



The prophet Habakkuk could see the coming onslaught. God's people were about to be overthrown by the Babylonians. Habakkuk cried out to the Lord for justice, but accepted his fate as judgment and correction. His cries are our cries today. We pray from a position of longing and hope, wanting above all that God would send his Kingdom. We watch and wait for heaven to come down. We long for the Kingdom Come.

Kingdom Come - How Long? • Habakkuk 1:1-5 • Tim McConnell • November 5, 2017

Here in Colorado you can usually see the storm coming. It's not like that everywhere I've lived. In some states you have so many trees and hills around you can't see the sky like you do here and a storm can just drop in on you, but not here. That's why if you get struck by lightning in other states, they ask you in the ER, "Oh no! How did this happen?" But here you say, "I got struck by lightning," and they ask, "Well, why did you do that?" You can see the storm coming. Habakkuk was a prophet who could see the storm coming. But just because you can see it coming, that doesn't make it less of a storm. Just because you can tell that hard times are about to get harder, just because you can see that there are rapids around the next bend or storms on the horizon—that doesn't make the storm any less stormy. I've seen storms blow people's ships right up onto the rocks. I've seen storms blow people right into the strong arms of Jesus. When you can see the storm coming, what do you do? Turn to Jesus. Hope in His Kingdom Come. Are you hanging your heart on something that will hold? Hang on to Jesus; He's hanging on to you.

Let me give you some context as we open up Habakkuk this month. It's a short book, a minor prophet—that just means the book is short, nothing against Habakkuk's personal stature. It's a short book and it's not a happy book. It's called, well our version says "the prophecy" in verse one, but it's also translated "an oracle" which means a "burden." A burden. That's what this message is—a burden. Why? Well, Habakkuk was in ministry at a time when the nation was falling apart. After the glory days of King David and King Solomon, Israel went into decline, split into two nations and lost track of devotion to God. King Josiah tried to get the southern half, Judah, back on track but he died in 609 BC and things kept slipping. In Habakkuk's time the people of God, the covenant people God had bound to Himself through Abraham and Moses and David and everything else, were acting like every other people on earth. They were burning incense and performing rituals to worship the sun and the moon, harvest fields and wine; they sacrificed to fertility gods and participated in raucous festivals—they even sacrificed their own children to the god Molek by fire. Holiness was gone. Honor to God had slipped away. Reverence and obedience were nowhere to be found. And Habakkuk saw what was coming next. God was done supporting a nation of disobedience and self-destruction. The writing was on the wall. Enough. There comes a point, doesn't there? There comes a point when a loving father says, "Hey, I'm not going to bankroll your self-destruction any longer. You're

on your own." But for Judah it was even worse. They were about to be overthrown and carried into exile to Babylon—modern day Baghdad, Iraq. Habakkuk had his eyes open, and he saw the storm was coming. Where do you hang your heart when the storm is on the horizon?

What I love about the Bible is that it's honest. When you get out of the Bible for a while, you forget that. You think of it as an answer book. It's edgier than that. It's honest and real. The whole book of Habakkuk is a prayer, a dialogue between a man and God. And it's real. There's no superficiality about it. Habakkuk opens up with honest complaint. This is terrible! This isn't right! This stinks! Verse 2, "How long, LORD, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, 'Violence!' but you do not save?" (Habakkuk 1:2). Well, that's honest. Isn't it? How long do I have to deal with this? This is awful. This is wrong. How long is this going to go on, Lord? I cry out, 'violence'—this is like screaming for help when you get attacked. "Help! I'm getting mugged. I'm getting attacked" Nothing. No response. My hands reach out for help from God who says He's good...how long? You know, God can handle your complaints. He wants your heart, whatever's in there. We've all known times when it just isn't fair. The cancer comes back. The diagnosis is some incurable genetic condition. One of my closest friends has spent the last two weeks sitting in silence in a dark room because he was t-boned by a reckless driver and is struggling to heal from a serious concussion. It makes his head spin just to look at a screen. Not fair. How long, Lord?

