

Where Are You, Lord?

GOD QUESTIONS #3 - Pastor Gary Combs - February 18, 2024 - Habakkuk 2:6-20

INTRO: Good morning church! We're continuing today with part three 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 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.

In part one, we covered Habakkuk 1:1-11, where the prophet asked, "How long, Lord? How long must I cry out to You for help with the injustice and violence in my nation Judah before You answer?"

And God did answer, but not in the way that Habakkuk expected nor hoped. For God told him that He was already at work, sending the Babylonians to judge Judah. Which caused Habakkuk (in Hab. 1:12-2:5) to ask, "Why Lord?" "Why would you let an even worse thing come upon us?" We covered that question last week.

Now this week, in part three of our God Questions series, we see Habakkuk asking, "Where are you, Lord? What are you doing? I'm confused. I don't see You at work in this. Where are you, Lord?"

Need: Do you ever ask? "Where are you, Lord?" "There is so much evil in the world, so much pain. Where are you, Lord?" "Do you see the violence in Israel and Ukraine?" "Do you see the violence in our own land, the murders, the rapes, the stealing, the abuse, the division?" How much longer are You going to let this go on? Do you see the immorality? The lack of shame? The way people and nations are calling wrong, right and right, wrong? Where are you, Lord? How does what we see in our world today fit into Your plan, Lord? The things of this world seem to be getting worse and worse. How am I supposed to stay faithful in this world of confusion? Where are you, Lord?

Trans: Isn't that the real question? How are we to stay faithful when it seems like God is absent? 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. It is this way of crying out our questions and complaints to God in prayers of faith that the Bible calls "lament."

"Lament is a pathway to praise when life gets hard." — Mark Vroegop, *Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy*

Even when life doesn't make sense and God seems far away, we can lament, crying out our questions and complaints to God, believing that He is good and that He will cause all things to come together for good in the end.

BODY: In the book of Habakkuk, when the prophet struggled with understanding how a holy God could use an evil nation like Babylon, God answered him, declaring five woes of judgement on Babylon. Within these five woes, God encouraged Habakkuk's faith by helping him understand where God was at work. We can be encouraged in our faith by understanding where God is at work. How can we be encouraged in our faith by understanding where God is at work? The text gives three ways we can be encouraged in our faith by understanding where God is at work.

Text: Habakkuk 2:6-20 (ESV) ⁶ Shall not all these take up their taunt against him, with scoffing and riddles for him, and say, "Woe to him who heaps up what is not his own—for how long?— and loads himself with pledges!" ⁷ Will not your debtors suddenly arise, and those awake who will make you tremble? Then you will be spoil for them. ⁸ Because you have plundered many nations, all the remnant of the peoples shall plunder you, for the blood of man and violence to the earth, to cities and all who dwell in them. ⁹ "Woe to him who gets evil gain for his house, to set his nest on high, to be safe from the reach of harm!" ¹⁰ You have devised shame for your house by cutting off many peoples; you have forfeited your life. ¹¹ For the stone will cry out from the wall, and the beam from the woodwork respond. ¹² "Woe to him who builds a town with blood and founds a city on iniquity!" ¹³ Behold, is it not from the Lord of hosts that peoples labor merely for fire, and nations weary themselves for nothing? ¹⁴ For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. ¹⁵ "Woe to him who makes his neighbors drink—you pour out your wrath and make them drunk, in order to gaze at their nakedness!" ¹⁶ You will have your fill of shame instead of glory. Drink, yourself, and show your uncircumcision! The cup in the Lord's right hand will come around to you, and utter shame will come upon your glory! ¹⁷ The violence done to Lebanon will overwhelm you, as will the destruction of the beasts that terrified them, for the blood of man and violence to the earth, to cities and all who dwell in them. ¹⁸ "What profit is an idol when its maker has shaped it, a metal image, a teacher of lies? For its maker trusts in his own creation when he makes speechless idols!" ¹⁹ Woe to him who says to a wooden thing, Awake; to a silent stone, Arise! Can this teach? Behold, it is overlaid with gold and silver, and there is no breath at all in it. ²⁰ But the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him."

WE CAN BE ENCOURAGED IN OUR FAITH BY...

