

Why Lord?

GOD QUESTIONS #2 - Pastor Gary Combs - February 11, 2024 - Habakkuk 1:12-2:5

INTRO: Good morning church! We're continuing today with part two of our sermon series entitled, "GOD QUESTIONS: An Exposition of Habakkuk." We're going verse by verse through the little book written by the prophet Habakkuk. It's one of the 12 Minor Prophets (the two classifications "Major" and "Minor" are based on the size of the books, not the significance of their message). Habakkuk was a contemporary of Jeremiah, Nahum and Zephaniah. Based on internal evidence, the writing of his book took place "between the death of King Josiah of Judah in 609 BC and the beginning of the Babylonian captivity in 605 BC" (*The Believer's Study Bible*, p.1266).



It may be a little book, only 3 chapters, but it asks really big questions, the kind of questions about God that we all struggle with from time to time. Last week, we covered Habakkuk 1:1-11, where the prophet asked, "How long, Lord? How long must I cry out to You for help before You answer?" And God did answer, but not in the way that Habakkuk expected nor hoped. Now this week, we'll see how Habakkuk has gone from asking, "How long, Lord?" To "Why Lord?" "Why would you let an even worse thing come upon us?"

Need: What do you do when you've prayed to God and you don't like the answer you've received? You prayed for your marriage, but it ended in divorce. Why Lord? Wasn't marriage Your idea? Didn't You say You hate divorce? You prayed for a promotion at work, but they gave it to someone else. Why Lord? You prayed for healing, but the doctor says it looks like the chemo isn't working. Why Lord? I know You can heal. Why aren't You healing me? You prayed for your friend or family member to trust in Jesus, but they've actually run further from God and from you. Why? Why Lord? What do we do when God's answer doesn't seem to be "yes," but "wait," or even more difficult, "no?" What do you do when you've prayed to God and you don't like His answer?

That's Habakkuk. He doesn't like God's answer. It doesn't fit his understanding of God and the world. So now, he has more questions for God. These questions make him somewhat unique among the prophets. For while the other prophets represent God's voice to His people, Habakkuk seems to stand as a representative of God's people crying out to God. Indeed, the book of Habakkuk is a lament, crying out to God for answers about the violence, suffering, sin, strife, and injustice of this world and why the Lord doesn't seem to be doing anything about it.

What is lament? In his book, *Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy*, author Mark Vroegop says that "Lament is a prayer in pain that leads to trust. It is not only how Christians grieve; it's the way Christians praise God through their sorrows. Lament is a pathway to praise when life gets hard." Lament is praying and crying out our questions and complaints to God, while still believing and keeping our faith in Him.

Trans: That's why the key verse for understanding Habakkuk is:

Habakkuk 2:4 (ESV) ... but the righteous shall live by his faith.

Because while Habakkuk had many questions and complaints, he lifted them all up to the Lord by faith. He even lifts up his "why" questions. "Why Lord? Why would you let this happen?" And "why" questions are the hardest of all.

BODY: In the book of Habakkuk, when the prophet struggled with why a holy God would allow an evil nation like Babylon to prevail over Judah, the Lord called Habakkuk to trust that His plans would be better in the end. We can trust that God's plans for us will be better in the end. How can we trust that God's plans for us will be better in the end? The text gives three ways we can trust that God's plans for us will be better in the end.

Text: Habakkuk 1:12-2:5 (ESV) ¹² Are you not from everlasting, O Lord my God, my Holy One? We shall not die. O Lord, you have ordained them as a judgment, and you, O Rock, have established them for reproof. ¹³ You who are of purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong, why do you idly look at traitors and remain silent when the wicked swallows up the man more righteous than he? ¹⁴ You make mankind like the fish of the sea, like crawling things that have no ruler. ¹⁵ He brings all of them up with a hook; he drags them out with his net; he gathers them in his dragnet; so he rejoices and is glad. ¹⁶ Therefore he sacrifices to his net and makes offerings to his dragnet; for by them he lives in luxury, and his food is rich. ¹⁷ Is he then to keep on emptying his net and mercilessly killing nations forever? ^{2:1} I will take my stand at my watchpost and station myself on the tower, and look out to see what he will say to me, and what I will answer concerning my complaint. ² And the Lord answered me: "Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so he may run who reads it. ³ For still the vision awaits its appointed time; it hastens to the end—it will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come; it will not delay. ⁴ "Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him, but the righteous shall live by his faith. ⁵ "Moreover, wine is a traitor, an arrogant man who is never at rest. His greed is as wide as Sheol; like death he has never enough. He gathers for himself all nations and collects as his own all peoples."

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HOW TO TRUST THAT GOD'S PLANS ARE BETTER:

1. Write it plainly.

EXP: (1:12-2:2) First, look at 2:2, God answered, "Write" and "make it plain." Write what? Well, we have it recorded here in 3 chapters: This "oracle" (1:1), this "vision." God instructed Habakkuk to write out his questions and God's answers. And to write it plainly, so that people could read it and quickly understand it.

"Write the vision" (2:2) (חָזַן, *hāzôn*) - (Imp. verb) vision, oracle, prophecy (divine communication)

"Make it plain" (2:2) (בָּאֵר, *bā'ar*) - (Imp. verb) to engrave; to explain, declare, to make plain. "In large legible characters. Upon boxwood tables covered with wax, on which national affairs were engraved with an iron pen, and then hung up in public, at the prophets' own houses, or at the temple, that those who passed might read them." - *JFB Bible Commentary*



"Everlasting" (12) (קָדֵם, *qēdem*) - Lit., "aforetime." Question #1: LORD, aren't You from before all time?

