

O LORD, How Long?

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[0 : 00] 2 Chronicles 36. I'll be reading from the ESV. This is God's Word.

The people of the land took Jehoahaz, the son of Josiah, and made him king in his father's place in Jerusalem. Jehoahaz was 23 years old when he began to reign, and he reigned three months in Jerusalem.

Then the king of Egypt deposed him in Jerusalem and laid on the land a tribute of a hundred talents of silver and a talent of gold.

And the king of Egypt made Eliakim his brother, king over Judah and Jerusalem, and changed his name to Jehoiakim.

But Necho took Jehoahaz, his brother, and carried him to Egypt. Jehoiakim was 25 years old when he began to reign, and he reigned 11 years in Jerusalem.

[1 : 13] He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord his God. Against him came up Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and bound him in chains to take him to Babylon.

Nebuchadnezzar also carried parts of the vessels of the house of the Lord to Babylon and put them in his palace in Babylon. Now the rest of the acts of Jehoiakim and the abominations that he did and what was found against him, behold, they are written in the books of the kings of Israel and Judah. And Jehoiachin, his son, reigned in his place. Jehoiachin was 18 years old when he became king, and he reigned three months and ten days in Jerusalem.

He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. In the spring of the year, King Nebuchadnezzar sent and brought him to Babylon with the precious vessels of the house of the Lord and made his brother Zedekiah king over Judah and Jerusalem.

Zedekiah was 21 years old when he began to reign, and he reigned 11 years in Jerusalem. He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord his God.

[2 : 48] He did not humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet who spoke from the mouth of the Lord. He also rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar who had made him swear by God.

He stiffened his neck and hardened his heart against turning to the Lord, the God of Israel. All the officers of the priest and the people likewise were exceedingly unfaithful, following all the abominations of the nations, and they polluted the house of the Lord that he had made holy in Jerusalem.

The Lord, the God of their fathers, sent persistently to them by his messengers because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place.

But they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his word and scoffing at his prophets until the wrath of the Lord rose against his people until there was no remedy.

We are going to be not in 2 Chronicles 36 this morning, but in Habakkuk.

[4 : 18] Pastor Jeremy and I are going to be preaching through this book, doing a short series in it, Lord willing, through the end of the year. So we're in Habakkuk this morning, and I hear those pages already turning.

Let's find it. We're like, we got to start now because it might take a second to get there. Well, hopefully this maybe will help us to find it literally in our Bibles, but also we can find it in terms of when and where Habakkuk was as he brought this prophecy.

So Habakkuk is in the Old Testament. This book of the Bible is one of the minor prophets. Now we've actually preached through a couple minor prophets in recent years. We like the minor prophets here at Grace Fellowship.

We were in both Nahum and Habakkuk, but it's been a little while. So just a quick refresher on the minor prophets. They are not called the minor prophets because their message is minor or their message is not very significant.

If that were the case, first of all, why would it be in the Bible? And second of all, why would we spend time preaching through it? No, this is God's inspired word, all of it, including the minor prophets. What makes them to be called often the minor prophets is their length, not the significance of their message.

[5 : 37] We could just as well call the minor prophets the 12. For centuries, they were called just the 12 because they were all contained in one scroll. We obviously have bound books now, not scrolls, but for many centuries, one scroll contained the 12 prophets that are called the minor prophets now.

Written by 12 different prophets, all of the minor prophets prophesied within a span of several centuries in Israel and Judah's history from about 780 B.C. to 420 B.C.

Now what was happening in this period of Israel's history? Well, in short, Israel, which had been divided into two kingdoms at this point, the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom, the northern kingdom still being called Israel, the southern kingdom being called Judah, these two kingdoms during this period of time that the minor prophets were writing went into exile.

First, the northern kingdom in the 700s to Assyria, and then the southern kingdom of Judah in the 500s to Babylon. So all of these prophets, the 12, are writing either before the exile, during the exile, or after the exile, or somewhere in the midst of all of those.

Habakkuk is one of the prophets who wrote before the exile to the southern kingdom of Judah. And we actually find all of the prophets who wrote to the southern kingdom of Judah before the exile grouped together in our Bibles.

[7 : 17] So you've got Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah. There's actually purpose behind why our Bibles are ordered the way that they are in our Bible.

That includes the minor prophets. So Habakkuk is in this cluster of four books written to Judah before exile. Those books, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah.

So I don't hear so many pages turning anymore, but if you're still looking and you found one of those other three, you're close. And they all are writing about the same time to the same people concerning the same kinds of things.

