

... the righteous
shall live by his faith

HABAKKUK 2.4

Habakkuk

FAITH IN A SOVEREIGN GOD



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notes

read this first

the book of Habakkuk (*ha-bə-|kək*)

Some of us didn't have a clue that a book called Habakkuk existed, and now that we do, we're not sure if we're even pronouncing the name right. Not too many people have spent time studying the minor prophets. Tucked in between the ever-popular books of Nahum and Zephaniah, it is unlikely that we would have ever found it, and you're probably wondering why we chose it.

Many people dismiss the Old Testament as outdated and irrelevant. Instead of delving into obscure Minor Prophets like Habakkuk, most Christians choose to spend their time in more practical books like James. What they fail to realize is that Habakkuk is part of the very foundation of the faith that James so plainly fleshes out. Habakkuk is one of the smallest yet most powerful books in the Old Testament. It has influenced some of the most influential leaders in the history of the Christian faith including the Apostle Paul and Martin Luther. Though not much is known about Habakkuk the prophet, his words have transformed the Christian faith.

At Damascus Road, we believe that all the words of the Bible are the very Words of God. While churches often preach through neatly packaged topical sermons with clever titles focused on Christian living, we don't. Instead, we have chosen to go verse by verse through books of the Bible that speak to larger and weightier theological concepts like the Sovereignty of God and God's relationship to Evil. We believe that, if we focus primarily on knowing God as opposed to how to reform our behavior, we will end up living transformed lives that glorify and enjoy Him.

Personally, I love Habakkuk. I love his raw, honest, complaining heart. And I love his faith. Our prayer is that we will walk by faith and not by sight; that our confidence will not be found in our circumstances, but that in all circumstances we will be found resting in the sovereignty of God.

Because the tomb is empty,

Sam Ford, Lead Pastor

On behalf of the Elders of Damascus Road Church

the format

Each study begins with a key verse that summarizes the heart of the sermon being preached. Each sermon will make use of selected texts that help flesh out the truth being proclaimed. Memorizing the key verse in addition to the references for the other texts will help equip you to learn and discuss these important ideas with others. Following the verse, there is a basic summary referencing various passages that you can use for review or, if you miss a Sunday, will help you follow along with us wherever we are. There are also some questions for personal reflection as well as group discussion. Finally, each section concludes with space for sermon notes in case you want to write things down as you listen to the sermon on Sunday to reference or review as you reflect.

suggestions for individuals

- **PRAY:** Before you begin, pray that God would open your mind to understand and your heart to accept His Word. Pray that, as you see the truth, the Holy Spirit will give you strength to act in accordance with what you have learned.
- **STUDY:** Work through the study and write out answers to the questions. Resist any temptation to skip over questions in the section. It is important to ponder how the truths apply to your life. Though these questions are sometimes penetrating and difficult, they are designed to help you think seriously about your understanding of God, yourself, and others.
- **SHARE:** Take what opportunities you can to share with others about what you've learned and how you'd like your life to change as a result.

suggestions for Road Groups

- **REVIEW:** It is recommended that you take some time to meditate on some or all of the passages preached. Review the sermon but, more importantly, the verses and their surrounding contexts. Try to spend more time dialoguing about God's Word and the truth therein, rather than focusing on the strengths or weaknesses of the sermon itself.
- **DISCUSS:** In your time together as a community, discuss what you have learned. Present new questions or verses that have come to mind as you have studied. Focus on the implications for your lives individually and as a group.

notes

with God’s people agreeing that it would be so “forever” as the musicians raised their instruments in triumph.

After 16 verses of praise to God and His Salvation, Habakkuk closes the chapter with some of the most powerful words in the Bible. In them, he describes the genuine heart of faith that trusts in the “God of my Salvation” through all circumstances; rejoicing in God’s Sovereignty because of what He has done, even if He does nothing else.

discussion questions:

1. What impressed you most about the book of Habakkuk’s?
2. In Job 2.10, after Job lost everything, his wife told him to curse God and die. He responded by saying “Shall we only accept good from God and not adversity?” Was there ever a time when everything you desired did not come to pass, and yet you still were able to worship and rejoice?
3. If your goal is to be successful, you will not be able to praise God when you are not. If your goal is to be wealthy, you will not be able to praise God if you are poor. If your goal is power, you will not be able to praise God when you have none. What must our goal be in order to praise Him no matter what happens?
4. It feels like it is much easier to worship God when life is good and all is well; when you are healthy, your friends are near, and your bank account is full. Can prosperity actually hinder our worship?
5. How does God use community to make it possible to praise God when it seems impossible, especially during hard times? (Read Romans 12.15, 1Corinthians 12.26, 2Corinthians 3.1-7, Hebrews 10.24)
6. Is Jesus enough for you to sing about forever even if He is all we have? Why do you feel that way?
7. How has your view of God changed as a result of this study?

sermon notes _____

- **REVEAL:** Share with one another how you sense God calling you to change, pray for one another about these things, and invite one another to encourage you and hold you accountable to apply the truth.
- **PRAY:** In your time together as a community, use this guide as a launching point for discussion and genuine care for one another. Resist the urge to have to discuss every question or “get through the material.” Listen to one another’s hearts beyond the words of the answer so that you might minister to one another effectively.

questions or comments?

If you have feedback or questions about the series or studies, please feel free to email them to life@damascusroadchurch.org.

getting to know Habakkuk

a message from God's man to God's people

the role of the prophet

The Old Testament and its 66 books are organized into different sections. The first five books are called the **Books of the Law**, also known as the Pentateuch. The next twelve books are considered the **Books of History**, ending with Esther. The five books of Job through the Song of Solomon are often called **Books of Poetry or Wisdom**. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, and Daniel are considered the **Major Prophets**, while the final twelve books are called the **Minor Prophets**, identified as such by their size not necessarily their superior character.

Habakkuk is the eighth Minor Prophet. This is not a chronological distinction as, historically, many of the prophets were contemporaries. The Hebrew word for prophet, *nabi*, comes from a root meaning “to bubble forth, as from a fountain,” or “to utter”. Even though a certain amount of uncertainty exists regarding the exact meaning of the word, it is the first and the most generally used for a prophet. The essential idea in the word is that a prophet is an “authorized spokesman”. The “prophet” proclaimed the message given to him by God; he spoke in God's name and by his authority (Ex. 7:1). He is the mouth by which God speaks to men (Jer. 1:9; Isa. 51:16), and hence what the prophet says is not of man but of God (2 Pet. 1:20, 21; comp. Heb. 3:7; Acts 4:25; 28:25).

Contrary to popular opinion, future-telling was only a small part of the prophet's message. As God's spokesman, their message can be seen in a three-fold function they had among the people of God in the Old Testament:

- **First, they were preachers.** Prophets expounded and interpreted the Mosaic Law to the nation of Israel. As they proclaimed the Word of God, their duty was to admonish, reprove, denounce sin, threaten with the terrors of judgment, call to repentance, or bring consolation and pardon. In this capacity, their role is that of a prosecuting attorney bringing charges against Mosaic Lawbreakers.
- **Second, they were predictors.** In addition to preaching, prophets announced future judgments, deliverance, and events relating to the Messiah and His kingdom. Predicting the future was never intended merely to satisfy man's curiosity, but was designed to demonstrate that

Week 5

Habakkuk 3.1-19

*yet I will rejoice in the LORD;
I will take joy in my salvation (Hab. 3.18)*

Our study concludes in the third and final chapter with prayer and song. Habakkuk lives in a world that sickens and disturbs him. His direct and honest complaint to God reveals how he struggles to understand why a Holy and loving God sits silently doing nothing. God responds to Habakkuk, telling him that he is going to answer his prayer—He is going to end it all. God also tells him how: He will use a wicked pagan people to destroy his own idolatrous people. God's plan sits with Habakkuk as well as if God answered our prayers by sending Hugh Hefner to deal with pornography or Tiger Woods to help fix marriages.

After his second complaint about the character of his chosen instrument (Babylon), Habakkuk is left to trust in God's Sovereignty. Like Job, he comes to understand that God desires, more than anything, for His name to cover the earth as the water covers the sea as the remedy for all the pain and sin, injustice and lawlessness. How God brings that about is not for us to question or complain about. Habakkuk's prayer of complaint is transformed into a prayer of submission where Habakkuk confesses his reverence for a God whose glory is more than he can comprehend—so much he must sing.

