

Habakkuk Notes

Today we are going to go look at the book of Habakkuk. You may be thinking why should we look at the book of Habakkuk? It's some small book of the bible, it's in the old testament and its quite hard to find. You may be interested to know that is exactly what I thought when Bruce said to me can you preach on Habakkuk. As a bit of background, Bruce usually prepares most of the years sermons topics ahead of time and then allocates it to the various preachers. When I got Habakkuk, I thought it might have been pick on the student day. That as I was the new boy it would do me good to preach on some obscure book of the bible, after all isn't that why you go to Bible college. So I started looking at Habakkuk and quickly found that it contains a very famous verse. I would think most people here would know it, "The righteous shall live by faith." A line used by Paul in Romans and Galatians and then even by Martin Luther to help summarize how we as Christians should live. I thought it would be a simple message based around this verse and that Habakkuk wouldn't take too much looking into. But as I read Habakkuk I was deeply moved, and it has quickly become one of my favourite books of the bible. So as I preach this sermon today I would like to share with you the journey of Habakkuk, so that you too can see what an amazing book this is. You will be able to see the hope that in can bring as it helps us think through things like this...

Lydia is a 10-year old girl who lives in a rural area in southern Africa. Three years ago her father died of AIDS; then, last July Lydia's mother died also. Lydia and her 3 younger siblings now live together with 12 other cousins – all AIDS orphans – in the small home of her grandfather. There is no money for school fees, so she can't go to school. Where is God for Lydia?

Sarah, a single mother of 2 kids, is driving home from work after picking up her children from daycare. Mike, also on his way home, stops at a bar and has a few drinks. He realizes he's stayed too long and is already 15 minutes late for his evening appointment. He rushes out to his car – and runs through the first stop sign just as Sarah pulls into the intersection. His car broadsides hers, killing one of her daughters and leaving Sarah and her son crippled for life. Is that justice?.

Hearing stories like this makes us ask who is in control of this world? Anyone? Does it make sense to talk about a wise, loving, and all-powerful God who governs all the affairs of men when stories like this happen every day? Where is justice in a world full of AIDS orphans, and innocent, crippled children? How can we believe in the God of the Bible when we are faced with such darkness, such tragedy, such devastation?

Habakkuk also asked these questions. Let me set the scene for you and tell you about the time Habakkuk was living, Habakkuk was written about 600BC. This was a time of major upheaval in the middle east. Assyria, the major world power that had destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel about 100 years previously, had also recently been destroyed, and the Babylonians were now beginning to look threatening for the southern kingdom of Judah. Over the last 100 years Judah has had a mixture of good and bad kings but mostly

there was a lot of corruption and injustice. Writing about 20 years before Habakkuk, Jeremiah assesses the state of his country:

26 "Among my people are wicked men who lie in wait like men who snare birds and like those who set traps to catch men. Jeremiah 5:26

Habakkuk has seen this wickedness and cries out to God for justice against the corrupt rulers in Judah:

2 How long, O 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 wrong? 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.

How often do we cry out with the same question? Why God? Even with the same questions. Why is there injustice? Why do you tolerate wrong? Why don't you save?

I don't know about you, but I always feel a little uncomfortable when I ask God questions like this. But Habakkuk shows us that it's alright to ask questions to God. And if you look through the bible you will see that asking these sort of questions is not actually that unusual. Abraham questioned God about destroying Sodom and Gomorrah, Job questioned why he was being treated the way he was and there are many Psalms all raising questions to God.

Habakkuk has asked God to do something about the violence and injustice. So let's read God's response on how he will fix the problem in Judah. Verse 6 says "I am raising up the Babylonians, that ruthless and impetuous people" God is going to raise up bad people, just like the ones that H was complaining about to fix the problem.

Can you imagine what Habakkuk must be feeling. He has asked God why? Why is he ignoring violence and injustice in Judah and God responds that he will raise up even worse people to wipe out the violence and injustice by destroying Judah.

This isn't what Habakkuk asked for! He wants justice in Judah – not the destruction of Judah! It's almost as if God said: "You want justice? I'll give you justice!"

It may sound like God has not answered Habakkuk at all but let's quickly look at what God has said and done.

Did God hear? Yes!

Did God answer Habakkuk's questions? Yes!

Is He concerned about injustice and violence? Yes!

Can He do anything about it? Yes!

Will He do something about it? Yes!

Those are all answers Habakkuk wants to hear! Those are answers we all want to hear!