So Habakkuk. We're looking at chapter one this morning in just the first four verses. Verse one introduces us to the book and to its author.

Verse one reads, the oracle that Habakkuk the prophet saw. That's a pretty brief introduction. I mean, many of the prophets are brief, but this is briefer than even many of those others.

[8 : 23] Like Micah. The prophet Micah begins his book saying, the word of the Lord that came to Micah of Moresheth in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, which he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem.

So you hear there, Micah tells us a little bit more. He tells us where he's from, Micah of Moresheth. Micah also tells us when he wrote down his prophecy during the days of those three kings of Judah. Micah even tells us in very general terms what his prophecy is about. He says what he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem. Habakkuk offers us none of that information, none of that detailed information.

He simply identifies himself, though he does tell us that he's a prophet, that he's a messenger sent from God. That's important. We want to know that. But we know little else about Habakkuk himself. He doesn't appear anywhere else in God's word outside of this book that he wrote. Habakkuk doesn't also state for us when he wrote down this prophecy in this opening introduction of the book.

[9 : 33] But context clues from the rest of the book do help us here. We see down in verse 6 that God says, Behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans.

Now the Chaldeans, that's another name for the Babylonians, the nation that would eventually conquer Judah. Also, in the first four verses of Habakkuk's prophecy, as we're going to see, he speaks of the sinful state of Judah.

He's not writing during a time of prosperity and faithfulness and fidelity to the Lord. He's writing during a time of great sin and wickedness.

It abounds. It is a time that is characterized by great evil. That too helps us to identify when Habakkuk is writing.

It's near the time of the Babylonian invasion and when the nation is also in spiritual decline. Well, we find those two realities right around the year 600 BC.

[10:38] Now this is important because the last king who is characterized as good has just died before 600 BC. That's King Josiah. King Josiah was the last of the kings of Judah who the Bible speaks of favorably.

He brought many spiritual reforms to the nation. His reign was characterized by spiritual growth among the people. And he died in 609 BC. And so that brings us to the scripture reading that Stan had for us this morning.

In 2 Chronicles 36, we read that after Josiah died, Judah did enter into this time of great spiritual decline. The son of Josiah, Jehoahaz, was made king.

But he was quickly deposed by the king of Egypt. And what was he said to have been? Wicked. And then his son, or I'm sorry, his brother was made to be king. And his name was changed to Jehoiakim.

And the scriptures say, Jehoiakim did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. So did his son, Jehoiachin. And then after him, his brother, Zedekiah, which how did that guy get that name?

[11:47] Like so many Jehoahaz and Jehoahaz and then Zedekiah. Zedekiah, he too stiffened his neck and hardened his heart against turning to the Lord.

The refusal to repent from the evil ways that he was following and that his fathers and ancestors before him. And then let me just read again that summary statement from 2 Chronicles 36, beginning in verse 15.

The Lord, the God of their fathers sent persistently to them by his messengers because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place.

But they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words and scoffing at his prophets until the wrath of the Lord rose against his people until there was no remedy.

That's a bleak outlook. These are dark days in the kingdom of Judah. Messengers from God, prophets from God were sent.

[12:55] And the people did what? They mocked them. They despised God's words. They scoffed at his prophets. And they did that until what happened? Until God's wrath rose against the people.

And how did God do that? How did he bring his wrath? He sent the Babylonians to conquer them. Well, Habakkuk was one of those prophets sent by God whose message was rejected by the people.

And Habakkuk spoke of those coming Babylonians, the Chaldeans, that God would raise up. So that's the setting in which the book of Habakkuk was written. The nation of Judah in spiritual decline, sin running rampant, and Babylon is coming.

The nation of Babylon is coming to conquer Judah. So Habakkuk has a message to share. He has an oracle as the text says there in verse 1.

And it's an oracle that Habakkuk saw. So prophets in the Old Testament would often speak this way. They have an oracle that they've received. They have a message from God to deliver to his people.

[14:07] And often this message comes in the form of a vision. Not all translations bring this out, but the ESV says, the oracle that Habakkuk the prophet saw.

Similar to Micah's words. The word of the Lord that came to Micah which he saw. Or Nahum. An oracle concerning Nineveh, the book of the vision of Nahum of Elkosh.

The prophets heard from God. They were given his words to share. But they often received them through visions. So Habakkuk, it's not as though he's sat down and he's simply listening to God speak to him about what is going to happen to the people of Judah and then writing it down.

