

A Faith Where It Counts

Do you ever get tired of the decadence and injustice that surrounds you?

This is the first question Dr. Ellis asked in his introduction of Habakkuk 1:1-7, in which Habakkuk, an “urban pastoral prophet” of the 6th-7th century BC, speaks to God on behalf of His people, in the midst of injustice and evildoing.

Habakkuk 1:1-7

1 The oracle that Habakkuk the prophet saw.

Habakkuk's Complaint

2 O Lord, how long shall I cry for help,
and you will not hear?
Or cry to you “Violence!”
and you will not save?

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.

4 So the law is paralyzed,
and justice never goes forth.
For the wicked surround the righteous;
so justice goes forth perverted.

The Lord's Answer

5 “Look among the nations, and see;
wonder and be astounded.
For I am doing a work in your days
that you would not believe if told.

6 For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans,
that bitter and hasty nation,
who march through the breadth of the earth,
to seize dwellings not their own.

7 They are dreaded and fearsome;
their justice and dignity go forth from themselves.

This passage is broken down into two main components:

I. Habakkuk complains to the Lord (vv. 1-4)

- Habakkuk’s heart was broken over the decay of righteousness and religion.
- Habakkuk looked to the Lord for help during this time. His questions included: the urgent description of need and the sustained appeal for deliverance.
- Habakkuk struggled with the principle of justice and of evil. Lawlessness and violence had run amuck in Israel and had taken over the very institutions ordained by God to keep them in check. This is a classic story of government and religious corruption.
- Although Habakkuk knew that only God could help, God’s intervention had not yet come. Habakkuk’s faith was being stretched to the limit.
- Habakkuk was personally confronted by the corruption (v. 3).
- Evildoers had the faithful pinned down, boxed in, discouraged. Enemies were not pagans, but circumcised, fellow Jews (read: professed Bible-believing, evangelical Christians)
- Habakkuk is having theological problems: God does not listen, He does not save. In these circumstances it is normal to, as he does, ask the question, “How long?” (v. 2).

- Habakkuk was upset over the crisis of violence. The leaders of Israel were guilty of flagrant violations of basic ethics, which led to the breakdown of society in general and physical brutality in particular.
- Habakkuk cried for deliverance of oppression. His dialogue with God is full of the tension of unanswered prayer.

II. God's response (vv. 5-7)

- We know that: 1. God will not allow His name to be un-vindicated and 2. If you are in Christ, God has called you by His name. Therefore, for His name's sake, you will be vindicated.
- When we don't see God respond quickly, it is easy to think that He tolerates evil. But we know this is not true.
- For perpetrators of injustice and oppression, justice involves the application of the legal consequences of their actions and omissions. When God says an "eye for eye, tooth for tooth," He means that nothing more than that should happen — He is directing them toward non-vengeance. ("Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord" Romans 12:19)
- 1. God's judgment would arise not from within the covenant community but from heathens (v. 5) 2. Jerusalem would not be a safe haven from God's judgment
- It was assumed that Israel's greatest threat would come from Assyria, not the "start-up" Chaldeans (v. 6)
- God gives a description of future oppressors. Because Israel refused to live for the honor of God, they would serve people who lived for their own honor. Because evildoers in Israel had pinned down the faithful, the Chaldeans would pin them down.

Are you tired of the evildoing around you? (Cf. Psalm 37)

If you let anger, jealousy, and resentment take over, they will destroy your faith in God's righteousness and justice. But with a faith where it counts, you won't destroy yourself with negative emotions. Faith must be expressed in an act of obedience and must also be expressed in confident expectation of God's justice and vindication. He has called you by His name and He will vindicate.

Commit your negative feelings to the Lord. No matter how it looks, the Lord is still righteous and just. He does not tolerate evil nor ignore the pleas of His children.

Discussion Questions

1. What does it mean to have a "faith where it counts"?
2. What can we tell about Habakkuk's feeling toward the Lord based on verses 1-4? How does that encourage you in your times of frustration and disappointment?
3. How is what Habakkuk was facing at this time similar to situations we see today?