Difficult and confusing circumstances can overwhelm us. Suffering, our own and that of others, often draws us away from a focus on God in the trial to what he hasn't done to deliver us from the trial. We read as Habakkuk's focus transitions from a horizontal focus to a vertical one. His shift toward dwelling on the glory of God moves him to praise. *Shigionoth* is a term which is used in a musical setting. It is uncertain exactly what instructions this gives, but we know that it reveals that this prayer is really a song.

In this song you will also see the word “Selah” which is used three times here and 71 times in the Psalms. *Selah* is a dramatic and powerful musical device which prompted the music to stop or the people to cry out “forever” like a “yes Lord, let it be always.” It was a powerful way for the people to join together in praise in response to a profound truth regarding the God we worship. Sometimes it was only silence, sometimes it was musical silence

In the middle of God’s response, verse 14 reminds us of what is needed—the glory of God to fill all things. The truth is, there is no hope in our work to make things “better”. If our work fails, we despair; if it succeeds, we marvel at becoming a “better me”. We don’t need to become better versions of what we once were, we need to become new people who are recreated, not just refurbished.

discussion questions:

1. What about Habakkuk 2.5-20 reminded you of our world today?
2. There seems to be a lot of similarities between the world of Habakkuk and our world today. What solutions do various groups (even Christian ones) offer to make the world a better place? What, according to Scripture, is the only solution?
3. Do you think the warnings of God and the natural consequences of our sin are powerful enough to deter us from hurting ourselves or those we love? Why or why not?
4. What is the difference between particular “sins” and the spiritual condition of sin? How can an unbiblical, or narrow, view of sin impact our view of salvation?
5. Read 1Corinthians 10.31. Is it safe to say that anything that does not glorify God is sin? How will asking a question like, “Does this glorify God” impact all of our decisions, thoughts, attitudes, etc.?
6. We are built to worship God. We have a worship disorder; it is called idolatry. Idolatry occurs when we make anything but God our ultimate joy or glory. How do people make relationships, money, sex, jobs, and even family idols? How do you?
7. Ironically, what happens to the things we love when we find more meaning and join in those things more than we do in God? Give an example.

sermon notes _____

God knows and controls the future, and to give purposeful revelation. The failure of a prediction to be fulfilled would identify the speaker as a false prophet (Deut. 18.20-22).

- **Third, they were watchmen.** Prophets served as watchmen over the people of Israel, both practically and symbolically. In practical terms, they warned against poor political decisions, the dangers of idolatry, false worship, and the worthlessness of religiosity. Figuratively, many of the lives of the prophets serve as symbolic images of God’s relationship with his people. Not only were they watchmen, but they were watched.

the prophet Habakkuk

Unfortunately, very little is known about Habakkuk. Though there are many legends attached to him, biblically, there is nothing written about him other than what is found in the first verse of his book. His name may be connected with a word with a Hebrew root meaning “embrace”. Some scholars have suggested that he is the son of the Shunammite in 2Kings 4.16 or the watchman of Isaiah 21.6. There is little evidence to support such claims. The Talmud records the remark of one rabbi that, “Moses gave Israel 613 commandments, David reduced them to 10, Isaiah 2, but Habakkuk to one: *the righteous shall live by his faith.*” (2.4)

the history

All of the books of the Bible must be read in the context of the complete story of redemption. Habakkuk was not written in a vacuum but has its place in history of God’s people. Specifically, we must review a portion of Israel’s history in order to understand the setting for this book.

When King Solomon died (between 926-922 BC), the ten northern tribes refused to submit to his son, Rehoboam, and revolted. From this point on, there would be two kingdoms of Hebrews: in the north, Israel, and in the south, Judah. Kings rose and kings fell. Some were good, most were bad and often led God’s people into idolatry. Israel (northern 10 tribes) grew in its faithlessness and God warned them, through Isaiah and other prophets, of their impending punishment. In 722 BC, God used the Assyrians to punish Israel and they were conquered. The Assyrians were aggressive and effective; the history of their dominance over the Middle East is a history of constant warfare. The Assyrians scattered the 10 tribes throughout their kingdom. Additionally, some Assyrians settled in the capital of Israel, Samaria. There they set up Assyrian Gods, false worship, and cultic

Habakkuk 2.5-20

What profit is an idol... But the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him. (Hab.2.18b, 20)

practices. Conversely, Judah survived in its sovereignty until the Assyrian empire began to fall at the hands of the Babylonians (the Chaldeans).

