

Dialoguing With God
 Habakkuk 1-3
 Tampa Covenant Church
 29 June 2025

Proposition: Because God is faithful, we can bring our confusion and questions to him in honest dialogue and trust in sovereign promises for the future.

FCF: Struggling to engage in honest, faithful dialogue with God, especially when his ways confuse us, leading to misplaced doubts rather than trust.

RHF: Through Christ's redemptive work, we have full access to God, where honest dialogue is welcomed and transforms our doubts into deeper trust in his sovereign plan of redemption for the future.

(#1) Introduction:

Today we'll survey the book of Habakkuk. Scholars suggest he may have been a temple musician as well as prophet serving in Judah.¹ What we know of him comes from this book that bears his name. In it we see the heart of this man as he dialogues with God concerning God's pending judgment on Judah. And Habakkuk is brutally honest with God; he doesn't have answers but a lot of questions. For you teachers out there; Habakkuk's that student with his hand constantly in the air and he's not putting it down until you call on him: *"Yes, Habakkuk... what is it this time?"*

And when God allows him to speak, we'll see, he voices the type of questions we've all wrestled with in our relationship with God. We witness all sorts of brokenness in this world and it's natural to ask, *"Hey God what's going on?"* But when the answers don't make sense; we can stuff our frustrations or pretend we're ok. Neither are good options. The best option is bringing our questions, frustrations and confusion to God. Because honest dialogue with God in prayer is not a sign of weak faith; it's a journey to deeper trust in his sovereign promises for the future. So, we'll look at this dialogue between Habakkuk and God and along the way reflect on how it plays out in our own lives.

First Dialogue: *Questioning the LORD's righteousness amid injustice (1:1-11)*

(#2) V.1 reads, *"The Oracle [burden] that Habakkuk the prophet saw."* As a prophet, Habakkuk received this oracle² from the LORD through a vision. But unlike the other prophetic oracles, Habakkuk doesn't accuse the people nor does he speak for God, rather he dialogues with God directly.³ And he comes hot out the gate with some **(#3) hard-hitting questions:** *"O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not hear? Or cry to you "Violence!" and you will not save?"⁴ 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. The days of religious reform under good King Josiah have come to an end and his wicked son Jehoiakam is now on the throne. His epitaph reads, "He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD." And that also sums up the condition of God's people. They're spiritually bankrupt and morally corrupt. Sin is flourishing, injustice is the norm and God seems to be on holiday. He concludes that God's law is paralyzed and the justice system is crooked.*

Habakkuk's words serve as a clarion call for many believers who wrestle with why God would allow injustice to rear its ugly head in the world he created. And we shouldn't be surprised when we hear people screaming for justice in our world because every human being has a sense of right and wrong; it's

hardwired into us as image (#4) bearers of God. John Calvin wrote, *“There is no doubt that certain notions of right and justice are innate in the human mind, and that a light of justice shines in them.”*⁵ That’s a fact! But here’s the tension: While we all live with this built-in longing for justice; we also live with the consequences of the fall. Maybe it’s something personal in the home, terrible neighborhood environment, work drama, what we witness in society and across the globe....brokenness touches everything. And so, like Habakkuk, we wrestle with it and cry out to God, “Don’t you see this?”, “Haven’t you been watching the news?” “How long will you allow it to continue?” Like Habakkuk, we want answers.

(#5) **Beginning In v.5**, the LORD answers in a surprising manner: *“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.”* For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans⁶ a bitter and hasty nation, who march through the breadth of the earth, to seize dwellings not their own.” (#6) **Bottom line**, we’re talking about *“guilty men whose own might is their god.”* This prideful and arrogant nation will serve as God’s chosen instrument to deal with the injustice and corruption in Judah. No doubt God is at work but his solution doesn’t make much sense to Habakkuk. But he doesn’t fake spiritual confidence; he continues to dialogue with God.

Second Dialogue: *Questioning the LORD’s instrument of his righteousness (1:12-2:3)*

(#7) **Habakkuk responds** with what he knows to be true about God, *“Are you not from everlasting, O LORD my God, my Holy One? we shall not die.”*⁷ *O LORD, you have ordained them as a judgment, and you, O Rock, have established them for reproof.”* (#8) **And his confusion** is clear in v.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?”* In Habakkuk’s mind, this isn’t the way it’s supposed to play out because Judah is God’s chosen people. They have a covenant relationship with the LORD and he’s the Rock of their salvation. Yes, Habakkuk acknowledges the wickedness in Judah but compared to Babylon, Judah is more righteous! So, if anyone should serve as the instrument of God’s justice, it should be Judah, not a prideful (#9 **Blank**) empire like Babylon. What’s Habakkuk doing? He’s claiming the moral high ground. He can live with the wickedness out there, knowing that evil often leads to self-destruction. But when that wickedness is permitted by God to invade his community because of their evil; he has a huge problem with it.⁸

And if we’re not careful, this same attitude can creep into our prayer life. We assume the moral high ground in our dialogue with God; especially when life isn’t going our way, *“Lord, I know I’m not perfect but I’m not them.”* or *“Lord, how can you use them; haven’t I been more faithful?”* We get the point... To pray from that platform, is to jettison humility in favor of pride. Sisters and brothers, this is where we must guard our hearts. Prayer is not about claiming moral high ground with God; it’s recognizing we all stand in desperate need of his mercy and grace. Scripture reminds us, *“there is none righteous; not even one.”* Every single day, we all fall short of God’s glory. So, we replace comparison with confession and confess our need of his grace. And we endeavor to seek the heart of God over the prideful desires of our own hearts. Yes, he invites us to bring our hopes, desires and questions to him, but we do so with humble awareness that his ways are higher than ours and his thoughts far beyond our own. And here’s the good news; his ways and thoughts toward us are always for our good and always for his glory.

