

**“When You Can’t Understand”  
Major Messages from the Minor Prophets  
(The Book of Habakkuk)**

**Intro: Over the past year we’ve seen tens of thousands of people die in a Southeast Asia tsunami. Closer to home, hundreds lost their lives and tens of thousands lost their property and businesses in Hurricane Katrina. Another hurricane ravages the Texas coast.**

**Of course, when such things happen, people want to know why God would allow such things to happen or what His purpose is in all these things. There are a number of possible answers we can give; but the truth is that we cannot always know God’s role or purposes in what happens in this world beyond the statements of His sovereignty over it and His ultimate purposes for mankind.**

**So the better question is not “why” but “what”? What do you do when you can’t figure God out? To guide us in this study I’d like to ask you to join me in reliving the experience of one of God’s OT prophets, Habakkuk. His prophecy only takes up about 3 pages in your Bible; but it has a powerful message for our time. It is a conversation with God.**

**THE MESSAGE OF HABAKKUK**

*Habakkuk’s three chapters naturally outline its three main sections:*

Three genres of literature

*Chapter one--a burden*

*Chapter two--a vision*

*Chapter three--a prayer*

Three views of faith

*Chapter one—faith sighing*

*Chapter two—faith seeing*

*Chapter three—faith singing*

***One of its unique features is the fact the whole book concerns communications between Habakkuk and God.***

In chapter one the Habakkuk cries out to God because of the sins of his own people, Israel. He, a righteous man, even suffers at their hands (Hab. 1:2-4)

*How long, O Lord, will I call for help, and Thou wilt not hear? I cry out to Thee, “Violence!” Yet Thou dost not save. (Habakkuk 1:2)*

God answers with the astounding statement that He will raise up the Chaldeans to punish the disobedient Israelites (Hab. 1:5-11).

*“For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans, that fierce and impetuous people who march throughout the earth to seize dwelling places which are not theirs. (Habakkuk 1:6)*

Even so, God acknowledges that they are not acting because of faith in God but because of an idolatrous worship of power. Habakkuk acknowledges God’s plan. He knows that Israel’s God will not allow

them to perish. He knows that God has appointed the Chaldeans to judge his people. But even so, he is troubled by this revelation; it puts him in dilemma. Why would God look with favor on a wicked nation and allow a people more wicked to destroy a people less wicked? (Hab. 1:12-2:1).

*Thine eyes are too pure to approve evil, and Thou canst not look on wickedness with favor. Why dost Thou look with favor on those who deal treacherously? Why art Thou silent when the wicked swallow up those more righteous than they? (Habakkuk 1:13)*

So Habakkuk needs to hear a word from God. How can God reconcile this action with His nature as a just and holy God?

God responds to Habakkuk's concerns.

*God says, "You can write this down! The Chaldeans will get their just desserts for their sin. God pronounces His judgments upon the Chaldeans in a series of "woes". Because of their pride, their theft of the possessions of others, for their murderous invasions of other peoples, and for their trust in false gods, they will experience the pain that they have inflicted upon other peoples.*

*In contrast God affirms that the righteous will live by their faith! I.e. there will be salvation for the faithful. This principle would become the*

*He promises that he will act for His glory so that "the nations will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord".*

*He affirms that in contrast to the speechless idols upon which men place their trust, He is alive and dwells in His holy temple (2:20).*

In chapter three Habakkuk responds to God's revelation with a faithful and reverent prayer.

*He respectfully asks God in the day of wrath to "remember mercy" (Hab. 3:1).*

*But then He sees the glory of God as He comes to accomplish His purposes (Hab. 3:3-4) and He sees the terror of God as He unleashes His indignation upon the wicked (Hab. 3:5-15) in order to save His people.*

*And because of this he can prepare himself for the nearer day of chastisement for Israel. Here is one of the greatest statements of faith ever found in Scripture:*

*Though the fig tree should not blossom, and there be no fruit on the vines, though the yield of the olive should fail, and the fields produce no food, though the flock should be cut off from the fold, and there be no cattle in the stalls, yet I will exult in the Lord, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation. The Lord God is my strength, and He has made my feet like hinds' feet, and makes me walk on my high places. (Habakkuk 3:17-19)*

Habakkuk's conversation with God has helped his faith and answered his questions. God's holiness and justice will be vindicated by His actions; and God's people will at last find salvation in Him.

#### **A MESSAGE FOR MODERN MAN**

*We can learn important things from Habakkuk's conversation with God. Though God loves His people, He may at times allow them to suffer, especially at the hands of evil people around them. Such suffering is a test of faith and patience.*

*God may consequently use those more wicked to punish the less wicked if need be. Yet those who act wickedly, even if serving a divine purpose, will not go unpunished. Their time of judgment will come.*

*Those who trust in God and wait upon Him shall see their faith rewarded in His salvation and blessing.*

*Therefore what life may bring, we must accept it with trust that God works always for the ultimate good of His people.*

**Conclusion:** Understanding these principles I hope will cause us to express the faith that Habakkuk faced. Sometimes we must simply brace ourselves to times of testing and instead of struggling in doubt with questions about God's actions, we need to instead firm up our convictions that everything will ultimately work out for the salvation of the faithful.