

Message #1**Various Texts**

Just recently we sold something on Craig's list. We put several pictures of the item on line and we received a call within 30 minutes of listing it. Someone wanted to come see the item. Now we often watch those true stories about people who commit crimes and then the police track them down, so when this happened, Mary reminded me of the programs we have watched about the "Craig's list killers." She said someone could show up and pretend to be interested and then rob us and kill us. So while the person was looking at the item, she stood behind the door with a 357 magnum gun. When I told her the guy was legitimate and gave her the safety nod, she put the gun down and decided not to shoot.

But one thing that is interesting about the things listed on Craig's list is that often the picture does not do justice to what the item really looks like. For example, you look at a picture of something on-line and it looks great, but then you get there and discover it isn't so great. In fact, sometimes you discover you are looking at a piece of junk.

Ron Blue made an interesting observation like that he said when you see a picture of earth taken from outer space; the earth looks beautiful and magnificent. It looks so wonderful and spectacular. But when you live here on earth for a while, it looks anything but magnificent. We live in a dirty world, an immoral world. We live in a world of terrorism, turmoil, tension, trouble, tragedy, trials and trauma (*Habakkuk*, p. 1505).

We look at what is actually happening in this world and it is not a lovely place to be. It is filled with immorality, greed, liars and crime. Our country, for the most part, is being run by political leaders who don't care about God's Word. They don't care whether or not they make decisions that are consistent with God's Word or will.

What is so hard to take about all of this is that it almost appears as if God is just letting all of this go on. It looks like God isn't doing anything about any of this. He is just letting the evil people and evil sin dominate this country.

Anyone who has any honest theological sense often wonders "Why isn't God doing something about this?" "Why doesn't God intervene right now and shut this evil down?" "Why doesn't God put a stop to these God-mocking politicians who are ruining our nation?"

There is a little O.T. book of the Bible that really wrestles with that. There is a little O.T. book of the Bible that does give us some insight and help. It is only three chapters long and it only contains 56 verses, but what is in the book is something very powerful and very needed. Often times we say that each book of the Bible is unique, but when it comes to this one, there is really no book quite like it. The book's name is Habakkuk. If ever there is a time when we need to study a book like Habakkuk, it is right now. So in the next few weeks we would like to take you on a journey straight through it.

Now to begin our journey, we would like to introduce you to the book by asking and answering a series of introductory questions:

QUESTION #1 – Why study the book?

Let me suggest seven reasons for studying the book of Habakkuk:

Reason #1 - It is one of only 66 inspired books that God has given to man and we need to know every single word and every single book.

God did not give man His written Word because He needed it; but because we need it. God put this book in His Word and He wants us to study it and know it and most people and churches don't really study Bible books of God in a serious and systematic way.

Let me ask you a question—Have you ever in all of your church life carefully gone through Habakkuk? When is the last time you went straight through this inspired book? When is the last time your church said it is critical that we carefully study Habakkuk? Fact is most don't care if they ever study it.

Habakkuk is the 8th book of the 12 minor prophets in both the Hebrew and English Bible. This classification dates back to 190 B.C..

Now the fact that Habakkuk is an inspired book of Scripture has overwhelming manuscript evidence.

Habakkuk was found in Qumran Cave #4 of the Dead Sea Scroll find in 1952. Another copy of it was discovered in caves southeast of Bethlehem in the same year. So the manuscript evidence for this being an inspired O.T. book is overwhelming. When the Dead Sea Scroll Habakkuk manuscript was compared to the Masoretic Hebrew Text (Vowel-pointed Hebrew text A.D. 900), the words were identical.

It shows up in the Cairo Codex written and vowel-pointed in A.D. 895. It is in the Aleppo Codex (A.D. 930). It is in the Codex Leningradensis (A.D. 1008). It is in the Babylonian Codex (A.D. 916).

As Carl Amerding said the acceptance of this book as being one inspired by God “is never questioned” (*Habakkuk*, p. 496). So clearly this is one of the rare inspired books of God.

Reason #2 - It is a prophetic book like no other prophetic book in all of inspired Scripture.

Luke records that Jesus talked about the written O.T. and He broke it down into “the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms” (Luke 24:44). So we know God inspired books in the O.T. called prophets. Habakkuk is one such book. But this book is like no other prophetic book.

