

A Lament

November 13, 2022

Lesson Summary

Main Passages

Habakkuk 1:1-11

Session Outline

1. Taking Problems to God (Habakkuk 1:1-4)
2. God Answers (Habakkuk 1:5-6)
3. Trusting God's Judgment Will Come (Habakkuk 1:7-11)

Theological Theme

Habakkuk knew God's judgment would be unpleasant and harsh, but he welcomed it because he knew it was the only way to get the people's attention. God always uses judgment for the purpose of restoring and reconciling His people unto Himself.



Leader Guide

A Lament

Introduction

Questions are a normal part of everyday life. Think about the number of times a day you deal with questions. You may see something unusual and wonder where it came from. You may hear an interesting fact or idea and want more information about it. There are times when you observe a situation that causes you to ask, “What can I do about that?” We all deal with different types of questions on a regular basis.

An interesting part of any discussion about questions is finding out where we take our questions. Who do you ask about the different things that come into your mind? Many times, we direct our questions to specific people we think will have insight into the subject, or we look for answers from someone we respect or consider wise. It is important to know where to go with your questions so that you can receive the best answers.

- ❓ Who do you ask when you have a question about parenting? Car trouble? Health issues? Recipes? Marriage?
- ❓ Why does it matter who you go to for answers to your questions?


Session Summary

Habakkuk was a prophet to God’s people who warned of the coming Babylonian invasion and destruction of Judah. The time in which he lived was not specific but because of the events he prophesied about, it is believed he ministered in the mid to early 600s and that he was a prophet during the reign of a good and godly king, so he witnessed great revival in the land. He would have also observed the spiritual decline of the nation.

As he watched what was happening in the people and saw their ungodly practices, it burdened him. Habakkuk demonstrated what to do with our questions, even when they are hard. His book is a record of the questions he asked of the Lord and how the Lord responded.


1. Taking Problems to God (Habakkuk 1:1-4)

The book of Habakkuk begins by identifying the writer and his position as a prophet. There is not a lot of specific information included about Habakkuk and the exact time he ministered but considering the dates of the destruction and invasion he warned about, historians place him around 612 BC to 587 BC. This would mean he prophesied during the reign of Josiah when the Lord was honored and worshiped. It would also mean he then watched as that same nation began sliding away from the Lord and experiencing spiritual decline.

 Why would there be added difficulty in seeing the people go from faithful to unfaithful in Habakkuk's time? Consider people you know. Without giving details, what makes this process hard to observe?

It was during the time of spiritual decline among the people that Habakkuk's heart was burdened. This burden was heavy for him to carry and created questions that he needed answered. We all have certain things that we are burdened about. We experience or witness issues that weigh us down and break our hearts like Habakkuk. Christ-followers should refuse to be apathetic about what we see happening in the world around us. These events can be overwhelming and cause us to wonder what is going on. Habakkuk gave us a great example of what to do when we have questions—he cried out to God.

These verses in Habakkuk 1 are the first questions he posed to the Lord. Habakkuk was burdened by what he saw, and instead of taking his questions elsewhere, he took them straight to the One he knew could do something about it. Note that Habakkuk was specific as he poured out his heart to God. He asked God where He was and why it felt like the Lord was not with them. Habakkuk obviously struggled with how God could allow the people to be so ungodly and evil. There is much from Habakkuk's day that parallels the world we live in. We can learn from his example how to live in this fallen world while honoring the Lord with our lives.

 What breaks your heart and makes you feel burdened about the world around you?

Consider some of the things Habakkuk listed specifically as he questioned why the Lord allowed him to see the iniquities and injustices. He saw violence, iniquities, strife, troubles, and contention. He noted that the law was powerless, and justice was not prevalent so the wicked prospered. As he looked around at the culture of the day, it appeared as if God was absent, and the enemy was in charge. Imagine how frustrating that was for a man who knew God had the power necessary to take care of all the issues, and yet He wasn't doing so at the time.

How Long?