No, we should envision here that Habakkuk is being given a vision. He's seeing what will unfold in human history. And we actually see God drawing our attention to that in the book.

Look down at verse 5. Verse 5 begins, Look among the nations and see. Verse 6 begins, For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans.

[15:18] Chapter 2, verse 2. And the Lord answered me, Write the vision. Make it plain on tablets so he may run who reads it. So write down what you see so those who read what you have written can run.

Habakkuk obviously wrote a book. That's what we have. But he wrote not just what he heard but what he saw. Habakkuk is like many prophets in that way.

But Habakkuk is also unique in another respect. Many prophets simply proclaim messages from God to the people. So you'll read in other prophetic books some common phrases like, Thus says

the Lord.

Or, So the Lord declared. Or, For the Lord has spoken. In those books the prophet very much is delivering to the people the word of God.

He's saying to the people, Here's what God says to you. He's proclaiming God's words. Habakkuk isn't so straightforward. Habakkuk actually is less a book of proclamation and more a book of dialogue.

[16 : 31] It's this intimate glimpse. It's this exchange that Habakkuk has with the Lord where he's wrestling with what he sees around him in Judah, the spiritual decline, the darkness of their sin.

He sees that. He's wrestling with what he sees and with what he knows of God, of who God is. And he's seeking to reconcile that.

So we see that Habakkuk, or as we will see, Habakkuk doesn't start strong. But, through the book, he ends very strong.

Habakkuk moves from bitterly complaining to the Lord to ultimately rejoicing in the Lord. So this book is somewhat different from most of the other minor prophets.

It actually tells us what God first says to Habakkuk, though God directs all that he says to Habakkuk to all of God's people. But it's not just Habakkuk coming and saying, here's what God says to you.

[17 : 31] It's Habakkuk writing down, here's what God said to me and here's what I said to God. So we have this Habakkuk speaking to God and God speaking to Habakkuk.

That's the basic structure of chapter 1 and into chapter 2. Then in chapter 2, God pronounces five woes on the Babylonians.

And before Habakkuk finishes the book in chapter 3, we have this wonderful prayer. So we have two Q&A's, five woes and one prayer in three chapters that make up the book of Habakkuk.

This morning, we're beginning with just Habakkuk's words in verses 2-4. He's issuing this complaint to God. He's questioning God.

And we'll end before we hear God's answer. So what do we see in Habakkuk's words here? We see that Habakkuk cries for help.

[18 : 34] Habakkuk cries for help. And we're going to see three characteristics of Habakkuk's cry. We're going to see the direction, we're going to see the cause, and we're going to see the tone.

So there's much that we can learn from Habakkuk's cry because we too need help. We too cry out for help in this life. So let's see the direction, let's see the cause, and let's see the tone of Habakkuk's cry this morning.

So first, the direction. And we see this right away in verse 2. It's so obvious that we might overlook it. The oracle begins with the words, O Lord. Habakkuk directs his cry to the Lord.

These opening words of his prophecy read more like a psalm than prophecy, don't they? They sound very similar to David in Psalm 6. David says, My soul also is greatly troubled, but you, O Lord, how long?

Or Psalm 11. There David begins by saying, How long, O Lord, will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? So Habakkuk echoes these same words.

[19 : 49] O Lord, how long? He directs his cry to God for help. Now again, that may seem just so very obvious to us. Well yes, cry to God for help.

But often, in the Old Testament, God's people did not cry to the Lord for help. They did not turn to the Lord for help. They turned to other sources other than God Himself.

They didn't look to God. Instead, they looked to other nations for help. We actually see a very vivid example of this in Habakkuk's lifetime. After Babylon had conquered Judah, the people of Judah came to another prophet in that time, the prophet Jeremiah, and they requested a word from God. So it sounds like they're starting well. We're coming to Jeremiah asking for help. But what happens in this exchange is that they're really not interested in receiving the prophecy from Jeremiah.

Jeremiah, they just want to hear the words that they want to hear.

And when they don't hear those words, their answer isn't, let's keep trusting the Lord. Their answer is, we've got to go find help somewhere else. So they come to Jeremiah.

[20 : 59] Jeremiah brings the word to them, and they don't trust God to be their help. Instead, they turn, and they go to Egypt for refuge. This is like the saddest twist of irony.

They go back to the very nation that God had delivered them from so many centuries before. So they go for help back to the place where they had once groaned as slaves and cried out to God for help.

