

# Habakkuk 1: 1-17

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[ 0 : 00 ] Rebuilding the cause of God in the land. And so, in Habakkuk's time, you see, all that seemed to have been achieved, in fact all that was achieved, was simply crumbling and decay.

And the impact of it all made even godly people question the Lord's sovereign power. It made them wonder how can God be sovereign and allowing all this to happen, having allowed the work to be built up only decades before in Josiah's reign.

Well, I hope that you feel connected here and that you can see the relevance of this to our own day. Many of us here have lived to see changes in the life of the church and nation we never thought to see.

We're seeing things crumble. We're seeing the moral and spiritual and social fabric of our nation crumble. And you see, we can easily be drawn into the same kind of questioning that Habakkuk had in his own heart.

How long shall I cry, even cry out violence? Why all this violence, Lord?

[ 1 : 34 ] How long will it go on? Verse 3, why do you show me such iniquity and cause me to see such trouble?

You're sovereign. What's it all about? And you see, Habakkuk had these questions and they were real and serious questions.

Questions of a man of God. Questions of one who was empowered by the Spirit of God as a prophet of God. And yet he's allowing us, or God is allowing us through him, to consider these questions.

And we want to look at how he questions and how God deals with him. First of all then, I want us to begin with looking at the obvious, and that is simply Habakkuk's questions.

And then we may look at Habakkuk's distress, which he certainly had. First of all, in Habakkuk's questions, they're there in front of us, how long?

[ 2 : 47 ] Coupled with the all too familiar question, why? How long is an age-old question that has been with the Lord's people, as indeed has why?

How long will this go on? How long will the situation be like this? Why is it like this? From Habakkuk's viewpoint, it appeared that God, the Sovereign Lord, the God who had brought Israel into existence, who had kept it, who had revived it again and again, was now letting it go and letting it be filled with shocking violence.

And it appears the Lord is not listening to prayer and he's not going to help. And so Habakkuk grieves over the grim and shocking injustice all around him in the country.

The poor were brutally oppressed and the godly remnant were bitterly opposed and persecuted. Now, we were mentioning in prayer a moment ago, and it's good to connect with what's happening in the world to our brothers and sisters in Christ.

We may not be directly persecuted in terms of physical assault on our persons and the destruction of our property, but there are many of our brothers and sisters in Christ the world over who are right there in the cauldron of that kind of persecution.

[ 4 : 35 ] So let not this seem irrelevant. Rather, let it seem all the more relevant to us and that we interact with it as those who feel for those who are persecuted in that way.

It has, by its very nature, a contemporary relevance. And we can identify with the prophet, O Lord, how long shall I cry out to you violence?

And you will not save. Why do you show me iniquity and cause me to see such trouble? Now, some Old Testament scholars have thought that so strong is Habakkuk's language here, that he actually lived much earlier on than I have suggested, that he lived a way later, I shouldn't say later, earlier, but earlier in history in Manasseh's reign.

And you remember that Manasseh caused such violence that the streets of Jerusalem ran with the blood of the people of God.

And there was terrible, lewd practices going on. But we take the view very firmly that what we are looking at here is that Habakkuk was operating as a prophet at the same time as Jeremiah and in the reign of Jehoiachem.

[ 6 : 12 ] And that, as I say, is about 609 to about 597 or so. And at that time, if you remember, those of you who are good at this, if you remember that by 586 BC, the people of Israel, or Judah and Jerusalem, were taken away captive.

So, to give you a round figure, you're only about 23 years or so from the final removal of the people from the land, you see?

That's where you're thinking about Habakkuk. He's only a score of years or more earlier than all this, than the final removal of the people. And Jehoiachem's reign was very much a violent reign. And so, he was confronted by a cruel, oppressive king and his courtiers, his henchmen, who were loading up the people with crushing taxes to pay for the help that he had derived from the Egyptian pharaoh, Necho.

He exacted gold and silver from everyone, according to the king's assessment, in order to pay off the debt, so to speak.

[ 7 : 46 ] And by this time, you've got a situation in the land, wherein there is terrible violence. All that is antagonistic to grace and to God.

See verse 4. Therefore, he says, there's such strife and contention, therefore the law is powerless and justice never goes forth. It's all happening.

And it's all happening, Lord, in a way that is anti to what you are and what is right. And in actual fact, not to burden you with the detail, but from Jehoiachem, you have a succession of kings right down to Zedekiah.

They all had short reigns because there was chaos and rebellion. And these kings had short reigns because of their own wickedness.

One was taken away to Babylon and one earlier on down to Egypt and so on. It was a turbulent and lawless time.

[ 8 : 59 ] And so Habakkuk cried out. He cried out not only to the people to turn back to the Lord, but he cried out to the Lord to turn the people to change things around.

