

It's OK to ask God "Why?" Habakkuk

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- **Is it OK to ask God "why?"**

- *Why do you allow evil?*
- *Why do evil people get away with things?*
- *Why do good people get caught up in the mess others make?*
- Today we'll look at the prophet Habakkuk and what happened when he not only asked God "Why?" but when he kept asking God when he didn't like how God answered him the first time.
- Habakkuk is a fascinating book, but Before we get into answering these questions, let's look at the form of the book before we look at the content

- **This book is a record of a conversation with God**

- Job is another example, so are some of the writings of Paul in the New Testament
- Let's now look at the significance of this form
- When people talk about "hearing from God" it can either be a sign of delusional self-deception or the natural outgrowth of an intimate and real relationship with God.
- How do we know?
- One resource helpful to me has been:
- *Hearing God* by Dallas Willard, deep & thought-provoking, but useful for further study—obviously so much in the book, but let me read you one quote from the introduction:

- **Intro from the book:**

- *Hearing God? A daring idea, some would say—presumptuous and even dangerous. But what if we are made for it? What if the human system simply will not function properly without it? There are good reasons to think it will not. The fine texture as well as the grand movements of life show the need. Is it not, in fact, more presumptuous and dangerous to undertake human existence without hearing God?*
- *Hearing God* by Dallas Willard
- **Consider—conversation with God this is how we ought to live**
- Not an unusual, other-worldly activity, but this

is how we ought to live

- God's intention in Eden—he walked with Adam in the "cool of the day"
- It will be restored as John looks forward in the book of Revelation 21:3 "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God."
- That will be glorious, but as Habakkuk shows us—it is available to us now
- **More than a super-spiritual option we NEED to be in conversation with God because we are not as independent as we like to think**
- We were created for this and if we don't listen to God, if we aren't in conversation with him
- We always have "referent others"
- They are voices we listen to
- They are what guides our actions when we aren't conscious of it
- Where do they come from?
- Media? A sports team? Expectations of a social group?
- Or does our heart immediately turn to our God and His Word?
- Where do we turn for answers, not only to daily actions of life, but to the big questions of personal or national tragedy?
- Let's look at Habakkuk, to see what he did
- **1st Historical setting of the book (reminder of real people in real history)**
- **Previous to this time, the prophets preached and challenged Israel to repentance**
- **Repentance no longer preached for the nation of Israel**
- **722:** Northern Kingdom of Israel (10 tribes) falls & is exiled to Assyria
- **627:** Jeremiah begins his prophetic ministry to Southern Kingdom of Judah
- **621:** Rediscovery of Book of Law which had been lost in House of God! Josiah's reformation (but not lasting revival)
- **612:** Fall of Nineveh, capital of Assyria, conquered by Babylon
- **609:** Death of godly King Josiah, interfering in the conflict between Egypt who was moving north to help Assyria and Babylon, who was intent on world power
- **607-588: Habakkuk begins his prophetic ministry—in the middle of it all—this book**
- **605:** Nebuchadnezzar defeats Pharaoh Necho of

Egypt at Battle of Carchemish = "the turning point of world history" Egypt and Assyria no longer world powers

- **605:** First invasion of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylon; Daniel taken captive
- **Habakkuk ministry ends sometime before what follows**
- **597:** Second invasion of Judah by Babylon; Ezekiel and 10,000 taken captive
- **592:** Ezekiel begins his prophetic ministry to Babylonian exiles
- **586:** Fall of Jerusalem, Destruction of Temple
- **538:** Exiles return from Babylon to Judah (relatively small number return)

- **Let's go through the book and comment**
- The book begins:
- Hab. 1: How long, Lord, must I call for help, but you do not listen?
Or cry out to you, "Violence!"
but you do not save?
³Why do you make me look at injustice?
Why do you tolerate wrongdoing?
Destruction and violence are before me;
there is strife, and conflict abounds.
⁴Therefore the law is paralyzed,
and justice never prevails.
The wicked hem in the righteous,
so that justice is perverted.
- Evil on the world stage
- Evil in the nation after the death of the good King
- People hadn't learned from previous prophets or judgment
- Habakkuk knows things are wrong and he wants to know why God isn't taking action

- **God does not answer as he imagined he would**
- "Look at the nations and watch—
and be utterly amazed.
For I am going to do something in your days
that you would not believe,
even if you were told.
⁶I am raising up the Babylonians,
that ruthless and impetuous people,
who sweep across the whole earth.
.. They laugh at all fortified cities;
by building earthen ramps they capture them.
¹¹Then they sweep past like the wind and go on—
guilty people, whose own strength is their god."

- **A break here..... Babylon was a NEW power on the world stage.**
Assyria had been the big bully, the conquering nation Remember power and brutality of Assyria?
- Review of Assyrian Empire
- City founded in 6,000 BC, one of the oldest, largest, most powerful in the ancient world
- About 7.5 in length, the wall system consisted of an ashlar stone retaining wall about (20 ft) high surmounted by a mudbrick wall about (33 ft) high and (49 ft) thick. The stone retaining wall had projecting stone towers spaced about every 18 metres (59 ft).
- Evil, pagan, incredibly cruel—well documented in archeological evidence
- Repented under Jonah, reverted to old ways,
- Conquered and resettled Northern Kingdom of Israel
- Their destruction prophesied by Nahum, here we see fulfillment
- Babylonian alliance conquered them and so thoroughly buried their city it was not discovered til mid 1800's
- God tells Habakkuk that this is going to happen

- **This response does not satisfy Habakkuk—he isn't at all happy about it**
- ^{Hab. 1: 12} Lord, are you not from everlasting?
My God, my Holy One, you will never die.
You, Lord, have appointed them to execute judgment;
you, my Rock, have ordained them to punish.
¹³Your eyes are too pure to look on evil;
you cannot tolerate wrongdoing.
Why then do you tolerate the treacherous?
Why are you silent while the wicked
swallow up those more righteous than themselves?
.
¹⁷Is he to keep on emptying his net,
destroying nations without mercy?

