

HABAKKUK

living by faith

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 1

Read: **Habakkuk 1-3**

Today's assignment is to read all three chapters of the book of Habakkuk for an overview of the book. This will help you understand the smaller sections we'll cover in the coming days.

Background of the book of Habakkuk

The prophecy of Habakkuk reads more like something out of the Psalms rather than something one would find from the Old Testament prophets. The function of a Prophet is to deliver a message from God to their people. Although Habakkuk does indeed have a message for his people, it comes to him through a long series of questions that he asks the Lord. There is no actual address from Habakkuk to his people. Instead, the book records Habakkuk's personal faith journey that becomes instructive for ours.

Habakkuk's name in Hebrew means "embracer" and it is certainly fitting to the life of Habakkuk Himself. As he looks around him, Habakkuk sees the downward spiral of sin and he's perplexed. His question is not *why do the righteous suffer*, but rather, *why do the wicked prosper*. Habakkuk is not afraid to take these questions directly to the Lord and neither should we. However, the answers Habakkuk receives from the Lord initially led him to even greater confusion. The book concludes with Habakkuk embracing the Lord's sovereignty and resting with a peace that can only come by faith in the living God who not only has matters in his hands but also has his people's best interests in mind.

Chronologically, the book of Habakkuk falls somewhere between the death of King Josiah in Judah and the rise of Babylon as a major world power. The historical context for King Josiah's reign is found in 2 Kings 22 and 23. Jeremiah wrestled with similar questions as Habakkuk in Jeremiah chapter 12. At this point, Babylon is not yet a dominant world power, so it is likely that contextually the book of Habakkuk falls within the same timeframe as Jeremiah 12. Accepting Babylonian captivity as the discipling hand of God is a major theme in Jeremiah's prophecy just as it is with Habakkuk.

As such, the struggles of these two prophets serve as a living illustration of what it means to walk by faith. It is a comparison-contrast to the prideful and the humble that Habakkuk addresses in Habakkuk 2:4. The prideful live with a “puffed up” soul. The righteous, on the other hand, “shall live by his faith.” This concept is foundational to our understanding of the gospel. Habakkuk 2:4 is quoted at least three times in the New Testament. It is first quoted in Romans 1:17 to describe the gospel revealing a righteousness of God “from faith for faith.” In other words, in Christ, we are the believing who believe by faith and by faith keep on believing. Habakkuk 2:4 is quoted again in Galatians 3:11 and Hebrews 10:38, confirming that without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6).

The following reading guide is designed to help you grow in your understanding of this wonderful, short book of the Old Testament. For the next three weeks, Charis Community Church will be going through a sermon series through Habakkuk titled “*Living by Faith*.” Our hope is that by following the short readings in this guide each day this week, you’ll come to church on Sunday better prepared to understand and know God’s word by interacting with the passage before the sermon on Sunday morning.

Each day, there is a passage from the book of Habakkuk to read, followed by a brief devotional for that day’s reading. Finally, there are challenging questions to guide you in your thinking and application of the passage you’ve read for that day. I’m excited for our Charis church family to dive into this wonderful book of the Old Testament.

- **Pastor Craig Stimpert**

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 2

Read: **Habakkuk 1:1**

Habakkuk 1:1 opens with “*The oracle that Habakkuk the prophet saw.*” Some translations of the Bible say “message” or “prophecy,” but perhaps the best translation of this verse is in the King James translation of the Bible with its use of the word “burden.”

An oracle is a burdensome message or a pronouncement from God. It conveys not only what God is going to do, but more importantly what’s on God’s heart. In the case of Habakkuk, the Lord is causing Habakkuk’s heart to break for the things that break God’s.

Habakkuk’s burden first begins with his observation of the sinful condition of his people. In the eyes of the Lord, sin demands justice. This is confirmed throughout the Scriptures through the concept of atonement. Habakkuk’s cry in the opening chapter is for God to do something about his people’s sin. Instead of justice being delivered, what Habakkuk sees is wicked people

prospering. This leads to considerable confusion for Habakkuk and thus the questions he asks the Lord that are recorded in this book.

The Lord's answers to Habakkuk's questions lead to even more questions for Habakkuk, but the end result of Habakkuk's perplexities is a burden for his people to know the Lord and understand his will. So much so that Habakkuk issues his message in the form of a burden or oracle recorded in the very first verse of the book that bears his name.

Habakkuk is greatly burdened for his people and as he brings this burden directly to God, he discovers a God who daily bears his burden (Psalm 68:19). Our challenge is to make God's burden for his people, our burden, and then to give it back to the Lord and let him do the heavy lifting through us.

CHALLENGE QUESTIONS

- What burden has the Lord placed on your heart?
- What keeps you awake at night?
- What is your longest unanswered prayer?