We have gone through several prophetic books of the O.T. in this church. We have gone through Isaiah, Daniel, Amos and Jonah. What we have seen in every one of these books is that the prophet would typically give some prophetic message to Israel in the north or Judah in the south. In the case of Jonah, he took a prophetic message to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria. This is what prophets do. They get a message from God and take it to the target group. **Habakkuk is not like that at all. This is the only prophetic book that does not give a prophetic message to Israel or Judah. In fact, what makes this book so unique is that the whole book is a dialogue between Habakkuk and God.**

In the first two chapters of the book, Habakkuk is debating and arguing with God, and in the last chapter of the book he is praying to God and praising God. This is one odd prophetic book. We have a prophet who wants to argue with God.

When this book opens, Habakkuk begins with an interrogation of God; but when the book ends, it ends with intercession to God. As one commentator observed in Habakkuk, worry is transformed into worship. Fear turns into faith. Terror turns into hope and anguish turns into adoration.

In other prophetic books, the prophets predict divine judgment is coming in the future; but in Habakkuk, he pleads for God's judgment to come now. Habakkuk is sick and tired of seeing evil politicians and corruption and He wants God to wipe them out.

This is going to be one interesting book to study. There is no book like it.

Reason #3 - It is a book that gives some answers as to why God permits such horrific things to exist in this world.

When Habakkuk starts arguing with God, the political leadership of Judah was a disaster. They were leading the nation down and it did not look like God was doing anything about it. Doesn't that seem to resonate a bit?

Night after night we turn on the news and it is depressing. We have politicians who are more open to the lies of Muslims or Mormons than they are the Truth of God. Our world is a mess. It is depressing and dark. We hear of one crime after another. We hear of one evil after another. We hear of murders and sex scandals and robberies and shootings. You cannot get away from it because it is right in front of your face every single day.

Now you cannot help but wonder why in the world does God allow these horrible things to continue to exist? You cannot help but wonder, is God still in sovereign control when all we see is evil crud day after day? Habakkuk wanted to argue with God about this very point.

Habakkuk is a book that will help us straighten out our theological thinking. This is a book that will force us to realize our God is still in sovereign control even in a world that looks out of control. He still does have a sovereign plan that is in full operation.

Reason #4 - Habakkuk is a book quoted multiple times in the N.T. and it especially is significant to N.T. grace theology because this is the book that teaches “the just shall live by faith.” **Hab. 2:4**

The statement that “the just or righteous shall live by faith” is a statement that plays a major role in the Christian faith. The idea that “justification is by faith alone” did not originate with Augustine or Luther. It did not originate in the Reformation. It is a statement that was given directly by God to Habakkuk in Habakkuk 2:4 and was also given to Moses in Genesis 15:6.

This famous statement is critical and theological and practical. It is a statement specifically quoted by Paul in **Rom. 1:17** to show that the grace Gospel is a Gospel that proclaims the righteousness of God is found only by faith in Jesus Christ. Paul also cites it in **Gal. 3:11** to show that we are justified by faith alone and not by works of the Law. The writer of Hebrews also uses it to challenge believers to continue to live their righteous lives and develop by faith (**Heb. 10:38**).

Now there are a couple of powerful theological applications that we may make from this statement in Habakkuk:

- 1) We are justified by faith alone in Jesus Christ and not any works or law—Gen. 15:6; Gal. 3:11. In other words, we are saved from our sins by faith alone in Christ alone. Faith is the real highway to heaven, not works and not law.
- 2) **We cope in an evil world by faith alone in what God reveals about Himself in His Word and not by looking at what we see in the world.** When you look at this world you do not see any evidence that God is in sovereign control; but we don’t live by what we see, we live by faith.

Those who are righteous live their lives by faith in God and His Word. They believe what God says even when it appears as if God is silent. That is how the just live and cope in a world

Reason #5 - Habakkuk is a book that teaches us God is still in control even when His Word is being completely ignored. **1:4**

We are living in a time in which very few actually care about what God’s Word does say. Most people don’t care if they honor God. It is expected that our political leaders will soon sign into law something that promotes same-sex relationships. These politicians don’t care that this is leading us to God’s judgment because they don’t care about the Word of God. Just recently, a man stood in the White House and blasphemed God by saying, “Praise Allah” because his traitor son was released. Allah is a demonic invention of a god invented by a child-molesting liar and con man whose name was Mohammed. Arab Christians do not use that name because they realize that is not referring to the true God. Our political leaders don’t care about that because they ignore Biblical truth.

It is obvious Habakkuk saw the same thing in his day. He saw that most leaders could care less what God's Word actually said. His governmental leaders were not interested in obeying the Word of God. Habakkuk was very disturbed about that. How could God permit that? When the government of the nation completely ignores God's Word, is God still sovereign? Is God truly working out His sovereign plan? God will answer that question Himself straight up in this book of Habakkuk.

