

The Gospel in the Minor Key Habakkuk 1:1-3:19

Recently a few well-known Christian leaders publicly declared that they were *abandoning the faith*.

- Josh Harris, former pastor, and well-known author, separated from his wife and said that he “no longer considers himself a Christian.”
- Hillsong artist, Marty Sampson, also announced recently he was “genuinely losing his faith.” He later clarified that he was seriously struggling, but “had not renounced the faith” but was on “incredibly shaky ground.” He stated in an Instagram post reasons like the problem of evil, his issues with Bible, a failure to see miracles and so on.

I do pray for the Lord to do a work of grace and renewal for each of these men.

Maybe you know someone *in a similar state*. *Maybe that's you*.

Unfortunately, these types of stories make the headlines, **but the more common and encouraging narrative doesn't**. What is the more common narrative? It's this: A genuine believer (one who is not “famous”) wrestles with the problems of life, with the seeming inactivity of God, and with dark days of the soul, yet holds on to the faith and actually grows in that process, becoming even stronger on the other side.

This is the story of virtually every genuine Christian I have ever met!
And it's the story of Habakkuk. It's an encouraging story.

Habakkuk is a prophet – one devoted to God, but has questions, complaints, wrestlings – **but by the end of the book he is a changed man**; his testimony of faith is inspiring.

Becoming a Christian doesn't mean you don't have **doubts and questions**.

- It doesn't mean you don't **wrestle with the mysterious ways of God**.
- It doesn't mean that **you will never have any dark days**.
 - **After all, we have an adversary that wants us to deny the faith!**
- It means when these come, you **live by faith** in the Savior (2:4).
- You live **with eschatological hope** (2:14).
- You **find your joy in God, not in circumstances** (3:17-18).

Habakkuk is like much of life – it's what you might call “life in the minor key” or “The gospel in the minor key.”

- The minor chord sounds *darker than a major chord*.
- Not everything in life is “happy clappy.”
- But that doesn't mean God isn't reigning and that the Gospel isn't gloriously true – these are facts even when the darkness doesn't seem to lift.

The first two chapters of Habakkuk are dark – but there's hope in these chapters.

- In fact, the great statement in **Hab 2:4** is **quoted three times in the NT, and was the great battle cry of the Reformation.** It's the theme of Habakkuk.
- And **2:14** and **2:20** are rock-solid assurance, given in context of darkness.

I've been looking forward to this prophet, perhaps more than others.

It's not a very long book, but it is powerful.

- **George Burns said the secret to a good speech is "to have a good beginning and a good ending, and to have the two as close together as possible!"**
- **Habakkuk has a good beginning – "Why? How long Lord?"** Questions we have.
- **Habakkuk has a good ending: "Though ... yet" – that's genuine faith.**

The book of Habakkuk predicts the coming Babylon invasion of Judah, and subsequent exile (**1:6**).

- The book, however, is unique in that he **never addresses the people of Judah directly**, but instead involves *a dialogue between the prophet and Yahweh (chs 1-2)*, and then a *prayer/psalm of the prophet (ch. 3)*.
- **The Babylonians were an imminent threat when Habakkuk was writing, though we can't be sure as to how near the Babylonian invasion was.**
- **Habakkuk was a contemporary of Jeremiah, Nahum and Zephaniah.**
- This was a time of **great political, moral, and theological turmoil.**
- **Josiah followed the wicked reigns of Manasseh (52 years) and Amon (22 years), and led a great reform, but then Jehoiakim followed in the footsteps of evil kings.**
- **Politically, Assyria was weakening, and Babylon was becoming the world power.**

The flow of the book carries a message in itself.

- He **begins** the book with a series of complaints and questions to God.
- He **ends** the book **waiting on God, worshiping God, and trusting God.**
- **Habakkuk is like Job in that he questions God's justice, but in the end realizes that God is sovereign and his judgments are just, and God's justice is far beyond human comprehension.**

The book is **structured** in the following way:

#1: Questioning God (1:2-2:20) [Two Cycles of Questions/Answer]

#2: Worshiping God (3:1-19)

1:1: We have **no biography of Habakkuk!** We read that he had a "burden."

