



Habakkuk 1:1-4 – Adversity Leads to Legitimate Questions

- this morning I'd like to begin our time with a quiz – school is in session, or about to be for many, so let's take a one question quiz together...
 - **True/False – God is the friend of the honest doubter.**
 - in other words, it is OK to ask God questions...
 - it is OK to express a lack of understanding...or perhaps even point out what seems to us to be an apparent inconsistency in His ways...perhaps to even lodge a “respectful complaint”...
 - is there any sense in which God is the friend of the honest doubter?
 - or, does the Lord expect us to keep our questions to ourselves?...
 - does He expect us to put blinders on and ignore the events around us as if there is no connection between His Word and contemporary events?
 - if His predictions and promises don't seem to be coming to pass, are we supposed to just put on an act?...a plastic smile...at least on Sunday when we come together?...
 - is it OK to ask God questions...
1. For example, questions about His timing...
 - have you ever thought God was a bit slow in the customer service department?...
 - it's like, Lord I have prayed for this for like three days in a row now...
 - I was assuming this request would be put in the heavenly micro-wave...
 - I got on my knees...I pushed the buttons...and I've yet to hear the beep...or the ding telling me the request is answered...
 - so when that happens, is it OK to ask about that?...to bring up the timing issue?...to use the words “how long” in a respectful discussion with the Almighty...
 2. Or questions about God's ways?...
 - do you ever look around and say – how could a just God allow that?...
 - does He know what that person just said to me?
 - does He know what my boss just did?...
 - does He know about this diagnosis?...
 - have you seen this commercial where a guy is riding down a country road with his sunroof down singing a song on the radio...
 - and all of a sudden some animal, a squirrel or something, fall right through the sunroof and starts singing along...
 - and then some birds fly in and join the chorus...
 - and all of a sudden a wolf drops in and eats one of the birds...
 - and the guy looks over at the wolf with this incredulous look like – “what was that”...and then the wolf spits out the bird and everyone starts singing again...

- and we all know that feeling of shock and outrage at injustice...where you stop in your tracks and say...what was that?...but the problem is in the real world...the wolf doesn't always spit out the bird...
- is it OK to look right at the Lord in prayer and say...I don't understand how you could allow that kind of injustice...that kind of adversity...

3. Or the violation of God's law...

- even among His own people...
- it's not that you are out looking for gossip...but you read the newspaper, or you just open your eyes...
- and you see people who say they know the Lord but who clearly violate His Word...
- and what's worse – they get away with it...and sometimes they even seem to be prospering...
- so one college student who says he or she is a Christian goes out and boozes it up all weekend...while you practically lock yourself in your dorm room to study for Monday's exam...
 - and the test results come back and the kid who boozed it up did better than you...
- how could God allow His law to be ignored like that...to become powerless?...
- and are you supposed to live what amounts to this double life...
 - where you have the Bible filled with principles and promises...and apparently that's good for Sunday...
 - but then you have another category the rest of the week where God's Word doesn't seem to be coming true, or His presence doesn't seem to be apparent...
 - are you supposed to live in these two worlds that never intersect?...
- I think you would agree – for a lot of reasons those are very important questions...
- which is why we want to study the matter of **Seeking God's Plan During Times of Adversity**
- and that is going to take us to the message of a man whose name you need to know...
- I'm talking about the prophet Habakkuk...and let me invite you to open your Bible to that important book...
- now, on the off-handed possibility that you've not been to Habakkuk recently – let me help by pointing out that it is the fifth book from the end of OT...
- while you're turning there, I realize that some of you are new to studying the Bible...
 - in fact today may be your first day in church...
 - and you may be thinking – there is no way I am going to understand this...and even if I did, there is no way it could possibly have any relevance to my life today...
- I believe both those thoughts are incorrect...everyone in this room can understand this book, even though admittedly it's going to take some work...but there are rich lessons here that are breathtakingly relevant to where we live today...

- Read Habakkuk 1:1-4

- Here's the point today – **Adversity Leads to Legitimate Questions about God's Ways...**
- with the time we have remaining, let's look for **3 questions thoughtful believers sometimes ask.**
- here's one of the obvious ones...

I. How Long Will God Make Us Wait?

- is there anyone here who is not waiting on God for something?...

