

WRESTLING AND WAITING

Habakkuk 1:1-2:20

Introduction

Introduction to the Minor Prophets – ancient, yet relevant – Habakkuk is one of the smallest, yet he has much to say to us today. As with many of the Minor Prophets, not much is known about the prophet except what can be inferred from the book. In the case of Habakkuk, internal information is virtually nonexistent, making any conclusions about his identity and life pretty much guesswork. His simple introduction as “Habakkuk the prophet” may imply that he needed no introduction since he was a well-known prophet of his day. It is quite certain that he was a contemporary of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zephaniah, but none of the other prophets mention him in their writings.

Times were hard in the days of Habakkuk. Habakkuk probably wrote this prophecy during the final days of the Assyrian Empire as the Babylonians were gaining power. This was shortly before the Babylonians invaded Judah and the captivity began. The Babylonians do not appear to be an imminent threat when Habakkuk was writing, but he seems to be very aware of their potential threat, and thus Habakkuk’s time frame is probably not later than the end of Josiah’s reign (640–609 BC). Before Josiah, Judah had radically turned away from God under the leadership of the extremely wicked kings Manasseh and Amon, and the nation was ripe for punishment (refer to scripture reading - 2 Kings 23:26–27). Judah was morally and spiritually corrupt. They were worshiping Baal on the high places, offering their children to Molech, dedicating horses to the sun god, and allowing the temple to fall into ruin. Judah experienced a significant, though short-lived, time of revival during Josiah’s reign with the restoration of the temple and reinstatement of the Feast of Passover, but returned quickly to its evil ways following his death. It was a politically turbulent time as well. Assyria had ruled Judah with a heavy hand for well over a hundred years, inflicting punishment and tribute; but Assyria was beginning to weaken, and soon Babylon would be the

world power. This would place Habakkuk’s prophecy sometime around 620–610 BC.

As Habakkuk, a sensitive man with a tender heart for God, looked on and saw all of Judah’s wickedness and the increasing strength of Babylon, he wondered, ‘Where in the world could God be? How could God stand back and let His people become more and more wicked without stepping in and bringing the nation to its knees as in days past?’

These are the kind of questions Habakkuk was dealing with in his writing. One other aspect about this little book that is unique among all of the prophetic writings is that Habakkuk never addresses the nation or the people of Judah. The entire book is a dialogue between the prophet and God. Today we are going to look at chapters 1 and 2.

I. The Burden – the prophet’s complaint

In vv. 1-4 we see his first complaint – two main questions: how long? Why? He looked around at the wickedness and the rebellion of his people and he asked, God, how long are you going to let this go on? When are you going to do something about these wicked people, to bring them back to God? God, why don’t you do something?

v. 4- he expresses 4 conclusions about what has happened in their nation. And if you think the Bible isn’t relevant for today, just look at these (go through the four statements) – they sound just like our society today.

- Destruction and violence are all around
- Strife and conflict are rampant
- The law is paralyzed so there is no justice
- The wicked are controlling the righteous, so that justice is perverted (twisted) – wrong is right and right is wrong.

Doesn’t that sound like our world? The only difference is that they were the chosen nation, God’s own people – we can’t make that claim today. That is really the prophet’s argument. “These are your people, God. Aren’t you listening? When are you going to do something?”

In vv. 5-11 we have God's answer to the prophet's first question – look at what he says.

v. 5 - Don't worry, I have a plan. I am going to do something. I'm going to do something so amazing you wouldn't believe it.

v. 6a - I'm going to use the Babylonians to punish the people of Judah for their sin.

v. 6b-11 - he goes on to describe the Babylonians – a ruthless and impetuous people. He did not answer the question of when this would happen, only that it would happen.

In vv. 12-17 we have Habakkuk's response and his second complaint. His response is essentially, "God, you're going to do what?" Then he begins an argument with God about God's holiness – read the verses and discuss his argument – God you are holy and righteous. It doesn't make sense for you to use the wicked to accomplish your work and purposes. That is not like you, God.

Application – review the discussion in this first chapter:

Habakkuk – God what are you going to do about your people?

God – you wouldn't believe it if I told you?

Hab (implied) – Yes I would, Tell me

God – I'm going to use the Babylonians.

Hab – I don't believe it.

How often do we respond in much the same way as Habakkuk? We pray about something, pleading with God for an answer, and then when He gives us His answer, we say, God, why would you do that?

II. The Vision – God's Answer to the Complaint

v. 1 – Habakkuk decides that it is time to shut up and wait for an answer – and what a good idea that usually is – read v. 1 - Applic. – teach me Lord to wait.

v. 2 – **THEN** the Lord replied – only when the prophet gave up and waited. One of the most difficult things to do when we are struggling is to stop struggling and wait for God's answer.

In vv. 2-20 we have God's response to the complaint of Habakkuk that He was not doing anything about the sin of his people.

Read vv. 2-3 – Three commands

- write it down

- make it plain so those who read it will know what to do

- be patient – believe me, it will happen.

Read vv. 4-5 – Here we have a contrast

– the arrogant (Babylon) ←→ the righteous

-self

- faith

Habakkuk was concerned with the sinful actions of his people and well he should be. But God also made the point that the truly righteous person is the one who lives a life of faith.

This statement was quoted by the Apostle Paul in Romans 1:17 and it later became the rallying cry of the reformation. It was the truth that motivated Martin Luther to fight against the corruption he saw in the church of his day. Here we see the contrast with Babylon who was wrapped up in themselves, with no notice of God.

In vv. 6-17 we have a series of taunts – woes expressed toward Babylon. We are not going to read these verses, but what God is saying in these verses was designed to reassure the prophet that, just because God was going to use the Babylonians to deal with Judah, did not mean that they would get off without consequences. No, they would have to answer for their sin as well.

vv. 18-20 – a reminder of God's power and rule. The contrast between idols and the true God.

Conclusion

Four lessons in this for us, when we are looking for answers to the questions that trouble us in life.

1. God always hears our cries. But, while he always hears our questions, he doesn't necessarily answer them all. He tells us only what He wants us to know.

2. Our responsibility is to believe and accept God's plan, not to understand it.
3. Our confusion is usually the result of our narrow viewpoint.
-----> looking at a baseball game through a knothole in the outfield fence.
4. God is still on the throne. v. 20 He is alive and powerful, unlike idols which are made by man.

He has not abandoned His people. Just because He is silent does not mean that He is not there.

Just because what He is doing does not make sense to us does not mean that He has lost control.

There comes a time when we need to stop questioning and start worshipping, to stop arguing and start listening, to simply be silent before Him.

There are many lessons in Habakkuk. Next week – ch. 3 – I encourage you to read through the entire book this week – each day if possible.