

August 23, 2026 - Habakkuk 1:1-4 - "When God Doesn't Add Up"

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[0:00] Please turn in your Bibles to Habakkuk 1, 1-4. The oracle that Habakkuk the prophet saw.

! This is God's Word.

Thanks be to God. Praise the Lord. Beautiful singing this morning. I think the neighbors heard.

Quite possibly called the police.

Noise ordinance violation. I think it's awesome we're going through this book. And I would really love to see how many people I'm going to disappoint or cause issues with throughout this series. Raise your hand if you pronounce Habakkuk. Habakkuk. Raise your hand if you think that that's right. Okay. All right. How about the other way?

[1:36] Habakkuk. Okay. Habakkuk. Any other thing that may exist out there that I'm not aware of? Raise your hand. Maybe a little hach. Habakkuk.

Yeah. Nathaniel's on board. Duffy, I was expecting you to raise your hand. I am the Hebrew scholar here in our midst. But I'm sure as...

Huh? Okay. I'm sure I'll find some way to make somebody mad at some point along the way. So, just let you know at the front ends as we go through this series that it's Habakkuk to me.

So, the other church might say something different down the road. You're more than welcome to try that one. But it is great to be in this new series and to look at lament.

It's really cool how everything is really tied together with the service between what we're singing, with what we're reflecting on throughout the service, and now the series that we're walking through.

[2:48] And one thing about Habakkuk is he is a strange prophet. Not just because of his name. He's a strange prophet because he opens his book with an oracle.

An oracle meaning a burden. There is a burden that he has. But unlike most prophets, Habakkuk doesn't begin with a word from God for the people.

It's actually in reverse. Instead, he begins with a word from himself to God. Habakkuk is a strange prophet.

Before he ever preaches, he protests. His protest is built around three words that was just read. First word, how long? Second, why? And third, therefore. Essentially, that's the structure that we see here.

[3:51] How long shall I cry for help and you will not hear? Why do you make me see iniquity? Therefore, the law is paralyzed and justice never goes forth.

And that's the tension that we have in this book. Habakkuk knows who God is. He knows who God is. Israel's God hears the cries of his people.

God saves his people. He's holy and this God, Yahweh, loves justice. And yet Habakkuk looks around in his world in his day.

He sees violence, Hamas. He sees destruction. He sees strife. He sees corrupted law.

He sees twisted justice. You see, this isn't just some abstract thought for, theological thought for Habakkuk, is it? This is anguish.

[5:02] This isn't just something that he's just working through. And we'll see that very quickly in this passage. Calvin describes this part of Habakkuk as a hard struggle when all things were in a perplexed state and no outlet appeared.

Habakkuk isn't the only one that struggled with this, whose theology and experience have collided. I mean, I feel that collision so many times in this church body.

When what I believe about God completely differs from what I see around me. It's heartbreaking. Every time I hear about somebody struggling with infertility issues, I feel that collision as a pastor.

Every time I hear about somebody walking through a diagnosis at the doctor, I feel that collision. Every time I turn on the news, honestly, every time I turn on the news, locally or internationally, I feel that collision between what I know about God and what I see around me.

[6:24] And I know many of us keep me in good company. And we all struggle with that from one regard to another. And we felt this collision at some point or are actually living through that very realistically right now.

And what Habakkuk does is something remarkably faithful during this collision. During this collision between who he knows God to be and what he sees around, he does something faithful.

What does he do? He takes it to God. He takes it to God. The main point I'm going to thrust in all of our hearts today from the text is to bring God your questions, but don't presume his answers.

Bring God your questions, but don't presume his answers. And I want to make this very simple in structure as we go through this.

I want to break it up one through three and then verse four. I want to look at these questions he asks. And then I want to look at his therefore. So, but before we do, let's pray as we turn to the Lord to be our guide during our time.

[7:47] Let's pray. Lord, we come to you, a holy God, a hearing God, a helping God.

We know who you are. We know who you have revealed yourself to be through scripture. And though we look around the world, we are so confused. We see the tragedy that surrounds us. We see the issues that hit us like waves upon a shore time and time again, just to the point of wondering what's next.

How much more are you going to give us? And it constantly hits. Help us, Lord, to see this prophet, see this prophecy coming to fruition in Habakkuk's day, but also reassuring us in our day as we walk through this series together.