Now, of course, they go there. God had told them not to. So do you think it went well for them? No. They don't find that safety and that security in Egypt because guess what?

Babylon comes to Egypt and Babylon conquers Egypt as well. So they're looking to other sources for protection and for help rather than God himself.

And we can be just as guilty of that, can't we? Putting our trust in other sources. You know all of these sources. We look to people. We look to institutions.

[22 : 09] We look to our bank account. We look to our own ability to think and reason out of a trial that we're in who hasn't lost the night of sleep trying to remedy the problem while they're lying there in bed.

All of these other sources that we're tempted to look to and to forget God. We might not say it, but we live as though we'll figure this out on our own.

We know where we can find some help. We're going to go to that source for help and we're going to forget to let our cries be made known to God. So Habakkuk doesn't do that. He looks to God.

He turns to the Lord in his distress. So here's an example for us to follow. We are weak. We are needy.

Every day we have a reason to cry for help. Where do we turn? Who do you turn to? Psalm 146 says, Put not your trust in princes and a son of man in whom there is no salvation.

[23 : 16] When his breath departs he returns to the earth. On that very day his plans perish. Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob whose hope is in the Lord his God.

So Habakkuk he directs his cry to the Lord his God. We should do the same. That's the first characteristic of Habakkuk's cry. Now here's the second.

The cause. Habakkuk issues his cry for help because he is intolerant of the sin that is all around him.

Now follow along as I read beginning in verse 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.

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 so the law is paralyzed and justice never goes forth for the wicked surround the righteous so justice goes forth perverted.

[24 : 31] Sin is all around Habakkuk. It is threatening him. It's not just sin that he's reading in the newspaper like reading about kind of afar. It's not the corruption of other nations that he's concerned with here though we'll see that in the coming verses of Habakkuk.

It's the sin of God's own people right there in Judah. How do we know that? Well remember the historical context. This was likely written around 700 or 600 BC.

Habakkuk is writing as Babylon was growing in power and threatening to invade and conquer the land and the people are in spiritual decline spiritual decay.

So Habakkuk is living in the midst of the people's sin. He's talking about the people of Judah. We know that from historical context. We also know that from Habakkuk's own words right here in these verses.

Where do we see that? Verse 4. The law is paralyzed. This is not just a vague reference to the rules of the land. This is the word Torah.

[25 : 43] This is God's law that he speaks of here. God's law is paralyzed meaning it's being set aside. It's being ignored.

The leaders in Judah are not governing the people according to God's laws. So what's the result? Rampant sin. Destruction and violence.

Strife and contention. Evil reigns in the land of Judah in Habakkuk's day. Habakkuk himself says that justice never goes forth.

But then he clarifies. It does go forth but it goes forth perverted. It's a false justice. There may be verdicts that are reached in the courts of law but those verdicts are wrong.

They are a miscarriage of justice because the standard of justice God's word well God's word is being ignored. And so just as Isaiah says evil is called good good is called evil.

[26 : 44] The depravity of sinful man is on full display in Habakkuk's day. The people who were supposed to be a light to the nations are themselves walking in the darkness of their sin.

That is so troubling to Habakkuk. This isn't even the world. This isn't even other nations. This is God's chosen people in the Old Testament living in their sin without a concern.

The prophet Jeremiah was also bringing messages from the Lord to Judah in the same period of time as Habakkuk. We heard that in 2 Chronicles 36. Well we read this indictment from Jeremiah 21 beginning in verse 11.

And to the house of the king of Judah say hear the word of the Lord. O house of David thus says the Lord execute justice in the morning and deliver from the hand of the oppressor him who has been robbed lest my wrath go forth like fire and burn with none to quench it because of your evil deeds.

Behold I am against you O inhabitant of the valley O rock of the plain declares the Lord. You who say who shall come down against us or who shall enter our habitations I will punish you according to the fruit of your deeds declares the Lord.

[28 : 08] I will kindle a fire in her forest and it shall devour all that is around her. So the people of Judah they were failing to listen and to obey the word of God the law of God the people of Judah were failing to uphold justice and God says I won't fail to do that.

You may fail to uphold it I will not. I will punish you according to your evil deeds. I will punish according to the fruit of your deeds.

So Judah may not be punishing wrongdoing but God promises he will. Through Jeremiah he made that abundantly clear. He'll make that clear through Habakkuk as well.

But God is not doing that just yet. Not in these verses. Here in these verses the coming judgment of God the just judgment of God for sin is not on display.

