

Habakkuk

Introduction

Ever had a bad day?

Habakkuk knows about bad days too! The book of Habakkuk is really a dialogue between Habakkuk and God during a vision Habakkuk receives from Yahweh. It starts with Habakkuk's complaint against local corruption and leads to a prophecy that spans ninety years. It begins with a persistent question, "Why ...?" and ends with a confession of faith!

Ever been around a preschooler or young child? The "why" questions never cease!

Let's get in the car, we are going bye, bye.

Why?

I need to go to the bank.

Why?

To get some money.

Why?

To go to the store.

Why?

To buy some food.

Why?

So I can feed you.

Why?

So you will have enough energy to keep asking me why!

There are some really good "Why" questions (bitoffun.com/oneliners_why/):

- Why do you press harder on the remote control when you know the battery is dead?
- Why is it that doctors call what they do "practice?"
- Why don't you ever see the headline, "Physic wins lottery?"
- Why is the third hand on the watch called a second hand?
- Why doesn't glue stick to the inside of the bottle?

The "why" question of the night – "God, why are you doing nothing about all the bad stuff going on today?" Sound familiar? It is a question that continues to be asked of the prophets. It is a question you may be asking yourself.

Habakkuk was probably an official temple musician-prophet (1 Chronicles 25:1). He was a contemporary of Nahum, Zephaniah, and Jeremiah. He prophesied in the midst of a violent political upheaval. The subject matter of the book begins in the context of Assyria's upheaval (605), describes the Babylonian victory over Jerusalem (597), and prophesies Babylon's subsequent fall to Persia (539). Throughout this extended dialogue with Yahweh we hear Habakkuk's vibrant faith and deep humanity, learning and growing in relation to God.

He asks healthy questions (1:2-4) and is persistent in his questioning (1:12-2:1). He is historically grounded in the memory of Israel (3:1-15). He expresses a profound faith in song (3:16-19). His humanity and joy are a model and a challenge. The result is a book that is a timeless witness to God's purposes in a world dominated by corruption and violence.

As we listen in on the conversation, we hear Habakkuk wrestling with an increasingly difficult word from God as he struggles to hold onto his faith. He believes Yahweh is a righteous and holy God who cannot tolerate wickedness, yet he sees evil prospering around him. Habakkuk is looking for an explanation to pass along to his congregation, but no answer is coming. By the end of the conversation he realizes that he may run out of concrete reasons to believe. He realizes he may have to confess his faith based on his memory and experience of what he knows is true. It is that “even though” kind of faith—that kind of faith that was displayed by Daniel in the lion’s den and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace. It is the faith of Joseph who realized over and over again that life is not fair. It is the kind of faith that says even though I cannot see it, hear it, feel it, or touch it, I still believe. It is believing without feeling the nail-scars or putting your hands into the pierced side. It is believing that God is going to redeem His people when everything else around you seems to indicate our world is crashing and burning.

Chapter One

In chapter one Habakkuk enters into conversation with Yahweh. His first question is, “Lord, why do you tolerate wrong?” Read verses 1-4.

Yahweh’s first response (which is not precisely an answer) is, “Look...I am raising up the (more ruthless) Babylonians.” Read verses 5-11.

Habakkuk (who probably takes a breath and admits that there may be more evil and difficult circumstances than he is presently facing) then rephrases the question, “Lord, why then do you tolerate the (more) treacherous?” Read verses 13-17.

Contemporary prayer – God there is Ebola in Dallas, a mayor in Houston who issued a subpoena for sermons, pastors in Idaho who may face jail or fines for not performing gay weddings, Isis is beheading believers and growing stronger and more present in every part of the world, and Christian persecution all around us.

Chapter Two

This chapter begins with Habakkuk waiting on God’s answer. Read verse 1.

God describes two ways of waiting on the coming days: puffed-up (ironically describing the Babylonians who will conquer them) desire or faith. Read 2:4.

A paraphrase of 2:4 – “Those who want to live in right relationship with God and His people will live by their trust in the promises of the Lord.” The Message says, “But the person in right standing before God through loyal and steady believing is fully alive, really alive.”

Then God gives five woes to those who are puffed up:

1. “Your debtors will make you tremble” (2:6b-8), rests on those who become wealthy by extortion.
2. “Stones of the wall will cry out against you” (2:9-11) denotes public shame for those who build their security by unjust gain.
3. Those who build profit through bloodshed and crime (2:12-14) will be overcome with exhaustion and by the knowledge of the glory of Yahweh, which will fill the earth.

4. Exposure to the terror of trees and animals (2:15-17) will come on those who entice others to drunkenness in order to take advantage of them.
5. The final woe concerns lifeless, breathless, and silent idols (2:18-20). This is the foolishness of worshipping anything created in place of the life-giving creator.

God seems to say wait, not yet. It will happen, but you must wait!

Chapter Three

Chapter three begins with a song Habakkuk writes to God as a response to the conversation in chapters 1 and 2 (3:1-15).

The song is followed by a concluding confession of fear and faith (3:16-19).

Habakkuk finally acknowledges that he has gotten the message about Babylon's coming triumph. He is afraid because he believes the words concerning Judah's demise to be true. Read verse 16. God tells the prophet that his people will experience the end of prosperity, the end of political autonomy, the increased success of the more wicked, and the seeming withdrawal of Yahweh's protection. What will remain for them? Yahweh promises it will get better after it gets worse. This makes His response in 1:6 clearer – tougher days before better days.

Habakkuk realizes, and even accepts, the likelihood of his own death, having faith that God has an ultimate victory in store. For the just to live by faith means loving and serving Him in one's dying as well as one's living. As Bonhoeffer wrote in *The Cost of Discipleship*, when Christ calls us, He bids us come and die to ourselves.

How does a prophet respond? Read verses 17-19.

There is a man that life cannot defeat. This man:

1. Knows that life does not owe you anything (verse 17).
 - a. Life is not fair – we sinned!
 - b. Habakkuk learned what God taught the people in the desert and what Jesus reiterates for us. Scarcity leads us to recognize our need for a God who seeks to speak with us.
 - c. Example of Joseph
2. Understands that materialism is not the goal of life (verse 18).
 - a. I can rejoice and exalt God regardless of material things.
 - b. Circumstances do not control our worship.
 - c. Life is too important to get bogged down with things
3. Has an unshakable faith in God (verse 19).
 - a. God's presence makes the difference in our being able to believe. Look at Daniel in the lion's den, the three Hebrew slaves in the fiery furnace—what do both stories have in common? God was present!
 - b. David and Goliath
 - c. Hebrews 11 – Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Rahab, Gideon, Barak, Sampson, David, Samuel. These men and women were not perfect, but their God was perfect, and they had an unshakeable faith in Him.

What do you do while you are waiting on God?

1. Talk to Him.
2. Understand that God's time is not your time.
3. Understand that God may choose to use things you do not expect or do things differently than you expect.
4. Continue to worship, praise, and exalt God. (Abram in Genesis 12, heading toward the desert, unsure of God's plan, but he stops to worship).

Background information taken from James Bruckner's *The NIV Application Commentary: Jonah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*.