



PRAY YET: A STUDY OF

Habakkuk

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**NEXT
LEVEL**  **ONLINE**

OZARK CHRISTIAN COLLEGE

PRAY YET: A STUDY OF HABAKKUK

SESSION #1: OVERVIEW

Mark Scott

-Preacher went into a Sunday School Class and asked, “What’s faith?” Little girl responded, “Faith is believing God without asking any questions.” But genuine faith has lots of questions. The opposite of faith is non-faith; not actions in conjunction with faith. The opposite of faith is not doubt. In fact, in faith, there is room for doubt. Just like temptation is not sin but can lead to sin, so doubt is not unbelief, but it can lead to unbelief.

-John Ortberg wrote a book entitled *Faith and Doubt*. He said that the middle word is the most important. Not “or” but “and.” Faith goes hand-in-hand with doubt. He says that we doubt and worship; we doubt and serve; we doubt and help other people with their doubts. Frederick Bruner said that faith is always bipolar. It advances and then retreats—3 steps forward and 2 steps backwards (Swindoll). Frederick Bueckner says that doubt is the ants in the pants of the believer. It keeps it alive and moving.

-In the Minor Prophet, Habakkuk, we learn about how to turn our doubts into faith. It has to do with learning how to *pray yet*. And this would be a lesson that Habakkuk would have to learn personally. Judah gets to *overhear* Habakkuk’s complaints, dialogues, prayers, and songs to God. In addition Judah gets to *overhear* God’s response to Habakkuk. In this sense the book of Habakkuk is unique. There really is not another Bible book like it—the narrative prophet Jonah comes the closest.

-Two simple observations about OT prophets might help us:

- 1) The prophets (major or minor) were the covenant watchdogs to God’s people.
- 2) The prophets didn’t just design messages; they were messages (Calvin Miller). Very true of Habakkuk because his faith struggle would be Judah’s struggle.

-Habakkuk’s name means “to embrace.” He would have to embrace the ways of God even when he didn’t understand them. I have never had difficulty believing in the existence of God. It made sense that a design demanded a designer. But I have struggled to understand why God does, what he does, and when he does it.

-Habakkuk lived and prophesied around 610 BC. Good King Josiah had just died and God’s People fell back into deep sin. Along with the major prophet, Jeremiah, Habakkuk’s job was to get God’s people ready for Babylonian captivity.

-I once outlined the book this way:

- 1) Hello? (1:1-4)
- 2) Nunnh-Unnh (1:5-11)
- 3) Say What? (1:12-2:1)
- 4) Chill (2:2-20)
- 5) Whoa Dude (3:1-19)

-Famous texts: 2:4, 14, 20; 3:17

-Traditions about his death and burial—two sites in Israel and one in Iran. In the Dead Sea Scrolls a commentary was found in Cave One in 1948. It is a commentary on Hab. 1-2.

-So we will dive into this minor prophet with a major message—how can we maintain our faith in God when our world seems to be falling apart? Maybe the key is to learn to “Pray Yet.”

Discussion Questions:

- 1) How is it that within faith there is “room for doubt?”
- 2) In what way do prophets not only deliver messages but are messages?
- 3) What does “pray yet” mean to you?
- 4) God can handle your largest question. What is a “big” question you have for God?

PRAY YET: A STUDY OF HABAKKUK
SESSION #2: FIRST COMPLAINT AND FIRST RESPONSE

Mark Scott

-We are learning how to “pray yet” in this book of Habakkuk. How do we stay faithful in trying times?

-Habakkuk calls what “saw” as an *oracle* (1:1). This is a word for inspired speech, i.e. prophecy. But notice that he said “saw.” This might be partly visionary. Regardless it means “inspired.”

FIRST COMPLAINT (1:2-4):

-How long? That’s often the cry of believers who feel that the world is dissing them. It’s an honest cry. It’s the same thing the persecuted saints cried in Revelation (5:10).