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 3

Read: **Habakkuk 1:2-4**

Today's reading records the first of Habakkuk's questions to the Lord. In summary, what Habakkuk is asking is why does God allow wicked people to prosper in Judah? Habakkuk cries out to the Lord for help in verse 2 and his misperception is that the Lord does not hear.

Twice in this passage, Habakkuk uses the word "violence" to describe the condition of his people. This is a familiar Hebrew word that we know as Hamas. This is not just a terrorist organization as we know it in our contemporary context. Rather, it is a Biblical term to describe physical violence against other people. It is first used in Genesis 6:11, "*Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence.*" Genesis 6 records an increasing corruption on earth through violence or Hamas. In Genesis 6, God does act through a universal flood to judge the earth for its sin. But, Noah and his family are spared. It is through Noah and his descendants that God will establish his covenant (Genesis 6:18) by rescuing them in an ark.

Habakkuk stands in the place of Noah among his people. He's burdened for God to act, but at this point in his prophecy, he's more confused than comforted. Where is God in all of this?

And, where is Habakkuk's fortress of protection that Noah had in the ark? Habakkuk even mourns the fact that the Lord makes him see iniquity. He wrongly believes in verse 3 that God just idly looks the other way. As a result, Habakkuk sees the law of God being "*paralyzed.*" "*Justice never goes forth.*" The wicked continue to prosper and in Habakkuk's eyes justice is "*perverted.*"

God will respond to Habakkuk's questions and confusion, but for today, put yourself in Habakkuk's shoes:

CHALLENGE QUESTIONS

- If you could ask God just one question, what would it be?
- Where do you see justice being perverted, never going forth?
- In what ways do you feel God's word has been paralyzed?

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 4

Read: **Habakkuk 1:5-11**

Today's reading is God's answer to the questions Habakkuk posed in verses 2-4 of chapter 1. In verse 5, the Lord asks Habakkuk to do four things: "*Look*", "*see*," "*wonder*" and "*be astounded.*" God is doing something unbelievable and Habakkuk is about to hear what it is.

God is raising up the *Chaldeans* in order to punish Habakkuk's people for their sins. The *Chaldeans* are also known as the Babylonians. The prophet Jeremiah often referred to them as "a people from the north."

In Habakkuk 1:6-11, the Lord addresses what kind of people the Chaldeans or Babylonians are:

- They are a "*bitter and hasty nation, who march through the breadth of the earth, to seize dwellings not their own*" (vs. 6)
- "*They are dreaded and fearsome;*" The Babylonians are a law to themselves. "*their justice and dignity go forth from themselves*" (vs. 7). They answer to no one.
- They are an unstoppable military force, defeating anyone who stands in their way, "*Their horses are swifter than leopards, more fierce than the evening wolves; their horsemen press proudly on. Their horsemen come from afar; they fly like an eagle swift to devour*" (vs. 8).

- They are full of “*violence*,” the very thing Habakkuk decried of his own people in verses 2 and 3. “*They gather captives like sand*” (vs. 9).
- They are an intimidating military force. They “*scoff*” and “*laugh*” at “*kings*” and “*rulers*.” No one is able to withstand their power (vs. 10).
- They are a prideful people who care not about the destruction they leave behind. “*they sweep by like the wind and go on*,” their “*own might is their god!*” (vs. 11).

What God is asking Habakkuk to “*look*,” “*see*,” “*wonder*” and “*be astounded*” over is not a pretty picture. It is worse violence than what Habakkuk has seen from his own people. It is perplexing, to say the least, and as we’ll see as we read on in this book, it causes Habakkuk to question God even more. All of this should cause us to look, see, wonder, and be astounded at what God is doing in our day. Where we see things as running amok, we need to look further and see a God who is in control and not be surprised. Our God is a God of order, not confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33) and that should cause us to stand in awe of him as it does Habakkuk. We don’t have to understand every single mystery of God’s will, but we should stand in awe of the things we understand of God as well as the things we don’t understand of him. The enormity of what we don’t understand should make God greater in our eyes, not less.

CHALLENGE QUESTIONS

- What do you think God is asking you to look, see, wonder, and be astounded over?
- What is the least likely thing you would expect God to do?
- What would your reaction be if God were to reveal that to you?
- What are some things that you’ve dismissed as being out of God’s hands that in reality, God allows? How might God be using those things in your lives and in the lives of your fellow brothers and sisters in Christ?

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 5

Read: **Habakkuk 1:12 – 17**

The Lord answers Habakkuk’s second set of questions in verses 12 through 17 of chapter 1. The questions Habakkuk asked in verses 2-4 could best be summarized as *why don’t you do*

something, God? The Lord answers in verses 5 through 11, and his answer is rather unbelievable. God is raising up the Chaldeans, or Babylonians, a wicked and evil nation, to discipline Judah for its sin.

God's answer leads to even more questions for Habakkuk beginning in Habakkuk 1:12. As you'll notice in your reading, these are some pretty bold questions on Habakkuk's part. They are very accusatory.

What we see in this passage, is the answers we receive from God are really a matter of the posture we assume before we ask the questions. Verse 12 shows us Habakkuk's posture. He begins with an acknowledgment that he is in a personal relationship with God. He knows God and as such, he's comfortable enough to ask God the difficult questions that he's wrestling with. Habakkuk describes the Lord as "*my God, my Holy one.*" When Habakkuk says, "*We shall not die,*" he is acknowledging God's character as a covenant-keeping God. Habakkuk understands that God will not abandon his promises to his people.

Habakkuk resolves that God answers to no one. He's free to do as he pleases, "*O Lord you have ordained them as a judgment, and you O Rock, have established them for reproof*" (vs. 12).

Nonetheless, Habakkuk comes before God with a heavy heart with questions that need answers. There's a lot to extrapolate from Habakkuk's statement in verse 13:

*You who are of purer eyes than to see evil
and cannot look at wrong,
why do you idly look at traitors
and remain silent when the wicked swallows up
the man more righteous than he?*

Habakkuk understood well that the people of Judah deserved judgment for their sin. The book begins with Habakkuk asking God to deliver it. But, God's use of the Babylonians, a people more sinful than the people of Judah is more than Habakkuk can comprehend. Habakkuk calls them "*traitors*" in verse 13.

Habakkuk reasons, beginning in verse 14, that if God will allow the evil actions of the Babylonians to judge his own people, then he also has to be responsible for the outcome. Habakkuk compares God to a fisherman catching helpless fish. Babylon is compared to a net that catches these fish and in Habakkuk's eyes, God takes great pleasure in the process. "*Is he then to keep emptying his net and mercilessly killing nations forever?*" (vs. 17).

Obviously, Habakkuk has a lot to learn about God and what God will do through the Babylonians to address the sin of the people of Judah. Yet, if we're honest with ourselves, Habakkuk's not

afraid to ask the questions that we're often too afraid to ask ourselves. This is a good place to stop and meditate on some of our difficult questions.

CHALLENGE QUESTIONS

- What are some things you think about God that you know aren't true? What are some things you resent about God that you'd be afraid to have a conversation with God about?
- Reread verse 12. Do you have the confidence in your relationship with God to know that you're safe to ask God the types of questions Habakkuk asks? Read Romans 8:1.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 6

Read: **Habakkuk 2:1**

Today's reading is very short, just one verse, however, it's a very important verse that we must not gloss over. It is the concluding verse of Habakkuk's second set of questions. This section started in 1:12 with Habakkuk's questioning of God. His questions began with Habakkuk assuming a correct posture before God. This round of questioning ends, the same way, by Habakkuk, assuming a posture of humility, yet great expectation before God. Habakkuk understands two very important things of one who would question God. First, he has a responsibility to his people as God's messenger, and secondly, he anticipates an answer from God.

Habakkuk is not the first prophet to stand at a watchpost or to see himself as a watchman. Isaiah spoke of watchmen on the walls of Jerusalem in Isaiah 62:6. The watchmen Isaiah spoke of were false prophets as we see in Isaiah 56:10, "*they are blind, without knowledge,*" delivering a message that is not from God. This comes from false prophets who are not willing to wait on the Lord for the message he has for them to deliver. Instead, they presume to know what it is. Often it suits their own passions and the desires of the people to whom they should deliver it. They tell people what they want to hear rather than what they need to hear.

But, that's not Habakkuk. In 2:1 he takes his stand at his watchpost, looking and waiting to see and hear what God will answer to him from his complaint or petition of 1:12 – 17. In this posture, Habakkuk is more like Ezekiel whom God called throughout his prophesy to be a watchman over the house of Israel. "*So you, son of man, I have made a watchman for the*

house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me" (Ezekiel 33:7). This role comes with great responsibilities. If the watchman does not sound the warning, then the watchman is derelict in his duties as God's spokesman. Though the wicked person will die in his sin, the watchman's blood will be required of him for forsaking his responsibilities to warn (Ezekiel 33:6). Habakkuk senses that responsibility, but he wants to make sure he hears correctly from God. It's a heavy burden God's prophets bear.

The second thing in 2:1 that Habakkuk understands is that those who call upon the Lord can expect an answer if they are patient enough to wait for it and not presume as the watchmen in Isaiah did. The Lord spoke to Jeremiah in Jeremiah 33:3, *"Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known."* Habakkuk has taken God up on his invitation and now he waits for the answer.

All of this is part of a faith journey that is such a prominent theme throughout the book of Habakkuk. This journey is not void of the really hard questions our Lord invites us to ask. In fact, it's what faith is all about. Habakkuk trusts that God has answers for the things he does not understand.

Hebrews 11:6 says, *"And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him."* Habakkuk has come to the Lord in faith, expecting an answer. Now he waits as God's watchman.

In the blank cover pages of an old Bible of mine, I wrote this quote, not sure where I got it: *"God is on the lookout for a man who will be quiet enough to get a message from Him, brave enough to preach it and honest enough to live it."* The prophets of the Old Testament are such men and Habakkuk is no exception.

CHALLENGE QUESTIONS

- What are you waiting on God to answer?
- What things have you kept from God out of fear over how he might answer?

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 8

Read: **Habakkuk 2:2-3**

How we receive the Word of God tells a lot about our faith. In today's reading we see that faith is not an abstract idea, but an active participation in what God is doing. Habakkuk positioned himself as a watchman in Habakkuk 2: 1, eagerly anticipating God to answer his complaint. Today, the Lord answers.

What a wonderful opening in verse 2, *"And the Lord answered me."* Our God takes great delight in answering the prayers of his people. This is a call for us to pray boldly, even daringly to our God. He stands ready to answer as he did with Habakkuk.

In verse 2, Habakkuk is to write the answer or vision on stone tablets, making it plain to read and preparing it for a herald to run with the message. There are two very important points the Lord is communicating to Habakkuk in this verse, both addressing his faith. First, is the clarity of God's message. God does not mumble when he speaks. Habakkuk is to *"make it plain"* so that whoever reads it will understand it. Secondly, there is an urgency to this message. Those who read it are to run with it as a herald to others, warning them of what is to come.

God's answer to Habakkuk will need to be preserved because *"the vision awaits its appointed time"* (vs. 3). Yet God is true to his word. If the fulfillment of God's word seems to be delayed, *"wait for it; it will surely come; it will not delay."* Again, this has everything to do with Habakkuk's faith. He does not presume upon God's message, nor the timing of its fulfillment.

Habakkuk does not rejoice in the way God answered his petition. It's not the answer he hoped for or wanted. Instead, Habakkuk rejoices in a God who speaks. Habakkuk's God is our God. Brothers and sisters, let this faith be your foundation, this hope your liberation. He is there and he is not silent.

CHALLENGE QUESTIONS

- In what ways is God's word unclear to you and how have you sought to *"make it plain"*?
- How have you "run" with God's word, with a sense of urgency to share his message with others?
- What is a prayer of yours that remains unanswered?

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 9

Read: **Habakkuk 2:4-5**

Habakkuk 2: 4 is one of the most important verses in the Bible. It is foundational to our understanding of justification by faith which is why it is quoted three different times in the New Testament to help us understand the gospel (Romans 1: 17, Galatians 3: 11, Hebrews 10: 38). As with all matters pertaining to the study of Scripture, context determines meaning.

Habakkuk 2: 4 is first of all a comparison contrast of a righteous man and an unrighteous man. Habakkuk is trying to come to terms with why and how God will use a wicked nation (Babylon) to judge and discipline his own people. Sure, Habakkuk's people have sinned and are deserving of judgment. But, God using the wicked Babylonians as his hand of discipline against them is more than Habakkuk can comprehend. God speaks to this tension beginning in verse 4.

The Babylonians are the ones with a "puffed up" soul. But, in a broader context, this also applies to Habakkuk's own people who have abandoned God's law. Their sin is, after all, what brought about Habakkuk's oracle in the first place. It's hard to see your own sin when you're focused on the sins of others. With God, there is no hierarchy of sin. What God is saying in verse 4 is that the sin, pride, and self-sufficiency of Habakkuk's people is just as offensive to God as that of the Babylonians.

Specifically, they've become a law to themselves. They've walked away from God's law, his prophets and have prospered on their own without God. They have in effect formed a "righteousness" of their own that is apart from God. They are self-righteous, self-sufficient, and full of pride. In God's eyes, their soul is "not upright within." But, a righteous person lives by faith.

Over 500 years ago, a German monk named Martin Luther dared to ask what this means? His answer did not come from Habakkuk 2: 4, but from one of the places where this verse is quoted in the New Testament in Romans 1: 17. The power of the gospel spoken of in Romans 1: 16 is in direct contradiction to the power of man. Luther had exhausted his efforts in obtaining peace with God through his own efforts and few have tried as hard as he did. Luther came to understand through his study of the book of Romans that faith is a divine work in us. It changes us and causes us to be born again to a living hope (1 Peter 1: 3). Luther said, "*Faith is a living, daring confidence in God's grace, so sure and certain that a man would stake his life on it a thousand times.*"¹

Luther did just that. Since he could not obtain righteousness with God on his own merits, he repented of his sin and received the righteousness of God that is through faith in the finished work of Christ on the cross, who paid the price for our sin. Romans 1: 17 describes this as "*the righteousness of God, revealed from faith for faith.*" Habakkuk 2: 4 reminds us that though we

¹ Luther, *Commentary on Romans*, Introduction xvii.

have a fuller revelation of it in Christ than Habakkuk did, it has always been this way, *“the righteous shall live by his faith.”*

Habakkuk 2: 5 illustrates this point even more. The pride and self-sufficiency of a self-righteous person are intoxicatingly deceptive, compared to a man drunk on wine. It is *“an arrogant man who is never at rest.”* Though rich in pride and power, it will not save.

Praise God that since we could not save ourselves on our own merits, God saved us and gives us a righteousness, not of our own making, but a righteousness from *“faith, for faith”* imputed in us and received by faith in the finished work of Christ.

CHALLENGE QUESTIONS

- In what ways are you self-righteous? What do you put your hope in other than the finished work of Christ?
- Romans 1: 17 speaks of this righteousness by faith as one that is *“from faith for faith.”* How are you growing in your understanding of the gospel?
- How is Habakkuk 2:4 good news to you?

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 10

Read: **Habakkuk 2:6-8**

One of the things Habakkuk could not understand is why would God allow a wicked nation like Babylon to be the instrument of discipline against his people. Beginning in verse 6 of chapter 2, God answers Habakkuk’s conundrum. Though God will use Babylon to discipline Habakkuk’s people, the sin of the Babylonians will not go unaddressed. God takes our sin very seriously and he addresses the sin of the Babylonians in Habakkuk 2, through a series of five *“Woe”* statements. This is a very common pattern in Scripture of addressing sin.

Today’s reading in verses 6 through 8 is the first woe and it pertains to Babylon’s sin of plundering other nations. The message is clear. Those like Babylon who plunder other nations will themselves be plundered. But, there’s much more to these three verses than just the takeover of other nations and the resulting retribution from God. What’s really at stake here is the Biblical concept of just measure.

In Deuteronomy 25: 15, God commanded Israel, *“A full and fair weight you shall have, a full and fair measure you shall have, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.”* This is more than an accurate scale or balance. It is about treating people fairly, not lording power over another or placing unrealistic demands or expectations on other people.

It's what the Babylonians did with their subjects and in effect, it's what Habakkuk's people did to others as well. It is enslavement and it goes against the Law of God.

In the Bible, we know this as the Golden Rule, based on the words of Jesus, "*So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law of the Prophets*" (Matthew 7:12).

The Babylonians will get what's coming to them. But, on this side of the Cross, we look to our Savior Jesus and his example:

²² He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. ²³ When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. ²⁴ He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. ²⁵ For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. (1 Peter 2: 22 -25).

CHALLENGE QUESTIONS

- In what ways have you held to a different standard of justice of others than what you'd expect of yourself?
- What are some resentments you harbor toward others and how does the example of Jesus in 1 Peter 2 speak to that sin?
- What are some examples of you turning your grievances of others over to God and how did he answer?

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 11

Read: **Habakkuk 2:9-11**

The second woe God issues to the Babylonians in Habakkuk 2: 9 -11 is similar to the first woe in verses 6 - 8. It concerns the acquisition of wealth by unjust gain: "*Woe to him who gets evil gain for his house.*" The wealth and power of the Babylonians came at the expense of others. They had "*set their nest on high,*" seeing themselves and what they had built or accomplished as being impenetrable, "*safe from the reach of harm*" (vs. 9).

God pronounces woe on all of this. "*You have devised shame on your house by cutting off many peoples*" (vs. 10). The end result is deadly. It will all come crashing down: "*For the stone will cry out from the wall, and the beam from the woodwork respond.*"

This is a good place to stop and contemplate our Lord Jesus' question to us in Mark 8: 36: *"For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?"*

CHALLENGE QUESTIONS

- What is your most valued personal possession?
- What is something that you owned that was taken away from you? How do you feel after losing it?
- What is something that you cling too tightly to that you need to give up?

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 12

Read: **Habakkuk 2:12-14**

In order to understand the third woe against the Babylonians in Habakkuk 2: 12- 14, we need to read Proverbs 14: 34: *"Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people."*

Babylon was a nation built on bloodshed, iniquity, and unrighteousness. We know from the book of Daniel that King Nebuchadnezzar was an ambitious builder. Much of it was built by the forced labor of subjugated people. In Daniel 4: 30, Nebuchadnezzar says, *"Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?"* Such bold assertions are a direct offense against a holy God and sadly not much has changed in people's attitudes since Nebuchadnezzar's time.

Habakkuk 2: 12 pronounces woe for building *"a town with blood"* and a city *"on iniquity."* The end result of this labor is that it's going to burn (vs. 13). Indeed, everything we own or work for is temporary. Back in 2017, Kevin Rogers and I went to Houston, Texas to help with Hurricane Harvey recovery efforts. We saw firsthand everything people had becoming nothing more than a heap of rubble in their front yard, destroyed by the floodwaters. While that's not necessarily the direct result of sin or rebellion against God, it nonetheless does illustrate the temporariness of what we build here on earth.

God has a more beautiful plan of restoration in Habakkuk 2: 14: *"For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea."* God is leading us to a beautiful place, a place where present trials, suffering, and sadness are not worthy to be compared to the glory that awaits us (Romans 8: 18). It's a place where every tear will be wiped away and *"death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away"* (Revelation 21: 4). Best of all God is in this place and his presence will never depart. We will safely be in his care forever, filled *"with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea."*

CHALLENGE QUESTIONS

- Where is the most beautiful place you've ever been? How do you compare that to the future glory of heaven?
- How do you long for heaven?
- What things hinder your desire for heaven?

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 13

Read: **Habakkuk 2:15-17**

Today in the fourth woe against Babylon we see the utter disrespect for God's creation by the Babylonians. This is seen on two fronts. The first is toward their fellow human beings or in the case of the Babylonians, their subjects.

God compares the Babylonian's treatment of their subjects to a man who gets his neighbor drunk in order to take advantage of him (vs. 15). This highlights the Babylonian's complete disregard for humanity by exposing people in their most vulnerable position, *"to gaze at their nakedness!"* By doing so, the Babylonians are showing their own *"uncircumcision!"* This is God's way of highlighting their detachment of the things of God, or his covenant people. As with the other woes directed to the Babylonians in Habakkuk 2, they will face divine retribution for their actions, *"The cup of the Lord's right hand will come around to you, and utter shame will come upon your glory"* (vs. 16).

The second display of disrespect is toward the environment in verse 17. Judah was not the only nation to suffer in Babylon's wake. In verse 17 the reference is to Lebanon, known for its cedar trees. Solomon used them to build his temple in 1 Kings 10. Throughout the Scriptures, they are not only a symbol of beauty but strength and power of the nations who build with their wood. The cedar is also used for healing and purification, preparing the water of separation to purify leprosy in Leviticus 14. In the wake of Babylonian destruction, Lebanon was ravaged. The Lord uses the word *"violence"* or in Hebrew, *"hamas"* to describe what was done. This is the same word Habakkuk used to describe the actions of his own people in 1: 2 and 1: 4, only in chapter 1 the reference is to violence against other people. In Habakkuk 2: 17 it is violence against God's creation.

All of it is in stark contrast to the cultural mandate of Genesis 1: 28. More than reproduction is in mind in this command. God placed Adam and Eve in the garden commanding them to “*work it and keep it*” (Genesis 2: 15). The idea in the Hebrew is to worship and obey. Through the raw nature of plants, animals, soil, and rocks, man was to produce the processes and products of their culture and livelihood. The Babylonians violated this decree by robbing their subjects of such opportunity by destroying their environment.

All of this will eventually “*overwhelm*” the Babylonians. It will not escape the righteous indignation of Holy God.

CHALLENGE QUESTIONS

- What does it look like for you to be an environmentally conscious Christian?
- In what ways have you disrespected God’s creation, both fellow human beings and the environment?

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 14

Read: **Habakkuk 2:18-20**

The Lord completes his series of woes against the Babylonians in Habakkuk 2: 18 - 20 by highlighting the foolishness of idolatry. These verses are a comparison contrast of false worship of a false God to true worship of the one true God.

Habakkuk is certainly not the first prophet to focus on the utter folly of trusting an idol fashioned by the hands of man. Isaiah 44: 18 speaks of those involved in this process as not knowing, “*nor do they discern, for he has shut their eyes, so that they cannot see, and their hearts, so that they cannot understand.*” This verse comes after a long detailed description of the process in Isaiah 44: 9 – 17. Jeremiah compared the worship of a wooden idol to a scarecrow in a cucumber field (Jeremiah 10: 5). Habakkuk follows suit with the question, “*What profit is an idol when its maker has shaped it, a metal image, a teacher of lies?*”

But, these and other passages of Scripture that highlight the stupidity of this practice are not enough to stop our propensity toward it. The possibilities of our following after it are endless. Habakkuk makes clear idolatry is not limited to wooden or metal images. It is anything fashioned by man whereby he “*trusts his own creation*” (vs. 18).

In stark contrast, *the lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him*” (vs. 20).

CHALLENGE QUESTIONS

- What is something you have done or made that you are most proud of?
- What steps have you taken to keep it from being an idol in your life?
- What does it look like for you to “*keep silence*” before God?

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 15

Read: **Habakkuk 3:1-2**

Our relationship with God is grounded in the truth of God’s word. God gave the prophet Habakkuk a vision in chapter 2 that was in response to Habakkuk’s prayers in chapter one. Today in our reading of Habakkuk 3: 1-2, Habakkuk responds to the Lord in prayer to what he knows to be true of God. He opens his prayer by stating, “*O Lord, I have heard the report of you, and your work, O Lord, do I fear.*”

Specifically, Habakkuk is responding to the vision the Lord revealed to him beginning in 2:2. The prayer in chapter 3 is Habakkuk’s response to that specific vision. But, it’s clear from these opening verses of chapter 3, that Habakkuk is also reflecting on the previous knowledge he had of the Lord and his work prior to the vision he received in chapter 2. This comes from a grounded understanding of God’s word. Moreover, it’s important to note that as God gave Habakkuk a vision in chapter 2, that vision came with instructions from God for Habakkuk to preserve God’s revelation “*write the vision*” and to “*make it plain on tablets so he may run who reads it*” (2: 2). You’re reading it today due to Habakkuk’s obedience. Implicit in these instructions is the idea of knowing and obeying God through his word.

Habakkuk’s response in chapter 3 is one of fear (vs. 2), but he also expresses a strong desire for the Lord to “*revive*” and “*make known*” his work in Habakkuk’s lifetime (“*in the midst of the years*”). As we know God’s word, we should desire and pray like Habakkuk to see the fulfillment of God’s promises in our lifetime.

Habakkuk understood that God is not an unhinged moral monster, “*in wrath remember mercy.*” While God is more than the sum total of his attributes, he is perfectly balanced in his attributes. We never have to worry about God doing something contradictory to one of his attributes. God’s attributes (wrath tempered in mercy) exist in harmony with each other.

CHALLENGE QUESTIONS

- What attribute of God do you marvel at the most?

- What attribute of God do you struggle with the most and how is that tempered by other attributes of God (“*in wrath remember mercy*”)?
- What promises of God do you long for God to fulfill in your lifetime?

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 16

Read: **Habakkuk 3:3-6**

There are two important geographical locations mentioned in Habakkuk 3: 3 that could use some explanation in order to better understand Habakkuk’s prayer in chapter 3. They are Teman and Mount Paran.

Teman is a city in the land of Edom. The Edomites are descendants of Esau and Teman is named after Esau’s grandson. The Edomites have a long history in the Old Testament of being perpetual enemies of Israel. Mount Paran is a mountain range southwest of Edom. It is northeast of Mount Zion, the central hub of worship in Israel where the temple of God is located. Teman and Mount Paran are juxtaposed to Israel in these verses. They represent Habakkuk “making plain” the vision God gave him in chapter 2. God is on the march in this vision and no one will withstand his judgment in the day and hour of his coming, not only Israel’s enemies, but Israel itself.

Habakkuk describes God as “*the Holy one*” His splendor “*covers the heavens and the earth is full of his praise.*” Verse four continues the theme of God’s holiness, “*His brightness was like the light; rays flashed from his hand; and there he veiled his power.*”

Yet, this display of holiness is shrouded in judgment, “*Before him went pestilence, and plague followed at his heels. He stood and measured the earth; he looked and shook the nations; then the eternal mountains were scattered; the everlasting hills sank low. His were the everlasting ways.*”

These verses portray the holiness of God displayed in his judgment of sin. We often don’t make the connection. In light of the sin of Judah, God has no choice in administering judgment due to his own holiness. Our sin is an insult to God’s holiness. God is too holy to tolerate it.

CHALLENGE QUESTIONS

- How would you describe God’s holiness?
- Does God’s holiness speak to your sin?

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 17

Read: **Habakkuk 3:7-15**

Two more geographic locations are mentioned in today's reading, "*the tents of Cushan*" and "*the land of Midian*." The people of Cushan are nomadic. That's why Habakkuk refers to their tents. Moses married a Cushite woman (Numbers 12: 1-10. In the Numbers passage, Moses' wife is described as a daughter of the priest of Midian. The idea of these geographic locations mentioned in Habakkuk 3 is the widespread panic that seized the neighboring nations the Israelites passed. God is passing by them too in his march of judgment. Again, no one will escape his righteous indignation.

All creation will be affected by it. Verses 8 through 11 speak with respect to the rivers, the sea, the mountains, and raging waters all giving voice to what God is doing. This is the judgment of God, but it's more. It is God fighting for the "*salvation of his people; the salvation of his anointed*" (vs. 13). God is purifying his people through judgment. We often look at God's judgment, in the Old Testament in particular, as God being against his people. It's important to note that God is against his people's sin, not them personally. God is jealous for his people (Exodus 20: 5).

Some thoughts on all of this from other places in Scripture. First with respect to all of nature speaking out about God's judgment, consider Jesus' words in Luke 19: 40: "*I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out.*" God inhabits the praise of his people (Psalm 22: 3).

Finally when we're tempted to think that God is against us rather than him being against our sin, consider Romans 8: 31, "*If God is for us, who can be against us?*"

CHALLENGE QUESTIONS

- How does nature testify to the greatness, glory, and judgment of God?
- Do you think of God being for you or against you?

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 18

Read: **Habakkuk 3:16**

Habakkuk 3: 16 records Habakkuk's reaction to God's impending judgment upon his people that will be administered by the Babylonians. It causes Habakkuk's body to tremble. His lips quiver, rottenness enters into his bones and his legs tremble.

More than fear of God's wrath is going on in this verse. This verse describes Habakkuk's interaction with the word of God. This is not a casual reading of the Scriptures. Habakkuk's whole physical being changed by the vision God gave him. In worship, Habakkuk resolves to *"quietly wait for the day of trouble to come upon people who invade us."* This is a posture that we need to imitate from Habakkuk. God's word is what changes us and the book of Habakkuk reveals a life that's been changed. Habakkuk is a different man in chapter 3 than what he was in chapter 1. It's important to note, his circumstances are far worse in chapter 3 than what they were in chapter 1. Habakkuk has been given a vision of what lies ahead and it's not good. It's far worse than what he thought it was. Yet he will wait in worship.

The book of Isaiah ends with these challenging words: *"Thus says the Lord; Heaven is my throne, earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest? All these things my hand has made, and so all these things came to be, declares the Lord. But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word."*

Habakkuk models for us what that looks like.

CHALLENGE QUESTIONS

- What do you fear most and how can your fear be an act of worship as it was with Habakkuk?
- What is a recent example of the Word of God causing your whole body to tremble?

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 19

Read: **Habakkuk 3:17-19**

Today's reading concludes the book of Habakkuk and it is one of the most beloved passages of the Old Testament. It's Habakkuk's benediction to the prayer he started in 3: 1. The last line of the book indicates that today's passage is to be sung in worship to God, *"to the choirmaster: with stringed instruments."* For those of us less musically inclined, what we read should lead us to stand in worship, in absolute awe of our God.

Throughout this book, Habakkuk dares to come before God with really difficult questions. For Habakkuk, nothing is off-limits and the best part is: God answers. Habakkuk begins his encounter with God in worry. Today he concludes with worship. Habakkuk has stopped to consider the worst possible case scenario in his life and what that will mean to his worship of God should it happen.

What if the fig tree won't blossom? What if there's no fruit on the vines? What if the olive crop fails? What if the fields yield no food? What if the flocks are cut off from the fold? What if there is no heard in the stalls? For Habakkuk, these are more than "what if" scenarios. This is real life. We know from other places in the Old Testament that King Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians were quite destructive in their treatment not only of their subjects but their lands. Jeremiah witnessed this destruction first hand in the book of Lamentations. All of this is very real for Habakkuk. This is his future.

Yet despite all of this, Habakkuk resolves in verse 18, *"yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will take joy in the God of my salvation."* This verse has astounded me for years. It's confirmation that absolutely nothing in our lives can or should rob us of the joy of our Savior. This truth comes from a strong resolve through our faith that's best seen in Habakkuk 2: 1 with Habakkuk's waiting on the Lord. He's taken his stand at his watchpost and stationed himself on his tower. These are military terms for a soldier going into battle refusing to turn back. For Habakkuk, they're spiritual disciplines that have helped him to grow in his love for the Lord.

"God is his strength." Habakkuk compares this to the feet of a deer who is able to tread on high places. If you've ever seen a deer in the woods, you know what Habakkuk is talking about. A deer gracefully and powerfully jumps through all kinds of landscapes that seem impossible for us to get through.

Brothers and sisters, that strength is available to us. Rejoice in the Lord, take joy in the God of your salvation.

CHALLENGE QUESTIONS

- What's the worst possible thing that could happen to you and how would you respond to the Lord if that would happen?
- How has the Lord sustained and strengthened you in difficult circumstances?
- Have you seen a deer run or jump over high places? How does that imagery relate to your experience with God?