

HABAKKUK

MINOR PROPHETS SERIES

As we come to the close of this short book of Habakkuk, the prophet has now experienced a whole range of emotions as he has prayed and complained to God, listened to God, and remembered the mighty actions of God in history.

Habakkuk has looked at Judah with dismay and asked God how long he would allow injustice and violence to continue. God answers by saying the wicked Chaldeans would be used to bring punishment and judgment upon Judah. Habakkuk questions how God could use such an evil nation as the Chaldeans as an instrument of judgment. God tells Habakkuk that the Chaldeans were not going to escape justice, but that they had a terrible future awaiting them.

In chapter 3, Habakkuk has accepted God's answers and marvels at how God has worked through history to save and protect his people against many adversaries. The sovereign God who rules over nations and Creation itself has been active in the past and will act in the future to benefit his people.

In verses 16-19 Habakkuk responds to God's actions in three ways: 1) stunned awe; 2) a recognition and acceptance of coming judgment and loss; and 3) joyful faith.

Habakkuk's Final Response 3:16-19

Habakkuk is physically affected by God's answer about what was going to happen to Judah. He hears what God says and his body "trembles," his lips "quiver," his bones feel like they are rotting away, and his legs "tremble." These words indicate fear, anxiety, and moves the prophet to consider his own mortality.¹



The physical reactions of Habakkuk should not be taken metaphorically; Habakkuk is actually physically moved by what God was going to do. The fear of God should cause a reaction among the faithful. (See Ex 15:14; Deut. 2:25)

I. Why do extremely difficult events or situations bring about a physical or emotional response?

God's answer to Habakkuk is so awe inspiring and terrifying that he shakes in anticipation of what is going to happen. Still, he accepts God's judgement and waits quietly for the Chaldeans to invade Judah. The word translated as "trouble" is used fifteen times in the Old Testament to describe

¹ Hahlen, Mark Allen and Ham, Clay Alan. *The College Press NIV Commentary: Minor Prophets, Vol. 2 Nahum-Malachi*. Joplin, Missouri: College Press, 2006, p. 167.

personal or national distress. Habakkuk knew a day of great and terrible trouble was coming, but he also knew that God would destroy the Chaldeans and all evil. Habakkuk's faith allowed him to face the future with confidence believing God that deliverance would come after judgment.²

2. Has the anticipation of what God has promised he will do in the future ever moved you physically? If so when and how? If not, why not?



In verse 17 Habakkuk describes the devastation that he expects during the siege of the Chaldeans. Though he could be anticipating adverse weather conditions it is more likely he sees the Chaldeans slashing and burning their way through the countryside.



Figs were a staple in the Jewish diet with ripe figs eaten from the tree and dried figs used in cakes. Figs and fig trees are found sixty-three times in the Bible.



The fruit on the vine describes the grape harvest. Grapes were eaten from the vine, were dried and saved for later consumption, and were used to make a grape juice or wine with water generally added to dilute any alcohol content.³ So vital was this harvest that over two hundred times the Bible refers to vines, vineyards, or grapes.

Likewise olives were critical to the national diet with olives mentioned some fifty-two times in the Scripture. Most olives went into the production of olive oil which was used for cooking, medicine, fuel, and in spiritual rituals.



Other crops of the field may also fail. Chief among these crops would have been barley and wheat. Without these grains it would be impossible to make bread.

Not only might war bring a failure to crops as the Chaldeans ruthlessly burned fields, vines, and trees, but the livestock would not be spared. Here Habakkuk is thinking of sheep, goats, and cattle. The animals could die from lack of feed, because they were killed, or because they were taken by the enemy for their own use. Whatever the cause, the Judeans would be robbed of meat.



It is hard to imagine a devastation worse than the complete loss of the food supply, but this is what Habakkuk expects to happen. With war, hunger, and death Habakkuk envisions a future filled with immense pain and suffering. Yet in the midst of the absolute worst possible circumstances that any person might face Habakkuk declares, "yet I will rejoice in the Lord."

² Smith, James E. *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah: A Christian Interpretation*. Lulu, 2011. p. 193.

³ Ibid. p. 195.

The word translated “yet” is an important one. It couples two thoughts and shows a contrast between what that might happen in this life (or was certain to happen in this case) compared to the attitude of joyful faith the servant of God can hold in the face of any storm. No matter what happens, yet will I rejoice in the Lord.

Habakkuk speaks personally in verse 18 using the personal pronoun “I.” In other words, no matter if no other Jewish person reacts this way, “I” will rejoice in the Lord. The prophet is now looking at God’s faithfulness instead of his own circumstances.

3. Describe why the word “I” is so important in verse 18.

4. What do verses 17 and 18 teach about joy and the personal or physical circumstances of life?

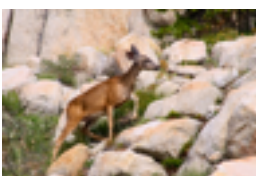
Habakkuk sees God as the God of his salvation. Seeing God in this way allows one to view life’s circumstances through an eternal perspective and not an immediate one. No matter what one faces in life a man of God can have joy in his Lord and the God of his salvation.

5. Define the word “joy” as used in verse 18.

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In verse 19 Habakkuk calls God, the Lord, his strength. The fact is that Habakkuk would not be able to bear up under such immense pressure without assistance from God. Dr. James Smith writes, “My strength ... refers to psychological, moral, and spiritual strength in this context—stubborn faith which refuses to throw in the towel when all that sustains life has been removed. It is the Lord who provides empowerment to those who have been beaten down by life.”⁴

6. How does one derive strength from God? (See also Psalm 18:31-32, 39)



Habakkuk’s feet were like that of the deer referring not to his speed, but his sure-footedness. As the deer walked among the rocks in the high places his sure feet kept him from stumbling. In those places where danger is apparent and falling is possible Habakkuk clung to the God who made him steady and kept him upright. David expresses a similar thought in Psalm 18:33.

As mentioned in the last lesson the final phrase along with the word “Shigionoth” (3:1) and “Selah” found in the margin of 3:3,13 show that this chapter was composed as a psalm to be sung. Habakkuk cannot keep from singing of the greatness of God even in the midst of trial.



⁴ ibid. p. 197.

Habakkuk wrote in 2:4, "...the righteous shall live by his faith." No matter the challenges, no matter the danger, no matter the unknown obstacles in the path, the faithful will rely on the unchanging Creator who is the rock, the hope, the joy, and the God of our salvation.

Key Lessons from Habakkuk

1. Like Habakkuk we face our world concerned about violence, and lack of justice, idolatry, and godlessness. We can be tempted to ask God, "How long will you allow these wrongs to go on?"
2. We can be sure that God will act to right every wrong and bring justice to every man. God will do what is right within his own timeframe.
3. The justice that God distributes can mean that the righteous are caught up in the judgment and punishment of the wicked even as God punishes nations.
4. No matter what we face in this world, God loves us and brings joy to the man and woman of faith. He is the God of our salvation.

