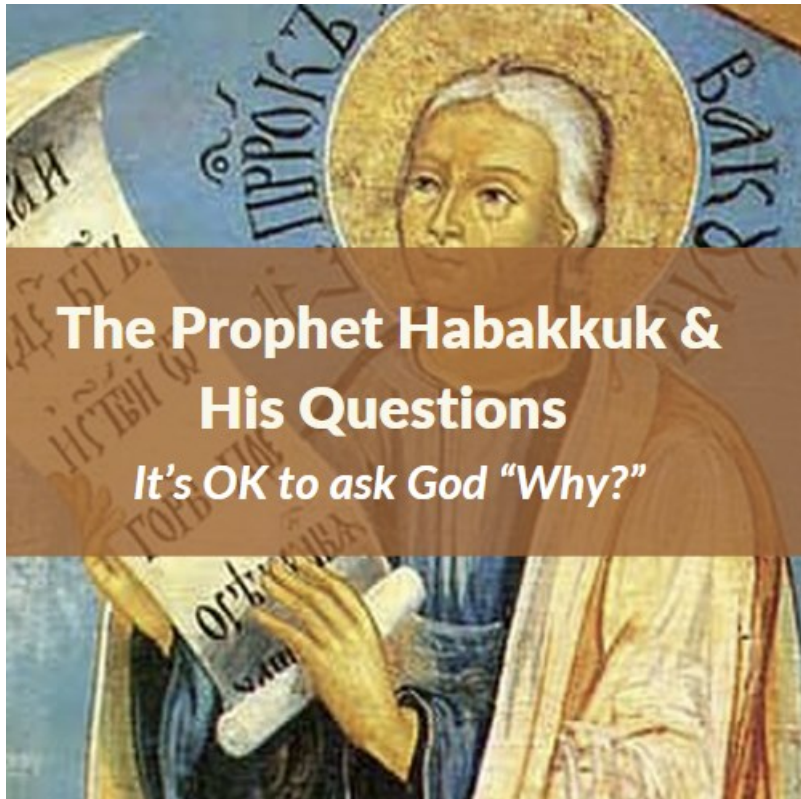


Handouts

Notes & Questions



The Prophet Habakkuk & His Questions

It's OK to ask God "Why?"

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

My Notes

- We all have questions like these:
- *Why does God allow evil?*
- *Why do evil people get away with things?*
- *Why do good people get caught up in the mess others make?*
- In this lesson 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.
- The Psalms are full of this where the writer directly addresses God with questions or complaints—so often in fact, you may not have been aware of the conversational nature of it.
- So are some of the writings of Paul in the New Testament as when he asked God directly why he couldn't get rid of a physical problem he had.
- What does it mean to have a "conversation with God?"
- Popular culture tell us that when people mention talking to God "hearing from God" or hearing from God, it is a sign of delusional self-deception.

But it might be something else entirely

- What if it is an intrinsic part of an intimate and real relationship with God?
- One resource helpful to me has been:
- *Hearing God* by Dallas Willard, deep & thought-provoking, highly recommended and 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 is 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 God's intention from our creation, when in Eden, God 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.
- And I think it is something our Lord desires, amazing as that seems—He made us for interaction with Him and died so that the sin that separates us was destroyed, and He gives us eternal life so we will never be separated from Him.
- He wants us to talk to Him.

What if we don't have that a conversational relationship with God?

- I'd argue it isn't simply a spiritual bonus, but essential because, humans cannot bear to be alone; we will always be talking to someone and in return.....
- We will always listen to someone.
- We always have "referent others."
- They are always voices we listen to.
- They are what guides our and choices actions when we aren't conscious of it.

A key question we need to ask ourselves is who are they for us?

- Where do the voices you listen to come from?
- With whom do you have internal conversations?
- Media? A sports team? Expectations of a social group?
- Or does your heart immediately turn to 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 in a very difficult time, where did he turn for answers to make sense of his world?