- God gave him a message that became burden that had to be announced.
- It is striking that **little to nothing is said of these prophets.**
- It shows us that **the message is more important than the messenger.**
- **Some of you are called into the preaching and teaching ministry: Recognize that the vast majority of us will be forgotten in 25 years or so, but the gospel marches on!**
- **Matt Carter story "If they don't know their names, they certainly won't remember mine."** The messenger is buried, but the word of God is not bound.

#1: Questioning God (1:2-2:20)

Question 1: Why is wickedness unpunished (2-4)?

2: Habakkuk looks at the wickedness around him wrestles with the problem of injustice.

- He has a problem the God's *timescale* (v. 2)
- He has a problem with God's *inactivity* (v. 3).
 - God appears to be tolerating sin instead of punishing it.
 - **Violence** and **division** exists but nothing is being done.

4: Because God has not acted, the prophet laments over the **injustice** in the land (v. 4) and the **lack of impact the law of God** had on the people.

- He is speaking specifically about **the injustice in Judah**.
- The law was not the authority of the leader and the people, by and large.
- The rich were oppressing the poor.
- There was a righteous remnant but life was hard for them because they would not violate God's law to get ahead.

But notice the prophet is still **calling out to God** (v. 2).

- "How long shall I cry for help?"....
- He knows where his help comes from! (Ps 124)
- Take your problems to him!

The rest of the book shows us that God is actually active, so we should remember that the delays of God are always purposeful.

- Often the delays are sanctifying us – ridding us of pride, selfishness, and our comfort idols.
- God's delays are always tied to his eternal purposes.
- God is still on his throne, even when various burdens distress us.
- **Can you still trust God even though you are bringing questions to God, and even when you are carrying a heavy burden before God?**

Response 1: Judgment on the wicked is coming (1:5-11)

God essentially says, "You're going to need to sit down for this one."

5: He tells the prophet to "look among the nations and be amazed!..."

- This is one of those verses that's often ripped out of context when people want to describe how God is doing something wonderful among a group of people... (ex: youth service)
- But the verse (and following verses) speaks about **the Babylon's coming to punish Judah!**

Acts 13:41 – Paul quotes verse **Hab 1:5** and shows a common principle that was present in both settings. It was this: the sin of **presumption**.

- Those in Judah were **complacent regarding the covenant**.
- In Habakkuk's day, the thought they were safe **because they were Jewish**.
- They accepted the **blessings** of the covenant, but ignored the **curses**. (Deut).
- They thought **Jerusalem could never fall**.
- **God is acting in this way in Habakkuk's day because of their complacency.**

- **He is judging them because they have not taking his word seriously, and have presumed on his grace.**
- **In Paul's day**, he preaches to the Jews in the synagogue, as a warning to not reject the Messiah. Many were cynical scoffers refusing to believe on the Messiah, saying in effect, "We don't need a Messiah who dies on a cross; we're Jews. We have a temple, Passover. It doesn't matter what this Jesus has done. We've got the law. Paul says, "Remember what happened to those in Jerusalem who became complacent. Don't neglect God's Word, God's message, or you will perish, like Judah did because they neglected God's Word."

6: "I am raising up the Chaldeans..."

- Habakkuk was lamenting that God was inactive; God responds by telling him that he is doing something!
- **He is working through the Babylonians to change the events of world history!**
- **The Assyrians were losing power while the Babylonians were gaining power.**
- **"bitter and hasty nation"**
 - God knows their character and uses these traits to punish Judah – which will pose another problem for Habakkuk!

Application: God often answers our prayers differently than we want him to answer!

- **Habakkuk anticipated the answer being, "yes, I will send a revival."**
- **But God says, "Yes, I'm going to send the Babylonian war-machine in judgment."**

So first, Habakkuk's problem is God's silence, and now his problem is God's reply!