(#10) With that Habakkuk declares, he'll take his stand at his watchpost and on the tower. Where he will lookout for God's reply to his complaint. Habakkuk has just pushed the envelope with God but he doesn't hit and run nor does he ask God to hurry up; rather he resigns himself at his post to watch and wait for the LORD's response. I've always loved the 3rd **(#11) stanza of that old hymn;** Blessed Assurance, "*Perfect submission, all is at rest, I in my Savior am happy and blest; Watching and waiting, looking above, Filled with His goodness, lost in His love.*" Don't you wish we could truly watch and wait as easily as those lyrics flow from our lips? But it must remain the prayer of our hearts because the truth is we live in an impatient culture where time rules with an iron fist. And in many ways seeks to invade our prayer life. However, we will do well to remember that in our relationship with God; he isn't ruled by time; therefore, our watching and waiting must be conformed to his timeline; not ours.

Our text doesn't tell us how long Habakkuk assumed this posture but the **(#12) LORD answers** and tells him to write a vision and make it plain so that it could be read, understood and shared throughout Judah. This vision awaits its appointed time; it hastens to the end; it will not lie. Figuratively speaking, the word "hastens" is likened to breathing or panting.⁹ It's as if the vision has a life of its own but it doesn't mean it will fulfill itself. The word conveys the sense of God's passionate commitment to fulfill what he's promised.¹⁰ See, if God cannot lie then the vision will not lie, therefore, he tells Habakkuk, "*If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come; it will not delay.*"

Living By Faith: *Trusting in the Sovereign promises of God for the future (2:4-20)*

(#13) And here in v.4, the LORD rests his case to Habakkuk in saying, "*Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him, but the righteous shall live by his faith.*" This verse describes the difference between those who have a relationship with God and those who don't; it's faith. This is the central message of the vision and serves to clear up Habakkuk's complaint about Judah being more righteous than Babylon. The LORD is saying, it doesn't matter if you're a Babylonian or an Israelite; if you're full of pride and crookedness; you will face judgment. But those who by faith, entrust themselves to the faithfulness of God will truly live. Church, this is the sum total of the Christian life; trusting in God. The LORD isn't blind he sees the condition of the Babylonians, they're the epitome of pride and crookedness. And as we've already read, they stand guilty before God because they trust in themselves over him. Therefore, they're not off the hook; judgment awaits!

Next, the Lord pronounces five judgments against this proud nation. **(#14) In the third** woe, he declares: "*Woe to him who builds a city with blood and founds a city on iniquity! Behold, is it not from the LORD of hosts that peoples labor merely for fire and nations weary themselves for nothing?*" In other words, Babylon's empire, built on violence and corruption, may look impressive now but it's destined for ashes and will come to nothing. And we've seen this pattern play out in human history; nations and empires rise only to fall; kings come and go. But things won't always be this way as God **(#15) gives Habakkuk** and us a glimpse of the future, "*For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.*" God is reminding his confused prophet and us that the wicked empires of this world will never get the last word; his glory will.

(#16) We recall Ex 40 when Moses couldn't enter the tent of meeting because the glory cloud settled on it, "*and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.*" That was one small space but here God lets Habakkuk

know there's coming a day when every square inch of his creation will experience an intimate knowledge of his glorious presence as it literally fills the whole earth. (#17) And we also look forward as Rev 7:9 gives us a glimpse of that fulfillment, when John sees a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, tribe, people and tongue, standing before the throne. All of the redeemed on this earth filled with the knowledge of the glory of God, declaring in worship that salvation belongs to the LORD, who sits on the throne and to the Lamb!

At the end of Chap 2, after the dialogue, the (#18) woes, and warnings, there's this statement of fact: "*But the LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him.*" In light of God's powerful word of judgment, what else was there to say? Nothing! Habakkuk got the message loud and clear; no more back and forth. And now he assumes the proper response of silence in the presence of a sovereign God. He recognized that in the chaos; God was still on the throne. And everything was subject to his authority; even the Babylonians. And may it be the same for us. As we dialogue with God in our confusion and waiting, may his word quiet our restless hearts. May it silence our murmuring. And may it bring us to a place of humble, voluntary submission to his powerful and gracious rule over our lives.

