

Habakkuk 1 (1-11) – I Don't Like What I See

Vs.1 – Habakkuk was a prophet of God who ministered about 600 years before the time of Jesus. The background to this oracle, or burden, of Habakkuk is that the nation of Judah was in a difficult time. They had abandoned God's Law. And they were on the decline, spiritually, economically, and socially. Things were very bad. And they were going to get worse. The more Habakkuk saw, the more he didn't like it. And he was letting God know it and asking why.

The book of Habakkuk is written as a dialog between the prophet and God. Back and forth it goes. Habakkuk will pray or speak and then God will answer him. As Habakkuk begins this dialog, he is extremely upset. He is disappointed, distressed, and offended. But by the end of the book, he is full of joy, understanding, and faith. Habakkuk was on a journey from being discouraged in God to being delighted in God, no matter what happened.

This is a journey all believers need to make. Because all believers will see and experience things that will make them question God. And God wants you to see and experience the joy, understanding, and faith that awaits you as you travel along this journey, and know him in the process.

Vs.2-4 – Habakkuk sees all the wrong going on. It's all around him, everywhere he looks. He can't avoid it. No one can. This isn't being done in secret. It's all out in the open, and nothing is being done about it. Conflict, strife, violence, wickedness, wrongdoing, corruption and destruction pervade the whole nation. God's Law isn't stopping anyone from doing whatever evil they desire. There is no restraint. Intimidation is prevalent, injustice is prevailing, and justice is perverted. It is total chaos. And it reminds you of how things are today, doesn't it?

Habakkuk cries out to God. And he's been seeing all this awfulness and praying to God about it for a long time. Everything is wrong, nothing is right, and it seems like God's just going to let it all happen. Why, Lord?!

Vs.5-6 – The Lord answers the prophet. How gracious God is. Habakkuk thinks about all that God seems to allow. But Habakkuk seems to forget that God is allowing him to question The Almighty. Habakkuk is tired of how awful the culture has become. And he is also tired of how silent God seems to be. But God doesn't owe the prophet an explanation. And Habakkuk may be offended, but God is the one who really has the right to be offended. What right does the creature have to question the Creator in such a way?

You see, Habakkuk was not simply crying out to God about how bad it was. He's impatient with God, and complaining to God about God! Yes, people were defying God. But the prophet was accusing God! Now that is injustice indeed. But as you read here in Habakkuk, and in the book of Job, and the Psalms, and elsewhere, God allows this, because prayer is a place to be honest, and prayer is a place where God changes you.

God knows your heart, and he wants to reveal your heart, so that he can win your heart, and grow your heart. And a vital part of that process is for God to be gracious in allowing people to bring their complaints and concerns to him. The Bible shows you how God instilled faith in others, so you can have faith, even when your situation doesn't change, or it changes for the worse.

So, God tells Habakkuk what's going to happen. God's going to do something so amazing it will seem unbelievable. Even though he is telling the prophet ahead of time. And even though Habakkuk will see it in his lifetime. God has everything under control. He has a plan, and a purpose. But it involves raising up the Chaldeans, also known as the Babylonians.

This did not seem like a good solution to Habakkuk. The Babylonians had a reputation of fierceness as they had been conquering everyone along their path. And their path kept on going, and they were headed for Judah. This was God telling Habakkuk about what is known as the Babylonian Captivity, which God's people would have to endure for seventy years. And once again, it reminds you of the ideological and geopolitical turmoil in the world today, with the wars and the general unrest among the nations.

Vs.7-9 – God describes the Chaldeans as people who are not bound by God’s book. They are a law unto themselves. They did what they wanted, when they wanted, where they wanted. And they had the power to back it up. Their armies were strong, swift and fierce. They forced people and nations to do their will. They were taking territory, and taking captives back with them to their own homeland and other nations they had conquered. They moved massive amounts of people from one area to another to keep the people down and keep them from rising up against them.

Vs.10-11 – The nations were afraid of the Babylonians, but the Babylonians were not afraid of the nations. They destroyed the Assyrians. The Egyptians couldn’t beat them and fled from them. Nothing could withstand them. And now they are coming against Judah. And God tells the prophet Habakkuk that the Babylonians will do as they always do. They will *sweep by like the wind and go on* to the next conquest. Destroying, plundering, and taking captives with them, back to Babylon.