We ask you, the Holy Spirit, to help us to understand and help us to trust in you. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.

[9:00] The first point, if the sly guy can put that up, the first point that we have here is be honest with God. Be honest with God.

Habakkuk begins, he continues as an oracle of what he saw. And Habakkuk begins that oracle. He says, oh, Lord, how long shall I cry for help and you will not hear?

Or cry to you, violence, and you will not save? While this book is not necessarily marked by a certain period in history and in biblical time, his experience is definitely timeless, looking around, right?

But it's not marked by day. It's not marked by occasion. But it is marked by a time span. He says, how long? There's a span of time here that Habakkuk is experiencing.

How long indicates to us that this isn't his first time bringing this before God. How long makes us realize that this has been something ongoing.

[10:26] His prayer journal is pretty repetitive if you were to look into it. He's been praying. He's been waiting.

He's been experiencing idleness from God amid violence. Habakkuk has accumulated great anguish at this point in his life.

It's as if he's saying, Lord, I have asked before. Lord, I'm going to ask again. How much longer?

And then comes the second question.

Why, in verse 3, why do you make me see iniquity? And why do you idly look at wrong? Destruction and violence are before me.

Strife and contention arise. I really appreciate Habakkuk's honesty. Right? He doesn't suppress the question.

[11:31] I grew up with a father that basically said, you know, don't show emotion. Just if you have to cry, leave the room so nobody sees you. Be a man.

Right? As if men don't cry. I think it's the most masculine thing for men to do is cry. He doesn't suppress here.

Nor does he polish his question with less offensive words. I would imagine if we may confess that we've prayed these things to God, like questioning God, we probably got scared during the next thunderstorm that a tree's going to fall on our house, or that we're going to get struck by lightning. Like, we can't question God. But what Habakkuk does here is absolutely stunning. He takes the question that is actually tormenting him deep within, and he places it honestly before the Lord.

He takes his inner torment, he takes his inner struggle within his heart, and he says, God, this is my struggle. We ought to find something deeply instructive here, church.

[12:51] Deeply instructive. Maybe the most important words that Habakkuk actually says here aren't his questions at all.

It's not the how long. It's not the why. But it's the address. He begins his questions with, oh, Lord. Yahweh. His complaint has an address to it. And we ought to see that faith is not the absence of hard questions, but faith knows where to take those hard questions.

Right? I mean, think about it. Habakkuk can ask why God doesn't hear because he knows Yahweh is a God who hears.

It comes with the presupposition of knowledge. God, why don't you hear? Why is he asking that? Habakkuk knows that God hears. He's a hearing helping God.

[13:57] I mean, after all, the exodus began when the nation of Israel was in slavery. And what happened? God heard their groanings. And so Habakkuk can cry out, violence!

Because he knows Yahweh is the God who saves. See, this is so important. Do you see how his anguish grows out of what he knows about God?

His anguish grows out of his theology. This means that there is a kind of doubt that can actually be expressed by faith.

And I believe that some of us have sort of learned to treat our spiritual maturity and our growth in Christ as just using the two words, I'm fine.

Right? I took my dad's advice. I kind of hid away. I'm fine. God's good. Right? But your emotional life says everything that you're everything but fine.

[15:13] Your marriage, the condition of your marriage says you're everything but fine. Right? Don't treat spiritual maturity with the simple words, I'm fine, and add this Christian-y theological vocabulary to it.

Scripture gives us a prophet who says essentially, God, I am not fine with what I am seeing, and I need to know where you are.

A prophet is saying that. That's the point. Be honest with God. Be honest with God, church.

Prayer is where we take confusion. To God. And learn to kneel before him. Habakkuk needs his vision enlarged by God's answer.

And just a primer for next week, his answer isn't going to give us much comfort at all. It's actually just going to make the issue even worse. We'll leave that for next week.

[16:23] But Habakkuk does not stay silent. Instead, he stays in conversation with God. And church, this is one of the greatest differences between lament and unbelief.

Thank you, Carmen, for the great little teaching there. Lament keeps talking to God. It's a continuous conversation with God, born out of our sorrow.

So when injustice exhausts you, when prayer seems unanswered, when God's promises feel miles removed from your circumstances, church, do not let the questions ferment in your heart in isolation.

