

A Prophet is Troubled, then Taught

Habakkuk 1:1 - 2:20

Pastor Michael Lynn / West Hampden Baptist Church

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Introduction: Very little is known about the prophet Habakkuk, though his name means either “embracer” or “wrestler,” perhaps because of his love for God. He “wrestles” with God concerning Israel’s lack of chastisement for sin & then he “wrestles” with God because He uses a more wicked nation, Babylon, to bring about that chastisement. Many pastors, myself included, preached from this book after the events of 9/11. What was God doing? Why was He doing it? Ryrie’s summary of the prophecy of Habakkuk is simple: “Habakkuk’s problems (1:2 – 2:20), & Habakkuk’s praise (3:1-19). I also appreciate Wiersbe’s outline: “The prophet wondering & worrying (chapter 1); the prophet watching & waiting (chapter 2); & the prophet worshipping & witnessing (chapter 3). We first looked at the book of Habakkuk back in February of this year when we were preparing for the evangelistic meetings with Mike Shrock. Habakkuk 3:2 was my text on a Sunday morning with the message “Passionate pleading for revival.” That Sunday evening we considered the phrase “*the just shall live by his faith*” (2:4) & saw how it is quoted 3 times in the N.T.

This morning I want us to examine the prophet’s honest doubts as he questions the seeming indifference & inconsistency of God in regards to both Judah & Babylon. “This book is a theodicy, a defense of God’s goodness & power in view of the existence of evil” (Ryrie). Note with me here the problems Habakkuk voices & the answers God reveals. Tonight we will look at Habakkuk’s closing words of praise in chapter 3.

I. Habakkuk’s first problem & God’s answer (1:2-11) > Is God **indifferent**?

A. The concern of the prophet (:2-3)

1. The conditions in the land: “*violence, iniquity, grievance, spoiling (destruction), strife, contentions (disputes), injustice.*”
2. The cry of the prophet:
 - a. First word for “*cry*” – “to call for help.”
 - b. Second word for “*cry*” – “to scream, cry out with a loud voice & with a disturbed heart.”

B. The cause of the problem (:4)

1. The leaders refused to obey the law.
 2. Courts were crooked & justice never prevailed.
- Summary: See Phillips comments pp. 206-07.

C. The counsel to the prophet (:5-11)

1. God is going to use the godless Babylonians to punish (chastise) His people.
 - a. The evaluation of the people (Babylonians).
 - b. The expectation of the prophet – for God to send revival & establish righteousness.
2. “God gave Habakkuk a revelation, not an explanation, for what we always need in times of doubt is a new view of God” (Wiersbe).

Summary: God will allow the Babylonians to invade Judah & take them into exile.

II. Habakkuk’s second problem & God’s answer (1:12 – 2:20) > Is God **inconsistent**?

A. The charge of God’s inconsistency (1:12 – 2:1):

1. By God using Babylon, is He inconsistent with His **holiness** (1:12-13)?
 - a. Consider the focus on the character of God – He is eternal & holy.
 - b. Compare the distinction between doubt & unbelief.

2. By God using Babylon, is He inconsistent with the **helplessness** of His people (1:14-15)?
 - a. Consider the fierce savagery of the Babylonians.
 - b. Compare the false prophets in Jerusalem (Jer. 6:14; 8:22; 14:13ff.).
3. By God using Babylon, is He inconsistent with the **haughtiness** of His enemies (1:16-17)?
 - a. The Babylonians worshiped the gods of power & violence.
 - b. The Babylonians trusted in their military might (cf. “puffed up” in 2:4).

Summary: “It seemed unreasonable that the Lord would allow such spiritually ignorant people to conquer Judah, the land that housed His own temple” (Wiersbe). But Israel had refused to heed the warnings from the prophets, particularly Jeremiah.

Application: We may at times “wrestle” with God concerning the problems of life – but we must not succumb to debating with God to make Him change His mind. Nor should our honest doubts lead to unbelief; rather we must rest in verses such as Isaiah 26:3-4 & Romans 11:33-36.

Illustration: Habakkuk sees himself as a watchman (2:1) on the walls of Jerusalem, as he awaits a message from God to give to the people of Judah. Compare the spiritual lesson for us today as watchmen. Do we wait before God to hear & heed what He says to us in His Word?

B. The challenge to Habakkuk’s inquiry (2:2-20):

1. The command to **discern** (write God’s vision – 2:2-3).
 - a. The writing was to be permanent – for generations to come.
 - b. The writing was to be plain – for anyone to read, even running by (large & legible?).
2. The command to **depend** (trust God’s Word – 2:4-5).
 - a. Consider the sinner:
 - (1) He is puffed up with pride - “*his soul which is lifted up*”. Example: Daniel 4:30.
 - (2) He is “*not upright*” – given to crooked & sinful appetites (cf. II Peter 1:4).
 - (3) He is restless – “*cannot be satisfied.*”
 - b. Contrast the saint (“*just*” one):
 - (1) “*...but the just (speaks of salvation) shall live (speaks of sanctification) by his faith (speaks of security).*”
 - (2) “They may well be the 7 most important monosyllables in all of church history (Wiersbe).
3. The command to **declare** (declare God’s judgment – 2:6-20). Five “*woes*” -
 - a. Selfish ambition (:6-8); yet they reap what they sow.
 - b. Covetousness (:9-11); compare Mark 8:36 & Luke 12:15.
 - c. Exploitation of people (12-14); slave labor built the city of Babylon.
 - d. Drunkenness & violence (15-17); intoxication resulting in sensual behavior.
 - e. Idolatry (:18-20); disobedience to God – foolish & useless.

Summary: Habakkuk is given 3 assurances in this chapter: 2:4 focuses on God’s grace; 2:14 focuses on God’s glory; & 2:20 focuses on God’s government. God is still on the throne & everything is under His control.

Conclusion: Habakkuk is transformed from being a worrier to being a watcher & he becomes a worshiper (chapter 3). Have you ever “wrestled” with God, not in unbelief, but with doubts? A doubter may question God, but he doesn’t abandon God. The sin of unbelief is rebellion against God, an act of one’s will, to refuse to hear & heed what God says. In contrast to the unbelieving Babylonians that God used to chastise Judah, the sin of the religious Jews was greater. The greater the light, the greater the responsibility. Habakkuk was an honest man, desirous for God to spare His people Judah. But he was also open & willing to wait for God’s answer (2:1). We need to consider the words of Paul in Romans 11:33-36. “*O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom & knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, & His ways past finding out!...*” We are to seek to discern the Word of God (& be a faithful watchman); to depend upon the Person of God (trust Him fully); & to declare the judgment of God upon unrighteousness. Will you be a faithful servant – one who stands & listens for God to speak? Psalm 46:10.