So, God’s answer to Habakkuk is that it isn’t going to get better. It’s going to get worse. But notice the last part of vs.11 – *guilty men, whose own might is their god!* Here is how the New English Translation (NET) renders it – *But the one who considers himself a god will be held guilty.* Babylon, whose strength is their god, are guilty before the One True God. And he will punish them.

Habakkuk was complaining about the wickedness of Judah. And God told the prophet that he raised up the Babylonians, and he was sending them to be his hand of judgment against the wickedness of Judah. That was his plan. And in time, he was going to punish the wicked Babylonians as well.

But Habakkuk doesn’t like God’s answer. And he gives God what is known as Habakkuk’s second complaint, starting in vs.12 and going through chapter 2, vs.1. The prophet wonders how and why God could let a nation even more wicked than Judah be the judgment against Judah. But Habakkuk needed to understand, and you need to understand, that God will judge evil in his time and in his way. God is at work, even when you can’t see him

working. And even when you don't like what you see. You need to be patient, and pray, and be at peace in the Lord. Even when your situation doesn't change. And even when it changes for the worse. Have faith.

I have another question for you to ponder. You know that God was the one who raised up Babylon. And God was the one who sent Babylon to attack Judah. So why does God hold Babylon accountable?

You see this elsewhere in the Bible. Before Judah was taken into captivity, Israel was taken into captivity. And in Isaiah 10, you see how God did the same thing with Israel as he did with Judah. Israel had become corrupt, so God brings the Assyrian army to punish Israel. And then he punishes Assyria for doing it. Assyria thought that they were doing this in and of themselves. But what God decrees in eternity, man freely chooses in time. And the intention of the heart is the basis on which the judgment is made.

This is the compatibility between God's sovereignty and our responsibility. Acts 4:27-28 says this – *for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.* Herod, Pilate, the Jews, and the Gentiles (the Roman soldiers) were all gathered against Jesus, but for different intentions. And each will be judged on the basis of their intentions. They were responsible, but they all did what God had predestined to occur.

Jospeh told his brothers what you meant for evil God meant for good. This is not a case of you did me wrong but God made it right. No, it is that your motive was bad but God ordained this bad for my good. So, you are still responsible for your evil motive, but God's motive was to use the bad to accomplish good. You designed this evil because you wanted evil to happen. But God worked through your evil so that good would happen. He designed this, not after the fact, but before the fact. The bad is a means that God ordains to work the good. For the Christian, God working all things together for your good includes your own sin, as well as factors outside your heart.

What does this all mean for you and me? Well, if you are a Christian, you're probably upset with how this whole thing is playing out. At least from our perspective. You trust God, you look to God, you pray to God. But other worldviews, and other religions are advancing. Wickedness is rampant. Evil is now the norm, and spiritual decline is evident, with nothing to check it, but what seems to be an increasingly fractured, heretical, weak church. There is no restraint. Anger, bitterness, contempt, despair, destruction, fear, loneliness, tribalism, unforgiveness, vindictiveness, and violence are growing worse by the day. You've seen it and experienced it. It's surrounding all of us. You can't escape it. And I'm sure you're not the only person who has wondered what God is up to.

You don't have to be a prophet to watch the grass grow. The world is bad and it's getting worse, at least for now. Yes, I believe that we can still see a great awakening in our world. I have a hope for this church, and this country, and for the ultimate advance of Christianity. I see it in the Bible. But sometimes you can't see what's coming. And sometimes you can see what's coming but you don't like it. But even when you don't like what you see, you can still trust God. And you can find a peace that is greater than any human understanding. It comes from the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ.

It is time to come to faith in Jesus. Or renew your faith in him. If you're not yet a Christian, confess your sin to God and trust Jesus to forgive you, based on his perfect life and sacrificial death for you on the cross. If you are a Christian, but you've been impatient with the plan and purpose of God, it's time to renew your faith by renewing your mind. Read the whole book of Habakkuk, and go on the same journey he did. It ends in a steadfast, deep joy. Or read Romans 9-11, and see how the Apostle Paul wrestles with God's sovereignty, and see why that leads him to plead for believers to submit themselves to God's plan and purpose in Romans 12:1-2.

All is well in the kingdom. God sees what you can't see. And he's working everything out just as he planned. And there's more than enough food in the Bible to nourish your faith, for every circumstance, and for a lifetime. Amen.