Lloyd-Jones: "We all tend to prescribe the answers to our prayers. We think that God can come in only one way. But Scripture teaches us that God sometimes answers our prayers by allowing things to become much worse before they become better... it is a fundamental principle in the life and walk of faith that we must always be prepared for the unexpected when we are dealing with God."

7: You don't want to mess with them – they don't abide by the rule of law or common decency.

8: Speaks of their **domination**.

- **The athlete Bo Jackson popped into my head when I read this! (Tecmo Football!)**
- Their horses are like **leopards**.
- They were as **fierce** as **wolves**.
- You didn't have time to prepare, as they **flew in like an eagle**.

9: Habakkuk had seen violence, but the Babylonians took it to another level....

- **They continued the Assyrian practice of deporting captives to discourage and disorient them.**

10: They **scoff** and **laugh** at weaker rulers and weaker nations...

11: Instead of relying on God, or in the gods (like other nations), they **relied on might alone..**

Question 2: Will Babylon be punished? (1:12-2:1)

The more general question is: How can God use an unholy nation for a holy cause?

Or, how can God use a wicked nation to punish a less wicked one? (v. 13)

12: In all of his questions, Habakkuk has **not adjusted his theology**.

- Often in hard times, **frustrating times, grievous times, one is tempted to change his or her theology**. But not the prophet.

12a: He has a good **doctrine of God**: everlasting, Lord, Holy.

12b: He has a good **theology of the people of God**: “We shall not die”

- Habakkuk’s theology also includes a trust that God will not abandoned his people (at least a remnant).

12c: He also has a good **theology of the judgment** – “you have ordained them...”

- He knows God has raised up the Babylonians to by his agent of punishment.

13: **Nevertheless, he is perplexed...**

- He doesn’t know how this all-powerful, holy God can allow sin to go unpunished.
- Babylon is “wicked” and Judah, less wicked (13b)

14: **It seems to the prophet that God allows people to act like lower creatures** –

everyone just lives wildly with no leadership or values.

15: “He” (Babylon) (Amos 4:2) is vicious in his conquering.

- Captives were sometimes taken away with literal **hooks** in their noses creating pain and humiliation.
- Ancient art depicts **prisoners** in nets being hauled off.

16: They are proud of their weapons; for the gain they bring.

17: Will God step in and do something to these Babylonians?

- If not, then who will? Where is God’s justice? How long, Oh, Lord?

2:1: the prophet waits on an answer.

- It’s okay to bring questions to God, but are you willing to wait, to listen, to learn, to trust?

Response 2: Babylon will be punished (2:2-20)

God responds to Habakkuk’s second question.

God assures Habakkuk that he will punish all the wicked at the proper time, including Babylon.

In responding, God gives **three wonderful words of assurance that I want to circle back to** – **in verse 4, v. 14, and verse 20.**

2: God tells the prophet to “write it down,” **as a permanent witness.**

- So “**he may run**” – my refer to the messenger or to anyone fleeing coming judgment.

3: The fulfillment of the vision will happen slower than expected, but God’s timing is perfect.

- It would begin soon in 586, but would not be fulfilled until 539.

4a: “His soul” refers to Babylon, but with primary reference to the king.

4b: The proud person relies on himself or herself, but the righteous person relies on God.

- It takes faith to trust in God’s timing and God’s action.
- The humble wait and trust God; the proud trust in self.
- Habakkuk 2:4 is an important verse that I take as the theme verse of the book.
- Notice where it sits in the book.
- Faith is the answer to Habakkuk’s problem. Faith in dark times.
- Hebrews 11:27, “Moses endured as seeing him who is invisible.”

Rom 1:16-17

¹⁶For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹⁷For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.”

- The gospel is received by faith; we are declared righteous by faith alone (Romans 1:17-5:21)
- “from faith to faith” or “from faith for faith.”
- That is, “faith from beginning to end” or “start to finish” (NLT).
- The whole Christian life is a life of faith from start to finish.

Gal 3:11-14

¹¹Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for “The righteous shall live by faith.” ¹²But the law is not of faith, rather “The one who does them shall live by them.” ¹³Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”—¹⁴so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.