1. Understanding that God's judgment is already in motion.

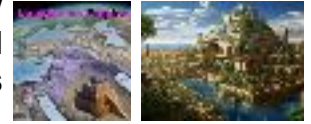
EXP: When we see injustice and immorality without any consequence, it challenges our faith. We wonder where's God? Yet, God revealed to Habakkuk that Babylon's judgment was already in motion by declaring five woes against Babylon.

Where Are You, Lord?

GOD QUESTIONS #3 - Pastor Gary Combs - February 18, 2024 - Habakkuk 2:6-20

“Woe” (6,9,12,15,19 - 5x) (הוי, *hōy*) - Alas!, Woe! Expressing dissatisfaction and pain; especially preparatory to a declaration of judgment. “When God utters **woe** against evil men He sets divine judgment in motion” (The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Matthew 16—23, ch. 35, p. 375). **Five woes:**

1) (6-8) **Extortion, unjust economics, theft.** Babylon will be plundered by those it had plundered. Why? Because they took it by “the blood of man” (8) and “violence to the earth” (8). By murder and stripping the land and cities of their wealth. Babylon even plundered the Temple in Jerusalem. It was the wealthiest nation in the world at that time. Its hanging gardens were one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.



2) (9-11) **Greedy and arrogant.** Babylon’s house will fall. Even the stones and beams of its great walls will cry out in judgment against it. “Protected by its huge walls more than 85 feet thick and 11 miles long, Babylon seemed as impregnable and inaccessible as an eagle’s ‘nest’ (9) (The Believer’s Study Bible, p.1269). Today, it lies in ruins and its Ishtar Gate is displayed in Berlin.



3) (12-14) **Bloodshed, iniquity and slavery.** Babylon’s civilization will be replaced with devastation because it was built with violence, bloodshed, and on the backs of slaves. All their “labor” will burn with “fire” and will be for “nothing” (13). Yet their glory will disappear, but the Lord’s glory will “fill the earth” (14).

4) (15-17) **Exploitation, alcohol abuse, sexual immorality.** Babylon’s glory will become shame. The LORD will cause them to drink the cup of “utter shame” (16). “Part of the crime of the Chaldeans is the devastation that they have caused upon nature and the animal world, which is seen in what they did to the cedars and cypresses and the animals of the forests of Lebanon” (17) (The Believer’s Study Bible, p.1269).

5) (18-20) **Idolatry, false religion.** Babylon will be judged for making and worshiping idols rather than the one true God who lives in His holy temple in heaven. “What profit is an idol?” (18)

“**Knowledge of the glory**” (14) (כְּבוֹד, *kābôḏ*) - “In contrast to the short-lived glory of Babylon, Jehovah’s glory shall be made known all the world over, and shall not be effaced” (Ellicott). “This is a singular and important verse. It may be first applied to Babylon. God’s power and providence shall be widely displayed in the destruction of this city and empire, and in the captivity and restoration of his people” (Clarke).

ARG: God will bring every deed into judgment.

Ecclesiastes 12:14 (NIV) For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.

God’s judgment on sin is already at work...

Romans 6:23 (ESV) For the wages of sin is death...

The gospel shows we are condemned already, but that we may be saved by faith in Jesus.

John 3:16-18 (NKJV) ¹⁶ For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. ¹⁷ For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. ¹⁸ “He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

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: The storyline of the Bible, and the metanarrative of history, can be understood through the four words: Creation, Fall, Redemption, Restoration. In Habakkuk, God showed that His judgment on sin was already in effect, but now He was preparing His people for redemption through Jesus.



Where Are You, Lord?

GOD QUESTIONS #3 - Pastor Gary Combs - February 18, 2024 - Habakkuk 2:6-20

2. Understanding that God's redemption is available now.

EXP: (14) Let's take a closer look at v.14. Certainly when God's five woes of judgment on Babylon were fulfilled in 539 BC, God's glory was magnified by the fulfillment of His Word and the return of His people to Jerusalem where King Cyrus gave them orders to rebuild the Temple. This set the stage for Christ's coming as our Redeemer, which v.14 points to. How? Let's look at Isaiah to see because Habakkuk quoted him:

Isaiah 11:9 (ESV) ...for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

How does this point to Jesus? Let's look at the context from Isaiah 9. This is a Messianic prophecy.

Isaiah 11:1-3, 10 (NLT) ¹ Out of the stump of David's family will grow a shoot— yes, a new Branch bearing fruit from the old root. ² And the Spirit of the Lord will rest on him... ³ He will delight in obeying the Lord. He will not judge by appearance nor make a decision based on hearsay. ¹⁰ In that day the heir to David's throne will be a banner of salvation to all the world. The nations will rally to him, and the land where he lives will be a glorious place.

So Hab. 2:14 points first to the glory of God's people being redeemed from Babylon back to Judah, but "Secondly. It may be applied to the glorious days of the Messiah. The land of Judea should by his preaching, and that of his disciples, be filled with the knowledge of God. God's great design fully discovered, and the scheme of salvation amply explained" (Clarke).

ARG: **Redemption, salvation, is available now!**

2 Corinthians 6:2 (ESV) For he says, "In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you." Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.

ILL: When God's people returned to Jerusalem, they no longer struggled with the false worship and idolatry of Canaan. Their exile in Babylon increased their love and desire for God. And the fall of Babylon put into motion the consecutive kingdoms of Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome that paved the way for Christ's redemptive message to be carried on the Roman roads throughout much of the world.

APP: Understanding that God's judgment is already in motion and that His redemption is available now encourages our faith. It builds our faith up knowing that God is at work on His four part plan.

3. Understanding that God's restoration is coming soon.

EXP: (14, 20) V. 14 shows God's ultimate plan. Adam knew His glory, but sin caused his understanding to **Fall**. Now, the **Redeemed** of God are spreading His glory and one day Christ will return and **Restore** all things and the "knowledge of the glory of the LORD" will fill the earth "as the waters cover the sea." How do we know this will come to pass? Because "the LORD is in His holy temple" (20). He has never left His royal throne! And He will bring the vision to pass! Remember what God said?



Habakkuk 2:3 (ESV) 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.

ARG: **Two Bible reasons this passage points to God's future restoration: Isaiah 11 & Revelation 18.** (Isaiah 11: 1-3,10 described Christ's 1st coming and Isaiah 11:4-9, His 2nd)

Isaiah 11:4-9 (NLT) ⁴ He will give justice to the poor and make fair decisions for the exploited. The earth will shake at the force of his word, and one breath from his mouth will destroy the wicked. ⁵ He will wear righteousness like a belt and truth like an undergarment. ⁶ In that day the wolf and the lamb will live together; the leopard will lie down with the baby goat. The calf and the yearling will be safe with the lion, and a little child will lead them all. ⁷ The cow will graze near the bear. The cub and the calf will lie down together. The lion will eat hay like a cow. ⁸ The baby will play safely near the hole of a cobra. Yes, a little child will put its hand in a nest of deadly snakes without harm. ⁹ Nothing will hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain, for as the waters fill the sea, so the earth will be filled with people who know the Lord.

Where Are You, Lord?

GOD QUESTIONS #3 - Pastor Gary Combs - February 18, 2024 - Habakkuk 2:6-20

In Rev. 18 we see Babylon as emblematic of a one world government, economy, and religion that God will one day carry out His ultimate “woes” upon.

Revelation 18:1-20 (NIV) After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven. He had great authority, and the earth was illuminated by his splendor. With a mighty voice he shouted: “Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great! She has become a dwelling for demons and a haunt for every impure spirit... For all the nations have drunk the maddening wine of her adulteries. The kings of the earth committed adultery with her, and the merchants of the earth grew rich from her excessive luxuries.” ... “Woe! Woe to you, great city, you mighty city of Babylon! In one hour your doom has come! ... “Woe! Woe to you, great city, dressed in fine linen, purple and scarlet, and glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls! In one hour such great wealth has been brought to ruin! ... “Woe! Woe to you, great city, where all who had ships on the sea became rich through her wealth! In one hour she has been brought to ruin! “Rejoice over her, you heavens! Rejoice, you people of God! Rejoice, apostles and prophets! For God has judged her with the judgment she imposed on you.”

ILL:

APP: Habakkuk asked, “Where are you, Lord?” Where are you in all this mess? And God pulled back the veil and showed the prophet where He was already at work. This awareness of God’s work and plan in the world today and in the future encourages our faith and helps us walk by faith even when we’re not sure where God is at work in this very moment.

CONCLUSION: Where’s God at work in your life today? Are you one of God’s redeemed? Have you received this Jesus in whom we see the glory of God revealed? And having received Him, are you spreading the knowledge of His glory so that it fills the earth as the water covers the sea. Let’s pray.