Reason #6 - Because Habakkuk is a book that proves no proud person can possibly be right with God and will one day face the ferocious wrath of God. **2:4**

Truth is there is something wrong in the soul of one who is proud. Proud, arrogant people tend to dominate things, but they are heading to total eternal destruction. We live in a world of proud people who are too proud to even see the truth about themselves. They are too proud to admit they are sinners who need a Savior.

God says to Habakkuk, I have them all in my sights and the proud, arrogant, dominant, rich political and religious leaders will ultimately be fully exposed and ultimately judged. They will pay. As this book says, God will "trample the nations" of the earth (**3:12**) and He will split open their arrogant heads (**3:13**).

Reason #7 - Because Habakkuk is a book that clearly proves is it possible to have many questions and still end up rejoicing in this life. **1:2, 3; 3:18**

There is absolutely nothing wrong with having honest questions. Remember that, young people. You have a God-ordained right to ask questions and you have a right to ask questions that relate to God.

But here is something you do not want to miss from this book—when Habakkuk had questions about God and what He was or wasn't doing he went straight to God with them. He did not go to a counselor, or to some God-mocking college professor, or he did not go around talking to a bunch of people about his doubts. He went straight to God and the end is he ends up rejoicing.

When we have questions, we need to go to God and carefully search His Word and when we carefully search a book like Habakkuk, we will get some answers and we will end up rejoicing—so we are going to study the book for these reasons.

QUESTION #2 – Who is Habakkuk?

Well, the truth is we really don't know much about him. All we actually learn about him comes from two verses in the book: Habakkuk 1:1; 3:1. From these verses we learn that **his name was Habakkuk and we learn he was a prophet**.

We don't learn anything about his family or his hometown. In fact, the actual meaning of his name is suspect. It may come from the Hebrew word "habaq," which means "to embrace" or to "fold hands around."

Martin Luther thought that Habakkuk meant embrace because he tried to theologically comfort and uphold God's people in a dark world.

There are some strange stories in history about Habakkuk that no one can really prove. One story that shows up in the Apocrypha book "Bel and the Dragon" says that Habakkuk was supposedly commanded by an angel to take a meal to Daniel, who had been cast into a lion's den a second time and when Habakkuk said that he did not know where the lion's den was, the angel took him by his hair and transported him to Daniel and then back to Judea.

Another rabbinic story says that Habakkuk was the son of the Shunammite woman mentioned in II Kings 4, whom Elisha restored to life. This is based on the fact that Elisha said, "you shall embrace a son" (II Kings 4:16) and Habakkuk's name means to embrace.

Another speculation says that Habakkuk was a temple priest in Jerusalem and a musician in the Levitical line. This is based on the fact that the book ends "for the choir director on my stringed instrument."

But the truth is we really don't know much about him. All of this is conjecture. What we do know is that he was a prophet and as a prophet, he got direct revelatory messages from God and his responsibility was to communicate those messages to the people.

In the case of Biblical prophets, the messages end up being in the written Scriptures.

So Habakkuk was a prophet of God. **Now the typical job of a prophet was proclamation, but Habakkuk didn't fit the mold because he got into speculation.** Habakkuk started questioning God. He was a very honest man with honest questions. He told the truth.

QUESTION #3 – When did Habakkuk write this book?

Well, we get some help from the book. God revealed that He was going to raise up the Chaldeans (Babylonians), who were a fierce people and that He was going to cause them to march through the world and dominate it and punish the evil-doers of Judah (**1:6**). Obviously it had not happened yet because God told Habakkuk that He was about to do it. In fact, God told him that it would be in "your days" (**1:5**).

The Babylonians began to move in 612 B.C.. In 605 B.C. they fought their battle in Carchemish. Then a few years later, Jerusalem fell to the hands of the Babylonians in 586 B.C.. **So we would conclude that Habakkuk wrote the book around 606 B.C.. This would mean that Habakkuk wrote during the reign of Jehoiakim, who ruled from 609 B.C. to 598 B.C..**

Jehoiakim was an evil king who reigned for 11 years as king in Jerusalem (II Kings 23:36-37). Habakkuk saw him and saw his evil political leadership and he could not figure out why God let this evil leader get away with it. Well, in this book he gets his answer.

QUESTION #4 – What is the theme of the book?

God is sovereign over everything at all times, even over God-mocking political leadership who are corrupt and evil and even over a sin-filled world; and the righteous and just of God may have questions, but they will continue to believe God is in sovereign control and will, by faith, believe the Word of God.

The just will always live by faith. That is true for the salvation from sin and that is also true for sanity in a sinful world.