The Babylonians began their conquest of Assyria around 625 B.C. In 612 BC, the Babylonians destroyed the Assyrian city of Ninevah. In 604 BC the Babylonians advanced into the Syro-Palestinian area, encountering only weak resistance. After the death of King Josiah, his son, Jehoahaz became king. The king of Egypt, Necho (put into power by the Assyrians), rushed into Judah and deposed him, and Judah became a tribute state of Egypt. When the Babylonians defeated the Egyptians in 605 BC, Judah became a tribute state to Babylon. But when the Babylonians suffered a defeat in 601 BC, the king of Judah, Jehoiakim, defected to the Egyptians. So the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar, raised an expedition to punish Judah in 597 BC.

The new king of Judah, Jehoiachin, handed the city of Jerusalem over to King Nebuchadnezzar, who then appointed a new king over Judah, Zedekiah. Just as Israel experienced exile, Nebuchadnezzar deported around 10,000 Jews from Judah to his capital in Babylon; all the deportees were drawn from professionals, the wealthy, and the craftsmen. Ordinary people were allowed to stay in Judah. This deportation was the beginning of the exile. The story should have ended there. However, Zedekiah defected from the Babylonians one more time. Nebuchadnezzar responded with another expedition in 588 and conquered Jerusalem in 586. Nebuchadnezzar caught Zedekiah and forced him to watch the murder of his sons; then he blinded him and deported him to Babylon.

According to Habakkuk 1.6, the book was written at the time of the “raising up of the Chaldeans.” The mention of the Chaldeans suggests a date between 625 and 604 BC during the numerous conquests of the Babylonian before the fall of Assyria. Habakkuk was probably a contemporary of Jeremiah, Zephaniah, Nahum, and possibly Joel. The prophecy itself would be fulfilled several decades after Habakkuk with the complete fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.

the theology

Habakkuk addressed Judah and Jerusalem during what would be the final days of the state. During this time, the kingdom was rife with internal corruption, and the rising power of Babylon would soon issue destruction on the temple and city. The book is a record of Habakkuk’s complaint to God as he sees His people suffering while His enemies prosper. Through his

It has been said that the 1st Commandment to “Have no other Gods before me” is broken before any of the remaining nine. Habakkuk continues to write down God’s answer to his second complaint about using an evil people to punish His own. At the heart of God’s response is a future judgment on the Babylonian’s pride and idolatry—the root cause of all sin.

Men have insatiable appetites for all that is not God. They work hard and spend harder believing that they will find satisfaction or win the approval of men. In the end, they find themselves in a hollow cycle of despair resulting in little satisfaction and immeasurable destruction. One’s individual sin is never private and often affects many others.

As Habakkuk writes, God identifies the specific sins, and resulting consequences, of the Babylonians whom He will judge. God speaks five different “woes” detailing the woeful state and miserable condition of a sinful people that will face the wrath of God. In doing so, God reminds us of what broke in the world when Adam and Eve broke God’s commandment in the Garden. When sin entered the world, man’s relationship with himself and everything else died. From Genesis 3, we see the manifestation of those broken relationships through broken people, broken families, and broken communities. He addresses 1) sins against individuals, 2) sins against your home, 3) sins against your city, and 4) sins against creation and finally, he condemns the 5) sins against God and the self.