1st a Historical review & the events during Habakkuk's time

- **Previous to this time, the prophets preached and challenged Israel to repentance**
- **Repentance no longer possible for the nation of Israel**
- **722 BC:** Northern Kingdom of Israel (10 tribes) falls & is exiled to Assyria
- **612 BC:** Fall of Nineveh, capital of Assyria, conquered by Babylon, prophesied, recorded in Nahum
- **609 BC:** Death of godly King Josiah
- **607-588 BC: Habakkuk's time of writing—after Israel's fall; then Fall of Nineveh, and rise of the power of Babylon**
- **605 BC:** The first invasion of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylon; Daniel taken captive (possibly 2 years after Habakkuk begins writing)
- **Habakkuk ministry ends sometime before the final destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC**

In a time of uncertainty and turmoil, let's now go through the book and comment as we go

- **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?
³ Why do you make me look at injustice?
Why do you tolerate wrongdoing?
Destruction and violence are before me;
there is strife, and conflict abounds.
⁴ Therefore the law is paralyzed,
and justice never prevails.
The wicked hem in the righteous,
so that justice is perverted.*

There is a lot we can identify with in his prayer

- The world hasn't changed.
- 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 of Israel.

- They keep living selfish lives, unconcerned about the poor, living how they want to live.
- Habakkuk knows things are wrong and he wants to know why God isn't taking action.
- God never rebukes him for his questions, ****ASKING WHY IS OK****and this begins a conversation between them.

God does not answer as he imagined he would

- *Hab.1:5* "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.
⁶ I 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.
¹¹ Then they sweep past like the wind and go on—
guilty people, whose own strength is their god."

A little more about Babylon the power God was using

- They had defeated Assyrian, long thought impossible.
- Assyria's capital city, Nineveh, was founded in 6,000 BC, one of the oldest, largest, most powerful in the ancient world.
- It had a wall system consisting 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 59 feet.
- Evil, pagan, incredibly cruel—well documented in archeological evidence as we have seen.
- Repented under Jonah, reverted to old ways, conquered and resettled Northern Kingdom of Israel.
- Their destruction prophesied **by Nahum, and took place when a Babylonian alliance conquered them** and so thoroughly buried their city it was not discovered until mid 1800's.
- Babylon also conquered Egypt at that time.
- And now the world stage belonged to Babylon.
- 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.
¹³ Your 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?*
.....
¹⁷ *Is 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.
- NEED TO CLARIFY idea that no EVIL is NEVER PROMISED IN THIS WORLD and sometimes GOD allows it.
- We often just want the pain or problem to stop NOW.
- God is often working on something much bigger.
- That is the time to have a conversation with God—pour out your heart; question, pray.
- At the same time to respectfully “wait quietly” as Habakkuk did.
- ***BUT notice it was not an empty waiting time***it was a time waiting for God to speak—we’ll talk more about the practical implications of that in a bit.

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

- *He knows them better than Habakkuk can imagine.*
- *Stealing, extortion, plundering, unjust gain, bloodshed, excess drinking and sexual sins, idolatry.*
- *And though the primary emphasis is on Babylon, God also implicates the sins of Judah are similar and they will suffer judgment for them.*
- *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*
- *BUT..... during that time, a most interesting event took place.*

As ruler of the entire known world, the king of Babylon had incredible power, and he writes “the first Gospel Tract” in Daniel 4—often missed because of many other great stories in the book

- *King Nebuchadnezzar, To the nations and peoples of every language, who live in all the earth: May you prosper greatly!*
- ²*It is my pleasure to tell you about the miraculous signs and wonders that the Most High God has performed for me.. . . Tells of his dream of a great tree struck down—how it was about him and then how he was restored and then ends with....³⁴At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified him who lives forever.*

- *His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation.*
- *.....³⁷ Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble.*
- **Because Israel, who God created to be His witness, did not do what they were supposed to, God uses a pagan king to tell the nations about Him.**

Habakkuk's final response—a public song of praise

His prayer takes us back to a conversation with God

- God is always working on a bigger picture than we are aware of.
- AND that includes sometimes allowing bad things to happen or go on for longer than we think they should.
- And in the end, he acknowledges that though he can't understand the circumstances, He can trust and rest in God.
- ***And so we are challenged with the question, how can we develop the habit of lifelong conversation with God where we can feel free to ask questions, the patience to listen for replies, and the sense to know when we get them?***

As Habakkuk did, begin by talking to God

- It's Ok to talk first—God welcomes the prayers/the talk/the conversation of His children.
- *Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything; tell God your needs, and don't forget to thank him for his answers.* Phil. 4:6, LB
- What does "everything" include?
- Obviously.....everything.
- Pour out your heart to God as a continual part of the conversation of your heart and mind, over everything, every day.

What about prayer lists? Liturgical prayers?

