

THE GLORY OF GOD

Week 9 – Ask Habakkuk How God’s Glory Matters to God

November 6, 2018

Is God revealing His goodness? Rom. 8:28 - *And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.* Yet we continue to wonder about God’s ways. We need to remember that God has told us ‘*For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,*’ says 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*’ (Isa. 55:8-9).

A prophet named Habakkuk wondered and God inspired him to write the book of Habakkuk. This prophet prophesied the coming Babylonian army and its destruction of Judah. Habakkuk’s name means to “embrace” or “wrestle.” How fitting. Habakkuk was wrestling with a difficult issue. His name probably means, “He Who Embraces” or “He Who Clings.” It is an appropriate name because Habakkuk comes to a firm faith through grappling with tough questions. Habakkuk’s issue - if God is good, then why is there evil in the world? And if there has to be evil, then why do the evil prosper? What is God doing in the world?

Hab. 1:1 - *The burden which the prophet Habakkuk saw*

Habakkuk had a “burden” – he had a message from God. The burden was a heavy weight to Habakkuk who was announcing coming judgment on Judah. And, Habakkuk asks questions of God.

Hab. 1:2-4 - *O LORD, how long shall I cry, and You will not hear? Even cry out to You, “Violence!” And You will not save.* ³ *Why do You show me iniquity, and cause me to see trouble? For plundering and violence are before me; there is strife, and contention arises.* ⁴ *Therefore the law is powerless, and justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous; therefore perverse judgment proceeds.*

Habakkuk is crying out to God, telling Him that there is violence within Judah. “How long shall I cry out?” This reflects Habakkuk’s impatience with God Who is longsuffering. “What are You doing, LORD? What are You NOT doing?” Habakkuk wanted a cleansing, purging, chastening, and revival among the people of Judah. Habakkuk questions God’s wisdom and blames God for indifference resulting in, according to Habakkuk’s perspective, inactivity on God’s part.

God responds...

Hab. 1:5-11 - *Look among the nations and watch—be utterly astounded! For I will work a work in your days which you would not believe, though it were told you.* ⁶ *For indeed I am raising up the Chaldeans (the Babylonians), a bitter and hasty nation which marches through the breadth of the earth, to possess dwelling places that are not theirs.* ⁷ *They are terrible and dreadful; their judgment and their dignity proceed from themselves.* ⁸ *Their horses also are swifter than leopards, and more fierce than evening wolves. Their chargers charge ahead; their cavalry comes from afar; they fly as the eagle that hastens to eat.* ⁹ *“They all come for violence; their faces are set like the east wind. They gather captives like sand.* ¹⁰ *They scoff at kings, and princes are scorned*

by them. They deride every stronghold, for they heap up earthen mounds and seize it. ¹¹ Then his mind changes, and he transgresses; he commits offense, ascribing this power to his god

WHAT is God telling Habakkuk? From the surrounding nations will come a nation that will be God's instrument of judgment on sinful Judah! The Babylonians who will eventually come against Judah – are being sent by the LORD! God was in the process of raising up a very violent and cruel nation to judge His people. God tells Habakkuk that the Babylonians will indeed be judged for their sin! Babylon will be held guilty for their wickedness, however, God is going to first use them to chastise Judah! (Jer. 51:1-5)

Habakkuk was first troubled that there was no judgment against Judah; God answered by telling Habakkuk that He, God, was indeed at work and judgment was on the way. Had Habakkuk forgotten that God is longsuffering? Then Habakkuk was troubled by the agent of judgment, the Babylonians who were an even more wicked people than the people of Judah.

Habakkuk then speaks his second question to God after hearing about the agent of judgment God will use to judge Judah.

Hab. 1:12-13a - Are You not from everlasting, O LORD my God, my Holy One? We shall not die. O LORD, You have appointed them for judgment; O Rock, You have marked them for correction. ¹³ You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on wickedness. Habakkuk knows Who God is. God is everlasting; therefore, His promises must be forever. Habakkuk knows that God made a covenant with His people, Israel. God promised Abraham that he would become a great nation (Gen. 12:1-3) and that One from David's line would have an eternal kingdom (2 Sam. 7:14). Therefore, Israel cannot cease to exist as a nation. And, this is true! Habakkuk appears to have assumed, though, that if the Babylonians were allowed to prevail, they would completely wipe out Judah entirely. Thus, God could not allow the Babylonians to prevail and wipe out the entire nation. Habakkuk seems to have overlooked that God's promise was to preserve a REMNANT of Israel (Isaiah 1:9; 6:13; 10:20-22; 11:11; Jeremiah 23:3; Micah 2:12; Zephaniah 2:7). God could use the Babylonians to chasten His people, and yet preserve a remnant, through whom His covenant promises could be fulfilled.