- The same truth is being communicated here.
- We aren’t justified by the law, but through faith in Christ.
- Those who come to Christ through faith, are part of God’s family, and have the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Hebrews 10

³²But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, ³³sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. ³⁴For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one. ³⁵Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. ³⁶For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised. ³⁷For,

“Yet a little while,
and the coming one will come and will not delay;

38 but my righteous one shall live by faith,
and if he shrinks back,
my soul has no pleasure in him.”

39 But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.

In this passage, the focus is not on faith as the means of justification but as **the necessary condition for perseverance**.

He is calling for a **preserving faith in difficult days, much like Habakkuk**.

This passage then leads to **Hebrews 11**, an entire passage on faith, but then culminates in Hebrews 12:1-2, where we read that Jesus was the author and perfecter of our faith. That is, he is the example par excellence of faith – he was faithful to the Father, he lived by faith perfectly, and he is our rescuer.

5: This verse speaks of the character of the wicked Babylonians.

- They were out of control, deceptive and arrogant.
- The Babylonians are also greedy, with an insatiable desire to conquer the world.

6-20: Now come five “woe oracles” on Babylon, predicting their destruction.

- It is a predication of judgment that will also entail **Judah’s salvation**.
- The return from Babylon would be **a Second Exodus**.
- Thus Habakkuk is pointed to **the future promise of grace**.
- These oracles describe **why Babylon deserves punishment**.

1. Woe to the Empire Builder (6-8)

- “all these” (v. 6) – the nations that Babylon has destroyed.
- The oppressor has gotten wealthy from the plundered wealth of others. (v. 6)
- But it is short-lived gain.
- In divine judgment, the oppressor will eventually be oppressed.
- God will hold them accountable for the bloodshed and may use these conquered nations as a means of judgment (v. 7-8).

2. Woe to the Greedy and the Arrogant (9-11)

- This woe is similar to the first...
- Here the oppressor uses the gain to make his palace untouchable. (v. 9)
- But shame is coming (much like Nineveh) (v. 10)
- An empire built on violence, plunder and exploitation ultimately won’t last (v. 11)

3. Woe to the Those Who Build on Bloodshed (12-14)

- Babylon is condemned again for its bloodshed. (v. 12)
- God is the Lord of Host, the commander of Angelic armies. He rules history and will punish injustice. (v. 13)

- In contrast, to wicked nations that may reign for a moment, the Lord will reign forever and ever in righteousness. (v. 14)

2:14 - Earthly kingdoms rise and fall – Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Rome, Greece

- But the Lord’s kingdom has no end! God’s ultimate triumph is certain.
- In **Isaiah 11:9**, writing during **Assyrian domination**, the prophet declared, “the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea” (11:9)
- Here in view of **Babylon’s domination**, the prophet declares this promise – **with the second coming of Jesus Christ, and the dawning of new creation, the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of God as the waters cover the sea.**
- Conquering nations may momentarily seize large portions of the world, but our King will reign forever over all creation.

“**the glory of God**” is used here of the *visible presence of God* – the majesty of his character and actions will be on display.

- The “glory of God” is often associated with the **tabernacle and temple**, which are **types of the Garden, of Paradise lost**, and which were **types of Paradise being restored in the new creation.**

“**knowledge**” of the glory of God means that **everyone in this new creation will honor the Lord in submission, obedience and worship.**

- We will know He is worthy!
- In the midst of darkness, Habakkuk receives this wonderful assurance.
- While some **were filled with the knowledge of Babylon’s glory; it is momentary.**
- One day everyone will be filled the knowledge of God’s glory alone. (Ps 72:19)

4. Woe to Those Who Abuse Others (15-17)

- This woe is directed at the violent and shameful tactics of the conqueror. They degrade and humiliate the conquered, in order to take their dignity and to destroy their will. (v. 15)
- The image of drunkenness is an image of the **shame** they inflict (v. 15)
- But they will reap a corresponding judgment (v. 16).
- The Lord himself will give them the cup of judgment (v. 16b).
- **17: “Violence on Lebanon”** refers to their violence done on the land of Lebanon and the animals, in the name of their projects.
- They ravaged other nations for their own interest. But the oppressor will experience violence
- God will have the last word on all who abuse his creation and human life.