Habakkuk was a guy who had his eyes open and he didn't turn away, he didn't put his head in the sand. He saw the world for what it was. Verse 3: "Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrongdoing? Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict abounds." (Habakkuk 1:3) A man opens fire on a concert in Las Vegas. The latest mass shooting is the worst mass shooting. Not better. Worse. Destruction and violence, conflict abounds. "There is strife." That's an understatement. It is hard to trust the powers that be, hard to trust the story from our media outlets, hard to believe our leaders are fighting for the common good. How long will the world be like this? Is God deaf to it all? How long? Our prophet has his eyes open; he has his eyes open to it all. That's hard.

I think about guys like Habakkuk. He could see Jerusalem, and maybe hear reports about the larger

region. We see the whole world at once. In our times, we know every disaster. It's crushing. My son Jack is thinking about pursuing photojournalism or adventure photography. A renowned photographer here in the church you might know, Sean Sheridan, took him on a trip last month to Uganda. They went to photograph water projects in Bidi Bidi. Almost one million refugees have flooded into Uganda from South Sudan, and 300,000 of them are in Bidi Bidi—the world's largest refugee camp. Sean said to Jack before they left, "We are traveling to what is probably the hardest place to be alive on the face of the planet right now. Our job is to tell their story with pictures." That is the job. Keep your eyes open. Praise God we can know where the pain is. Thank God we can see where people are hurting and vulnerable, where children are again getting tossed into the fires of Molek, losing their innocent lives for others' pursuit of false gains and empty gods. It's good that we can see it. Who knows, maybe there is something we can do from time to time. But it begins with open eyes. Willing to see. Willing to ask "How long?" Look with clear eyes, see the world as it is—it's pretty bad. But don't get sucked in. Don't get taken under. Evil doesn't win.

Verse five is a turn: "Look at the nations and watch—and be utterly amazed. For I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe, even if you were told." (Habakkuk 1:5) Habakkuk prays. God answers. God is going to move. God is going to do something. Something you would not believe. Now, I don't want to give you the wrong idea about the context. The thing that God is about to do in the nation of Judah is not an easy thing. God is about to let Babylon overthrow Judah. God uses the evil war-mongering of a foreign nation to achieve His own ends—to purify His own people by fire. Not easy. Not great news for the people. But God is going to act. This is the verse that gets picked up in the New Testament six hundred years later, after the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Paul and Barnabas in Galatia quote it. Acts 13:41, "Look, you scoffers, wonder and perish, for I am going to do something in your days that you would never believe, even if someone told you." God is going to act. It's going to get worse before it gets better, but there is something coming on the other side. There is something out in front of us. The Kingdom of God. The rule and reign of Jesus Christ. God is going to do something you wouldn't believe.

So, hope from Habakkuk. Where do we find it? It isn't easy to find, let me tell you. Things were dark for him. A big storm was on the horizon, a huge struggle was

in front of him and lots of pain, lots of grief. But can we see a little hope? When the darkness is closing in, when the storm is on the horizon, where do you hang your heart? Are you hanging your heart on something that will hold? Here's hope from Habakkuk! Listen now. See what he does? Habakkuk prays. He talks to God. He calls out "How long?" He opens his heart in genuineness and trust and...and yes, in frustration and fear. But he prays. He prays and God hears. That's where we begin. See, there are so many temptations to the broken hearted. There are so many directions we might run when we are getting swamped by the evil swirling all around us, and in our own hearts. There are lots of ways to lose track of God. We can get cynical and give up—it's never going to change. We can escape reality, get into video games or spend our whole lives pouring into our little screens. We can run with the Epicureans—eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die. Or we can drive ourselves crazy trying to fix it all ourselves, always believing that just a little more effort, a little harder push in the political realm, a little better next administration, a little more education and maybe it will all turn! Maybe. We see how bad things are and our survival instincts take over, we are flushed into fight or flight mode. Here's hope from Habakkuk—it starts with prayer.

