



Week 5: The Book of Habakkuk (A detailed study)

A common question as people look at the state of the world today is 'Why doesn't God do something about it?'

Habakkuk asked a similar question as he looked at the situation around him in Judah — a nation which was supposed to be God's own people. The answers he got were both surprising and shocking, and at first sight seemed to raise more problems than they solved.

Most Christians have to face times when God seems to be acting in unexpected and perplexing ways, both on a large scale and in their own lives. Habakkuk's response may help us to begin to cope with those situations.

Habakkuk lived in a time when Judah was being threatened by the Babylonians. They had defeated some of her neighbours, and were about to attack and conquer Judah. Some twenty years later they took many of her people away into exile. You can read the account of it in 2 Chronicles 36:11-21.

Day 1. Habakkuk's first complaint

Habakkuk 1:1-11

1. Make a list of the evils Habakkuk complained of in Judah (vv.2-4). How many of these are present in our society?
2. Try to summarize Habakkuk's reaction to this situation in a couple of sentences. Do you ever think like this?
3. What was God's answer (vv.5-11)? What can Judah expect at the hands of the Babylonians (Chaldeans in the RSV version)?

What situations make you question God? God's judgment on Judah was to come through an event which we would interpret as being totally secular. In what ways do you expect God to act in your own life, and the lives of those around you?

Pray for the evils you see that exist in our society and the world around us.

Day 2. Habakkuk's second complaint

Habakkuk 1:12-2:1

Read the passage, trying to assess Habakkuk's particular reaction to this situation. Habakkuk's reaction (1:12) seems to be one of faith, both in remembering what he already knew about God, and in accepting what God had just said to him.

1. Make a list of the titles Habakkuk used for God in this verse. Why is each appropriate to the problem the prophet is facing?
2. Despite Habakkuk's faith, he had many questions about God's use of the Babylonians to bring judgment on Judah. Why did he find it so shocking (vv.13-17)?
3. How did he set about finding an answer (see 2:1)?

God sometimes seems to us to be acting unreasonably. Think of specific instances in your own life where this has been the case. How can Habakkuk's response help?

Pray: Bring to God any situations that are troubling you or those you know at the moment.

Day 3. God's answer

Habakkuk 2:2-20

As you read the passage, try to pick out the general flow of what God was saying.

1. Can you summarize God's answer to Habakkuk in just one or two sentences?

God's answer was to be written down for all to read (v.2) and it was sure to be fulfilled at the proper time (v.3). It could be summed up by saying that the Babylonians would eventually reap the results of their evil, while the righteous would live because of their trust in God (v.4).

2. Verses 6-20 are a series of five 'woes' pronounced on the Babylonians (vv.6-8,9-11,12-14,15-17,18-20). Try to sum up in a few words each of the evils being condemned.

Notice how the judgment pronounced against each one is appropriate — a serious version of the punishment fitting the crime!

3. What encouragements are there in this chapter for Habakkuk, and others like him, who want to remain faithful to God in a hostile world?

Pray: Spend some time meditating on verse 20. Consciously bring your own life and the state of the world under God's scrutiny.

Day 4. Habakkuk's prayer

Habakkuk 3:1-15

This chapter is a hymn, and the musical directions in vv.1 and 19 suggest that it may have been used in the worship in the temple. It was an expression of Habakkuk's confidence in God, no doubt deeply influenced by the events of the previous chapters.

1. In verse 2 what was Habakkuk asking God to do?
2. Try to write out this verse in words you might use to pray.

Verses 3-15 form a poetic picture of what happens when God does act. Part of it includes references to God's dealings with his people in the past. For example, the places mentioned in v.3 are the regions around Sinai, and this is a reference to the giving of the Law during the exodus (Exodus 20:18-21 gives you part of the account). Other parts appear to refer to future events.

3. What impressions do you think this passage is intended to convey?
4. What was the purpose of God's actions (see especially v.13)?

Memorize Habakkuk 3:2, a plea for God's merciful action.

Pray: Use verse 2 to help you in your prayers. Try to think of specific parts of God's work that need his reviving power.

Day 5. Habakkuk's confidence in God

Habakkuk 3:16-19

Read through the passage two or three times so that you get the feel of it.

Remember the situation that Habakkuk was facing as he made this moving statement of confidence in God.

His response seemed to be partly one of physical fear (v. 16) as he considered what would happen when the Babylonians invaded Judah. (Remember that the events of v.17 would be catastrophic in an agricultural community.)

Nevertheless, he was able to express his confidence, and even joy, in God.

1. What was the basis of his confidence?
2. How had his attitudes changed since the beginning of the book?
3. What, precisely, had made the difference?

Can you think of examples of your own attitudes changing in this way?

Part of Habakkuk's confidence came from remembering God's dealings with his people in the past.

Praise & Prayer: What events, both historical and personal, can you use to remind yourself of God's faithfulness when life is difficult? Spend some time thanking God for them now.

Weekend

If you have the time, re-read the whole book, looking to see how it all fits together. You may also notice things you missed on the first reading.

Can you sum up the impression left with you after studying Habakkuk? What is its central message? Are there parts of your life and attitudes which it affects?

Habakkuk 2:4 is a very famous verse quoted in the New Testament (Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:37- 39). Look at these references (in their contexts!), and see if you can find ways in which its meaning has developed with the coming of Christ.