-Here’s the thing, though. For Habakkuk, it’s not the world that is dissing the righteous; it’s the people of God themselves. Habakkuk sees the evil within his own people. Habakkuk’s world is filled with idolatry, immorality, violence, iniquity, and lack of justice.

-Habakkuk is thinking that God is not paying attention to things. Does it seem to you that God is asleep on your deal? Remember the first story of the calming of the storm (Mk. 4:35-41)? Jesus is asleep on the job. The seeming inactivity of God is a problem for Habakkuk.

-Habakkuk knows that God’s People are being *violent* (a word used much in Genesis – Kings). He wonders why, as a prophet, he has to look at how bad things are. It’s as if God has made the prophet look at *iniquity* (moral impurity). Destruction and violence are everywhere and God seems to sit idly by. Strife and contention are running rampant.

-Habakkuk notices that the *law* (so special to the People of God—I mean this is one way they know *who* they are) “seems paralyzed.” The Torah is paralyzed (no formal law enforcement). Justice is lacking. The wicked seem to win—Ps. 73.

-Habakkuk is having a “deistic” moment.

FIRST RESPONSE (1:5-11):

-Now we get to overhear what God is saying to Habakkuk’s complaint so this is *intimate*. We get to go inside of Habakkuk’s prayer closet.

-God says, “Actually I do know what is going on, and am going to do something about it.” The phrase, “I am doing a work” (1:5)—is literally, “a worker is working” (Hebraism)—heaping up the words for emphasis. But you won’t believe it—this is actually used by Paul in Acts 13:41.

-Vs. 6 says that I am going to raise up the Babylonians to punish all this wickedness in my own people. The nation of Babylon is going to march against Judah. Look how that nation is described:

- Bitter and hasty (6)
- Good marchers (6)
- Steal (6)
- Dreaded and fearsome (7)
- They have their own definitions of justice and dignity (7)
- Their war ability is described as horses (like leopards and wolves) and the riders (fast as eagles)—vs. 8
- They are fierce and intent (9)
- They gather enemies like sand (9)
- Foreign kings and rulers are nothing to them. They just scoff and laugh at them (10)
- They are as fast as the wind (11)
- They are arrogant and worship their own might (11)

-First Habakkuk had a problem with the seeming inactivity of God; now he has a problem with the activity of God.

-How do we “pray yet” when God’s ways seem so foreign to our way of thinking? Elie Wiesel said, “No faith is as good as a wounded faith.”

-Here is a very disturbing text from the NT—1 Pet. 4:17, “Judgment begins with the household of God. If it begins with us, imagine what it will be for those who do not obey God.”

-Pray yet even when God’s ways seem most odd.

Discussion Questions:

- 1) Deism is the belief that God made the world but then left it to its own. Does it seem to you that God has left you alone at times? How so?
- 2) Which poses a bigger issue for your faith, the seeming inactivity of God or his direct involvement? The disciples were afraid of the storm, but they were “very much afraid” of the Savior who could calm it. Discuss.
- 3) Are there ways that you see God at work today through seeming evil people and systems?
- 4) Have you had a time when your faith has been wounded? What else was going on in your life when this took place?

PRAY YET: A STUDY OF HABAKKUK
SESSION #3: SECOND COMPLAINT

Mark Scott

-We're working through the Minor Prophet, Habakkuk under the theme, "Pray Yet." We have seen Habakkuk's first complaint that God doesn't seem to be paying attention to the rampant evil going on (1:1-4). And we have seen God's response to that complaint (1:5-11), which basically tells us that God has a plan. That plan is to judge God's people with a people worse than God's people, namely Babylon.

-This causes a personal crisis for Habakkuk. He comes unglued. He knows that Judah is bad, but, I mean, after all, Babylon, really? That would be similar to using Sin City to judge Mayberry. It wouldn't seem to make sense.