All that we have is Habakkuk's very limited perspective. We only have Habakkuk's perspective. God hasn't pulled back the curtain to show Habakkuk and to show us what he will do about the great problem of sin in the land of Judah.

[29 : 25] We only have Habakkuk's view here. He sees the sin all around him and he's outraged. That's good. He sees the sin all around him and he's intolerant.

He's not accepting of it. That's good. It is virtuous to be repulsed by sin. I fear that we including myself that we as Christians far too often are not repulsed by sin as we should be.

I fear that we are numbed to sin in our society today that far too often it passes as acceptable. We throw up our hands and we say well what can you do? That's just how things are.

Pick your evil of our day whatever evil it may be that is celebrated or justified and see the destruction that follows in the lives of those who live in sin and in the lives of those who are affected by that sin.

Its effects splash onto others. Where sin is accepted the ruinous consequences follow in our own lives and society around us.

[30 : 38] Habakkuk saw that. He saw the ruinous effects of the evil in Judah which really should strike us. This was among those who were supposed to be God's people.

Isn't it true that many churches today the law is paralyzed in? God's word is cast aside. God's word is ignored.

God's word is not opened. It's shut and it's put away. It's twisted to say what it doesn't. We must be on guard to not compromise on sin.

And that absolutely includes in the church we should long to see sin rooted out in our own lives. We should long to see sin rooted out in each other's lives to help each other to pursue godliness and to help each other guard ourselves that we might not say no big deal.

I guess this is just how our world is today. May we never find sin to be agreeable to us. It should leave such a sour taste in our mouths.

[31 : 48] Kids, have you ever had a lemon? Have your siblings ever challenged you to try a lemon and you didn't know what happens when you have a lemon?

This has absolutely happened in the home household with some of the younger siblings. And you get that lemon in your hand and it's juicy and it smells good and you put it in your mouth and you bite down on it which is especially when it's exciting.

And what happens? Oh, your face contorts and immediately you're like, what have I done to myself? That's funny because it's a lemon.

But with the reality of sin in our hearts we should have the same kind of effect. When we see sin in our own lives we should immediately say, no, what have I done? Oh, I'm grieved.

Confessing our sin readily to the Lord. When we see sin around us we should be grieved by that, not kind of like, oh, I guess, it's okay. We should hate sin because we love God.

[32 : 51] We love God. We so love God. We so love His law. We so delight in the goodness of God, in the goodness of His ways, that anything that runs counter to that, yes, we hate.

We're opposed. We're against. Because sin is destructive. Sin brings ruin. Sin leads to death. Of course we hate sin.

We should be grieved by sin. We should be intolerant of sin. God. We're not because we're these bitter, cranky, bigoted, narrow-minded people, but because we know God and we love God and we long for all to know God and to love God as well.

Because Christ is King and we want to see Him exalted in all the nations. And those who bow the knee to them, they have it best.

Don't we have it best? Don't we want all to know that? Don't we want all to know God and to know His ways because His ways are best?

[34 : 01] Sin ruins and destroys, but in Christ there is life. There is fullness of joy in Him. We have the best life now and into eternity.

So we should share Habakkuk's perspective on sin. It should not make us squirm. To speak of sin boldly. No apologies about that.

We should be just as intolerant of sin as Habakkuk was. And let me also say that we should be just as gentle and compassionate and patient towards the lost as our Savior was towards us.

These are not mutually exclusive realities as though you have to be either speaking truth or being gracious. Jesus Christ. No, of course not.

Paul says speak the truth in love. Paul speaks of correcting opponents with gentleness. Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, came full of what?

[35 : 07] Grace and truth. Not one or the other, but both. And of course, He was perfect in that. Imperfect as we may be, we should still strive to be like our Savior, right?

We can be gentle and compassionate and patient and at the very same time, so very intolerant of sin. Not being accepting of it, but pointing lost sinners to the Savior who accepts all who come to Him.

He turns none away. none away. Have you turned from your sin and trusted in Jesus Christ for salvation?

All who come to Him, He warmly receives. He turns none away. All who come to Him saying, I'm a sinner in need of forgiveness.

I believe that you died on the cross for my sins, so forgive me of my sins. I turn from them and I put all of my trust, I put all of my hope in you.

[36 : 10] all who come to Him, crying out to Him for salvation, all He warmly receives. Like Habakkuk, Jesus doesn't tolerate sin.

He loves us too much to do that. So we shouldn't tolerate sin either in ourselves, in our church, or in the world around us.