Habakkuk, appears to think that God's plan to use the Babylonians as a chastening rod is inconsistent with God's character. How can a righteous God achieve His purposes through unrighteous means? God had foretold the Israelites in the Mosaic Covenant: *Deut. 28:49-50 - The LORD will bring a nation against you from afar, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flies, a nation whose language you will not understand, ⁵⁰ a nation of fierce countenance, which does not respect the elderly nor show favor to the young.*

How could Habakkuk speak of Babylon's unrighteousness and highlight their idol worship when Israel was engaged in idol worship?

Judges 2:13-14 - *They (Israel) forsook the LORD and served Baal and the Ashtoreths. ¹⁴And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel. So He delivered them into the hands of plunderers who despoiled them; and He sold them into the hands of their enemies all around, so that they could no longer stand before their enemies.*

Habakkuk continues his “rebuke” of God:

Hab. 1:13b - *Why do You look on those who deal treacherously, And hold Your tongue when the wicked devours a person more righteous than he?*
Habakkuk knows God hates evil and is rather amazed that God would use a nation even more wicked than Judah to punish Judah! Even though Judah has been sinful in her actions, she is better, according to Habakkuk, than the Babylonians.

Every word of Scripture is God-breathed – it is the inspired word of God. I believe that we are to learn from the early words of Habakkuk how we should NOT respond to God when we are perceiving that His ways are not in sync with our ways!
What are we learning?

Habakkuk has voiced two complaints to God. God answers once and then Habakkuk comments....

Hab. 2:1 - *I will stand my watch and set myself on the rampart, and watch to see what He will say to me, and what I will answer when I am corrected.*
What is Habakkuk declaring?

GOD answers...

Hab. 2:2-4 - *Then the LORD answered me and said: ‘Write the vision and make it plain on tablets, that he may run who reads it. ³For 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. ⁴Behold the proud, his soul is not upright in him; but the just shall live by his faith.* God tells Habakkuk to write down/record what He has told him. Habakkuk was to make it plain to others. Habakkuk first needed to understand it and accept it to make it plain. God instructed Habakkuk to write the downfall of the Babylonians which would happen in the future. “Write it down, Habakkuk, because it is going to happen.” The time has been appointed. God has decreed it. And may he who reads it “run” – move quickly; perhaps meaning transmits it quickly (??) What makes us know that what God has promised will transpire? FAITH in God – in WHO HE IS!

Hab. 2:4b – God tells Habakkuk...*the just shall live by his faith.* Faith in ALL Who God is – the glory of God - and FAITH in what He says! Trusting in His promises. How was a person in the OT saved? BY grace through faith in God’s revealed message! AND, God’s message always points to Jesus! There is ONLY ONE WAY OF SALVATION!!!

In this context, what is God emphasizing by stating the just shall live by faith? There were righteous people in Judah. BUT, not all of Judah was righteous. The righteous are in a right relationship with God because of faith in God and in His promises. A righteous person prior to Jesus' incarnation – was saved believing in God's promise of the Redeemer Who would come and deliver them. There has always been a remnant – Jewish believers in the coming Messiah. There will always be a remnant of believing Jewish people. God has stated that truth!

Isa. 1:9 - *Unless the LORD of hosts had left to us a very small remnant, we would have become like Sodom, we would have been made like Gomorrah – we would have been destroyed like Sodom and Gomorrah.*

Isa. 6:13 - *...yet a tenth will be in it, and will return and be for consuming, as a terebinth tree or as an oak, whose stump remains when it is cut down. So the holy seed shall be its stump.*

Rom. 11:5 - *Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace.*

...the just shall live by faith – we come to God by the gift of faith that HE gives us (Eph. 2:8-9). And, we LIVE by faith as a believer – as we walk with the LORD!

Phil. 1:6 - *being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.*

Rom. 8:30 - *Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.*

1 Pet. 1:5 - *who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.*

God then lays out five “woes” against the wicked: greed; coveting; bloodshed; intoxicating those they are capturing, idolatry.