The book begins with a cry to God: "How long?" This cry is often found in Scripture in complaints against those who persist in sin (e.g., Exod. 10:3; Num. 14:11, 27; 1 Kgs. 18:21; Ps. 4:2; Hos. 8:5; Hab. 2:6) and as here in laments calling for God to deliver from distress (Pss. 6:3; 13:1–2; 35:17; 74:10; 79:5; 80:4; 89:46; 90:13; 119:84; Zech. 1:12; Rev. 6:10). The opening speech laments rampant violence and injustice in Judah (1:1–4).

Habakkuk wondered why he witnessed all these distressing things and if there was a greater purpose. Today, too, it can seem as if the enemy is winning, and evil is prospering. We can take heart from what we see in Habakkuk's example and take our concerns and questions to the Lord, trusting that He alone will set things right and He is the final judge of the world. Seeing the iniquity around us can remind us to be watchful over our own actions and grateful for the grace of God that He freely gives. It should also motivate us to be a light in this dark world so that more people will surrender their lives to the Lord and receive the grace and mercy found in Him.



Application: How do you relate to Habakkuk? How is God calling you to respond to the things you see around you?

2. God Answers (Habakkuk 1:5-6)

The troubles and iniquities Habakkuk set before the Lord covered a wide range from personal relationships to the court system. Nothing was safe from the influences of the ungodliness of the day. God received Habakkuk's questions and responded without censure or criticism. He didn't chastise Habakkuk for asking, just as He doesn't and won't chastise us for asking today. Look at how God changed Habakkuk's focus from the issues weighing him down to the promise of what God would do.

Simply put, the Lord told Habakkuk not to worry. He told Habakkuk to look around in wonder and be astounded. The Lord was making it clear that Habakkuk was right in trusting Him and believing He could do something about the iniquity that concerned Habakkuk. But God was going to bring His judgment on the sinful nation of Judah.



How does trusting God relieve our worry even when hard circumstances surround us?

These verses have been used to apply to something good that the Lord is going to bring about, but it was originally used because God planned judgment that was going to astonish Habakkuk with its devastation. Either way, our response to what God has planned should be the same. We should turn to God with our questions and trust His plans. He is trustworthy, powerful, and omniscient. He has our best in mind and when He chooses to share His plans with us, we can believe they will happen exactly as He says.



When have you trusted God's plan even though you didn't completely understand it? What did you learn from that experience?

Habakkuk likely had the position of prophet both in times of favor with the Lord as well as when God promised coming judgment. It is interesting that God said Habakkuk would be astounded or astonished with what was going to happen. The Lord had chosen to use a pagan nation to punish Judah. The Chaldeans, or Babylonians, were described as a bitter and nasty nation. This was not going to be a pleasant confrontation, and though the Babylonians had the practice of attacking and devastating other nations, it is only because God allowed them access so that they would be victorious over Judah.

Many times, we need the reminder that God's ways are not our ways, and He is so much bigger than we can imagine. We often try to fit God into a space or box in our minds that we can understand. God gave Habakkuk a reminder of His greatness. God sees all things, and He has a plan in place that may very well astonish us when it unfolds.

- ❓ Application: Where do you need to trust God's plan in your life? How should your trust lead you to act?


3. Trust God's Judgment Will Come (Habakkuk 1:7-11)

After announcing to Habakkuk that the coming judgment would be beyond imagination, God was specific about the nation He would use. The Lord described the enemy who would have victory over Judah and how powerful and vicious they were. The picture God painted for Habakkuk was detailed and scary. The people of Judah were about to reap what they had sown in rebellion and sin.


- ❓ How do you respond when you see God's plan unfolding, specifically when it is different than you would have preferred?
- ❓ How would God's judgment of His people ultimately serve for their good? How does God use discipline in our lives as a loving Father (see Hebrews 12:6)?

The coming judgment at the hands of the Babylonians was going to be terrible. They were known for being fearsome and dreaded by everyone. They were a self-glorifying nation that took no mercy on their enemies.

Though most of God's people's wickedness was against one another, God brought His judgment on them in universal way and used an ungodly people to do so. We should never forget that God can use anyone He chooses to carry out His plan—even those who have no idea they are instruments of the Lord. The Babylonians thought they were enjoying victory because of their might and power, but they were being used by the Lord to enact His judgment on His people. It can give us hope during trying times to know God alone holds the power.

