

BaptistWay Bible Series for August 5: How long, God?

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How long, God?

- Habakkuk 1:1-2:4, 15-16

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God's justice, in the context of evil and suffering, has been and always will be of central concern to those who look to God for justice in times of destruction and violence. That is true whether the issue be literal destruction and violence in today's world, cultural corruption or personal needs. Those who trust in God eventually will ask: "Where are you, God?" and "How long must I wait for your justice to come?"

Cultures are different socially, morally, economically and spiritually. However, from age to age, there also remains some similarities. As is true in the 21st century, even in the day of the prophet Habakkuk (sometime between 609 B.C. and 598 B.C.), believers were looking for an answer from God as to his presence in times of persecution.





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The book of Habakkuk is unique in its revelation of a dialogue between the prophet and God about Judah's welfare. Habakkuk's ministry took place in Judah, when many scholars believe they were being dominated by the neighboring Egyptians. Habakkuk has some serious questions about God's presence in his nation's suffering and is in turn surprised by God's answer.

Habakkuk begins his questioning of God with his first concern. In Habakkuk 1:1-4, he asks God "How long, oh Lord, must I call for help, but you do not listen?" Habakkuk wonders why he is faced with having to even wonder about God's justice. Habakkuk goes on to remind God how wicked and violent his oppressors are being toward his nation.

Most likely, Habakkuk was asking for God to bring justice upon the people in his nation who refuse to follow God's law or Torah in the midst of Egyptian domination. Habakkuk is at his wits' end, saying "the law is paralyzed and justice never prevails." How often do we wonder where God might be in our suffering today?

What might be more interesting and even more useful for us is God's answer to Habakkuk's questions of injustice. In Habakkuk 1:5-11, God replies: "I am raising up the Babylonians, that ruthless and impetuous people. They are a feared and dreaded people; they are a law to themselves." God, unexpectedly to Habakkuk, informs him (in Habakkuk 1:6-8) that God is raising up the Babylonians as an instrument of justice for the Judeans who refuse to follow the law. Habakkuk never expected God to

punish the Judeans' violence with a taste of their own medicine. How often are we disappointed with God's answers to our questions of injustice?

Habakkuk continues his dialogue with God to express his second concern that God's use of wicked Babylon, as an instrument of justice, is unfair (Habakkuk 1:12-21). Habakkuk wonders how God can use what is completely evil to destroy what is at least partially righteous. Habakkuk is wondering what will happen to the righteous Judeans like himself.

God continued this dialogue with Habakkuk with a simple answer to Habakkuk's concern for protection of the faithful. In Habakkuk 2:2, God promises consolation and protection for the righteous in Judah.

This dialogue between God and Habakkuk can shed light on our own struggle to find justice in our culture today. The book of Habakkuk is a reminder to all of us that it is appropriate and sometimes essential that we are comfortable in questioning God's plan and role in our struggles and strife. We are encouraged, just as Habakkuk was, that God will, indeed, bring justice to each of our individual situations. We must, however, be ready for God to answer us in a way that is inconsistent with our own ideas of justice.

In questioning God, we do not doubt his ability to be God, we do not doubt his work or his involvement in our lives. But in fact, we are recognizing he is in control and has the ability to comfort us in time of struggle. The dialogue we find in Habakkuk encourages us that doubt could be used as a tool to strengthen our faith.

Habakkuk questioned God in a search for justice in his nation's time of struggle. So might we. There is evil around us just as Habakkuk observed in his day. God's answer to Habakkuk was one that applies to us also: God is just and his standards of justice apply to all—to us as well as our enemies.

Jesus made a similar point in Matthew 7:1-3: “Do not judge so that you will not be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?”

Perhaps an honest conversation with God will afford us a similar benefit to what it did for Habakkuk. We may not receive the answers we want, but God would respond with what we need to hear. Yes, ultimate and Godly justice will be done. But God will also, as always, call us to love, grace and forgiveness.

Discussion question

- How often do we resist honest dialogue with God in fear that doubt is not appropriate?
- What is our response as Christians when God’s answer is not consistent with our views of justice?
- How is living non-judgmentally an act of faith?

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