The Prayer of Habakkuk: *Resting in the God of salvation (3:1-18)*

And now in chap 3, after all the questions, the wrestling and silence; Habakkuk opens his mouth once again; not in protest but in prayer. (#19) He starts by remembering what he's heard concerning God's work in redemptive history and it evokes an emotion of awe and reverence. He asks God to revive it in the midst of his generation. He acknowledges that judgment is coming and rightly so but even in judgment, he pleads for mercy. Habakkuk is giving voice to his faith as he recognizes God's power in the past, his keeping power in the present and his power to be displayed in bringing justice and mercy.

From here, he recounts the (#20) saving acts of God, "*God came from Teman, the Holy One from Mount Paran,*" serving as a reminder of how God delivered his people from bondage in Egypt.¹¹ He recalls God's glory covering the heavens. His brightness and flashes of lightning shakes the earth, causing nations to tremble. Plagues, earthquakes, and cosmic upheaval. Vivid imagery reminding us repeatedly of God's power in humbling the proud. (#21) In v.13, he says, "*You went out for the salvation of your people, for the salvation of your anointed.*" God doesn't unleash his wrath without distinction. The pattern is clear in scripture, God always steps in to rescue his people; not just for their sake, but for the sake of his greater redemptive plan. Scholars tell us the title of "anointed" is never used for Israel as a whole but through the deliverance of his people, God preserves the line through which his anointed one will come forth.¹² The one promised of old who would bring salvation not just to Israel but to every type of person in the world.

(#22 Blank) Jesus is the Anointed One; the very fulfillment of God's promises and salvation comes through him alone. "*For there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.*" The death, burial and resurrection of Jesus has brought us into the family of God once and for all. Through Christ, we've been justified (declared righteous) through the instrument of faith. And we've been given access to our Heavenly Father who invites us to dialogue with him in prayer and assures us we belong to him. Church, Christ suffered and died so that we might be forgiven of our sinful pride and rebellion against God and our fellow image bearers. And he was raised to new life so that we could live

with hope, rooted in the sovereign promises of God for our future. So, today we look back on the love of God in Christ that's been poured into our hearts and count it all joy to live for him.

Conclusion:

And we do this as we await his glorious return to receive us as his very own. Yes, there will be seasons in life marked by chaos and confusion but inwardly we rejoice because the victory is already won in Christ. So let us live by faith as God's redeemed now and God's redeemed in the life to come. And with confidence, we join (#23) the prophet in saying,

*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. (#24 Blank) Amen.*

¹ Willem A VanGemeren, *Interpreting the Prophetic Word, An Introduction to the Prophetic Literature of the Old Testament*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 168.

² Oracle: מַשָּׂא (maššā'). n. masc. burden, oracle, pronouncement. *A message of punishment from God*. This noun refers to the pronouncement of punishment originating ultimately from God. Joshua G. Mathews, "Cursing," in *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, ed. Douglas Mangum et al., Lexham Bible Reference Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014).

³ <https://bibleproject.com/videos/habakkuk> (accessed 25 June 25)

⁴ Save: יָשָׁע (yāša'). vb. to save, deliver, help; to be helped, to be victorious. This is the primary verb for salvation in the Hebrew Bible. The core meaning of this verb involves helping or saving from danger; some forms can refer to being helped or being victorious. Joel T. Hamme, "Salvation," in *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, ed. Douglas Mangum et al., Lexham Bible Reference Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014).

⁵ Quoted in Emil Brunner, *Justice and Social Order* (Cambridge, England: The Lutterworth Press, 1945), 14.

⁶ Assyria, which lay directly north of Babylonia, dominated the ancient Near East as the imperial power for most of the first half of the first millennium bc. With the Babylonian king focused on Assyrian problems in the north, the Chaldeans used guerilla tactics in the marshes and political opportunism to seize the Babylonian throne—making Eriba-Marduk king in 770 bc. Wesley Crouser, "Chaldeans," in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

⁷ This statement has caused considerable discussion among the commentators. An alternative reading is 'You shall not die,' addressed to God. Whether this phrase expresses the prophet's confidence in the people's future security or in God's own indestructibility, it reflects the way his faith is beginning to rise, as he rehearses the attributes of God in prayer. David Prior, *The Message of Joel, Micah and Habakkuk: Listening to the Voice of God*, ed. J. A. Motyer and Derek Tidball, *The Bible Speaks Today* (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), 221.

⁸ *Ibid*, 223.

⁹ פָּוַח (pū'ah): figuratively, *to blow out, to utter*, as lies, Pro. 6:19; 14:5; 19:5, 9; in a good sense, *to utter* (the truth), 12:17. *to pant, to hasten*, Hab. 2:3. Compare יָצָא Ecc. 1:5.

¹⁰ Prior, 236.

¹¹ Teman was a desert oasis in Edom but it might also represent the entire region south of the Dead Sea. Paran lies west of Edom across the valley Ghor, between the Sinai Peninsula to the south and Kadesh Barnea to the north, another mountainous area. It may be of some significance that God's appearance to Moses was in the region south of Judah while the Babylonians invaded from the north. Furthermore, it was in this area to the south that God performed many wonders as He led His people into the Promised Land from Egypt. J. Ronald Blue, "Habakkuk," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 1518.

¹² *Ibid*, 1520.