Do not let them ferment in your heart in isolation. Take that whole burden to God. Address it to God. The one who can make the difference. Who knows what he's doing. Even in the worst hell we can ever experience on this earth. And be confident you are not dishonoring God by pleading with him to be the God he has always revealed himself to be in Scripture.

[17:45] Right? Habakkuk's prayer hurts, yes. It hurts. But because he takes God seriously, that's why it hurts.

And may that translate and contextualize in our own lives, however it may today. The second point I want to reinforce in this is found in verse 4.

If you can click that. Don't write the final sentence of providence too soon. Habakkuk reaches verse 4, and he makes these conclusions.

He says, so. Some say, therefore. It's a conjunction that says, okay, because of all of that, therefore, the law is paralyzed. It's not working.

Justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous. So justice goes forth perverted. Man, we really need to notice something here, church.

[18:51] Habakkuk is, his experience justice is not made up. This isn't just something that, like, situational, just a, he had a flat tire on the way to church.

No. Literally the law, in his day, was being ignored. It seemed paralyzed, quadriplegic, completely paralyzed.

Justice really was being bent. And those entrusted with doing what is right really were producing something crooked instead.

He's not talking about Youngstown in the 70s when the mob controlled the courts and all the systems, right? That's a little inserted joke there. Don't fire me.

But there is a lot of just disorder from God, like, what God has ordered, how God has ordered things within his law is being used to actually cause harm to people.

[20:02] Habakkuk can see corruption in front of him, but he can't see the providence above it. He can't see that. You know, I'm just gonna go with it.

Let's look at next week for a minute. Because I think we need to hear God's response to him. And there's a reason why he can't understand it.

Look in verse five. He says, look among the nations and see, wonder, and be astounded. For I am doing a work in your days that you would not believe believe if told.

That's really jarring. Here in verse four, Habakkuk is asking, God, why? Why aren't you doing anything? And God says, I am doing something that even if I told you, you wouldn't believe me.

What's God doing? Spoiler alert, verse six. For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans. He is raising up the Babylonians.

[21:12] He's raising up the enemy of God. The Babylonians were the worst of the worst.

They're brutal. They're proud. They're violent. Hamas, violent. And Habakkuk wanted God to deal with injustice in Judah.

And what does God do? God announces that he is going to use a nation even more wicked than Judah to judge Judah.

This is the doctrine of providence, the teaching of providence under great pressure.

I think of providence as sort of the storyline of God's will being unfolded progressively through history. And this is just the doctrine of that providence under great pressure.

[22:19] scripture. And it's interesting because God can't employ wicked people. He can't employ them without sharing their wickedness and being identified with their wickedness.

God can govern the actions of evil men without approving of their evil. And the Babylon God that God is using, Yahweh, I'm saying lower G God and upper G God.

Let me just refer to the almighty God as Yahweh here for the sake of clarity. So, even the Babylonian God used in chapter 1 will itself stand under Yahweh's judgments in chapter 2.

We quoted enough Baptist confessions. Let me quote the Westminster Presbyterian Confession for balance. Westminster Confession beautifully describes God's providence that storyline, that unfolding of history according to God's will.

His providence as, quote, most wise and powerful bounding in ordering of sinful actions, quote, to his own holy ends while insisting that God is never the author and he's never the approver of sin.

[23:43] Did you get that? He is the most wise and powerful bounding and ordering of sinful actions, ordering it like pieces on a table.

He's putting things together to his holy ends while insisting that God is never the author or approver of sin. And I think that we also need to be careful here as well.

Because Habakkuk tells us that this particular judgment, this happening in his day right there, right now that he's asking the hows, how longs and the whys, we have to see that that particular suffering coming upon Judah is, in this particular situation, an act of God's judgment against Judah. Judah did something wrong, very wrong. But Habakkuk does not give us permission to look at every single situation of suffering within the chairs of this church or the world around everything. It doesn't give us permission to look at every suffering person and conclude, well, God must be judging them for something. Isn't that our first instinct? That comes to our minds?

[25:01] Like, if I go to the doctor and get something, like, if they find something wrong with my heart, it's like, oh, Lord, what did I do? You know, it's like, I don't know, is that me only?

Or is that kind of like a shared thing? Okay, maybe it's my anxiety speaking. But I feel like that's fairly normal for us if we are sensitive to our relationship with God.

When we experience something in our lives, we say, what did I do? I, dummy Brent did it again, right? Don't amen that.

But we can't look at every suffering person and conclude, God must be judging them for something. He can't. do that.

And know the will of God. The rest of the book won't allow us to do that. The book of Job won't allow you to conclude that. Every single apostle who are martyred for their faith won't allow you to do that.

[26:06] You can't conclude that suffering that you're experiencing is the gift to you because you have sinned.

It's not because of your righteousness or unrighteousness. Sometimes suffering is used in many different ways, as it were for Job, as it were for the apostles, as it was for Paul, who's bound in chains for God's purposes.

You see, suffering may come under God's providence without being God's particular punishment for some particular sin. God tells Tabakkuk why suffering is coming and where God has not spoken church, we should not be slow to pretend that we know the secret purposes of his will and the secret purposes of his suffering.

Self-examination is good, but boy, don't lose sleep over that. In the clearest place that we have ever seen, the clear purpose of his will through suffering is not actually him raising up Babylon, but him raising up Jesus Christ on a cross.

A perfectly righteous man by the name of Jesus is betrayed for chump change, condemned through a corrupt hearing late at night, mocked, beaten, nailed to a cross, and had we stood beneath that bloody ground that lay beneath Jesus suspended upon a cross.

[27:41] If we had stood there on Friday of that day, we would draw many conclusions only from what our eyes are seeing.

we would be thinking justice is dead. What is this? Evil is one.

He's lifeless, shredded to pieces, our Messiah. May we even say God has abandoned that man on the cross and he died for nothing.

And drawing such conclusions, church, we would be wrong about God's sovereignty over wickedness.

You see, the cross doesn't minimize evil, but it proves that evil is never sovereign. It is never the ultimate word.

[28:44] In other words, the greatest injustice in human history became, under God's providence, the means of the greatest salvation in human history.

So, we have to be careful with, I love how I phrase this, we have to be careful with writing the final sentence when God is still writing the paragraph.

Right? We get to that sentence and we're like, period, we're screwed! But we're in the middle of a paragraph. Isn't that good news?

So, be careful about that. Faith does not need to see the whole plan before it trusts in the one who governs the plan. Maybe you're here today and you have distanced yourself from God because at some point, you just could not reconcile the reality that you see around in the world versus the God that you grew up in Sunday school with and VBS and everything and got older and it just got more difficult to reconcile a good God with such wickedness around.

Or maybe the God that you pushed away as a result of your own darkness because if something that happened to your brother or sister when they were really young or happened to yourself like God allowed that wickedness to happen a lot of unbelievers distance themselves from God because on account of that darkness that they have experienced.

[30:34] Before you let the darkness tell you who God is I think your time is better served to look at the cross and see what God has revealed and told you about himself about himself this isn't saying that the horror that has pushed you away from God is small or your experience doesn't matter I'm not trying to minimize people's experience or what happened to you or your brother or sister or whatever have you I'm not trying to discredit any experience but what I am trying to say is that we won't know all the answers in this life as to why bad things are allowed to happen but the cross gave you a clear answer indistinguishable answer because God doesn't just stand at a distance from suffering but in the person of Jesus

Christ he enters into suffering and through the greatest evil that men have committed God accomplished salvation for sinners like you and me and so before you conclude that the darkness disproves God look at what God has done in Jesus Christ that's what truly matters to bring

perspective not to discredit experience in your own darkness but it brings in perspective that God will use darkness to accomplish his purpose and he did that through salvation by the blood and the work of Jesus Christ on the cross by wicked rulers let go of your control over your life embrace Jesus Christ the God of life and you will receive in return eternal life Habakkuk teaches us how to live when we know about

God what we know about God and what we see around us when it seems difficult to reconcile that Habakkuk is teaching us that right now and church I think we need to take that attention to God we need to ask the how long we need to ask God the wise because faith doesn't require us to pretend injustice is less terrible than it is but I think the warning of the passage is this don't let darkness become what you believe about God don't let your darkness become your doctrine of God your theology proper what you know about God bring God your questions but don't presume his answers our field of vision is real but in the scope of history along the span of

God's providence unfolding it is very small it is very small in comparison to the field of vision that God sees providence is larger than what we see in the cross proves that God can govern through the darkest injustice without becoming unjust himself and accomplish salvation where we may only see defeat so church pray honestly watch humbly and wait faithfully let's pray go to to