

# WELCOME TO

# habakkuk

When my daughter was younger, she was terrified of the dentist. Before one of her routine appointments, her older brothers and I tried to prepare her with plenty of prayer (and, to be honest, several bribes for good behavior). We prayed at breakfast. We prayed in the car. We prayed in the waiting room. We begged the Lord to be with her and comfort her during her cleaning.

Then she lay down in the chair, and the cleaning started. It was just as uncomfortable, loud and frightening as she remembered. And my little girl started yelling loud enough for the whole office to hear: "God isn't helping me! God! Isn't! Helping! Meeeee!"

Maybe you've felt the same way. Life is falling apart, and no matter how often you cry out to God, your situation just keeps getting worse. You wonder what God could possibly be doing when life isn't going how you planned. You might even wonder if He's abandoned you completely.

That's exactly the situation we find in Habakkuk. These three short chapters in the Old Testament record a prophet's conversation with God. Habakkuk had been crying out to God for help, and he was frustrated by the lack of response. He brought his big questions to God, and God didn't give Habakkuk the answers he had hoped for. And yet Habakkuk learned to live by faith in the sovereign God who always keeps His promises.

Over this five-week study, we'll take a journey with Habakkuk from fearful frustration to faithful joy. Habakkuk's circumstances did not improve. In fact,

God told Habakkuk that things were only going to get worse.

But Habakkuk remembered the Lord's past faithfulness and gained confidence in the future fulfillment of His promises. God strengthened Habakkuk as he waded through uncertainty and waited for the Lord to act. Habakkuk rejoiced in the Lord, even when he faced suffering with no end date.

The book of Habakkuk is just as relevant to us today as it was to the people of Judah many centuries ago. Like them, we live in a world that is not our home. Like them, we're tempted to trust world leaders for our safety and security. Like them, we see the culture around us deteriorating, and we wonder why God doesn't intervene. We need Habakkuk's timeless teaching about God's character and purposes in a world corrupted by violence and injustice. <sup>[1]</sup>

As we study Habakkuk, we'll learn to . . .

- trust God's justice in the midst of injustice,
- hope in God when life feels hopeless,
- find joy in God's salvation when we feel stuck in our pain,
- keep running to God even when we don't get the answer we expect,
- and wait for God's promises to be fulfilled even when our suffering feels endless.



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THEMES IN

# habakkuk

THEMES IN  
GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY

The book of Habakkuk is ultimately all about God. Through this conversation between a sovereign God and a discouraged prophet, we learn about God's character and how the righteous respond to who God is and what He has done. Habakkuk's knowledge of God was the foundation of his approach to God and his prayerful worship of God.

## GOD'S JUSTICE

God's justice was at the core of Habakkuk's questions. Habakkuk saw injustice, wickedness and violence in the world around him, and he didn't understand why a just God would allow this evil to continue. When God said He would use another wicked nation to judge Judah, Habakkuk was even more confused. (Habakkuk 1:13)

Habakkuk believed God was just, but God didn't appear to be acting justly. So Habakkuk struggled to reconcile what he knew about God's character with the circumstances around him and with God's answers to his questions.

God didn't leave Habakkuk in his confusion. God graciously told Habakkuk how He would carry out His judgment of the wicked. In God's answer to Habakkuk, we learn about the glory of His perfect justice and the mercy we have received in Christ.

## GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY

Habakkuk's questions about God's justice were also questions regarding God's sovereignty. Habakkuk knew God's character. He knew God was sovereign. (Habakkuk 1:12) He knew the history of God and His people — how God had exercised His power and sovereignty to bring His people out of slavery in Egypt and give them the promised land. (Habakkuk 3:5-12) Habakkuk struggled to understand why God now seemed to be idly standing by while His people suffered. (Habakkuk 1:2)

God's people often have big questions when they think about the sovereignty of God and the evil in this world. Like Habakkuk, we struggle to reconcile our circumstances with God's character. *Why doesn't He put a stop to the suffering we see around us?* This is a big question without a quick answer, but the book of Habakkuk gives us some pieces of the puzzle.

Habakkuk teaches us that God is sovereign over the nations, and He ordains all things for the purpose of His Kingdom. Our confusion about suffering often stems from our limited vision — we're focused on the kingdom of this world. But God is directing all of history to bring about His Kingdom. As British minister Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones wrote: "What really matters in the world is God's kingdom. From the very beginning, since the fall of man, God has been at work establishing a new kingdom in the world. It is His own kingdom, and He is calling people out of the world into that kingdom; and everything that happens in the world has relevance to it."<sup>[8]</sup>



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God is able to answer our cries for help because He is sovereign over everything, from the smallest details of our lives to the events that happen on a global scale. In our confusion and pain, we can run to Him. We can trust that He is bringing about His good purposes for the world and for His beloved children, even when we don't understand His ways.

## LIVE BY FAITH

When life doesn't go according to plan and we wonder why God hasn't intervened, we're left with a few choices. We might decide God isn't good, isn't powerful or doesn't care. We might decide to look elsewhere for protection, purpose and hope. Or we can choose to believe His promises are true and worship Him in faith. This theme runs throughout the book of Habakkuk: The righteous live by faith in the promises of God. (Habakkuk 2:4)

Dr. Lloyd-Jones summarized Habakkuk's message this way: "The truth stated is that there are only two possible attitudes to life in this world: that of faith and that of unbelief."<sup>[9]</sup> Throughout our study, we'll explore the results of these two attitudes. Habakkuk teaches us that when the righteous face suffering, their response is to wait on the Lord, live by faith and rejoice in Him.