Because it seemed to him the Lord had forgotten him. The Lord had cast them off. That's why we were singing in Psalm 13 and from verse 1 from the beginning.

How long will you forget me, Lord? Will you forget always? God's sake. God's sake. God's sake. God's sake. God's sake. And you have it there in Psalm 77.

The same burden in the Psalmist's own day. God seems to have cast us off. God seems to have forsaken us, turned his back on us.

God's sake. And you see, this has a modern ring to it. This is relevant to us in the church today, both in our land and in other lands too, where it is brutally persecuted.

[ 10 : 04 ] And where it seems to be left to crumble and decay and disintegrate in our own land. And therefore, there's a place, you see, for identifying with the prophet in his cries.

We're to take the thing seriously. We're to question, just like the prophet, and take that to the Lord. Not to do nothing. To say, well, God is sovereign.

What can we do? That's what is often said. That's often the way it's put. That's not the way Habakkuk took it.

That's not the way the Psalmists took it. In the Psalms, we were singing Psalm 13, Psalm 77. They locked on to this. They got a hold of the Lord.

They wanted a change. And they saw the place of prayer. As vital to that. They would lay hold. They would take their questions to him.

[ 11 : 14 ] They trusted him, you see. Enough to question. And we must learn to do that as well.

Far better to come clean and to say it out loud in prayer than to be thinking it in our heart and never praying it. Far better.

To pour out our soul to him and to tell him the way it is. There are those here today who are adherents still after being all their lives in the church.

And you're an adherent still. Don't just leave that in a fatalistic way. Take it to the Lord. It's a serious matter for you. Surely it burdens you.

Take it to him. Lord, why? Have you left me like this? Why do I go groaning? The enemy is oppressing me.

[12:11] He's mocking me. You see the principle I'm highlighting here. This can be applied to your own situation.

Where you feel you're not getting an answer from him. And you're to simply say to him, Why, Lord? How long will you leave me like this? To return to the specific.

When we look at the situation in the land today, And the way that the church is disappearing from many a community, We ought to be burdened, And to bring out the questionings of our hearts.

And we ought to bring them out just like the prophet did. Violence is on every hand. You tell me, And I tell you, We turn our papers, Page after page, Violence.

We turn on, Whether it's Sky, Or BBC One, Or STB3, Whatever, Everywhere we look, Violence. And destruction.

[13:26] And within the church, too, All sorts of things happening. That ought not to happen. Why do you show me iniquity, And cause me to see such trouble?

For plundering and violence are before me. There is strife, And contention arises. So you see, He not only ponders in his heart, But he articulates that in prayer.

How long shall I cry, And you will not hear? I need to know. I need to see things change. Why do you cause me to see such iniquity?

Let's learn from him in this. The second thing is, And we've anticipated it a little bit, Let's look at Habakkuk's distress. We've already suggested in the introduction, That his problem came about with the way of God, In allowing such evil to abound, Even among the people of God.

And I think you see that, It's important for us, To see that this is not a superficial problem, But it's something that caused him distress.

[14:53] It caused him distress. And it caused him distress, Because his big difficulty was, That the covenant community, Was guilty of abandoning the Lord, And his ways.

They had turned their back on him, For the ways of the world. And that distressed him. And the fact of the matter was, They were not wanting the Lord's ways, But the world's ways, In their own day. And they weren't wanting to obey the Lord, But they were wanting to do their own pleasure. And the law, That they should have lived and obeyed, Was despised, In favour of the rules, And standards of men.

Did you, Did you click on there? Did you hear a modern ring there? Surely, If we're thinking, We see the relevance of this today.

It's not just the world, Out there, That wants its own way. But the church, Is not wanting the Lord's way, But the world's way, And the world's standards. We're in a serious situation.

[16:13] Habakkuk, Habakkuk, Habakkuk, Habakkuk, Habakkuk, Was distressed at this. He tried to persuade the people, You're going wrong.

You're turning away. Your standards are changing. There's a bit of controversy just now, And it was made all the more, When a certain preacher, Went over to, The Isle of Lewis, To give an address, On the keeping of the Lord's day, Sabbath of servants.

But, There are people here, Who know very well, From that very island, That, That the standards, Of, Of, Of, Sabbath of servants, Of keeping the Lord's day, For a holy rest, They've changed.

They've changed enormously. The things that you once, Took for granted, And never thought, Would ever change, Have changed. And what is happening, Is, And listen to me, Convenience, Becomes, Necessity.

Convenience, Becomes, Necessity. In other words, What before, Was absolutely necessary, And only done on that account, The thing has changed, And now, Convenience, Is made out to be, Necessity.

[17:34] And we have to watch out for that, That's a separate thing. People now have the availability, Of flights, For example, In Lewis, And they'll book their holidays, And go on the Sunday.