We should speak the truth in love and we should point others to the Savior. So that's the second characteristic of Habakkuk's cry, the lost.

Habakkuk cries out to God because Habakkuk is intolerant of sin. Now let's consider the third and last characteristic of Habakkuk's cry, the tone.

We need to consider how Habakkuk addresses God here in these verses. We can't just assume that these verses are prescriptive, meaning that everything Habakkuk says we can say to God full stop.

[37 : 18] Just if he said it, we can say it too. We have to be careful about that. We shouldn't just assume that how Habakkuk addresses God is exactly how we should too.

Consider Job. Job is the example. He is the one that comes to mind so quickly of someone who did not address God as he ought and God rebuked him for it.

Job was accusatory. Job was bitterly complaining. He spoke, as God says, words without knowledge. Job sought to argue with God.

So Job had to go through this purifying process in order to learn humility and submission before God. I think we see something of the same with Habakkuk in this short book.

Moving from accusatory and confrontational to humble and content and joyful in the Lord. Moving from questioning God to rejoicing in and trusting God.

[38 : 22] From telling God how to run the world to quietly, chapter 3 says, quietly waiting. on God. So this little book is teaching us it matters how we cry out to God.

We can cry out to God and at the same time not sin. We can cry out to God in a way that is good and right and pure. Like the Israelites in Exodus chapter 2.

They were in slavery in Egypt and listen in Exodus chapter 2 beginning in verse 23 what the text says. During those many days the king of Egypt died and the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help.

Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God and God heard their groaning and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. God saw the people of Israel and God knew.

So that is all good. That is God honoring groaning. not a hint of displeasure in God's response. Instead in fact we find compassion and we find covenantal love on display.

[39 : 38] There is desperation in the people but it is not sinful. And so their desperation is not met with God's displeasure. Just the opposite in fact. God heard their groaning, God saw his people, and God knew.

He remembered his covenant and he acted according to his sovereign plan to save his people. So Exodus 2 is a wonderful example of groaning, godly groaning.

Then we come to a very different example in the book of Numbers. And not an example of godly groaning but an example of sinful grumbling. Numbers 14, the people of Israel are now in the wilderness.

God has delivered them from Egypt. He heard their groans. He answered. And what did the people of Israel do in the wilderness? They grumbled. They grumbled in Numbers 14.

And what is God's response? Beginning in verse 27, he says, How long shall this wicked congregation grumble against me? I have heard the grumbings of the people of Israel, which they grumble against me.

[40 : 45] Say to them, As I live, declares the Lord, what you have said in my hearing I will do to you. Your dead bodies shall fall in this wilderness. And of all your number listed in the census from twenty years old and upward who have grumbled against me, not one shall come into the land where I swore that I would make you dwell except Caleb, the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua, the son of Nun.

But your little ones, who you said would become a prey, I will bring in, and they shall know the land that you have rejected. But as for you, your dead bodies shall fall in this wilderness.

clearly, there is a difference between the godly groaning of Exodus 2 and the sinful grumbling of Numbers 14.

One is a cry for help that comes from a place of trust and humility, and the other is a cry for help that comes from a place of entitlement and ingratitude and self-centeredness.

So, returning to Habakkuk, which is it in Habakkuk, some would say that this is the godly groan, that Habakkuk is pouring out his heart to God in a way that is still honoring to God, that his cry is more like the Israelites in Exodus 2, or like the martyred saints in Revelation 6.

[42 : 07] There in heaven, the martyred saints cry out with a loud voice saying, O sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on earth?

Now, this cry is very helpful to us because it comes from the saints who are where? In glory. They are glorified in heaven. So, we know without a shadow of doubt, this is a godly groan of the saints in Revelation 6.

Some would equate this cry then with the cry of Habakkuk. And there's a pretty strong parallel between the two. Perhaps you heard it. Both cry out to the Lord with those desperate words, how long?

How long? But there's also an important difference for us to notice. First of all, the martyred saints are quick to remember and to rehearse the character of God.

They call him sovereign because he is, he rules and he reigns over all. He directs the course of human history just as he decreed from eternity past.

[43 : 21] All of his plans will succeed. None will fail. So even in their cry, what are the glorified saints in heaven doing? They are trusting in God. They are acknowledging his sovereign control over all things.

Sovereign Lord, they call him. Holy and true. So they see that yes, he is in control of all things and that he is good.

That he does what is good. He's morally pure. He's right. He's holy and true. So the martyred saints, they cry out and they are quick to speak rightly of God's character.