As we read God’s description of men’s sin thousands of years ago, we can’t help but think “not much has changed.” We all believe that things need to be different, that justice needs to be upheld, that we need to spend our money more wisely, that we need to be less prideful, greedy, and self-indulgent. In response to all the brokenness we see, it is tempting to work harder to reform our behavior and that of others. What we fail to see is that the world is a reflection of our hearts. If we want the world to change, our hearts must change. We don’t have the power to do that, but God does, so ask Him to.

discussion questions:

1. In his second complaint, Habakkuk wrestles with how a Holy God can allow, even cause, evil to prosper. How does this make you feel? After his complaint, what did Habakkuk do? (See previous week about God's relationship with evil)
2. Why do you think it's so difficult for us to accept that God's glory (the brilliance that is connected with all God's virtues and his self-revelation in nature and grace) is the supreme goal of all things?
3. What does it mean to live by faith? (Read Habakkuk 2.4, 2Corinthians 5.6-7, and Hebrews 11.1).
4. It has been said that faith includes knowledge, acknowledgement, and action. How does faith move from intellectual ascent to facts about Jesus to a *saving faith*? (Read Romans 8.1-11, 1Corinthians 2.14, Ephesians 2.1-10, Colossians 2.13)
5. Habakkuk is perplexed by God's decision to raise up Babylon. In his mind, Judah is more righteous than these godless men. In view of God's holiness, what is the problem with that kind of thinking? How do we play the compare game like that with "sinners"?
6. Read Habakkuk 2.2. Why do you think God told Habakkuk to write down His answer? What does this tell you about God's chosen way to communicate with us?
7. 70 years after the vision is recorded, on October 13, 539 B.C., the great Babylon fell to the Medo-Persians. In the end, all will be judged. How does knowing what happened yesterday help us live with hope today? (Read Habakkuk 2.3, Hebrews 10.37-38, 2Peter 3.8-10, Revelation 22.20)

sermon notes

complaint, Habakkuk offers an honest assessment as he wonders out loud where God is, as he seems silent and unconcerned. Habakkuk's hard questions and God's harder responses cause us to think deeply about the sovereignty of our God:

- **Why do the wicked prosper?** Habakkuk is frustrated with the injustice he sees around him. Specifically, he cannot understand why God doesn't care that wicked are prospering, usually at the expense of the righteous. Habakkuk's complaint is what we all see when we watch the evening news: the sobering reality of a sinful world. At the heart of his cry is a desire for salvation, for Jesus to come and set things right. When the "righteous" forget their own need for salvation, they can easily begin to feel entitled based on their own good work and not that of Christ. Though we may not experience justice or even comfort now, we take peace knowing that God is God. He is a righteous judge whose perfect justice for all mankind will be meted out, if not today, in eternity.
- **Why do the righteous suffer?** Not only is Habakkuk concerned with the prosperity of the wicked, at the same time he complains about the suffering of the righteous. Why those who love Jesus suffer is another mystery that we have to deal with, that we suffer is not. The New Testament writers assume that suffering comes with a life of faith. Believing that God's chosen will not experience suffering then must exclude the life of Jesus as an example to follow. Peter, Paul, and James all encourage Christians to expect suffering, to learn in suffering, and to consider it joy. If our lives are going to look anything like Jesus', then we can expect to suffer: *For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.* (1Peter 2.20-21). Perhaps if we are not suffering, we're not living like Him as much as we thought.
- **What is God's relationship to evil?** God's relationship to evil is a difficult concept for us to consider. When God uses godless nations to punish His people, we're left to wonder if that means God is in some way connected with evil. As we consider God's relationship with evil, we must never come to a point where we think men are not responsible for the evil they commit, or that God takes pleasure in evil, or is blamed for it all together. At the same time, there are literally dozens of Scripture passages that say that God (indirectly) brought about some kind of evil including the death of His own Son (Acts 4.27). How God's sovereignty

Habakkuk 1.12-2.4

Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him but the righteous shall live by his faith. (Hab.2.4)

works with sin toward His glory is nearly impossible to understand. Romans 8.28 says, “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose” so we must understand evil to be one of those things God purposes. How this works will always remain somewhat of a mystery.

- **How now shall we live?** At the heart of the book is a call to live by faith. Walking faith is the very antithesis of walking by sight (2Cor. 5.7). No matter how difficult the circumstances, how impossible the situation seems, in spite all appearances to the contrary, we believe. More than that, those who live by faith actively trust in God’s promises, affirm God’s goodness, and live in submission to God’s Sovereignty. This theme echoes the words of Job who, after losing everything he declared, *“Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.” (Job 1.21)*

the connection with Jesus

Hundreds of years after Habakkuk, wickedness and injustice still flourished in Jerusalem. The temple, now personified by Jesus, was threatened once again. While some accepted the man from Nazareth as the Son of God, most rejected him as a rebel. Betrayed by one of his closest friends, publicly ridiculed as a drunk and glutton, falsely accused by the religious authorities, beaten, broken, and ultimately killed, from all appearances, evil had triumphed. The disciples wondered why God was silent as they hid. Where was God? How could he let the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer?