- Times of formal prayer, prayer lists, ***all are good***, but a continuous conversation with God over all of life is so important.
- In any meaningful relationship we would think it very strange if the only time they talked was with business agendas—it is often the "little things," the unguarded sharing that is most valuable.
- We ought not to think less of our God, He wants to be invited into all our lives.
- So often people are "too busy" for us—we will NEVER hear that from our God.

After you pray—listen to what God has to say

- How to do that?
- Not a vague, spiritual experience—God speaks through His Word.
- And we hear Him based on God's Word in our hearts that comes from time reading, studying, memorizing and meditating on it.
- Use various resources to study it more deeply.
- Once you have this reservoir, there are two ways to access it.

One, you can literally listen for an impression from God, pray, wait, and journal

- Continue to pray and then if you feel the Lord is speaking to you.
- Take time to journal the impressions you get.
- ***This is good especially as you start listening to God because ***God will NEVER lead you in any way that is contrary to His Word.***
- When you write down your thoughts, you can check them with His Word.
- On major decisions it is also good to check them out with a trusted friend.

Two, you can actively look for answers and ask for insight for how to apply them

- Look up verses on a specific topic, for example: "Show me verses about how to deal with difficult people" and "99 verses about difficult people" came up.
- Proverbs 15:1 ESV A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.

- Romans 12:18 ESV If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.
- Proverbs 12:16 ESV The vexation of a fool is known at once, but the prudent ignores an insult.
- Psalm 37:1-40 ESV Fret not yourself because of evildoers; be not envious of wrongdoers! For they will soon fade like the grass and wither like the green herb. Trust in the Lord, and do good; dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness.
- Matthew 7:12 ESV “So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.
- Galatians 5:14-15 ESV For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.

Then once you have a selection of verses (and perhaps articles)

- Some additional advice from Dallas Willard on what to do with specific scriptures:
- *“Meditate constantly on God’s principles for life as set forth in the Scriptures, always striving to penetrate more deeply into their meaning and into their application for our lives.”*
- The Spiritual Disciplines book has some valuable tips on how to do this.
- Journal some more.
- Think through how to apply the verses to your specific application; ask the Lord for additional insight in how it applies to you and the people you interact with.

Will I ever get it wrong? Am I ever just hearing myself?

- Yes.
- We can go through the motions and do what we want regardless.
- Or sometimes with the best of intentions, we were simply too immature in our faith, too emotional, or too blind, to do what God wanted.
- Always ask that God protect, intervene, correct you.
- Be open and willing to go in a direction you hadn’t thought of.
- If we realize that later we messed up when we were so sure of something—confess sin, accept forgiveness and press ahead.
- Habakkuk at first thought God was totally wrong in what He was doing and later realized that God wasn’t going to get him OUT of the situation, but He was going to get him THROUGH the situation.
- Which is often how it goes—and we don’t want to hear that.

What if God doesn’t answer?

- That can happen.
- There can be dark nights of the soul.
- God did not answer His Son, when He cried from the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”
- When that happens—we need to follow the example of what Jesus did next when He followed that cry with these words, “Father into your hands I commit my spirit.”
- And resurrection followed.
- As it one day will for us.

A few closing thoughts

- Habakkuk obviously had a wonderful, conversational relationship with God and, we see part of it in this book where he moved from confusion and challenge to a wonderful confidence that no matter what happened, God would get Him through it.
- Apparently so did Dallas Willard. Not only are his books a blessing, apparently

his life was also a lesson in what it meant to walk closely with, conversationally with God.

- As his friend John Ortberg said—Dallas had such a constant and abiding friendship with God that when he died, he probably didn't notice.
- May we all learn to live in that way as we daily live in conversation with our God.

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- **Links to:**
- Podcasts, blogs, and eBooks
- Printables & merch of Bible verses & encouraging sayings
- Chronological Bible-reading schedules

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Habakkuk and his Questions, why it's OK to ask God, "Why?"

1. What type of book is it? What makes it different than other books, but similar to the book of Job and some Psalms?
2. What do you think of the idea of "hearing God?" or having a conversational relationship with God?
3. Who are the "referent others" in your life? What do you model your life and behavior based on?
4. What was Habakkuk's problem with how God answered him? How did he respond and what was his final conclusion after discussing the situation with God?
5. What did the lesson teach you about prayer? What was new to you?
6. APPLICATION— What place does God's Word have in helping you develop a conversational relationship with God and how can you grow in that ?