-  Why does it matter that God can use even the ungodly to bring about His plans? What does this show about His power and might? How does this compare to the worldly sense of power and might held by the Babylonians?

The Babylonians were numerous. They had the fastest horses and the fiercest warriors. They struck swiftly and violently. They gathered captives like sand and made their lives miserable. They acted to honor false gods, and they gave credit to them in their victories. They found power and strength in themselves and their possessions. God knew all this about them and still allowed them the victory. Habakkuk was familiar with the reputation of Babylon, so imagine how it made him feel when he learned of God's plan. One thing was for sure. Habakkuk had no room to doubt that God was complacent or apathetic about the sin of the people. God does and has always taken sin very seriously, and we can trust that He will deal with it in His timing.

-  Application: How will you respond to the truth that God takes the sin of His people very seriously? Why is it appropriate to lament over sin in our own lives and the world? How is God calling you to lament to Him today?

Conclusion

The book of Habakkuk is relatable to today's world. We can see plenty of ways that wickedness is seemingly reigning. How do we as believers need to respond to what we see? If we learn from Habakkuk, then we will be broken over the state of the world as well as our own sin. We will mourn and be burdened about the sin that is rampant, and we will be moved to do something about it. Instead of looking around and bemoaning that we don't see God working or speaking about the evil in the world, we can go to God with our questions and for guidance on how we should respond.

Habakkuk demonstrated that the first thing we should do is take our questions and concerns to the Lord. He can handle it, and He has a plan we can trust. When we wonder where God is or if He is paying attention, this book is a good reminder that God can and will do things beyond what we can imagine. He is all powerful and all knowing. He is who He says He is, and we can believe that just as Habakkuk did. As His people, we should seek to be the light of truth in the dark of the world instead of just accepting sinful practices. When God revealed His plans for judgment on Judah to Habakkuk, it showed just how seriously God took the sin of His people. Habakkuk knew God's judgment would be unpleasant and harsh, but he knew it was the only way to get the people's attention. God always uses judgment for the purpose of restoring and reconciling His people to Himself. That is why we can be grateful for it even when it is tough to endure.

- ❓ Who do you tend to go to with your questions about the world? How will you be intentional about taking your questions to the Lord before anyone else?
- ❓ How do we as a group need to take our burdens to the Lord together? How can we make a regular practice of this?
- ❓ How has God used discipline to reconcile you to Him? How might this give you opportunity to have a gospel conversation with another person?

Prayer of Response

Thank the Lord for being a just God who has good plans for His children. Pray about any burdens you are carrying, and confess the times you have turned to someone or something else instead of Him. Praise the Lord for His perfect timing and the way that He works things out in your life for the best. Commit to trusting His plans for your life.

Additional Resources

- *Be Amazed* by Warren Wiersbe
- *Jonah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah: NIV Application Commentary* by James Bruckner
- *The Message of Joel, Micah, and Habakkuk: The Bible Speaks Today* by David Prior

Disciples Multiplying Disciples



DxD This Week

Call to Action

The hardship, disaster, and chaos of our world points toward creation's desire for redemption. Take time this week (preferably within the context of your LifeGroup) to make a list of the way God is pruning away idols (i.e., comfort, convenience, materialism) in your life so that you are forced to fully trust Him. Ask God to increase your trust and faith in His plan for the redemption of all things.

For Next Week

Session Title

- God's Master Plan

Main Passages

- Habakkuk 2:1-5

Session Outline

1. Waiting on God's Answer (Habakkuk 2:1)
2. Receiving God's Answer (Habakkuk 2:2-3)
3. Trusting God's Plan (Habakkuk 2:4)

Memorize

*Look at the nations, and observe—
be utterly astounded!*

*For I am doing something in your days
that you will not believe
when you hear about it.*

-Habakkuk 1:5

Historical Context of Habakkuk

Purpose

Like the book of Job, Habakkuk deals with the problem of understanding God's ways: Why does God allow injustice to prevail (1:3)? How can God use the more wicked Babylonians to punish the less wicked Judeans (1:13)? How long will God allow evildoers to dominate the world (1:17)?

God did not give clear answers to the questions Habakkuk raised. Instead he called on the godly to have faith (2:4). When Habakkuk declared he would rejoice in God no matter what (3:17–19), he showed that he had accepted and appropriated this message to his own life.