- **After asking this question, WHY? I DON'T Understand! he waits for God to answer**
- Hab. 2:1 I will stand at my watch
and station myself on the ramparts;
I will look to see what he will say to me,
and what answer I am to give to this complaint.

- **What we learn so far**
- Totally OK to question God
- Totally OK to discuss with God what concerns you
- God often does not do what we expect, because we see a limited view of what is going on
- We often just want the pain or question or problem to stop NOW
- God is often working on something much bigger
- And so it is OK to continue to question, but at the same time to respectfully “wait quietly” as Habakkuk did
- Great advice in many spiritual situations from life to not understanding something in the Bible: My seminary OT Prof. “It is my problem if I don’t understand, so wait for an answer.”
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- **God answers Habakkuk with a message for all time**
- Then the Lord replied:
- Hab. 2:2 “Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it.
³For the revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay.
- ⁴“See, the enemy is puffed up; his desires are not upright— **but the righteous person will live by faith—**
- God then goes on and catalogs the sins of the Babylonians
- Stealing, extortion, plundering, unjust gain, bloodshed, excess drinking and sexual sins, idolatry
- Because God is patient (hoping for repentance from the worst of sinners) does not mean he does not notice and will not take action
- Babylon did conquer Assyria, and took Judah captive, but its empire lasted only 80 years and it too was gone and the people taken captive were returned to their homeland
- **Habakkuk’s response—a public song of praise**
- **3** A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet.
- ²Lord, I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds, Lord. Repeat them in our day, in our time make them known; in wrath remember mercy.
- I heard and my heart pounded, my lips quivered at the sound; decay crept into my bones, and my legs trembled. Yet I will wait patiently for the day of calamity to come on the nation invading us.
¹⁷ ***Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls,***
¹⁸ ***yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior.***
- ¹⁹ ***The Sovereign Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to tread on the heights.***
- He won’t get out of the troubles, but no matter what the troubles, he can praise God in the midst of them.
- **We may not be able to rejoice in circumstances, but we can always rejoice in God**
- **Observations and applications**
- God is always working on a bigger picture than we are aware of
- To live by faith as Habakkuk affirmed those who walk we God need to do in the challenges of life, look at the stories in Heb. 11
- Faith is not some magical thing to make things happen we want to have happen
- To encourage someone to “have faith” isn’t a formula for “if you believe something enough God will make it happen”
- SUPER BAD translation in LB of Heb.11:1:
- LB: What is faith? It is the confident assurance that something we want is going to happen. It is the certainty that what we hope for is waiting for us, even though we cannot see it up ahead.
- This phrase: ***It is the confident assurance that something we want is going to happen.***
- ***There is absolutely no textural support for this comment, NONE! It’s a terrible translation***
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- **Hebrews 11, what is actually says, much better translation:**
- **NIV:11:1** Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. ²This is what the ancients were commended for.
- To live by faith, means to see present events in the light of God’s eternal plans and to trust God

in them and LIVE like we believe Him

- Things did not always go well for the heroes of the faith that Hebrews 11 describes, we will look at some examples in a minute
- They lived their life, made decisions and actions on the God's ultimate plan of salvation and their future with Him, not on only what they wanted in the here and now
- **By FAITH** is the only way we can have this perspective in life—because we can't perceive it in any other way

- **Heb. 11 Look at the examples given**
- **Heb. 11:8** By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. ⁹ By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. ¹⁰ **For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.**
- He didn't want to go—but by faith he went
- **Heb. 11:24** By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. ²⁵ He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. ²⁶ **He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward.** ²⁷ By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible.
- Again, he didn't focus only on what was in front of him, but what was in his eternal future
- Both had an eternal perspective—that is the view faith gave them—not working up an emotion to get their way or to force God to do something—
- Living by faith is a relationship with God that enabled them to obey in their present based on what they trusted God would do (and was working out) in the future
- **Summary of people living by faith**
- **Heb. 11:13** All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth. ¹⁴ People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. ¹⁵ If they had been

thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return.¹⁶ Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.³⁹ These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised.

- They trusted in GOD and his future for them—their vision, orientation of life was of faith, no matter what their present troubles or world situation or their calling in it.

- **Application suggestions**
- Take time to get to know God's big picture
- In the Bible we see his eternal plan
- "this world is not our home—we are just passing through"
- This is so foreign even to much "Christian" thought today
- In Jeremiah 23-25 and elsewhere so much of reading of how the religious leaders falsely handled the words of God—telling people things were OK when they should have been challenging them to repent
- So our should we live with that in mind?
- In all of our trying times, it is OK—more than that, we are encouraged to question, to talk to God about anything
- But then wait for his answer and pray that we respond and live in a way that is pleasing to Him
- Pray not always to get our way, but to live in no matter what our circumstances in a way that is pleasing to Him—LIVE THROUGH Challenges—represent Him well—don't always look for a way around them

