

Habakkuk, a dialog with God

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He asks the questions we all ask

- Why God?
- Why do you allow evil?
- Why do evil people get away with things?
- What happens to good people when they are caught up in it?
- How should we live when we don't understand what is happening?
- Before we get into answering these questions, let's look at the form of the book before we look at the content

A dialog with God

- This book is one instance in the Bible (ending of Job similar, some of Paul's writings) where we have a recorded conversation with God
- We need to be aware of this, to learn from the process, and not only the content of the book.
- When people talk about "hearing from God" it can either be a sign of delusional self-deception or the witness of an intimate and real relationship with God.
- How do we know?
- Recommend a book, *Hearing God* by Dallas Willard, deep, thought-provoking, but useful for further study

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?*

Historical setting of the book

- **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
- **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 as we go

- The book begins:
- 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

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."

Remember power and brutality of Assyria?

- Review of Assyrian Empire
- 3 historic periods going back to 2000, BC of around 300 years each
- City founded in 6,000 BC, one of the oldest, largest, most powerful in the ancient world
- About 12 km in length, the wall system consisted of an ashlar stone retaining wall about 6 metres (20 ft) high surmounted by a mudbrick wall about 10 metres (33 ft) high and 15 metres (49 ft) thick. The stone retaining wall had projecting stone towers spaced about every 18 metres (59 ft).
- Repented under Jonah, reverted to old ways,

- Conquered and resettled Northern Kingdom of Israel
- 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

This response does not satisfy Habakkuk

- 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, 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
- 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, respectfully and to "wait quietly" as Habakkuk did
- Advice from OT Prof. "my problem if I don't understand, so wait for an answer."

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.
- 3 For 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 through 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 it's empire lasted only 80 years and it too was gone

Habakkuk's response—a public song of praise

- 3 A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet. On *shigionoth*.
- 2 Lord, 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.

Observations and applications

- God is always working on a bigger picture than we are aware of
- To live by faith in that, 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. 1:1:
- 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 textual support for this comment, NONE!***

Hebrews 11, what is actually says:

- NIV:11:1 Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. 2 This 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 him in them***
- ***Basing our life, decisions and actions on the God's ultimate plan of salvation, not ourselves***
- ***By FAITH is the only way we can see these things***

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. ⁹By 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. ¹⁰For 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. ²⁵He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. ²⁶He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward. ²⁷By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible.
- Not what he wanted....argued with God about his call later

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. ¹⁴People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. ¹⁵If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶Instead, 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. ³⁹These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised.
- They trusted in GOD—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"
- So our should we live with that in mind?
- In all of our challenges, it is OK—encouraged that we talk to God, that we ask and question
- But then pray that we respond and live in a way that is pleasing to Him

No matter what

- Keep your eyes on the Lord
- Be much in his Word so you have a proper view of life, world events and personal trials
- Always be asking,
- "Lord, how can I be a good witness for you in this situation?"
- I may not be able to affect world peace or shooting in the streets, but I can be kind to those in my family, fair in business dealings, peaceful and encouraging in all interactions with others.

From a man who suffered greatly, William Cowper, hymn "God moves in mysterious ways"

- *God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants his footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm.*
- *Deep in unfathomable mines
Of never failing skill,
He treasures up his bright designs
And works his sovereign will.*
- *Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take,
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy, and shall break
In blessings on your head.*
- *Judge not the lord by feeble sense,
But trust him for his grace;
behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.*
- *His purpose will ripen fast,
Unfolding every hour;
the bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flower.*
- *Blind unbelief is sure to err,
And scan his work in vain:
God is his own interpreter,
And he will make it plain.*
- Though vine nor fig-tree neither,
Their wonted fruit shall bear,
Though all the field should wither,
Nor flocks nor herds be there;
Yet God the same abiding,
His praise shall tune my voice,
For, while in Him confiding,
I cannot but rejoice.
- —William Cowper, 1779, poet, hymn writer, suffered deep depression, friend of John Newton, see *God moves in mysterious ways*

- **Finally**

- Cowper died “in utter despair”
- We don’t know Habakkuk’s end
- We do know Judah went into captivity
- But God is faithful to his sad and suffering saints
- Cowper and Habakkuk now in a place no tears and great joy
- Judah’s captivity ended in 70 years and they returned to the land
- The captivity of our earth will end someday, “the siege is almost broken” and eternal joy in the presence of the Lord is waiting for us.
- Knowing that gave Habakkuk hope and it should give us hope also.