Hab. 2:14 – *For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea. The self-exaltation of the Babylonians will come to nothing. But the whole earth will recognize God's glory when His kingdom is established on earth!*

Hab. 2:18-19 – re: the Babylonians idolatry...what profit/benefit is there in ascribing power to mute idols of wood overlaid with gold and silver? And, the Babylonians are telling these mute false gods with no breath to “awake” and “arise”?

In Habakkuk 2, it is God who speaks with the exception of verse 1.

God ends His response words in Habakkuk 2 with

Hab. 2:20 - *But the LORD is in His holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before Him.” “Habakkuk – you may remain silent!” Worship God in humble submission.*

The first two chapters of Habakkuk presented the prophet's question and answer time with God. Now that God had answered Habakkuk, the prophet spoke forth a prayer to close the book. Habakkuk now understands and offers a prayer of praise because God is in control. The knowledge of God's ways – the severity of God's judgment had struck Habakkuk with fear. Habakkuk now voices a plea for God's mercy.

Habakkuk 3

A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, on Shigionoth. (exact meaning not known; believed to have musical-liturgical significance)

*² O LORD, I have heard Your speech and was afraid;
O LORD, revive Your work in the midst of the years!*

Habakkuk prays for revival. The knowledge of God's ways – the severity of God's judgment - had struck Habakkuk with fear. But now Habakkuk prays for God to quicken Judah. This prayer is speaking of revival as a work of God...not from man's achievement. Man can simply cry out to God and plead for His reviving work. *In the midst of the years make it known; In the midst of God's punishment of Judah. In wrath remember mercy.*

Habakkuk prayed knowing full-well that they didn't deserve revival. And so, he prayed for mercy.

Habakkuk then recalls God's mighty works on behalf of Israel (Hab. 3:3-15)

*¹⁶ When I heard, my body trembled;
My lips quivered at the voice;
Rottenness entered my bones;
And I trembled in myself,
That I might rest in the day of trouble.
When he comes up to the people,
He will invade them with his troops.*

Habakkuk responded in humility, acknowledging WHO God is. He responded with the knowledge that he lived and moved under the sovereign power of God. He recognized his own weakness and exalted our God of all power and might! And, as God revived, Habakkuk's desire was for REST in the day of trouble...when judgment would come – when the Babylonians would come against Judah. Habakkuk now knows that God judges righteously..

And then Habakkuk offers a hymn of faith

*¹⁷ Though the fig tree may not blossom,
Nor fruit be on the vines;
Though the labor of the olive may fail,
And the fields yield no food;
Though the flock may be cut off from the fold,
And there be no herd in the stalls—
¹⁸ Yet I will rejoice in the LORD,
I will joy in the God of my salvation.*

*¹⁹ The LORD God is my strength;
He will make my feet like deer's feet,
And He will make me walk on my high hills.*

To the Chief Musician. With my stringed instruments.

Might Habakkuk, in almost a vision, be viewing the Judean countryside as desolate, perhaps from the invading Babylonian army or from natural calamity? And, in the midst of such devastation, Habakkuk declares that he will rejoice in the LORD!

God's majesty and power is not diminished because man faces difficulty.

Obedience to the Mosaic Covenant in the OT resulted in being blessed – in enjoying agricultural prosperity and pastoral prosperity (flocks and herds) (Deut. 28:1-14). Disobedience to the Mosaic Covenant initiated the curses (Deut. 28:31-34, 49-51). Habakkuk declares his commitment to GOD! Habakkuk's longing and joyful desire was for the LORD HIMSELF! Security and hope is not based on temporal blessings but on GOD HIMSELF. This is the essence of *the just shall live by faith*.

While desolation would come upon Judah, Habakkuk speaks of rejoicing in GOD because GOD is immutable – God never changes. And, God is greater than even the most difficult circumstances!

As the sure-footed deer scales the mountain tops without slipping, so Habakkuk's faith in the LORD – in ALL WHO HE IS – the goodness and severity – will enable him to endure the hardships of the imminent invasion!

What say you?

QUESTIONS:

How has God impacted you through the three chapters of Habakkuk?

Why did Habakkuk seem to rebuke God? What had Habakkuk forgotten?

What do we forget...that we need to remember?

Did Habakkuk's thinking/attitude change? How can understanding this book change you?

What does the book of Habakkuk teach you regarding responding to God.

How does our response matter to God?

SUGGESTED HOMEWORK:

Reread the handout with the references.

Continue to journal re: what God is revealing to you (remember, God uses His word to reveal Himself) and how you're respond to God.

Share what you've learned from the book of Habakkuk with someone.

Read Week 10's handout when you receive it.