-This is the part of the book I imagine that Habakkuk is saying to God, "Say What?" Let's read the text (1:12-2:1). We might just go at this verse by verse.

Vs. 12:

-Habakkuk is going to be respectful to God as he questions God, which is always the way to go. He acknowledges that God is eternal, holy, and the rock. So, his angst is this: If God is eternal, holy, and a rock, how will he use such a terrible nation as Babylon?

Vs. 13:

-So, in case God has forgotten how wicked Babylon is, Habakkuk takes it upon himself to remind God how wicked she is in relation to a holy God.

-God's eyes are pure. God can't tolerate sin. God can't even look at evil. God's normal way is not to sit idle and watch evil go on. He usually steps in and does something about it. God is not in the habit of remaining silent when the righteous are being swallowed.

-We might also want to note here that Habakkuk seems to be tipping his hand to note that God is willing to allow even his holy remnant (through whom the Messiah will come) to suffer some.

Vs. 14-17:

-Habakkuk acknowledges in these verses that he knows how vicious Babylon is. The metaphor he draws upon is that of fishing. That may not be so far removed from our world. In the realm of computers today we talk about phishing. It has to do with cyberscams.

-From Habakkuk's world archeologists have uncovered monuments that show fishing hooks in human lips. It is a symbol of Babylon. The idea is that if Babylon hooks you, you won't be able to escape. You mean God allows Babylon to exercise his will?

-It would seem that God makes humankind like fish—they swim around like they are masters of their own destiny. He makes crawling things, and it would seem that they have no one ruling them. But that could not be farther from the truth. God is not in "to catch and release." God catches and uses for his own purposes.

-God hooks them, puts them in his net, and seems justified in how he wants to use them.

Vs. 2:1:

-Habakkuk is not sure what to do with this, but he decides to stand and watch the ways of God play out. He wants to know how to answer God.

Two Lessons:

- 1) God is amazingly consistent in character. He cannot stand in the presence of sin. So Babylon's sins are not of no account to God.
- 2) But God is also incredibly patient. He can allow evil to go on for years, decades, and even centuries, and will even use the worst of situations to accomplish his purpose.

-So, even though Habakkuk is voicing his complaint in his prayer closet, he is beginning to move in his heart to watch what God will do.

Discussion Questions:

- 1) Abraham, Moses, and Job all questioned God, but they were respectful about how they did it. Can you give an example of a *respectful question* that you would have for God?
- 2) How do we know that God cannot stand in the presence of sin? What is it in the character of God that makes him be repulsed by sin?
- 3) Why do even God's faithful people have to suffer along with others who are not totally committed to him? How is sin an equal opportunity destroyer?
- 4) How can God's patience be seen in when he punishes and when he redeems? (Example: Jonah and Nahum regarding Nineveh.)

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SESSION #4: WELL, WHAT ABOUT BABYLON?

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-Habakkuk is learning to “pray yet.” He actually has a legitimate question about Babylon. It’s not as if Babylon doesn’t matter, because she does. So in the Lord’s second response to Habakkuk’s second complaint God tells both the “what of” and the “what for” regarding Babylon.

-And this is extensive—and a bit challenging to unpack. Maybe focusing on three main passages will help us keep our heads about ourselves:

-2:4b, “The righteous shall live by his faith.” So significant...Romans 1:17.

-2:14, “For the earth will be filled...” When? Right now—even in the judgments?

-2:20, “But the Lord is in his holy temple...” Then why doesn’t it seem that way?

-Come what may, Habakkuk will have to learn to “pray yet.”

-God is going to give Habakkuk a bit of an excursus on Babylon. God is very aware of how arrogant Babylon can be. How bad is Babylon? Well, maybe this can be our clue—watch for how many of Moses’ famous ten words are broken by Babylon.

Arrogance of Babylon (1-5):

-Write down the vision (revelation). Write it on *tablets* (think of the ten commandments).

