

Explore: Hard questions, harder answers

April 9, 2015

- *The Explore the Bible lesson for April 26 focuses on Habakkuk 1:1-6, 12-13; 2:1-4.*

Introduction to Habakkuk

“Where does it hurt?” We often must answer such a question when a medical professional treats us. Pain sends sharp reminders regarding our mortality. Habakkuk, however, dealt with more than physical pain. He struggled with attempts to reconcile God’s nature with the problem of evil in the world. Why would God allow such pervasive evil to exist and remain seemingly unchecked?

You do not have to look far in order to recognize Habakkuk’s dilemma. The daily news may leave us scratching our heads and questioning our theology. In other words, we can relate to Habakkuk rather easily.

Scholars know little of Habakkuk’s background and even have some difficulty pinning down a date for his book. Still, it’s obvious Habakkuk was a deeply committed follower of the Lord who had a keen awareness of the Scripture. In fact, the first verses of his book have a great similarity to many of the psalms. Some scholars think Habakkuk served in some capacity in the Temple. His honesty in the face of complex theological and national challenges can be a source of tremendous comfort to his readers.

Habakkuk labored primarily with his theodicy. A theodicy is a way in which one attempts to explain why a good God would allow bad things to happen in the world. This lesson will attempt to offer some insights concerning Habakkuk’s struggle. We will examine the back-and-forth conversations

between Habakkuk and God, and we will reconsider our trust in the Lord. For more introductory information, please refer to the introduction of the Bible books included in the front section of the resources.

What about evil (Habakkuk 1:1-4)

Habakkuk asked two basic questions concerning God's nature in these verses. First, Habakkuk questioned God's timing. The question "How long?" comes to the fore in many of the lamenting psalms and now in Habakkuk's struggle. In other words, Habakkuk wondered at God's silence in the face of Judah's wickedness. In fact, he seemed utterly astonished God appeared to turn a deaf ear to the prophet's cries for help. Why would God put up with the "violence" of the age—those people who willingly harmed others in either physical or unethical ways?

Second, Habakkuk questioned God's seeming acceptance of evil. It appeared to Habakkuk that God turned a blind eye to atrocities. Habakkuk even noted a few of the barbarities of his day that ought to have raised God's ire. Habakkuk particularly noted both the destruction and injustice around him. In the Hebrew language, destruction refers to the ruin or spoiling of a society. Injustice characterizes the lawless nature of Habakkuk's context. Consequently, Habakkuk appeared to accept the imminent rise of Babylon and destruction of Judah. Why, then, would God allow such a thing? Would God even dare to use Babylon as a toll of judgment upon Judah?

I am in control (Habakkuk 1:5-6)

Yahweh responded clearly and pointedly to Habakkuk's questions. In fact, God answered with plural verbs in the Hebrew language and thereby replied not only to the prophet, but also to the entire nation. God's response also seemed to underscore the truth that God's will may not be easily grasped by human beings on every occasion of suffering. We ought to

leave room to be “utterly amazed” by the will of God. Certainly, his ways are not our ways (Isaiah 55:8-9). Accordingly, God elaborated on his plan to utilize the Babylonians against the nation of Judah. God’s plan even highlights quite an important aspect of God’s nature: God has power over any nation in the creation. God called the Babylonians “ruthless and impetuous,” meaning they fiercely swept the known world without much regard to people or wise decision-making. That is, the Babylonians had no clue God was using them in his strategic plan for justice.

But God, why? (Habakkuk 1:12-13; 2:1)

Habakkuk then pressed the issue further. Keep in mind, however, Habakkuk appeared to trust implicitly the words of God. Habakkuk did not have a problem necessarily with understanding God’s plan. He needed clarity. In other words, Habakkuk trusted God was in control and would utilize even the Babylonians. He even declared God was “from everlasting,” indicating Habakkuk’s belief in the preexistent and eternal God of creation and the created order. Yet, why would God “ordain” the Babylonians to punish Judah? Why would God not be on their side?

Trust me! (Habakkuk 2:2-4)

God’s next response appeared to be forthright and reassuring yet somewhat vague. God even invited Habakkuk to “write down the revelation” on tablets for heralds of the day to dispatch quickly the latest theological news update to the people. What therefore was the news from God? “Wait for it.” In other words, God invited trust. The meaning of God’s will and use of power will come to light in time for Habakkuk and the nation. Consider, too, God knows the ones who are and are not righteous, and God shall save the righteous based on faith. The wicked will receive what’s coming to them. Could it be that God must break down Judah before starting over again with the remnant?