"Holy One" (12) (קָדוֹשׁ, *qāḏôš*) - sacred, holy. Q#2: LORD, aren't You a Holy God?

"Rock" (12) (צוּר, *šûr*) - rock, cliff, a refuge, strength, mighty one

"Them as a Judgment" (12) (מִשְׁפָּט, *mišpāṭ*) - judgment, "Them" is the Babylonians. And as a "Reproof" (12) (יָכַח, *yākāh*) - to judge, rebuke, reprove, correct.

"Purer eyes" (13) (טְהוֹר, *t̥hôr*) - pureness, cleanness. Q#3: LORD, why do You let Your pure eyes "idly" look at: "Traitors" (13) (בָּגַד, *bāḡad*) - to act treacherously, deceitfully and "Wicked" (13) (רָשָׁע, *rāšā*) - wicked, criminal, guilty, wicked (hostile to God).

"More righteous" (13) (צַדִּיק, *šadīq*) - just, lawful, righteous. Judah is more righteous.

"He" (15-17) - Babylon is personified as a fisherman, gathering in the nations. Q#4 LORD, are You going to let Babylon keep on "mercilessly killing nations forever?"

"My watchpost" (2:1) (מִשְׁמֶרֶת, *mišmēret*) - guard, watch. Prophets as "watchmen" (Isa.21:8, Jer.6:17, Ez.3:17).

Ezekiel 3:17 (ESV) Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me.

"He will say to me" (2:1) (בִּי) - Lit., "in me," Habakkuk expects God to speak spiritually.

ARG: Habakkuk was learning what Isaiah had, that God's thoughts and ways are higher than ours.

Isaiah 55:8-9 (ESV) ⁸ For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. ⁹ For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

ILL: The job of a watchman could be pretty boring. Days and nights might go by with no activity. Yet, a watchman must stay awake and patiently be ready to publish a clear warning to his city.

APP: Write in a journal. Write down your prayers and complaints and write God's answers from studying His Word, His character traits, and His promises beside them. Next to your doubts, write God's names. The question is not, "Do I believe in God?" but rather "What sort of God do I believe in?" "And, how do I need to change my thinking to His?" Be willing to share with others what God is teaching you.

2. Wait for it patiently.

EXP: (2:3) Circle "wait for it." God is saying to Habakkuk, "Not today. Not tomorrow. But the answer is on the way. Hold on. Wait for it." It "will surely come."

"Wait for it" (2:3) (חָכַה, *hākā*) - imperative, to wait for, long for.

"Appointed time" (2:3) (מוֹעֵד, *mô'ēd*) - an appointment, a fixed time, a set time by God.

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“It hastens to the end” (2:3) (יָרָא, qēṣ) - end (of time or of space). This “it” will “speak” according to NKJV.

Habakkuk 2:3 (NKJV) For the vision is yet for an appointed time; But at the end it will speak, and it will not lie. Though it tarries, wait for it; Because it will surely come, It will not tarry.

Note that “it” (7x) is a masculine singular, not a neuter. “But at the end it shall speak, and not lie; or rather, “he shall speak”; and so in the following clauses it should be rendered, not “it”, but “he”; and so the apostle has taught us to interpret it of a person, and not a thing, Hebrews 10:37 that is” (John Gill).

Hebrews 10:37 (NKJV) “For yet a little while, And He who is coming will come and will not tarry.

Does this vision speak of the end of the Babylonians or of the end time when Christ returns and judges the World System Babylon? Perhaps both. Prophecy often has an immediate, ongoing, and future fulfillment.

“It will not lie” (2:3) - This vision/revelation will come true. “It will surely come.”

“Seems slow” (2:3) (מָחַהּ, māhah) - to linger, tarry, wait, delay.

ARG: God basically told Habakkuk to do as David wrote:

Psalm 37:7 (NIV) ⁷ Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him; do not fret when people succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes. ⁸ Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret—it leads only to evil.

ILL:

APP: Habakkuk was told that his answer was coming, but he’d have to wait for it. The Babylonians will be judged, and in the end destroyed. God’s not working on our timetable. Though he seems to linger, he does not delay. The next time you feel like giving up, keep patiently watching and waiting. In the end, Jesus “will come and will not tarry.” And all our “why” questions will be answered.

3. Believe it completely.

EXP: (4-5) Now we’re to the key verse of this book, “the righteous shall live by his faith” (4). “Habakkuk, I know you have questions, trying to understand how a holy God can allow such injustice, but keep believing!

“His/he/him” (2:4-5) - This is Babylon personified. “Puffed up, not upright, wine drinker, arrogant, greedy.”

ARG: But the righteous can choose to walk by faith in God’s plans, not by the world’s plans.

2 Corinthians 5:7 (NKJV) For we walk by faith, not by sight.

God gave this wonderful understanding to Habakkuk that Paul puts as the means of the gospel.

Romans 1:16-17 (ESV) ¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹⁷ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.”

ILL: In 539 BC, less than a century after its founding and only 70 years after conquering Judah, the Persian king Cyrus the Great conquered Babylon, while its King Belshazzar drank wine from the golden goblets his father had taken from the Jewish Temple, praising the “gods of gold and silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone” (Dan. 5:4). Habakkuk probably didn’t live to see this day, but those who read his prophecy did.

APP: Habakkuk was told to live by faith, to trust the Lord’s answer and timing even when he didn’t like the answer. In the end, God called him to believe that God’s plans were better than his.

CONCLUSION: We all have times when we ask, “Why Lord?” Yet, God calls us to trust that His plans are better than ours. Have you decided to trust God’s plans for your life? Have you believed the good news that Jesus has come, died for your sins, and was raised to life? Have you believed that He’s coming again? Let’s pray.