

MINOR PROPHETS #8

HABBAKUK

HOSEA took a faithless wife And spoke of judgement, love and life
JOEL told of locust plagues The Spirit and the end of the age
AMOS left his flocks and trees To call the nation to its knees
OBADIAH prophesied of Edom and its foolish pride
JONAH tried to run away, but lived to preach another day
MICAH spoke of God's great plan to change the world by changing man.
NAHUM showed that God is great And prophesied Assyria's fate
HABAKKUK thought the Lord unfair But found the truth through faith and prayer

Read: Habakkuk 2:1-4; 3:17-19

The big question

- Why does God allow injustice?
- Why do the innocent seem to suffer and the wicked triumph?
- Where is God when there is a tsunami or cyclones in the US or an earthquake in Pakistan or terrorist attacks in Bali?
- Theologians call this the issue of THEODICY (from *theos* = God; *dikaiois* = righteous) – ie the righteousness of God in a wicked world.

The situation

See Habakkuk 1:6-7

- The Babylonian/Chaldean armies of Nebuchadnezzar were attacking Jerusalem
- Babylon was a great city
- The inner walls were 21ft thick, the outer walls 11ft
- The towers were 300ft high
- The beautiful blue Ishtar City Gate was universally admired
- The central thoroughfare was 50ft wide
- Their armies were powerful
- They were skilled in astronomy, astrology and mathematics
- But they were also cruel and wicked.

Complaint #1

Habakkuk 1:3-4

- Habakkuk prophesied 2,500 years ago (around 605-598 BC)
- His name = 'love's embrace' or 'wrestler'* (ie one who 'wrestles' with God?)
- He questioned God's justice in sending the Chaldeans against Jerusalem

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Answer #1

Habakkuk 1:5

- Habakkuk would not understand even if God explained it
- Read Deut 29:29; Rom 11:33
- This is like trying to explain the solar system to a toddler
- God is God
- If we could explain God we would not want to worship Him
- Compare marriage – after 45 years I still do not understand my wife! She fascinates me, intrigues me, disturbs me, attracts me, annoys me, encourages me, loves me – and fills me with wonder. If this is true of another human being, how much more of God? (God also annoys me sometimes! But this is a reflection of me, not Him.)

Complaint #2

Habakkuk 1:12-13

- Habakkuk could not understand why God would use an even more wicked nation to judge Judah
- Sometimes we don't understand why God uses nastier people to deal with us!
- Read Proverbs 19:17 – we refine each other through fellowship.
- When people hurt us the answer is not blame them or turn away from them but to thank God for them as they help to make us better people. Don't leave your spouse or your church when they upset you – thank God for the opportunity for growth.
- Habakkuk set himself to seek the Lord. He was determined not to give up (2:1)
- So we need to wait on God in troubled times.

God's Answer #21. Make sure you get it right

Habakkuk 2:2

- People sometimes criticise God without taking the trouble to find out what he is really saying
- The good news is to be proclaimed whether we fully comprehend it or not

2. Be patient

Habakkuk 2:3

- Sometimes we just have to wait!
- Read Isaiah 28:16b – Literally: 'Whoever believes will not be in a hurry.'
- God's timing is not always ours!
- Habakkuk learned to do this (3:16)
- Ultimately, God always answers our prayers – if not in this life then in the next.

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3. Trust God

Habakkuk 2:4

- Romans 1:17 – saved by faith
- Galatians 3:11 – justified by faith
- Hebrews 10:38 – persevere by faith

4. Justice will be done

Habakkuk 2:8

- Babylon would also be judged in its time.
- Five ‘woes’ on Babylon for their –
 - Theft (6)
 - Corruption (9)
 - Murder (12)
 - Drunkenness (15)
 - Idolatry (19)
- God will always accomplish his purpose and He will always do what is right (Genesis 18:25).

5. Victory is the Lord’s

Habakkuk 2:14, 20

God will reign

HABBAKUK’S PRAYER

- Praise for the past (3:1-14)
- Hope for the future (16)
- Rejoicing in the present (17-18)
- Habakkuk decides he will rejoice in the Lord no matter what has gone wrong
- Read 1 Thess 5:16-18 – It is the will of God for us to give thanks in every situation

Student version: Though I failed my last exam; my parents won’t send me any more money; I can’t get a job; and my visa hasn’t been renewed... yet I will rejoice!

Wife version: Though my husband watches TV all the time; the kids are sick; petrol prices are going up; the fridge just broke down and my neighbour yells at me... yet I will rejoice!

Husband version: Though my wife nags me and I never have any peace; though my boss thinks I’m a slacker; though the kids won’t do anything I say; and my team lost the grand final... yet I will rejoice!

Personal version: Though my prayers don’t seem to be answered; I have been sick for ages; my workmates think I’m a religious fanatic and I’m on a fat-free diet ... yet I will rejoice!

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Seriously...

- You may be facing really major issues right now
- Could be a terrible trauma such as bereavement, terminal disease, bankruptcy, divorce, unemployment...
- Habakkuk's situation was also terrible – but he chose to rejoice in God
- Habakkuk's answers are still relevant today

Finally...

Habakkuk 3:19

- When we trust the Lord we stand secure even in rough places
- He leads us to the heights!
- Psalm 18:33; Eph 2:6
- Eg gazelles on the cliffs and mountains of Israel
- From the heights, troubles look small!
- We stand secure with the Lord today.

SOMETHING TO THINK OR TALK ABOUT

Remember: You don't have to answer all the questions. Choose those that seem most relevant at this time.

Biblical

1. Allowing for the fact that Habakkuk uses poetic imagery, what can we learn about the Babylonian (Chaldean) army? (1:6-11)
2. Compare 2:1 with Psalm 73:16-17. What do these passages have in common?
3. What do you think 2:3 means?
4. What is the prophet's attitude to idolatry? (2:18-19)
5. What is the overall point of 3:2-16? What do we learn from this passage about God?

Personal and practical

6. Using references to contemporary situations, rewrite Habakkuk's questions to God in your own words (1:2-4, 12-13)
7. When have you faced a situation where you felt that God was unfair and life was unfair? How did you come through it?
8. How would you use 2:3-4 to encourage someone who is discouraged (or yourself)?
9. If you had written 3:17-18 how would you have put it? How can you put this verse into practice?
10. What does 3:19 mean to you?
11. Choose a couple of appropriate and joyful songs to sing.

About Dr Barry Chant

Barry Chant is Senior Pastor of the Wesley International Congregation in Sydney, Australia. He is a regular speaker at church services, seminars, conferences and conventions. Hundreds of thousands of his books have been sold around the world. He has degrees in arts, theology and ministry, a diploma in education and a PhD in history. He was the initiator and former president of Tabor College, Australia.

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