Author

Habakkuk is not mentioned anywhere else in the Bible. His name is thought to derive from the Hebrew word *chabaq*, “to embrace,” but its form appears non-Hebraic. More likely the name is related to *habbaququ*, a word found in the related Semitic language of Akkadian. It denotes a species of garden plant or fruit tree.

Setting

Habakkuk predicted the invasion of Judah by the Chaldeans (1:6). The term Chaldean (Hb *kasdim*; Akk *kaldu*) was originally used of an ethnic group that appeared in southern Babylonia in the ninth century BC. In the eighth century BC, Chaldeans began to rise to power in Babylon. Among the early Chaldean kings was Merodach-baladan II (2Kg 20:12; Is 39:1), who twice in the late eighth century took (and lost) Babylon's throne. The Chaldean Nabopolassar (626–605 BC) began to dismantle the Assyrian Empire with help from the Medes and founded the Neo-Babylonian Empire. By the time of Habakkuk, “Chaldean” had come to be a synonym for “Babylonian.”

Special Features

The book of Habakkuk, one of the Minor Prophets, is unique in its style. Rather than speaking to the people on God's behalf, Habakkuk spoke to God on behalf of the people. Habakkuk struggled with how to understand God's actions in history, especially his use of an unrighteous nation as the instrument of his justice. God's answer to Habakkuk's objection was that “the righteous one will live by his faith” (2:4).

Extended Commentary

Habakkuk 1:1-11

1:1 Pronouncement (Hb massa') is a prophetic proclamation, literally a "lifting up [of voice]." "Burden" (KJV) is another meaning of massa', though it does not fit the present context well.

1:2–4 Habakkuk lamented to God (how long?) about overt violence ... injustice, and oppression during Jehoiakim's reign. King Josiah (640–609 BC) promoted God's law (2Kg 23:24), but his son and successor Jehoiakim (609–598 BC) based his reign on injustice (Jr 22:13) so that God's law (Hb torah) ceased to be honored.

1:5–6 God responded that he would punish the sins of Judah through an invasion by the Chaldeans (the Babylonians).

1:7 The so-called justice of these invaders was human (from themselves) rather than divine.

1:8 Comparisons with predatory animals (leopards ... wolves, and eagles) illustrate the speed, brutality, and efficiency of the Babylonian military machine.

1:9 Violence is the punishment Judah will receive for its own violence (vv. 2–3). The Hb term *chamas* here and in v. 2 refers to violation of the rights of others, often involving violence (see Ps 72:14; Is 53:9; Jr 22:3; Mc 6:12). It could also be rendered "injustice," "oppression," or simply "lawlessness."

1:10–11 The mighty Babylonian army scoffed at all opposition. The phrase their strength is their god suggests they worshiped their own military power (v. 16), though the verse possibly means that they attributed their strength to their national god Marduk.¹

References

1. *CSB Study Bible* (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017).

Author Bio

Warren Wiersbe (Be Amazed)

Warren W. Wiersbe, former pastor of the Moody Church and general director of Back to the Bible, has traveled widely as a Bible teacher and conference speaker. Because of his encouragement to those in ministry, Dr. Wiersbe is often referred to as “the pastor’s pastor.” He has ministered in churches and conferences throughout the United States as well as in Canada, Central and South America, and Europe. Dr. Wiersbe has written over 150 books, including the popular BE series of commentaries on every book of the Bible, which has sold more than four million copies. At the 2002 Christian Booksellers Convention, he was awarded the Gold Medallion Lifetime Achievement Award by the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association. Dr. Wiersbe and his wife, Betty, live in Lincoln, Nebraska.

James Bruckner (Jonah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah: NIV Application Commentary)

James Bruckner (PhD, Luther Seminary) is professor of Old Testament at North Park Theological Seminary and the author of several books including a commentary on Exodus (2008) and Healthy Human Life: a biblical witness (2012).

David Prior (The Message of Joel, Micah, and Habakkuk)

David Prior has pastored churches in Cape Town, South Africa, and Oxford, England, and has served as director of The Centre for Marketplace Theology in London.