When life doesn't go according to plan, how do we live by faith? Habakkuk shows us that we can filter our view of God's character through our circumstances, or we can filter our view of our circumstances through God's character. One leads to despair and hopelessness. One leads to an abiding hope, joy and settled rest in our Redeemer. As uncertainty swirls around us, we live by faith by clinging to what we know beyond a shadow of a doubt: the unchanging character of our God.

## THE PROMISED MESSIAH

When we live by faith, we wait for God's promises to be fulfilled. For Habakkuk, that meant trusting God's promised Messiah — the anointed son of David — would be sent by God to save His people. As the monarchy in Judah fell into chaos, God wanted His people to understand that their hope was not in their king. Their hope wasn't in political alliances or the mercy of foreign rulers. Their hope was in God alone. Only God could be the true King of Israel, their Savior and their Deliverer.<sup>[10]</sup>

Habakkuk looked forward to the fulfillment of God's messianic promises. We look back at the salvation secured for us by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and we wait for His return. Waiting for God's promises isn't easy. As one commentator wrote, "It requires strength to wait quietly for something for which we have God's promise but no date."<sup>[11]</sup>

While we wait, we hold on to the promises of God's Word. God gives us confidence, peace and joy in our Savior. (Habakkuk 3:18) God Himself is our salvation, and He gives us the strength to wait on Him. (Habakkuk 3:19)



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VEREIGNTY . JUSTICE

DAY 1

# habakkuk 1:1

THE PROPHET HABAKKUK RECEIVED AN ORACLE FROM GOD.

The introductory verse of Habakkuk simply states that a man named Habakkuk saw an oracle. We learned in the introduction to this study that Habakkuk isn't mentioned anywhere else in the Old Testament. He wasn't a significant or well-known character in the storyline of the Bible. So why should we spend several weeks studying the oracle he saw?

Just like the rest of Scripture, these words of Habakkuk are “*breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work*” (2 Timothy 3:16-17). The truth of Habakkuk's prophecy was confirmed by its historical fulfillment and its inclusion in the Bible. This oracle was given by God for the good of His people.

The Hebrew word translated “oracle” refers to a burden, especially one that is to be carried from one place to another.<sup>[1]</sup> Oracles were communications from God that answered questions asked by His people or made pronouncements about present or future events.<sup>[2]</sup> Prophets were burdened with this news from the Lord and tasked with taking it to the people.

- Based on what you learned in the Study Guide introduction, what do you know about the burden Habakkuk felt for the people of Judah at the beginning of his conversation with God?



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- This oracle was given to a prophet of God and included in the Bible. What does this tell you about the truth and importance of this oracle compared to other news, stories or information you read?

We live in an age of limitless information and competing claims of truth. The sheer amount of news coming at us every minute can feel like a heavy burden. However, God has given us His Word to be a light to our path. (Psalm 119:105)

- Read Psalm 119:103-105. Based on these verses and the verses from 2 Timothy that we read above, what do you learn about how God's Word is better than other sources of information and truth?
  
- In what ways are you tempted to seek truth and hope from the world rather than from God's Word?



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- What steps will you take today to keep God's Word central in your heart and mind?

As we spend the next five weeks studying Habakkuk together, we can trust God to transform our hearts and minds by His Word.

- Read John 14:26 and Hebrews 4:12. How do these verses encourage you as we start our study of Habakkuk?

- What are you looking forward to most about studying Habakkuk?



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- Do you think Habakkuk was right to ask these questions and make these accusations when talking to the Lord?

- Have you ever asked the Lord “how long?” and “why?” in a time of suffering or struggle?

Habakkuk was not the only man in the Bible to bring his big questions and emotions to God. God’s Word is filled with lament, which means “a passionate expression of grief.” <sup>[3]</sup> We find lament throughout Psalms, the prophets and books such as Job and Lamentations. One scholar commented: “Lamentation and questioning are God’s gift to the believer. They provide a pathway of honest faith and faithful conversation with him in horrible times.” <sup>[4]</sup> This gift of lament was given to the biblical writers, and it is also given to us.

- Let’s look at Psalm 13 — one of many psalms of lament written by David. In what ways were David’s questions in this psalm similar to Habakkuk’s?



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# Habakkuk 2:4

## IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The use of Habakkuk 2:4 in the New Testament indicates its importance to Paul and other New Testament writers. The quotation of this verse in Romans 1:17 was also a pivotal passage to Martin Luther as he developed his understanding of justification by faith. <sup>[1]</sup>

Let's take a closer look at how New Testament writers used Habakkuk 2:4 to explain the good news of the gospel.

### THE RIGHTEOUS

*"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, 'The righteous shall live by faith.'" (Romans 1:16-17)*

In Romans 1:17, we learn **how we are made righteous.**

We are saved through faith in Christ. Even though we are sinners, God declares us to be righteous because Christ's righteousness is given to us.

### SHALL LIVE

*"For, 'Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and not delay; but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him.' But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls. Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." (Hebrews 10:37-11:1)*

In Hebrews 10:38, we learn **how to live out our faith.**

Those who are saved through faith live by faith and are preserved by God's grace. We live with assurance and conviction as we wait for what we cannot see.

### BY HIS FAITH

*"Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for 'The righteous shall live by faith.' .. Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree'—so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith." (Galatians 3:11, 13-14)*

In Galatians 3:11, we learn that the **object of our faith is Jesus Christ.** We don't have faith in ourselves or our ability to keep the law. Our faith is in Christ, who kept the law perfectly and redeemed us by taking the punishment for our sin.



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