Or, It's easier to get away, To back to work, On the Sunday. And so on. Things change, And convenience, Becomes necessity. And we have to watch that, In our own experience, That we don't, Simply say, Well, It's convenient to do this, Actually, It's necessary to do it.

But the predominating thought, Is convenient. That, Of course, On the mainland, Here in Scotland, Has long since been the way.

And the church, Has been almost powerless, People have not been listening, Because, They look at the standards, Of the world, And they're not quite there, Therefore, They're not so bad. We're a bit better. And, The law of the Lord, And its application, To the life of a Christian, Is not seen as important. If you love me, Said Jesus, If you are saved by grace, Resting on my death, And resurrection, As your only ground, Of acceptance in heaven, If you love me, You will keep my presence.

[ 19 : 02 ] And the church, Is not listening. How can we expect, The world even, Give a second thought? The church, Is not listening.

And Habakkuk, In his day, Was distressed. You see it too, In Christians, Adopting, The modern approach, To relationships.

You see it, In, In, In, In, In, Living together, You see it, In sexual orientation issues, You see it, In so many different ways, That, The church, Professing church, Is adopting, The standards, Of the world.

It ought to distress us. It ought to make us, Like Habakkuk, Plead with the Lord, To act, You see it, In attitudes to life, Life in the womb, Life in old age, And, And, And the, And the whole emphasis, In the media, And in the articles, You'll read, Are little by little, Eroding, The, The high view, The Christian has, Of the sanctity of life.

Yeah? And little by little, People are shifting, And they're thinking, Oh well, Under certain circumstances, But the trouble is, The certain circumstances, Increase.

[ 20 : 38 ] Increase. And God's high standard, Is reduced, To somewhere above, The standard of the world, I grant, That world lay just the same.

And we ought, To be alarmed. We ought to say, How long Lord, Will you allow me, To see, Such violence?

Why, Do you show me, To, You show me, Such iniquity? Now, Habakkuk wasn't alone, In this, It's very interesting, Our time, I don't know where it's going, But it's nearly gone, Habakkuk wasn't alone, In this, If you look up, Jeremiah 12, Verses 1 to 3, He talks the same way, He said, Lord, You are righteous, Let me talk with you, About your judgments, Why does the wicked way, Prosper? Why are they so happy, That deal so treacherously? And then he says this, And this shows us, He's thinking about, The professing church, They, Are near, In your mouth, But far from you, In their mind.

Plenty talk about you, But they don't take you seriously. You see, Jeremiah was in the same position, And he wanted the Lord, To do something, He told the Lord, Just as Habakkuk did, About his real struggle, With providence, And his longings, For change, And his desire, That mercy, The mercy of God, Would flow down, Upon the people, Like a stream, In flood, And it is in this connection, That we cannot get past, The importance, Of seeing our questionings, As burdens, That we are to cast, Upon the Lord, And wait upon his will, And as we bring this, To a close, It is ours to know, And to remember,

[ 23 : 06 ] That our Lord, Jesus Christ, In the glory of heaven, On the throne, Is affected, By what distresses us, We need to keep that, Before us, We are told, He is touched, With the feeling, Of our infirmities, He knows our frame, He feels for us, That's why we are told, By Hebrews 4, 16, Therefore come boldly, To the throne of grace, That you may find mercy, And grace to help, In the time of need, We are, To have a mind shift, And to be, Open and honest, Like Habakkuk, And Jeremiah do, And pour out their questionings, And have help from the Lord, Put them to him, As burdens, That we need, Him to take,

And we need, Sustaining grace, In exchange, We need, To be helped, To quieten our spirits, And to, Act on this truth, That he is, In control, We sang, We sang our opening song of praise, From Psalm 33, And we were reminded, In verses 10 and 11, That the, The Lord, Files the plans, Of the nations, He thwarts, The purposes, Of the peoples, Of the nations, But the plans, Of the Lord, Stand firm, Forever, And the purposes, Of his heart, Through all generations, And that is what, Quietens, The distressed spirit, The thoughtful mind, Of the people of God, He operates, And we can rest, On this, It's true, Out with the church, And it's true, In the church, Man, Proposes, Someone has said, But the Lord, Disposes, That's why, We are, To, Trust him, And we learn to this, Children, Many of us, To trust him, With all our heart, And lean not, On our own understanding, In all your ways, Friend, Acknowledge him, Factor him in, I say reverently, Factor him into the equation, Lean not, On your own understanding, In all your ways, Acknowledge him, And he will direct, Your path, Though that be a difficult, And trying path,

Though we may have to say, With Habakkuk, Violence, I see, And trouble, And plundering, And strife, And contention, Are before me, Let us entrust ourselves, To him, Honestly, And openly, Prayerfully, And trusting, And we will find him, In Jesus, Sufficient, In his grace, And power, Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen,