

ABIDE

DISCOVERING YOUR OLD TESTAMENT



SOME QUESTIONS FOR GOD

HABAKKUK

Now the book of Habakkuk is very interesting. We've spoken before about the creativity of God in terms of how the prophetic writings differed from one another and all the different methods God used to grab the attention of the original audience. This writing certainly is to be given extra attention for creativity.

This book is one where there is no real specific audience except for the author himself.

In reading this book, you are taken on a journey with the prophet to figure out some truth. Has that ever been you? Were there ever any questions that you had regarding the plans and courses of God? Perhaps you say something like, "Well, I wonder why God brought me this way?" Or maybe it was, "Well, if this was destined to turn out so poorly, why did God allow me to go down this path in the first place? Why didn't He just stop me?" Or maybe your curiosity of your current situation took the form of a question closer to our prophet here, "O LORD, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear?"

This entire book is questions Habakkuk has for God. This is not in a disrespectful way at all; it is simply in an inquisitive way. He simply wants to hear from God regarding certain things in his life.

Because of this, some writers have called Habakkuk the "doubting Thomas" of the Old Testament", others have said that he must have had a question mark for a brain. But the reality was that he was simply trying to work some things out by talking to himself a bit and bringing us along with him on this little spiritual trip. He just wanted to understand, and I think that we can both identify and appreciate this from our dear prophet. He was just being himself.

Once again, just like we learned with Job, it isn't wrong to ask questions. It's wrong to ask questions in the wrong spirit. It is wrong to ask questions that are an accusation because we don't agree with something that was done, rather than an acceptance of the holy courses of God. But it is not wrong to ask God questions.

Right here in the Old Testament, you have an answer to how the believer in Christ can respond to the situations in life that just do not seem to make sense.

It is interesting to observe that the name Habakkuk means "Embrace" (a hug) and that is exactly what happens when you understand this book. If there is some struggle that you have and cannot seem to get worked out, come and get a spiritual hug from this prophet of God. You have a book that you can come to again and again to seek help in times of confusion.

How to Think About Habakkuk

As in our previous book, this writing only consists of three chapters and is a relatively easy read. Its major sections can easily be discovered with each dividing chapter. We also need to understand the purpose of this book. Habakkuk's questions to God had to do with those who held God's people captive at the time, the Babylonians.

As far as Israel's history is concerned in the Old Testament, God's people had conflict with three main enemies: 1) The Edomites, who were written about by the prophet Obadiah, 2) The Assyrians, who were written about Nahum, and 3) The Babylonians, who were written of here by our prophet Habakkuk.

Habakkuk had watched the atrocities of the Babylonians and stood in astonishment as God continued to allow this nation to oppress God's people without reprisal.

Faith Is Confusing (Chapter 1)— In this chapter, Habakkuk uses a series of questions in an attempt to understand what God was doing with His people.

When Are You Going to Do Something? (1:1-2): This is Habakkuk's frustration. He is a man of God.

Therefore, he knows God's power, he knows right and wrong, and yet he sees everything falling apart around him. He looks up to God with what he sees and utters a single word to God, "Violence!" But as he is listening back, he hears nothing from heaven and is simply wondering how long he has to wait before he does.

Why Did You Do That? (1:3-11): Here we see God's answer to Habakkuk telling him that the Babylonians would be raised up to deal with His unruly people. Verse 6 reads, "For, lo, I raise up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, which shall march through the breadth of the land, to possess the dwelling places that are not theirs."

How Can They Help? (1:12-17): Habakkuk can't understand at first how God would correct the evil and violence of His people by way of another nation who was more evil and violent than Israel had become.

Faith is Frustrating (Chapter 2)— Chapter 2 provides another question and another answer given by God.

Habakkuk and His Determination (2:1): The verse is short, but we must stop here and consider the significance. Habakkuk said, "I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved."

This is Habakkuk saying that he will simply bring this matter before the Lord, and then he will wait confidently for an answer. Now, the reason we must stop here is because if we read this too quickly, we will not understand the gravity. We may finish in seconds what Habakkuk learned over a significant period of time while in his pain of confusion. Habakkuk decided He would bring the matter before the Lord and would linger there until he had peace about it.

God and His Answer (2:2-20): After an unknown period of time, God told Habakkuk, "Hey, write this down." God then began to give Habakkuk an answer by a series of "woe" oracles against the Chaldeans. It was an indication that though they would be used to judge His people, these Chaldeans would ultimately be judged because of their sin as well. It was God's way of telling His people that ultimately, evil never wins, and will always be judged.

Faith is Unwavering (Chapter 3): Despite what can be seen immediately, God's faith calls us to move beyond the observable and simply take Him at His Word. This chapter of the book is actually a prayer of Habakkuk, but is written like a song, as he not only begins petitioning God on behalf of His mercy but also singing praise to God for all he has done.

The Prayer for God's Mercy (3:1-2): Habakkuk now knows what must come to pass, but only asks that in the middle of God pouring out His wrath, would He please remember His mercy as well.

The Praise for God's Power (3:3-15): Here Habakkuk gives God the recognition due only to Him. He is the Master of all creation, and all nature knows what to do at God's presence and command.

The Promise of God's Sufficiency (3:16-19): After all the trouble and after all the confusion, Habakkuk had this to say about what the Lord would do as he ends this prophecy in verse 19, "The LORD God is my strength, and he will make my feet like the hinds' feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places. To the chief singer on my stringed instruments."

It was Habakkuk's understanding that though there was trouble ahead, it would be God who would continue to sustain His people and continue to preserve them through all of their trouble.

What to Look for in Habakkuk

Promises— Like our other prophets bearing bad news, there are promises that are sown in to give rays of hope along the way.

The Promise of God's Knowledge to All— Habakkuk 2:14 reads like this, "For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea."

God desires, and has always desired to be known among all the peoples of the earth. Though this truth will be covered in greater detail in a moment, God works in the world and through His people that He might be made known.

The Promise of God's Permanence— This promise we find in just a few verses down from the previous. In Habakkuk 2:20 our prophet records these words, "But the LORD is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him."

In Scripture, we are reminded over and over again that what appears to be a world spinning out of control and burning away to its destruction, God is still there ruling and presiding over every instant of human history.

Therefore, instead of throwing up our hands in hysteria like everyone else, we can rest calmly and silently in the fact that God is in His holy temple, and there he will remain forever.

The Solution for Confusion— Once again, Habakkuk was sincerely confused about how to think about what was happening around him. It wasn't causing him to question his faith or the goodness of God, he just simply was trying to find an answer. In his search, we see a fantastic pattern to follow that we can use when we come against a spiritual problem we can't readily explain.

Acknowledge the Problem: That is what Habakkuk was doing with his series of questions. He recognized that things were not right in the world. Just honestly acknowledge whatever the problem is.

Tell God About It: Express your problem plainly to the One who is able to give you an answer. It won't do you any good to stay in a state of worry, fear, and confusion. There are so many answers outside of our control, so let's get used to telling God about our needs.

Wait On God: It's okay to keep praying for guidance over and over again. Don't stop praying and lose faith because you didn't receive an answer in your timeframe. Keep praying and keep waiting. Also, make sure that while you're asking God to answer you about what you don't know, that you preach to yourself those things about God that you can know. This is the example that we see from Habakkuk. It was as if he were praying to God, "Lord, I know that you are good, but I can't seem to work this out." This is the attitude you're looking for when you're waiting.

Listen and Follow: When God finally does answer (even if a specific answer is not known), we need to accept what God gives us peace about. If there is a direct answer, perfect! However, if we sense that we won't know until we get to heaven, we must also accept this as an answer.

What to Gain from Habakkuk

Everything God Does, He Does for His Glory— In the midst of Habakkuk's confusion, God helps his dear prophet put everything into perspective. God was working toward an end that would amplify His glory to the world, and that the world would come to know Him. Everything God does in our lives is also to this end. That we would know Him, and once we know Him, that we would be able to point others to Him. God wants all people to have a knowledge of Him, and He has allowed us to partner with Him to make that happen.

Sometimes Faith Has Problems— Habakkuk is a book to remind us that even though we don't have all of the answers, we can still trust God. So often we judge our lives by outward appearance only and forget that God is His holy temple ruling by His divine providence.

William Cowper said it best in his Hymn "God Moves in a Mysterious Way" when he wrote, "Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, but trust Him for His grace. Behind a frowning providence, He hides a smiling face."



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