

Intro: As strange as Habakkuk is our ears, his questions are as pertinent to today as any book within the Holy Scriptures. If God is powerful, then why does wickedness rule? Why suffering and loss and trouble if God sits on His throne? These questions, personal and moral questions, are what people struggle with today. The scientific questions are diminished and the moral questions have arisen, and it is precisely these questions that Habakkuk deals with: Is God willing to act?

And God’s response may not be what you expected. It wasn’t what His prophet was looking for, but it is true and it is good. God reigns over all the earth. He is sovereign and powerful over every human affair. He is in control of history, and though you and I may not understand the complexities and the wisdom of His plan, He doesn’t call us to understand, He calls us to trust Him. Thus, we are called, in the midst of our perplexities to have faith in the One who rules, reigns, and has acted within history to glorify Himself as the Supreme and Holy God.

1. The Burden of Questions Unanswered

a. "The burden of Habakkuk"

- i. Interestingly, Habakkuk labels his prophecy/oracle a “burden”
- ii. The issues that he is wrestling with are not trite, easily answerable, or devoid of the struggle. They are a burden to him.
- iii. It is important to recognize the propriety of a burden (life is not always happy)
 1. Not every question is answerable in the way that we want it
 2. Not every circumstance that the Lord brings us into is easy
 3. It is OK to feel the weight of our perplexity, and to watch how Habakkuk deals with it
 - a. And Jesus, too (Mark 15:34 – “Why have you forsaken Me?”)

b. The question of burden: "How long until you do something about wickedness and suffering?"

- i. “If God is sovereign and good, then why is there evil and suffering in this world?”
 1. There is injustice, suffering, and evil in this world
 - a. Habakkuk laments the “violence” within his own people and within his own land
 - i. Interestingly, when Balaam looked out upon Israel to curse the nation, he claimed that he could not find “trouble” or “suffering” (*aven* and *amal*)
 - ii. But here, Habakkuk both wickedness (*aven*) and trouble (*amal*) filling up his own people!!
 - iii. The covenant people are reaping the consequences of their rejection of God
 1. Deut 28:29 – “day after day you will be oppressed and robbed, with no one to rescue you.”
 2. They asked for a king like the nations, and they received the oppression and wickedness of King Manasseh and Jehoiakim (2 Kings 23; 2 Chr 33)
 - b. Habakkuk looks around and sees the wickedness and peril, the suffering and the injustice of his own people and cries out to God
 2. Habakkuk’s quandary is that God is looking upon it (v3) and not acting, even though he knows from prophecy that “your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong” (v13)
 - a. “hearing” is the same as “saving” – Habakkuk is wondering why God does not act to save His people from treachery in their midst
 - i. This is the same question that Job had as he suffered (Job 30:20) almost word for word

- b. So, we see that this question is not merely one of confusion, but it carries with it a hint of accusation
 - 3. Yet, God is tolerating evil and the wicked prosper in Judah
 - a. See also Jeremiah 12:1; Isa 24:16; Ps 50:21
 - b. Habakkuk is oppressed by these questions, so He wrestles with the Lord
 - ii. Our people have put together some common answers to this problem:
 - 1. He's not sovereign - open theism
 - a. God has given up His sovereignty to man's free will
 - b. Therefore, He doesn't have the power to change evil or to deal with it certainly. He just does His best, but cannot promise it.
 - i. He would like to do it, but He does not have the power to overcome humanity's "free and evil will"
 - 2. He's not good
 - a. God has the power, but He is unwilling to use it to do anything about evil, therefore He is bad and untrustworthy
 - b. "I cannot worship a God like that."
 - i. Since He doesn't do it the way that I would do it, which would mean ending all evil right now.
 - ii. We say that, but at the same are unwilling to admit that we are the evil in this world, thus for God to end evil means the utter destruction of all mankind
 - c. This is the functional response of the secular world
 - 3. Underneath both of these lies the real problem: Man is the Most Important Being in the Universe
 - a. Either Man's "free will" is the most valuable thing (He is not powerful) or Man's comfort and repose (He is not good)
 - i. Good is defined as "comfortable" – starts and ends with Man
 - ii. God defines good differently (that which is consistent with His character) - starts and ends with God
 - b. God's response to Habakkuk is simple: "I Am God, so Let Me Be What I Am...you trust Me."
 - c. Will we let God be God?
 - c. Habakkuk's questions are rooted, not in the presence of evil, but in the silence of God
 - i. The fact that evil and trouble exist does not seem to surprise Habakkuk at all
 - 1. He knows from the revelation of God that this is to be expected in the fallen world
 - ii. He does not understand his God's silence
 - 1. He cannot understand how God can *tolerate* evil and not act
 - 2. He cannot understand how the holy God can *tolerate* wickedness
 - a. not merely in the secular, but also within God's covenant people
 - b. How can God not act when the righteous are being *devastated* by the wicked?
 - c. HOW LONG ARE YOU GOING TO PUT UP WITH THIS?!!
 - iii. Habakkuk is particularly questioning God's willingness
 - 1. His perplexity is not particularly about God's power, but about God's heart
 - a. He doesn't seem to doubt God's power at all
 - b. What He does seem to be questioning is God's *willingness* to do something about evil and injustice
 - c. "Why won't you act?!" "How long until you do something?!"
 - 2. After all the God has done for Israel (calling in Abraham, redemption from Egypt, victory in Canaan, land of their own, Davidic dynasty, prophetic word, His presence in tabernacle and temple among them) Habakkuk sees only this moment

