

God Answers a Confused Prophet

SESSION IN A SENTENCE: God has authority over everything, which allows His people to live with faith and joy.

BACKGROUND PASSAGE: Habakkuk

When we think of the Boston Marathon today, unfortunately the terrible events that occurred during the 2013 race quickly come to mind. Two homemade bombs were detonated near the finish line of the race, killing three people and injuring two hundred and sixty-five others. Boston law enforcement organized an unprecedented manhunt to capture the two brothers responsible for the bombing. Four days later, the search came to an end with one suspect dead and the other in custody. In response to the bombing, the citizens of Boston rallied around the slogan “Boston Strong,” which proved to be a powerful mantra of solidarity and comfort for the city.¹



Why do you think the phrase “Boston Strong” helped to bring comfort to the city of Boston?

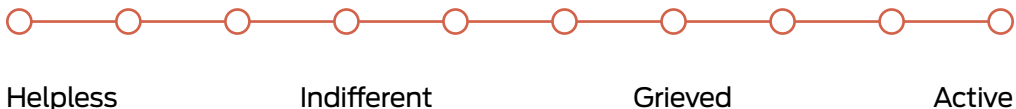
Group Time

Point 1: God's authority over injustice enables His people to live with patience (Hab. 1:2-6).

² O LORD, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not hear? Or cry to you "Violence!" and you will not save? ³ Why do you make me see iniquity, and why do you idly look at wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise. ⁴ So the law is paralyzed, and justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous; so justice goes forth perverted.

The Book of Habakkuk's opening verses record the prophet's impassioned plea to God. Habakkuk saw violence and injustice all around and wondered how God could tolerate such evil behavior from Judah. Sin grieved the heart of Habakkuk because sin should always grieve the hearts of God's people. "How long?" he asked. Habakkuk asked God hard honest questions, the kind we still ask today. The prophet was justified in his frustration as he witnessed firsthand the reality that life isn't fair, but he wrongly interpreted God's silence as either indifference or as a license for Judah to keep sinning.

Looking at the state of the world, where are you tempted to place God's response to sin and injustice on this scale?



⁵ "Look among the nations, and see; wonder and be astounded. For I am doing a work in your days that you would not believe if told. ⁶ For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, who march through the breadth of the earth, to seize dwellings not their own.

The Lord was not disturbed by Habakkuk's sincere questions because they were motivated by a righteous indignation. Yet the Lord responded to the prophet's appeals in a way that both *comforted* and *confused* Habakkuk. God was raising up a powerful, pagan people to punish Judah: the Chaldeans, also known as the Babylonians.

? What are some examples in Scripture and in your experience of God working in unexpected ways to accomplish His good purposes?

Point 2: God's authority over evil enables His people to live by faith (Hab. 1:12-13; 2:3-4).

¹² Are you not from everlasting, O LORD my God, my Holy One? We shall not die. O LORD, you have ordained them as a judgment, and you, O Rock, have established them for reproof. ¹³ You who are of purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong, why do you idly look at traitors and remain silent when the wicked swallows up the man more righteous than he?

Habakkuk wrestled with understanding how God could have dealings with the sinful Chaldeans. How could God's perfect character be reconciled with this prophecy? But Habakkuk was misguided in believing God's character would not allow Him to use enemy nations to discipline His people. Employing the Babylonians to discipline Judah was consistent with God's historical actions and His flawless, holy character.

The Problem of Evil: Given what we know about God's _____ and _____, Christians can rest assured that even in the midst of evil, God is working all things for our good (Rom. 8:28).

³ For still the vision awaits its appointed time; it hastens to the end—it will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come; it will not delay. ⁴ Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him, but the righteous shall live by his faith.

In response to Habakkuk, God described a stark contrast between the Chaldeans and the righteous. The Lord declared the Babylonians—and all the wicked, even among Judah—to be full of pride and lacking integrity. Babylon was a rising power, but their reign would be short-lived (2:6-20). Death and judgment await all who reject the Lord. The righteous one, however, will *live by faith*. God exhorted His prophet to trust Him during these darkest of days and he would live, just as those who believe the gospel receive eternal life in Christ.



What does it mean to “live by faith”?

Point 3: God's authority over difficulties enables His people to live with joy (Hab. 3:16-19).