-Make it billboard size so a runner can read it. This is similar to an Olympic runner to see how many laps he has left or something.

-But it’s not going to take place immediately (3). Remember that Habakkuk’s time is 610 BC. Nebuchadnezzar would not invade for the final time until 586 BC. We need to keep in mind that it is the patience of God that ratchets back his wrath at times. If people repent then he might not have to render his judgments.

-The “his soul” of vs. 4a is Nebuchadnezzar. He gobbles up land and wealth thinking that he will get away with it.

The Judgment of Babylon (6-20):

-The “woes” to Babylon is what follows. The Hebrew word for “woe” is an interjection intended to get the attention. “Hoy” means, “Hey, wake up.” It appears 5x here.

-Other nations and peoples will taunt Babylon for their:

1) Stealing, hoarding, and coveting (6-11).

2) Murder and immorality (12-13).

3) Adultery and debauchery (15-17).

4) Idolatry (18-19).

-The Bible says that vengeance is mine; I will repay, says the Lord. God always does vengeance best because he is not partial. We never do vengeance best because we don’t have all the facts and are often prejudiced.

-So a passage that we could superimpose on this part of Habakkuk would be Rev. 13:10, "This calls for the endurance and faith of the saints." Someday, Christ will return. When he does wrong will be eradicated and right will be vindicated. In those days we will know of Hab. 2:14. In the meantime, let us do 2:4, 20.

Discussion Questions:

- 1) Can you think of some current examples where evil seems to run rampant without any intervention from God?
- 2) Can you think of any time in biblical history where a prophecy did not come true because the people (God's or pagan's) repented?
- 3) Babylon ultimately did fall, but it was 70 years following the Jewish captivity. How does this fact underline the patience of God to punish?
- 4) When evil seems to run unchecked, what should God's people do?

PRAY YET: A STUDY OF HABAKKUK
SESSION #5: CARTWHEELS OF JOY

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-We come to this final lesson in Habakkuk and might want to ask, “Will Habakkuk get anything resolved?” Well, he will. We find in chapter three of Habakkuk a prayer. Isn’t that where we often get things resolved—it’s really not in argument or complaint or debate with God. It’s in listening and responding to his word. That’s what we have in this chapter. And it is a great resolution. This is the “whoa dude” part of the book. We literally see the “praying yet.”

-3:1 makes this abundantly clear. A prayer according to Shigionoth (Shee-gee—onat) = sung with great emotion.

-Habakkuk calls upon God’s faithfulness in the past to help him get through (2-3a). He calls it the “midst of the years.” Remember mercy. Come from the high places (heavens) to help us. Habakkuk recalls the following high water marks of biblical history:

- 1) Creation (3b-4).
- 2) Exodus (5-10).
- 3) Conquest (11-15).

-These aren’t hermeneutically or homiletically tight. There is an intermeshing of several events in biblical history and then some powerful imagery and metaphoric expressions to get at his power.

-Then we come to the climax of the book in 3:16 (one of the famous ones).

- 1) Coming judgment is still scary. He “heard” of coming judgment.
- 2) Body and soul live so close to each other that they catch each other’s diseases.
- 3) He is “all shook up.”
- 4) Six beautiful lines in 3 couplets. But they line up with Lev. 26 and Deut. 28 as terms of the covenant. So, what is he saying? “Even if God stripped away everything that he said he would give, yet...”

-Yet...God is his strength. He is turning cartwheels of joy” (*Message*).

-Learn to *pray yet* and you can put that to music.

Discussion Questions:

- 1) Can you give other examples from the Bible where someone resolved things in their lives by prayer?
- 2) How is that God’s faithfulness in the past can be an encouragement for us in the present?
- 3) What has God promised you that, if he stripped it away, you would still serve him?
- 4) Can you turn cartwheels of joy when you encounter various trials (Cf. Js. 1:2)? What is the key to doing so?