Three days later, the tomb was empty. The resurrection of Jesus is God’s own proclamation that that he is not far, that he is always in control and that evil will never triumph. At Pentecost, the people of God are gathered as the church. As more churches are planted throughout the world, the apostle Paul writes letters to admonish and encourage. At the heart of his letters is a call to live a life of faith, not works. Paul appeals to the 600 year old book of Habakkuk, arguing that righteousness—from Abraham to Habakkuk—has always been from faith (Romans 1.17, Galatians 1.4, Galatians 3.11, Hebrews 11.1, 2Corinthians 5.7).

We believe we are the center of the universe. Even if we don’t believe this, we often behave as if we do. Our worth is in how our rights, our comfort, our ways of doing things are held up as most important—it’s called self-glory. In the minds of many, even God himself should highlight our personal value and, if not, we feel confused and unloved.

We even believe that the value of the cross is in the people it saves. On the contrary, the cross does not demonstrate the value of the sinner, but the glory of God’s vindicated righteousness for sinners to enjoy. God’s love does not consist of *making much of us*, rather, in *making much of Himself for us*—His Justice, His Beauty, His Grace, His Mercy, His Righteousness. Though difficult for us to understand from a human perspective, God has always been about Himself and His glory. He loves his glory so much that he was willing to send his Son into the world to die that He might be reconcile rebellious sinners by Himself to Himself. He made a way for us to live as we were designed to live—for His Glory. Intellectually we can handle ALL THINGS being about God’s glory until we encounter something violent and ugly. It’s assumed that if God told us “how” God’s glory would come as a result of something terrible, it would bring us peace. Habakkuk reveals otherwise. His faith is not strengthened, rather, it is completely shaken as God grants him insight into His plans and purposes. Habakkuk had asked “How long? And the Lord replied, “Very suddenly and very soon.” Habakkuk asked “Why is justice not upheld?” and the Lord answered, “My perfect justice will bring vengeance even on my own people.”

Habakkuk received an answer, but not the one he expected. And it is an answer that God, 2,600 years later, wants us to hear. As Habakkuk wrestles, we should wrestle with who God is. Habakkuk’s faith is not weak; rather, his faith is real and raw. Though troubled, he desperately desires to understand His place before the Sovereign Creator of the Universe who knows everything, sees everything, preserves everything, and directs everything. Through God welcomes our faithful inquiries, our responsibility is to live by faith in God (Luke 18.8), not judge what God has done or is doing.

introduction to Habakkuk

²⁰ “When your son asks you in time to come, ‘What is the meaning of the testimonies and the statutes and the rules that the LORD our God has commanded you?’ ²¹ then you shall say to your son, ‘We were Pharaoh’s slaves in Egypt. And the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. Deut. 6.20-21

Habakkuk is by far the most significant of the Minor Prophets. Habakkuk 2.4 is quoted three times in the New Testament. Paul’s reference in his letters to the Galatians and Romans both changed the life of a monk named Martin Luther and ignited a Reformation. In other words, this ancient letter has significant meaning for us today.

Before we can ask what an obscure book like Habakkuk might mean for us today, we must understand what it meant for its original audience. Our tendency is to first ask how the text applies to us now, usually without discovering how it applied in context to the time and people “back then”. In part this is because we live in a self-absorbed culture which emphasizes personal experience and interpretation. Reading Scripture without context is dangerous as it can lead to a misunderstanding of God’s Word. Habakkuk serves as a smaller part of the larger story of redemption. We must begin our journey, therefore, learning about the historical setting, circumstances, and author. Even though many dismiss the Old Testament as irrelevant to faith, the truth is that our faith is rooted in an act within time and space; and a history on which our entire worldview and beliefs are grounded.