¹⁶ I hear, and my body trembles; my lips quiver at the sound; rottenness enters into my bones; my legs tremble beneath me. Yet I will quietly wait for the day of trouble to come upon people who invade us. ¹⁷ Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, ¹⁸ yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will take joy in the God of my salvation. ¹⁹ GOD, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the deer's; he makes me tread on my high places.

To the choirmaster: with stringed instruments.

Having questioned God's plans and heard God's responses, Habakkuk trembled in fear. Fear is a real thing, but there are different kinds of fear. The kind of fear Habakkuk felt when he encountered the Creator left him weak and shaken yet full of faith and joy. God took Habakkuk on a spiritual pilgrimage, and this sanctifying journey moved him from confusion and worry to contentment and worship. So he waited confidently and patiently for the day when God would put all things right.



Voices from Church History

"Fear not! I am with thee; O be not dismayed, For I am thy God, and will still give thee aid; I'll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand, Upheld by My righteous, omnipotent hand."²

—John Rippon's
Selection of Hymns



What are some reasons we may struggle to fear the Lord as our loving heavenly Father?

Habakkuk 3:17-19 communicates *two main thoughts*. *The first thought* is that God's judgment against Judah will be devastating. Habakkuk describes Judah's punishment by listing the demise of its main sources of food and agricultural commerce: fig trees, grape vines, olive trees, produce, sheep, and cattle. *The second thought* is that Habakkuk's faith is unwavering despite the pending pain of judgment. The prophet declared his faith in saying "Yet I will rejoice in the Lord."



What are some circumstances in which you have been able to rejoice in the God of your salvation?

My Mission

Because we have received forgiveness and life through the greatest evil ever—the crucifixion of Christ—we live with faith and joy through the injustices and evil we experience, showing the world the reality of our hope in Jesus.

- **In what areas of your life will you turn in faith to the sovereign, good God of our salvation?**
- **How can your group support and encourage one another as you strive to live with patience, by faith, and with joy?**
- **With whom will you be more open about your hope and joy in Christ with the goal of sharing the gospel?**

Voices from the Church

“We cannot begin a conversation about justice anywhere but at the cross of Jesus.”³

—Raechel Myers

Notes


Daily Study

Day 1: Read Habakkuk 1:1-11

Life isn't fair. Clean water is scarce. Disease steals loved ones away too soon. Innocent people are wrongly accused. Jobs are lost in the name of downsizing. Christians are persecuted for their faith. We see heartache all around and it leads us to ask difficult questions: Where is the justice? Why is God silent? Does God even hear me?

In Habakkuk 1:1-4, we encounter a bewildered prophet asking God hard questions. Habakkuk responded to his circumstances by crying out, "How long, O Lord? How long before You hear my cry? How long before You fix what is wrong in this world You created?" The Lord wasn't enraged by Habakkuk's questions but instead gave an answer of hope. He told Habakkuk that He was doing something so amazing that he wouldn't even believe it.

When confusing circumstances cause us to question God's presence, timing, or interest, we can rest assured knowing these statements are true: God is good; God does care about us; and God is doing something so amazing that we wouldn't believe it.

 What is one truth about God or promise from God that you need to be reminded of today in your circumstances?

Voices from the Church

"Though it may seem hopeless, the book of Habakkuk shows that God will respond to the sincere prayers of his people. God is doing something great in our day against injustice. Let us keep praying and seeking his face."⁴

—Africa Study Bible

Day 2: Read Habakkuk 1:12–2:5

It's true that waiting can be excruciating, especially if the news greatly impacts your life. Think of a time when you waited on something with great anticipation. Maybe you were waiting to hear if you received a promotion at work. Or maybe you were waiting to see if you were accepted into the college of your dreams. Maybe you've had to wait on some really bad news that you knew would change your life forever.

In Habakkuk 1:12-17, we encounter a troubled prophet asking God pointed questions about Judah's impending judgment. Chapter 2 then opens with Habakkuk quietly and patiently waiting for God's response. How long Habakkuk waited on God's response is uncertain, but it must have been agonizing.

When waiting on God to respond, our sinful inclinations can lead us to become angry or even disinterested. Instead of waiting, we may want to act impulsively, taking matters into our own hands. Waiting is hard, but what makes it easier is knowing God hears every prayer and answers them in the best way possible.



Why do we find it so hard to wait patiently on the Lord (see Isa. 30:18)?