- whether it is a request you've made about an area in your own life, or for a friend or loved one or acquaintance, we all are in a position of waiting...
- well, since that's the case, here's some great news...you've got a friend in this man Habakkuk...because over 2500 hundred years ago he posed a very similar question to God Himself...How long will God make us wait?...
- now, please keep in mind, we believe in interpreting the Bible in its historical context...
- part of the power of what we're doing here is dependent on using Scripture in the way the Holy Spirit intended...
- so one question that should have been rumbling around our minds is...

A. Where Habakkuk fits into OT history.

- now, please don't say – this is where you're going to lose me – I don't know any of this...
- listen, God has chosen to reveal Himself to Us in a book...the Bible...
 - and that becomes the lens through which we understand His other forms of revelation, namely His creation and His Son...
 - and because approximately 75% of your Bible is comprised of the OT, you need to have a working knowledge of this book...
- let me try to provide that for you in the simplest way I know...please think with me about:

Twelve Key OT Events

- the first 11 chapters of the book of Genesis explain...

1. Creation, Fall of man, Flood, and the Tower of Babel – Genesis 1-11

- so we learn both about God's glory and man's utter inability to make right choices in his own strength and his own power...by the way, some people believe the events recorded in the book of Job occurred during this time...
- but after you read the first 11 chapters in the book of Genesis and conclude, this is going to be a very sad story...until you turn the page and read about...

2. The call of Abraham – Genesis 12 – the beginning of the nation of Israel – 2100 BC.

- God came to a man and made a three-fold promise/covenant to him.
- the provisions of that covenant were, "land, seed, and blessing"
- I will multiply your seed into a nation, I will give you a promised land, and I will bless you"
- that establishes the principle that God chooses to reveal His glory by making promises to undeserving human beings, and then to keep them because of His grace...
- the rest of the book of Genesis tells about...

3. The lives of the patriarchs – Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph – 2100 - 1845 BC.

- and if time permitted, we could mention many women that God was using at the same time...but God was keeping His promises and unfolding His plan

4. After Joseph – The children of Israel in bondage in Egypt – 1845 – 1445 BC

- this was a period of terrible slavery, which God chose to end when a faithful mother hid her baby boy...who eventually grew up to lead Israel out of Egypt...

5. Moses – The exodus and wilderness wanderings – 1445 – 1405 BC

- that's also when the law was given to God's people, and the sacrificial system established to demonstrate God's mercy when His people violated the law...
- the books of Exodus, Numbers, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy fit into this period of history...so we're already through 6 books...then came another great leader...

6. Joshua – The promised land – 1405 – 1385 BC

- which was a thrilling time in the history of God's people as His promises were being fulfilled and they, in many ways, were joyfully following Him...after that was the period of...

7. The Judges – 1385 – 1040 BC

- fascinating stories of men and women God called to minister for Him, some who turned out to be faithful servants of God and some who did not...
- this is also when the story recorded in the book of Ruth occurred...then came the period of...

8. The Kings – Beginning in 1040 BC

- Israel's first king was a man named Saul...who was the second...

9. The Reign of David – 1000-970 BC

- by the way, I am rounding these dates for sake of simplicity...
- and this is where books like I-II Samuel, I-II Kings, I-II Chronicles fit in...
- David also wrote many of the Psalms...
- next came David's son named...

10. The Reign of Solomon – 970 – 931 BC

- he was used of God to write the books of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon...so by now, we've just thought our way through a fair amount of the OT...but then in 931 BC, a terrible event occurred...

11. The division of Israel into southern kingdom (Judah) and northern kingdom (Israel) – 931 BC.

- show map

- the southern kingdom came up to the top of the Dead Sea...they were renamed Judah...and they kept their capital in Jerusalem (also at the northern point of the Dead Sea)
- the northern kingdom kept the name Israel...and they set up a rival capital, and even a rival system of worship in the city of Samaria (middle way between Dead Sea and Sea of Galilee...a little to the left)...
- now what we have is this...God's chosen nation....the one He made all these promises to....was divided....was for the most part living in very sinful ways.
- you say...what did God do?...the answer is that He sent prophets to call His people back to repentance and faith...
- some of those prophets especially ministered to the northern kingdom...like Hosea, Joel, and Amos...and warned them of coming judgment if they did not repent...
- eventually that judgment came when...

12. The fall of the northern kingdom to Assyria – 722 BC

- after that devastating event, God sent a number of prophets to the southern Kingdom, including the man we're studying...Habakkuk...
- this only leaves, by the way, the fall of the southern kingdom to the nation of Babylon in 586 BC (that will all be explained next week), and the return of a remnant of God's people to Jerusalem...
- but all the prophets of both the larger books (the major prophets) and the smaller books (the minor prophets) ministered to one of those three groups...
 - either to the northern kingdom before it fell...
 - or the southern kingdom before it fell...
 - or to the exiles in Babylon before some of them returned to rebuild the wall and rebuild the temple at Jerusalem...that's what the books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther discuss...
- now, that was a whirlwind tour – - now, let's go back to Habakkuk...and think about...

B. The appropriateness of his question.

- Is it OK to ask God how long you'll have to wait for something...
- or to confess to Him that you are struggling because His timing doesn't seem to meet your schedule...
- apparently the answer to that question is a strong "yes"...because God put this material in the Bible...
- Peter explained to us in the NT...**2 Peter 1:21 - for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.**
- so, please keep in mind – this is in the Bible because God wanted it to be in the Bible...
- that is the point of the first verse...

1. He was a prophet.

- a nabbi – “bubbling up”

- his heart and life were overflowing with questions that he posed to God, and as a result answers that God chose to give...
- one of the best ways to fill your heart with answers is to have the courage to formulate and pose appropriate questions...
- and please don't ever think the Lord is not up to that challenge...

2. This book is his “oracle.”

- masasaa – burden or load

- Habakkuk understands that this is pretty weighty stuff...
- but he would rather have an authentic relationship with God that involves weighty questions than a superficial one filled with pat answers that won't really sustain him...
- now, one other hint about the appropriateness of this is down in chapter 2 verse 1
 - let's peek down there for a minute...
 - **Habakkuk 2:1 - I will stand on my guard post and station myself on the rampart; and I will keep watch to see what He will speak to me, and how I may reply when I am reproved.**
 - this verse teaches us that...

3. He asked his questions with the right spirit.

- he wasn't just talking, he was also listening...with the distinct impression that God might have things to say that he did not yet understand...
- **God is the friend of the honest doubter who dares to talk to God rather than about him. Prayer that includes an element of questioning God may be a means of increasing one's faith. Expressing doubts and crying out about unfair situations in the universe show one's trust in God and one's confidence that God should and does have an answer to humanity's insoluble problems (Barker and Bailey – The New American Commentary, Vol. 20).**

- How long, O Lord?

- Can I ask you this morning, is your relationship with the Lord strong enough, and healthy enough, and authentic enough to include you posing challenging questions to Him?...not disrespectfully, not with sinful judgmentalism...but in a way that helps you avoid a shallow, superficial faith that can't stand the test of adversity?...if not – maybe it's time to have a genuine talk with your Father...

- now, let's bring a second question into this discussion...

II. Why Does God Make Us Experience Iniquity, Strife, and Violence?

- those are exactly the words Habakkuk uses in verse 3...

- **Habakkuk 1:3 - Why do You make me see iniquity, and cause *me* to look on wickedness? Yes, destruction and violence are before me; strife exists and contention arises.**

- now, you might say – well, what exactly is he talking about?...

- that is a very important question...do you really want to know the answer?...badly?

- then that involves...

A. A little bit more history.

- we mentioned earlier that by now, the northern kingdom had fallen to the nation of Assyria...

- and so Habakkuk and several other prophets are ministering to the remaining southern kingdom...

- but many Bible students believe that the exact time Habakkuk was writing was about 10 years after the death of **King Josiah**..

- now you might say...so what?...

- that's actually a very big so what, and I can explain it very quickly...

- Josiah stands out among all the kings of both the northern and southern kingdoms as being unusually godly...

- you can read his story in **II Kings 22-23**, and also in **II Chronicles 34-35**

- here's what happened...

- Josiah came to power when he was 8 years old...and he apparently had some very godly family members and counselors, and he also had the humility to listen to them...because II Kings 22:2 says -- **2 Kings 22:2 - He did right in the sight of the LORD and walked in all the way of his father David, nor did he turn aside to the right or to the left.**

- and here's what that chapter goes on to report – he sent a team of people to make repairs to the temple and while they were working, they found a copy of the law of God...something Josiah did not even realize existed...

- so he had it read and he was greatly convicted for all the ways the people of Judah were not obeying God's Word...

- and so he repented and asked the priests to inquire of God on his behalf...and here's what they said...

- **2 Kings 22:18-20 - ...'Thus says the LORD God of Israel, "Regarding the words which you have heard, because your heart was tender and you humbled yourself before the LORD when you heard what I spoke against this place and against its inhabitants that they should become a desolation and a curse, and you have torn your clothes and wept before Me, I truly have heard you," declares the LORD. Therefore, behold, I will gather you to your fathers, and you will be gathered to your grave in peace, and your eyes will not see all the evil which I will bring on this place. So they brought back word to the king.**

- and the rest of King Josiah's reign was characterized by repentance and holiness on the part of the people of God...

- but now Josiah has been dead for about 10-12 years...and do you know what has occurred?...the people of the southern kingdom have gone right back to their sinful ways...

- even though they saw what happened to the northern kingdom...

- even when they had the example of Josiah to follow and point them back to the Word...

- that's what's so horrible about these opening verses of the book of Habakkuk...

- this violence, strife, and wickedness, and destruction...that was taking place among the people of God...

- that was what was especially troubling to Habakkuk...how in the world could God allow that kind of behavior to continue?...
- how long, O Lord?...
- and there are probably ways that you are in that exact situation this morning...
 - my spouse says he/she is a Christian...yet look at the way they act...Lord, how could you allow that to continue?...
 - those people in my office say they know the Lord – they even go to church and yet listen to the way they talk, and gossip, and take advantage of the boss when he/she is not around...how long, Oh Lord
 - my in-laws act all spiritual but behind closed doors they're meaner than snakes...
 - my parents...my children...those kinds in the youth group...
 - why does God make us see and experience strife, and iniquity and violence?...
 - here's a question...

B. Do you really want God to completely judge all injustice today?

- if you're upset about someone else's shortcomings and the way it is hurting you, or inconveniencing you...do you want to be the one who makes the decision about the timing?...
- do you really want God to completely judge all injustice today (please consider your answer carefully)...because here's the next question...
 - does that include yours?...
 - unless you're perfectly sanctified, would you also want God to judge any/all or your injustice?...
 - or would you want Him to have a double standard --- additional patience with you, and switch retribution with everyone else?...
 - maybe we just need to trust God's timetable when it comes to this matter?...
 - that's where the key verse of this book comes in... **Habakkuk 2:4 - Behold the proud, His soul is not upright in him; But the just shall live by his faith.**
 - I don't have to know "how long", as long as I know that my God who is good...knows how long...I will leave the timing up to Him...
 - Can I ask you this morning – are you in a place spiritually where you can say that with the prophet?...Lord, I will leave the timing up to you...
 - I've been honest with you, I've told you that I am struggling...but I know I'm not qualified to know when something should happen and when it shouldn't...
- now, you might say...where does this start?...
- Habakkuk 2:4 is quoted 3 times in the NT...the NT writers were familiar with the prophet Habakkuk...
- one of the occurrences is **Galatians 3:11 - But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for "the just shall live by faith."**
 - the point of that is that you cannot have a relationship with God on the basis of your own works...faith begins by trusting what Jesus Christ did on the cross as your only hope of salvation...
- and friend, maybe one of the reasons God has waited so long...is because He's waiting for you...**2 Peter 3:8-9 - But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.**
- it's only through a vibrant relationship with Christ that you can possibly leave the timing of everything else up to Him...

- here's the third question from our text...

III. Why Does God Allow His Law to Become Powerless?

- he said in verse 4...**Habakkuk 1:4 - Therefore the law is powerless, and justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous; therefore perverse judgment proceeds.**

- you can imagine how disappointed Habakkuk would have been in seeing the reforms under King Josiah, and then watching the people turn their back on the Word after the king's death...

- How long, Oh Lord...

- Why would you allow that to happen?...

- perhaps to give the true people of God an opportunity to live by God's Word even when it's hard, and to share that Word with as many people as will listen...

- an authentic faith in the promises of God's Word stands out especially well against the backdrop of an unbelieving culture...

- the just shall live by faith...which is why Habakkuk could end this book by saying...**Habakkuk 3:17-18 - Though the fig tree may not blossom, Nor fruit be on the vines; Though the labor of the olive may fail, And the fields yield no food; Though the flock may be cut off from the fold, And there be no herd in the stalls—Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation.**