We pray to the living God. What do you do when the storm rolls in? Where do you hang your heart? We pray to a living God. A God who is there and who hears. We look at the world and our lives with open eyes, not stuffing our heads in the sand, we look at it and we see it and we know it is wrong—and we cry out to God. Let me ask you this. Where did you get the sense that things are off base or not as they should be anyway? People might say Christians live in a fantasy world; Christians don't really look and see how bad the world is because if the world is bad it somehow makes God look bad, so Christians fool themselves into thinking things are better than they are. The opposite is the case. God instills in us a true sense of how things ought to be, a true sense of what goodness looks like, what justice looks like, what life ought to be. And when we see it for what it is, a beautiful world in a fallen and twisted state, we pray. We pray to the God who made this world, owns this world, and loves this world more than we will ever know. The God who instills justice and righteousness in us and makes us realize things are wrong in the first place. We pray to that God. And that God hears. We pray to the living God, just like Habakkuk, crying "How long?"

We pray to the living God...Who is over all. What

does Habakkuk see in the world? He sees corrupt power. Violence. Injustice. The corruption and destruction from the abuse of power. God is more powerful yet. God is over all powers. Imagine a world so messed up by human abuse of power and there is no God in heaven to correct it. We pray to the living God Who is over all.

Finally, **We pray to the living God...Who is over all...Whose Kingdom comes.** How bad is it? How heavy does it all feel? How long will the storms rage? A Kingdom is coming to set all things right. We pray like Habakkuk, "How long, O Lord?" and we don't pretend to know the answer. How long? I don't know. But I do know this: it's not forever. It's not forever. A Kingdom is coming that sets all things right, ends violence, sets up justice and righteousness, reigns in perfect love, ends all disease, ends all death and brings every part of creation back into place. There is a Kingdom Come. It will not delay. When Jesus began His ministry in Mark 1:15, "'The time has come,' he said. 'The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!'" Or as my friend Don Everts imaginatively put it: "I've got some good news for you...the Kingdom of God has come near! You can turn around now." (*Jesus with Dirty Feet*). Good news. It's really close! The time has come, He said. God is doing something new, something you wouldn't believe to be told. How long? I don't know. But because of Jesus, I know it isn't forever. There is in Him a Kingdom Come.

The name Habakkuk means "embrace." But not the sweet kind of hugging romantic embrace. More like the desperate embrace of two survivors hoping to make it through the storm, clinging together for warmth and protection. When the storm rages, what are you clinging onto? Where do you hang your heart? Hang your heart on something that will hold. There is hope from Habakkuk. When the storm is brewing on the horizon, when you are in the middle of the storm and waiting for peace to settle again. Here's hope. We pray to the living God Who is over all Whose Kingdom comes in Jesus' name.

STUDY GUIDE

KINGDOM COME • How Long!

Habakkuk 1:1-5

Start It

- A bridge that hasn't been tested can't be trusted. A doctor who hasn't been tested can't be trusted. Faith that hasn't been tested can't be trusted. Basil of Caesarea preached, "Storms at sea test the mettle of the ship's captain, just as the arena does the athlete, the battle line the soldier, calamity the magnanimous, and times of trial the Christian. Sorrows try the soul as fire does gold." ("In Time of Famine or Drought")

Study It

- Read Habakkuk 1:1-5. What do you notice about our passage? What stands out to you?
- What is Habakkuk's complaint to God? If you were to put verses 1-4 in your own words, what would you say?
- What is God's response to Habakkuk? What does God want Habakkuk (and us) to know?
- Habakkuk engages in a form of prayer called lament. Author Tremper Longman notes this about psalms of lament: "God invites us to speak to him with utter honesty and boldness... even though they [the psalmist] often addressed God in anger, they spoke to him, asking for help and hoping that he would answer them in their distress."
- What does this tell us about God – about God's character and who God is? How does God meet us in our lament?
- Consider the quote above from Basil of Caesarea. How have times of sorrow and trial tested your faith? How have those times drawn you closer to God?

Pray It

In the midst of the brokenness we see, we pray "Your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." Spend some time praying for specific, concrete areas in your life or in our city and world where you long to see God's Kingdom come.

Live It

In the coming week, make a list of people you can pray for and spend time praying for them. Pray for God's will to be done in their lives.