But is this the way Habakkuk expected God to fix the problem? No, God is sending the Babylonians to destroy the kingdom of Judah!

To give you an example, imagine that you're having a problem with bullies at school, and the principal and teachers have not been able to do anything about it. So the principal comes over the loudspeaker and says, "We've decided on a course of action to solve the bullying problem at Waitara Primary school: We are bringing in some criminals from Lidcombe Jail, and they'll take care of the bullies!"

Habakkuk just wanted the bad people gone from Judah, like God had done in the past. He just wanted a new king who would be good. Instead God has said he will bring an even more wicked nation to wipe out Judah. So Habakkuk again questions God. He asks why are you letting the evil Babylonians destroy us? Habakkuk does not understand why God is now tolerating these even more wicked people.

And once again the Lord answers Habakkuk. And he does this in 3 parts, Firstly God says wait for my answer. God says that he will answer it will just take time. And secondly because of this Habakkuk must have faith. God says the righteous shall live by his faith. And finally God describes what will happen to the apparently successful wicked. God says that the wicked will perish.

So having gone through the questions and answers of Habakkuk we can look at them as a purely historical thing, where Habakkuk at that period of time has asked God, Why don't you do something about corruption? Which God answers with "I will bring Babylon to end Judah's corruption. Then the next question from Habakkuk, "What about the Babylonians wickedness? Will you tolerate that? To which God replies No, I will destroy them too. You can view all these question and answers in that period of time.

But there is a difficulty with us looking at it this way, it still leaves Habakkuk and the Jews with a problem. God hasn't actually ended the violence and corruption, its just stopped it for a while, because after the Babylonians came the Greeks and the Romans. In the time of the Romans the book of Hebrews uses the verse "the righteous will live by faith" as the new Christians are encouraged to persevere through their suffering. The suffering hadn't ended then, even when Christ had come.

And it still leaves us with a problem today, we still suffer today, the righteous are still being persecuted, the wicked are still succeeding. Given the continued suffering we can well ask, has God still not answered the questions that Habakkuk asked? Has God still not answered our questions?

I believe he has. And we see glimpses of it through God's second answer. God says that his revelation, his solution, will "speak of **the end**, in verse 3, and that the earth **will** be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord in verse 14. The ultimate solution will be **when Jesus comes again**. When the end of this world happens, when everyone will know the glory of God. It is then that God will ultimately fix the problem of the wicked, of the injustice. Until then, until Jesus returns, we are told to live in faith.

Live by faith, that is what we should do. It sounds like such a simple statement, and earlier this week when I was going through my sermon, I had pretty much finished my sermon here, I was sure that was the easy answer, if a christian was suffering, just say to them, live by faith and it would be alright. But I was forced to drastically rethink this when I caught up with a friend from college on Monday and he told me that his brother in law had just died unexpectedly and a little later in the week I was told by another friend at college that he had just lost his baby. I was stuck, there was no way I was just going to throw that line at them, “it’s ok I know you have lost someone you love, you just need to live by faith.” I couldn’t do it, I had to really rethink what I was saying. And I came to a number of conclusions. And the final chapter of Habakkuk really helped me.

Habakkuk says the Sovereign lord is my strength, he can say this because he knows what God has done in the past as seen in verse 1-7 and how he is all powerful as seen in his power over nature in verse 8-15, Habakkuk can have faith even in the hard times because he knows the nature of God. So when I talk to my friends I remind them of Gods character, of his love for us and what he has done in the past for us.

And secondly I realized that simply by saying “the righteous will live by faith”, that it does not automatically fix the problem, Habakkuk at the end of his Psalm doesn’t say, everything is better now, so I will rejoice in the Lord. No, he says 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, **yet will I rejoice in the Lord**, I will be joyful in God my savior. **We** will always have problems and troubles in this world, but we can have faith that God is **our Savior**, that he has send Jesus for us and that ultimately Jesus will come again to stop the wicked, to stop the suffering.

I think so often we read the Psalms and praise God. and we should. We praise him for all the good things we receive. But what about in the sad times, when things are tough, when loved ones die, when children die of AIDS, when people are killed in unexpected car accidents. What then? Do we praise God then? Here in Habakkuk it says we can. We as righteous followers can still praise God, because we know he has saved us and that he will right all wrongs. We can praise God through all the hard times in life because God doesn’t save us from **this** life, he saves us **to have life with him for eternity**.

Amen