2. When We Are Perplexed We Ought to Pray

- a. Perplexity is to be Expected: Habakkuk is perplexed
 - i. This perplexity is native to the soil of authentic Christian faith (2 Cor 4:8)
 1. But this perplexity does not bring despair, for our hope is in the Lord (v14)
 - ii. We see through a glass darkly, and though we do not understand, we are not forsaken by the Lord
 1. Here we live by faith (2:4)
 - a. The Lord does not call us to understand all things, but rather to trust Him in all things (Acts 1:7)
 2. "The secret things belong to the LORD, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children..." (Deut 29:29)
 3. We don't have the answers to everything, but we trust the God who does...who is
- b. We PRAY Concerning These Perplexities
 - i. Habakkuk's complaint is proper because he deals with God, not about God
 1. It is BECAUSE God is SOVEREIGN that we pray: He is the Lord of History
 2. If God did not have the power over ALL things, then why would we pray?
 - ii. Often we have a problem, a lack of understanding, a perplexity with the Lord, but we don't come to Him
 1. We try to figure it out ourselves, or by wrestling with other people, or simply giving up on Him because it doesn't make sense to us
 2. Frankly, we seem to trust our own minds, assumptions, and philosophies more than we trust the LORD who is the Eternal One
 - iii. But Habakkuk prays!! He wrestles with God and waits for Him, asks for His light, for His perspective
 1. It is here that God reorients Habakkuk's heart and mind onto Himself so that Habakkuk can deal with His answer: "Let Me be who I AM. Trust Me!"
 2. It is in our prayers to the LORD, fortified by the study of His revealed Word, by which we wrestle with God and know Him better (and THAT is the point!)
 - a. Jacob wrestled with the LORD in order to strengthen him and he named that place of wrestling "Face of God" for "I have seen God's face and my life has been delivered" (Gen 32:30)
 - i. Jacob walked with a limp for the rest of his days, but he had seen the Lord and that was what he needed, not two good legs
 - b. Jesus defines "eternal life" as "to know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent" (John 17:3)
 3. God's goal in our lives is not merely comfort, for that is a goal too low, but rather it is for His renown and His glory: that He would be known as He is
 - iv. In his prayer, He doesn't necessarily get the answer that he wants or is looking for, because the Lord has a greater solution
 1. God's answer to Habakkuk's complaint of inaction will make Habakkuk even more perplexed!
 2. Sometimes God's answer to our prayer is that things are going to get worse before they get better
 - a. "I will act. I'm raising up the Babylonians to run through my covenant-breaking people and teach them the necessary lesson of humble faith"
 3. Sometimes God's answer is to make our situations harder so that *we are pushed to the very edge of faith*, so that when we are squeezed and "when all around our soul gives way, He then is all our hope and stay"
 - v. God's actions and His willingness are to move us into deeper and more dependent fellowship with Him, i.e. FAITH

1. "The righteous one shall live by faith" (Habakkuk 2:4)
 2. We live by dependence upon the LORD
3. What Do We Learn? God is the Sovereign Lord Of History
- a. All of history is under God's Sovereign Control
 - i. "I am doing a work..." and "I am raising up the Babylonians"
 - ii. Every nation, every person, every power is under His power
 - iii. He raises up nations to victory and defeat, kings to power and demise, armies to war and to peace
 1. What seems out of His control never is, but is planned with a greater purpose in mind: His eternal glory and praise
 - b. All of History Follows His Divine Plan
 - i. Nothing in history is accidental, for He raises and lowers all
 - ii. His purpose is never thwarted, altered, or varies from its path
 - iii. All history follows the channel dug for it by God (Prov 21:1; Heb 1:3; Acts 4:28; Ps 139)
 - c. All History Follows God's Sovereign Timeline
 - i. "In your days"
 - ii. Never too late and never too early (2:3)
 - d. All History is About God's Eternal Glory
 - i. This is the goal of all things, and it is easy to forget in the midst of perplexity of suffering
 - ii. This is true of the Church: Eph 3:10-13
 - e. Because of this Goal, He may bring War before He brings Peace
 - i. He answers Habakkuk, but not in the way that the prophet expected
 1. Habakkuk was asking for another Josiah, a David, a savior that would bring restoration of justice through reform
 2. What he got was a promise of a pagan hateful nation coming to devour and tear down Israel
 - ii. How can this be?
 1. The glorious eternal praise of God is the goal, and our greatest good is that we know Him and trust Him
 2. That's next week, "The righteous one will live by faith"
4. The Cross of Christ is what anchors our souls in the midst of our perplexities
- a. Habakkuk doubted his willingness, so what say we now?
 - b. Is He powerful to save? Is He willing to save?
 - i. He delivered up Jesus to die. "Not Judas for money. Not the Jews for envy. Not Pilate for fear." (Octavius Winslow)
 - ii. The question of God's willingness to act against evil for our good is rendered a resounding "yes!" when we look at the Cross of Christ.
 - c. And out of that apparent darkness, God brought forth Light to a lost world; out of death He brought Life; out of defeat He brought the greatest victory Mankind has ever seen
 - d. We must learn to see life through the lens of Calvary in the midst of our perplexity