We begin our story with Moses who led God’s people in the first chapter of their redemption. From tribes of slaves to a nation of soldiers, eventually God’s people were divided and conquered godless men. It is in these final days of the southern kingdom (Judah), that Habakkuk writes. He is overwhelmed by the injustice and corruption experienced by God’s own people; all while evil men prosper. Habakkuk complains to God who appears to be silently ignoring all of it.

discussion questions:

1. Read Habakkuk 1.1-11, does the violence of the world grieve you like this? Why or Why not? What should the violence of the world lead us to?
2. Where has God been silent in your life before? How, if at all, did you find peace, comfort, or understanding during that time?
3. Read Psalm 88. Is it sinful to complain to God? When does a complaint become sinful?
4. Read Job 23.1-17 and Jonah 4.1-11. What is the difference between these two complaints and conclusions of these stories?
5. How does it make you feel to know God told Habakkuk he would raise up an evil people to punish His own? How does your view of God change after reading Habakkuk 1.5 and Deuteronomy 29.29?
6. What is God’s purpose with all things? Read Romans 8.28. Are you comfortable with one of the “things” God uses being evil? Why or why not? (Read Genesis 50.20, Exodus 4.21/Romans 9.17-18, Joshua 11.20, 1Samuel 16.14, 2Sam 12.15-18, 1Kings 11.23, 1Kings 22.23, Amos 3.6; 6.4-12)
7. Read Acts 2.23 and Acts 4.27. Who was responsible for the death of Jesus? How does this change your view of God’s relationship with and/or responsibility for evil?

sermon notes _____

Habakkuk 1.1-11

*O LORD, how long shall I cry for help,
and you will not hear? Or cry to you “Violence!”
and you will not save? (Hab.1.2)*

discussion questions:

1. What has been your experience with or opinion of the Old Testament? Have you ever read the book of Habakkuk?
2. What did you learn about the History of God’s people today? What surprised, impressed, or disturbed you?
3. According to Scripture, what is a prophet? Are there prophets today?
4. Read Deuteronomy 14.1-4. How can you distinguish between true and false prophets? (See 1John 4.1, 1Thessalonians 5.20-21)
5. Read THE THEOLOGY section of the introductory material. Which theological issue is most intriguing to you? Why?
6. Why is history important to our faith in Jesus? (Read 1Corinthians 15.3-6, Hebrews 1.1-2, Luke 24.13-27)
7. What is dangerous, if anything, with a high emphasis on *personal* experience, application and understanding? (Read 2Timothy 4.1-5)

sermon notes

Evil and suffering are a problem in our world. They are not a problem for God; rather, evil and suffering are a problem for men because they believe that they are entitled to lives without it.

Suffering often leads us to question God existence, goodness, or power. Either God doesn’t exist, doesn’t care, or isn’t capable of doing anything to help a broken world. Some religions argue that suffering is an illusion while others admit it is real but offer no comforting explanations. In truth, Christianity is the ONLY religion that has a God who enters into a world of suffering, living and dying as a man. The Christian faith is the only religion that argues God must have reasons for suffering if He himself was willing to experience suffering on a cross. Though he does not tell us the reasons, God shows us that He does exist, that He is good, that He does care, and that one day all suffering will be completely removed and justice exacted.

Suffering is not an external problem; it is an internal one that only God can fix. What we see in the form of rebellion, folly, disease, and discouragement, are all the results of sin. Habakkuk’s complaint results from seeing sin infecting the world around him. We will never understand His message until we are equally frustrated with the evil we see. Habakkuk is terribly grieved by the suffering and injustice in the world, and God’s apparent silence. As he watches the people of God suffer while the evil seem to prosper, he is driven to cry out to God. But his frustration does not take the form of accusation or indictment. Habakkuk’s words are not an excuse for us to complain about God’s apparent silence in trials. Instead, we see an example to imitate, a man who is driven to God in prayerful inquiry.

Unfortunately, God’s response brings Habakkuk more concerns than comfort. God doesn’t dispute the complaint of Habakkuk. Instead, he demonstrates how the existence of evil is part of the greater plan of a sovereign God to reveal the fullness of His divine attributes for Him to receive the greatest amount of glory—the reason God does all things.