

The Mystery of God & Evil

A Sermon on Habakkuk 1:1-11

by
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1. Introduction and Superscription (1:1)

2. The Mystery of God's Indifference (1:2-4)

a. How long will I call for help and you will not answer (v.2)?

i. Habakkuk has been fervently praying and yet God is strangely unresponsive.

1. The prophet has been faithfully coming before the One he knows can fix things.

2. He cries out for help and there is no help. He cries out for salvation and God does not rescue.

ii. His prayer then is one of complaint because he believes God is indifferent to Judah's plight.

1. When he says that God has not heard his prayers, he means God has not responded.

2. The prophet's complaint is one that we can sympathize with a great deal if we apply it to our personal lives.

b. Why do you not address evil (v.3-4)?

i. The prophet's second complaint is that he believes God is indifferent to evil.

1. Habakkuk asks why God has made him look upon a land of unbridled sin.
2. There are four ways the prophet describes the problems he sees in Judah (3b):
 - a. There is destruction, violence, strife, and contention.
 - b. Habakkuk is showing that the Kingdom of Judah is a people characterized by complete, open rebellion to God
- ii. The prophet asks a second question that piles on to the first: why are you indifferent toward justice (v.4)?
 1. Habakkuk is focusing on two things here as he asks God why.
 - a. The first is that the Law of Moses is being ignored.
 - b. The second part of Habakkuk's complaint is that justice itself doesn't come forth, and he explains why in v. 3.
 2. The result of this is a perversion of justice itself—and Habakkuk raises this as his complaint to God.
 - a. He knows God is the one who upholds His Law and therefore is the one who upholds justice.
 - b. Habakkuk is utterly confused over God's indifference to address what's been going on.
 - i. Yet the important thing to know is that the prophet is dead wrong in his complaint.

ii. He is not passively watching the evils of this world with indifference, He addresses them in His own timing.

3. Though you may think God is indifferent to your prayers and the evil in this world, He is not.

a. God has not turned a deaf ear towards your pleas. He has not forgotten you.

b. God is already at work and He is not indifferent towards evil. Yet as we will now see in v. 5, sometimes, God's answers are just as mysterious to us as His timing.

3. The Mystery of God's Answers (1:5)

a. The first thing I want to draw your attention to is that God has given a series of four commands.

i. All of these commands are given in the plural form, so God is not merely addressing the prophet.

1. Habakkuk was speaking on behalf of the Kingdom of Judah, which would include both the wicked and the righteous.

2. The interesting thing to me is that God isn't going to address them separately.

a. What that plainly means is that whatever is about to happen to Judah will happen to all of Judah.

2. God says to Habakkuk: look at the events transpiring around you right now. This is all my handiwork.
 - a. Put yourselves in the shoes of the prophet. You're crying out for God's salvation and you don't hear anything for what seems like an eternity.
 - b. You wonder if God even cares and then He gives you an answer, but it's certainly not the answer you're looking for.

4. The Mystery of God's Instruments (1:6-10)

- a. The Babylonians are described as a bitter and hasty people claiming lands that do not belong to them (v.6).
 - i. Verses 6-7 gives us the broad contours of what these people are like. Verses 8-10 simply further describe their mannerisms
 1. They are consumed by conquest and prove to be a formidable replacement to the Assyrians.
 - a. V. 7 informs us that they are a dreaded—and the reason for this is relatively simple.
 - b. As a nation, they do what is right in their own eyes.
 2. Undeniably, we find the punishment to Judah fits their crimes.
 - ii. The prophet uses a series of metaphors and similes throughout the remainder of this section, but notice how it still conveys a literal truth.

1. We find clues in the text that makes us aware of the fact that he is doing so.
2. I'm going to use v. 8 to highlight this, but the remainder of our passage does the same thing.
 - a. Notice how the prophet compares the Babylonians to three different animals.
 - b. He's not saying they *are* leopards, wolves, and eagles, but that they are *like* them. It still conveys a literal truth: they are fast and they are fierce.
- b. This brutal nature of the Babylonians characterizes everything they do—yet they are the unlikely tool of God's judgment.
 - i. Notice in v. 9, "All of them come for violence, their horde of faces moves forward. They collect captives like sand."
 1. These are men of war through and through; they love violence.
 2. They come sweeping into an area like a whirlwind, and collect prisoners as easily as scooping up a handful of sand.
 3. Then in V. 10 we see they openly mocked kings and rulers—and the reason for this is that the Babylonians knew there was no real threat against them.
 4. These are the people God has told Habakkuk He is going to use to judge the Kingdom of Judah; God's ways are obviously not the ways of the prophet.

ii. Yet if you think about it, God has always been in the business of using methods beyond our understanding to accomplish His work.

1. A great example of this is the story of Joseph.

a. Yet there are many others we can look at as well.

b. God sends a demon to be a thorn in the flesh to the apostle Paul.

2. God's ways are not our ways, yet God's ways are always good.

a. The prophet Jeremiah recognizes that both evil and good come from the hand of the Lord.

b. God's ways are not your ways—and sometimes, God's ways are terrifying to us—but they are good.

5. The Mystery of God's Judgments (1:11)

a. The Chaldeans will appear to be unstoppable, yet God promises that they will be held guilty.

i. The Babylonians would be a people who constantly move from region to region to conquer.

1. They will be a people characterized by never-ending military conquests.

2. They are not yet the next great superpower—yet they will be, and they will invariably come to ravage Israel.

ii. Yet as God promises, Babylon will be judged for their wickedness and idolatry.

1. Everything will appear as if Babylon cannot be stopped.
 2. Yet as surely as God will judge Judah for their wickedness and idolatry, God will bring judgment upon the Babylonians.
- b. Though you may think God is letting the wicked go unpunished, God will uphold His promise to judge evil.
- i. If you doubt this reality, I simply invite you to look upon the history of judgment we have recorded right here in Scripture.
 - ii. Based on God's track record, the odds are completely stacked against the forces of evil.

6. Conclusion

Small Group Questions:

1. What are ways you have seen yourself in a similar spot as the prophet, where God has used unlikely and painful ways to your maturity?
2. How does the book of Habakkuk help you better understand what God is doing, not only in your own personal trials, but throughout the course of time and history? Why does this ultimately matter?
3. The book of Habakkuk reveals to us that God does not work in our timing, God's answers are not our answers, God's ways are not our ways, but God's judgments are final. Though this may be rather mysterious in how it plays out in our lives, what comfort does this bring you in the midst of suffering?