5. Woe to Idolaters (18-20)

- The fifth woe doesn’t begin in verse 18, but is held until verse 19.
- This woe expresses the folly of idolatry (v. 18-19).
 - This sort of thing is denounced throughout the Psalms (**Ps 135:15-18**)
 - This same kind of sarcasm was present in Elijah at Mt Carmel (1 Kings 18:27)
 - But our God never sleeps! He speaks! He listens! He is the living God!

20: By contrast the Lord is in his holy temple, ruling in sovereign power (**Ps 11:4**).

- “When my life was fainting away, I remembered the LORD, and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple.” - Jonah 2:7
- This God is worthy of our reverence and our trust! (Zeph 1:7)
- When troubles and darkness surround us, we must look up!
- We must remember the Lord is on the throne, and bow before him in reverence and confess that He alone is sovereign, wise, and good.

#2: Worshiping God (3:1-19)

Now we see how the questioner **has been transformed into a worshiper.**

- Habakkuk has learned to trust God and that trust leads to worship.
- “The truest expression of trust in a great God will always be worship.” (J.I. Packer)

There are 4 features of worship that I want you to see....

1. Worship involves responding to God’s Revelation (3:1-2a)

Walter Kaiser: “Habakkuk’s response to God’s revelation of answers to the probing questions he had set before his Lord was to worship God with an exalted combination of prayer and hymn. It was the prophet’s ‘amen’ to what he had been told”

His response to God’s Revelation was worship.

This section is similar to what we see in the **Psalms.**

- 1: **A prayer** – which is probably a prayer that is **sung corporately** (notice **the 3 Selahs.**)
- **Shigionoth** refers to an instrument or a type of Psalm.
- It’s probably the latter, referring to a type of lament that involves intercession for **God to intervene (Ps 7).**
- The following **song acknowledges God’s power and might.**

2a: What he had heard left him in awe; that is God’s revelation of himself (v. **2a; 16**), which refers to the first two chapters of Habakkuk or what follows.

2. Worship involves requesting God to act (3:2b)

2b: Before he reviews God’s saving acts, he offers two **requests** to God. This is the only verse that asks God to do something:

(1) “revive,” (2) “in wrath remember mercy.”

“revive it” – Work now like you have in the past. (Ps 44)

“Deliver from Babylon the way you delivered Israel from Egypt!”

“in wrath remember mercy”

- This is a statement about how God has dealt with his people.
- And we know that the ultimate display of this prayer is seen at the cross.

- Christ took the wrath of the Father, and gave mercy to the repentant.

3. *Worship involves reviewing God's acts in history (3:3-15)*

3: Edom and Paran are associated with God's appearance at Mt Sinai.

Teman was to the South and the mountains of Paran were on the edge of the Sinai Peninsula. God's formation of his people began there.

3b: Concerning those days, God's splendor covered the heavens and the earth was filled with praise.

4: God revealed his glory at Sinai and during other times, but he has "veiled it" because no one can see it and live.

5: Pictures of divine judgment. The Israelites had witnessed this at the Exodus.

6: Shaking mountains: another picture of God's judgment and might. The hills acknowledge his presence.

7: These places were in anguish because of God's power as his God's people marched North.

8: Was God mad at the rivers, streams and sea? No, they were his arsenal against the people who opposed his rule.

- God would use creation to fight for his people, and Habakkuk is longing for God to do it again. He had used the **Nile, the Jordan and the Red Sea.**

9: "Many arrows" – probably a reference to lightening bolts.

"Split the earth" a picture of storms and floods that split the desert.

10-11: Earth, water, and fire acknowledged God and acted for his delivering purposes.

11a: This is a reference to Joshua's victory at Gibeah (Josh. 10:12–13);

11b: God is a great warrior with his bow and spear.

12-13 recalls how God came out against his enemy to deliver his people.

- **"anointed"** God will not forget his promise made to his people and to his anointed one, which carries the idea of the promise of the Messiah.
- **"Crushed the head"** another rich concept that appears in various places...
- **"laying him bare from thigh to neck"** – a thorough defeat!

14-15: Another description to the destruction of Egypt.

Again, this is **providing the basis for longing for a second Exodus.** Do it again Lord!

4. *Worship involves rejoicing in God regardless of the situation (3:16-19)*

16: The situation: He feels the horror of coming Babylon (16a), but he is hopeful.

- He knows the Lord will also judge Babylon.
- On all this he must **wait**. (16b).
- He has come along way from **“Why Lord!?”** to **“I will wait patiently.”**

17: A list of material disasters that he anticipates: food, livelihood, comfort – gone.

18: Yet...

- **We all have a “Though”**
 - **(I have cancer, I have surgery, my kids are driving me crazy, I am under attack, I have lost a loved one),**
- **but not everyone has a “yet I will rejoice.”**
- **2 Cor 6**, “as sorrowful, **yet** always rejoicing”

Habakkuk has learned that he can trust God even in the darkness,
and with that trust comes joy.

A holy, mysterious, counter-cultural joy.

- *Sunday evening discipleship class all through Sept is on suffering.*
- This “God is his Savior.” This God is sovereign over the nations.

19: This God has become his strength.

- He can live on the heights even amid extreme circumstances, with feet like a deer.

19b: to the choirmaster... This liturgical notation suggests that Habakkuk meant this to be a “prayer” that God’s people would sing together.

How Habakkuk Teaches Us to Live in Dark Days

#1. We live by faith in God (2:4) who has acted in the past (3:3-15), who is active in the present (2:20), and who will act in the future (2:14).

A. Faith in the present

- The answer for Habakkuk was “trust me.”
- “I am on the throne, in my holy temple” – trust me.
 - This is a unifying theme of the Bible.
 - Adam, Noah, Abraham, Hannah, Disciples... Hebrews 10
 - God’s ways our mysterious; he often leaves us perplexed, but we trust in his character.
- He has made us his temple! His Spirit indwells us! God is with us! Trust him!

B. Faith rooted in the past.

- Chapter 3 teaches us that redemptive history should serve us now.
- The Exodus event in particular was an anchor for God’s people.

- But we have a better anchor: the cross.
- **We have even more reason to trust God than they did – because we have more revelation.**
- Our Savior died on a cross.
- Paul tells us in Rom 8:32 to never forget that past act, so that it will inspire you to trust God now!

C. Faith that carries an eschatological hope.

- Our Savior will return and the glory of God will cover the earth as the waters cover the seas.
- We live in that hope!
- The ultimate triumph of the Messiah is certain.

*Jesus shall reign where'er the sun
Doth his successive journeys run.
His kingdom stretch from shore to shore
Till moons shall wax and wane no more.*

#2: We find our joy in God, not our circumstances (3:16-19)

This is found throughout Scripture, and is the challenge throughout life.

- **1 Thess 1:6:** “And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit.”
- Rejoice in the Lord, always (Phil 3:1)

John Piper and his wife Noel took Hab 3 as their wedding passage!

He says:

When a man and a woman marry, they pledge their love and faithfulness to each other “for better or for worse, whether rich or poor, in sickness and in health, ‘til death do us part.” And if that’s true between husband and wife, how much more between us and God! That consecration is so important to Noël and me that we used Habakkuk 3:17–19 as a wedding text.... We are each other’s, and we are God’s, no matter how severe the tribulation. We trust each other, and we trust him absolutely.

When loss comes, when tragedy comes, can you look to God your Savior, who has come in Jesus Christ, (and suffered like no other!) and say, “The Lord gives, the Lord takes away, blessed be the name of the Lord.”?

When pleasures come, and life seems to be devoid of drama, can you find your joy in God above these pleasures?

Oh, let us say, “**In all of our sufferings, Christ is enough; in all of our pleasures Jesus is enough.**”

We all have a “though” but real faith says, “Yet I will rejoice in God.”

... Even if I’m doing so in the minor key -- because He is worthy.