We don't see that in Habakkuk. He makes no mention of the character of God in these opening verses. He's not quick to remember who it is that he cries out to.

And we know, don't we? As fallen, sinful human beings, we know how forgetful we can be, how often we need to be reminded and to remember who it is that we make our cries to.

[44 : 32] So we even in our prayers are speaking back to God in adoration who he is because we can forget. Well, Habakkuk isn't focusing on the character of God in these first verses.

He's focusing on what? The circumstances around him. That's one important difference between Habakkuk and the martyred saints of Revelation 6. Here's another difference. Listen again to what the martyred saints say.

O sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on earth. And now Habakkuk. O Lord, how long shall I cry for help and you will not hear?

So the martyred saints are asking God to do what he has promised in his word to do. They want him to do what he already has said he's going to do, to avenge and to judge his enemies.

They're not accusing him of anything. They aren't accusing him of wrong doing. But Habakkuk sure seems to be. He isn't just asking how long, he's also adding, and you will not hear.

[45 : 46] You do not listen, is what he's saying. I think Habakkuk is actually doing the opposite of the martyred saints. The martyred saints are asking God to do what he promised in his word to do.

Habakkuk is accusing God of not doing what God has promised in his word to do. And what is that? To hear the cry of the righteous.

Psalms 34:15, the eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous and his ears toward their cry. Psalm 145:18, the Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.

God says very clearly in his word, I hear the cries of my people. And yet Habakkuk is saying, no you don't. You will not hear.

You will not listen. Instead of coming to God and acknowledging who God is as the martyred saints did, Habakkuk does just the opposite. He doesn't just not acknowledge who God is, but he actually calls into question the very nature of God.

[46 : 53] Really, Habakkuk sounds more like Job than like the martyred saints of Revelation. Look at the second half of verse 2. Habakkuk chapter 1. Habakkuk continues his complaint saying, or cry to you violence and you will not save.

Now listen to Job. Job 19:7. Behold, I cry out violence, but I am not answered. I call for help, but there is no justice.

Habakkuk is echoing the same despair as Job. God will not save. God will bring no justice. God will not answer me.

They are such strong, bold statements against God. Not asking just when will you save, but declaring you will not save. R.C.

Sproul brings out these parallels between Job and Habakkuk and he concludes it is never proper to accuse God of wrongdoing. Well, then we come to verse 3.

[47 : 58] There is a real challenge here, a real demand for answers. Habakkuk says that God idly looks at wrong. Or your translation might say he tolerates wrong.

So again, Habakkuk isn't just bringing his concerns to God, he is challenging God. It is almost as though he is saying, I don't tolerate sin, but God, you do.

Why do you make me see iniquity? Why do you idly look at wrong? That sure sounds like Habakkuk speaking words without knowledge, the very thing that Job was rebuked for.

It seems there is a line here that we are seeing Habakkuk cross, even as he comes to the Lord for help. Parents, how often do our children cry out to us for help?

Like every 30 seconds, sibling conflict in the home, and they come to us for help, and we are glad to help them, right? We want to help them. We should want to help them, and shame on us when we don't.

[48 : 59] But all of us as parents would say that there's a difference between our children coming to us with a groaning spirit, and coming to us with a grumbling spirit. Coming to us and saying, Mom, Dad, please help me, or coming to us and saying, Mom, Dad, when will you finally help me?

You won't listen. Justice never goes forth in this house. Okay, my kids don't say that. But sometimes the spirit of that comes out in small children. Justice never goes forth in this house.

And we would say, it's good that our children come to us for help, but it still matters how they speak to us. And when they address us disrespectfully, in love, and in gentleness, and not ignoring the problem they've come to us about, we still correct them.

We love them too much to let that kind of heart attitude just go, well, it's okay, he's upset, so I guess this is a fine. No, wait a sec, son, we need to address this too.

We can cry out to God. We should cry out to God. Don't hear me say that Habakkuk was wrong to cry out to God, but we must do it God's way.

[50 : 14] It's become very popular, or maybe it was popular, I don't know if this is waning, but it was very popular for a time to say things like be honest with God, be real with God, be raw with God, be transparent, and if that means that we should bring our burdens to God, yes, if that means that we shouldn't think, well, this situation is too messy, or it's too dark, or it's too troubling for God, I need to actually get it cleaned up a little bit before I bring this to God, well, if that's what we're thinking, no, that's not true, if what we mean by being honest with God is that we bring all of our problems to God, that we never shy away from His throne of grace, that we never somehow think we need to clean up the situation or ourselves before coming to God, then yes, amen, God loves to hear our cries, He wants us to pour out our hearts to Him, cast all your anxieties on

Him, because He cares for you, that's what it means to be honest with God, fantastic, but if being honest with God means I can address God however I like, saying whatever I would like, well, look no further than Job or Habakkuk, and I think we see that kind of honesty isn't a good thing.

