sees and understands God's wrath, but pleads for mercy. As you stand this side of the cross and resurrection, how do those events from 2000 years ago speak to your understanding of God's wrath and mercy?

4) How is the church today a prophetic sign post of God's mercy? (Hint: see for example, Romans 3:19 - 26 or Galatians 3:10 - 14, 26 -29).

5) In poetic form, Habakkuk looks back and remembers the mighty acts of God and the events in the exodus from Egypt, conquest of Canaan, and establishment of the kingdom (3:3 – 15). These were foundational to the story of Israel.

What Scriptures do you most look back to that bring you comfort and hope?

What events from God's past action in your own life bring you comfort and hope?

6) The thought of the coming Babylonian invasion terrifies Habakkuk (3:16), but he will "wait patiently" for God to put things right in the future. What in the following verses (17 – 19) indicates to us that Habakkuk's waiting was not a passive action but an active, joyful faith that strengthened him, sustained him, and enabled him to rise above his circumstances?

7) I read recently, "Loosely hang on to the perishable things of life; firmly grasp the unshakeable kingdom of God". In what ways is that an accurate description of Habakkuk's attitude in these last few verses, and to what extent does that reflect the way you view life?

Praying Together: For Habakkuk, it was the perspective of faith in the faithfulness of God that took him from worry to worship, from his immediate circumstances to seeing the end game. Is there something that you need to bring to God and hand over to Him in faith? Spend time praying for each other.