Day 3: Read Habakkuk 2:6-20

Falling into the trap of just going through the motions is easy, whether at the office or in the home or on the basketball court. The grind of life has a way of subduing us. Without realizing it, we are lulled into living lives that feel uninspired. These feelings flow into our spiritual lives as well. Fill in this statement: "The last time I was in awe of God was..." Your response may reveal a lack of spiritual vitality.

In verses 6-20, God declared five woes against the Chaldeans, reassuring Habakkuk of His promise to deal justly with their sin. Yet in the midst of these woes, God described a time when the entire earth will awake to the awesomeness of His glory (2:14). One day everyone, both friend and foe alike, will know that the Lord alone is God.

Some things have not changed since Habakkuk's ancient prophecy. God's people still slip into spiritual slumber, demanding a fresh awakening to God's glory. Pray today that you would experience a renewed awareness of God's awesome presence.



How can you infuse energy and vitality into your spiritual life so you will praise God's glory even now?

Day 4: Read Habakkuk 3:1-15

Worship, by definition, must have an object. It must be directed toward someone or something. Habakkuk 2:18-19 tells us that the Chaldeans directed their worship to wood and stone idols, reflections of themselves (1:11). Habakkuk, in contrast, directed his worship to Yahweh.

Habakkuk 3 is a prayerful song of exaltation. As an act of worship, the prophet penned this song to praise the Lord's magnificence, His sovereign control over nature, His judgment against His enemies, and His salvation for His people. It should not be lost on us that this confused and tired prophet turned to worship to restore his weary soul.

Life has a way of beating us down, and in our weariness, we may not want to turn our hearts to the Lord in worship. Yet in God's goodness, He has imparted a restorative element to worship. The physical act of singing of God's character and authority restores our soul so we might approach God with a right attitude. For those physically, emotionally, and spiritually exhausted, worship is the best remedy for renewing one's faith and joy in the Lord.



What God-honoring song could you sing right now to renew your soul?

Day 5: Read Habakkuk 3:16-19

Living by faith in Christ does not insulate us from the pains of this world. In fact, in some ways life is harder for believers because we engage in spiritual warfare as our light encounters the darkness of this present world.

Habakkuk knew firsthand the pains of this world as his people faced imminent destruction by God for their sin. Habakkuk may have wanted to curse God in his weaker moments, but instead, he displayed God's sanctifying work through personal heartache and disappointment.

Despite doubts and questions, Habakkuk acknowledged God's righteousness and faithfulness. He told God that no matter how dire the circumstances, he would still find joy in the Lord. What we glean from Habakkuk is that remembering God's faithfulness in the past can help us walk by faith in the present and into the future.



How should God's past faithfulness and unchanging goodness help you face your present doubts?

Encourage One Another

Join together with 2-4 people from your group, or with your family, sometime during the week to reflect on the session and to share how God is working and you are responding.

Share your thoughts and reflections on the truths from Scripture in this session:

- God's authority over injustice enables His people to live with patience (Hab. 1:2-6).
- God's authority over evil enables His people to live by faith (Hab. 1:12-13; 2:3-4).
- God's authority over difficulties enables His people to live with joy (Hab. 3:16-19).



How have you responded to these truths from Scripture?



Why should God's authority over all things lead to faith and joy and not apathy or rejection?



How do patience, faith, and joy relate to the believer's mission of sharing the gospel of Jesus with the world?

Notes

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Trevin Wax

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AUTHOR OF MULTIPLE BOOKS, INCLUDING
*This Is Our Time: Everyday Myths in
Light of the Gospel*

The prophetic books of the Old Testament can be confusing, both to the newcomer to the Bible and the longtime reader.

Where do these prophets fit in the overall narrative of Israel and Judah? What messages did they communicate? What was God doing in and through their work? The benefit of this volume of *The Gospel Project* is that it gives you a glimpse of the prophets right at the point their message was going forth to God's people. We can ask questions of God with Habakkuk, look forward to the coming Suffering Servant with Isaiah, stand amazed at the stunning picture of relentless love in Hosea, and learn something of God's extravagant love with Jonah.

As you work through the sessions in this volume, keep an eye on all the different ways God reveals Himself and communicates His messages of judgment and grace. Fall to your knees in awe, and then stand up and boldly proclaim the love of this great God, who inspired the prophets to deliver His word.

UNIT 13

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