We should bring our troubles, all of our troubles, in a spirit of humility, in submission to God's will, trusting in Him, remembering His goodness and His righteousness and His holiness and His purity, remembering His sovereign rule over all, which it seems in these verses that Habakkuk is in this moment forgetting.

We can't just talk to God however we'd like, and I think too often when some say be raw with God, that's what they mean, just let it all out, just say whatever you want, however you want, because God wants to hear it, all of it.

That sounds less like a healthy relationship and more like a lack of self-control and immaturity, like a child still needing to learn how to ask for help from his or her parents.

[52 : 34] So are we going to come to God every time with complete self-control and perfect maturity? No. Remaining sin still in our hearts.

Should that dissuade us from coming to God? No. By no means. But we should want to be ever growing in self-control and maturity.

We should want to root out sinful heart postures of grumbling and complaining. We should not be content to be raw with God as though that itself is pleasing to him or virtuous or becoming of his child.

God wants to hear our deepest desires. He wants to hear our struggles. But let's bring them to him in a way that honors him. Shouldn't that be what we want?

Crying out to God from the depths of our heart while honoring him and revering him and trusting in him. And I know we would all say I have so far to go in that.

[53 : 39] Yes, keep going. Keep pursuing. Never settle for I can talk however I'd like and God's just good with that. Godly groaning and not sinful grumbling.

We'll see what that growth looks like in Habakkuk himself as we work through this book. May God give us the same growth. Because we can be tempted as Habakkuk was to look around and to think God is not here.

He's checked out on us. He doesn't care. There's so much sin and suffering in this world. We might be tempted to think God has abandoned me. God has forgotten me.

He's forgotten his people. And yet we're going to see in Habakkuk, no he has not. God has not forgotten us. God is not absent.

As he promises in Isaiah 59 1, Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save or his ear dull that it cannot hear.

[54 : 46] We have a strong refuge in our God. Our circumstances may look like Habakkuk's. The wicked may, it would seem, surround the righteous.

We have the truth of God's word. The truth of God's word tells us, Psalm 125, as the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds his people from this time forth and forevermore.

It is to this great God who surrounds us that we bring our cries for help. And we can't forget this same God God has heard our cries.

We're not just looking to the future saying, I'll cry out to God and we'll see what happens. No, he has heard our cries. In our greatest time of need, sinking in the depths of our sin, lost and gone astray, God rescued us.

All of us Christians here today, God has rescued us. God has heard our pleas for help. He sent his son, Jesus Christ, to die for our sins, to rise again, that we might have newness of life.

[56 : 03] The cross of Christ assures us that God is not deaf to our plight. He sent his son to save us from our sins that once enslaved us.

So who are we to question God's character? Who are we to doubt his faithfulness? He kept his promise to send the redeemer and not a promise made yesterday, a promise that he kept all the way back in Genesis 3.15, the serpent crusher who would come to crush the head of the serpent. Jesus is the yes and amen to all God's promises. So especially on this side of Calvary, who are we to question God's character?

God is for us. Our circumstances in life may be bleak, but the good news of the gospel shines brightly in our hearts. We have a living hope.

We've been made alive in Christ and it is through Christ that we now draw near, that we now have access to this God that we cry to in times of trouble.

[57 : 10] So may we cry out to him and trust him and submit ourselves to his sovereign plans, knowing that he is good, that he is working for our good, and no matter the darkness in this world, his face shines on us.

What a God we have. What a God that we can come to. Let's go to him in prayer. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word.

We thank you for all your word. We thank you for this short book of Habakkuk. We thank you, Father, that we can cry to you as Habakkuk did. We thank you, Father, that you hear us, that you receive us for Christ's sake.

We come knowing that we're weak, that we are still growing in grace, that we have so much growth yet to do, but help us that we would come ever more trusting in you, ever more humbly into your presence, ever more submitting ourselves to you.

Help us to see that you are good, that you do what is good, that you are for us, and we pray, Father, that you would be honored in our lives. We thank you that we can come to you through Christ.

[58 : 22] It's in his strong name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen.