

July 20, 2025

Return: Does God Really Care?

Habakkuk 1:1-11

Vernon Advent Christian Church

Introduction... Bible reading, bring your Bibles, where to find Habakkuk...

Habakkuk is unusual as a prophetic book. Habakkuk lived in the final decades of Judah. It was a time of injustice and idolatry, and he saw the rising threat of the Babylonian empire on the horizon. Unlike the other prophets we have looked at so far, Habakkuk doesn't accuse Israel or even speak to the people on God's behalf. Instead, all of his words are addressed to God. The book of Habakkuk tells us about Habakkuk's personal struggle to believe that God is good when there is so much tragedy and evil in the world.

The book of Habakkuk takes the form of a lament in which a complaint is given to God, a request for help is made and then an expression of trust is given. These laments allow for us to bring our honest expression of emotions and experiences before God. Which then leads to a deeper faith, trust, and intimacy with God and it can be a part of the healing process as we bring our wounds to God. This is because while we acknowledging pain, lament often points towards hope and the expectation of God's eventual restoration. In essence, lament is a powerful and God-honoring way to process pain, grief, and suffering, recognizing that God is present with us even in the midst of hardship.

When you strip away the literary and contextual differences and get to the heart of this book, you'll find that Habakkuk, the prophet, is not very different from us. He asked the same questions that we're asking today. Habakkuk had to deal with the fact that his beloved country was falling apart. The law was perverted and injustice was everywhere. There is a growing sense of frustration among Christians in our own country as we drift further away from Christian morals.

Habakkuk also lived in a time of global unrest. The world powers were shifting yet again from the Assyrian Empire to the Babylonians. Again, many of us can relate to these fears. We're not really sure what is going to transpire in the Middle East or Russia or China.

Habakkuk's prophecy goes even deeper. He wanted to know where God was in the midst of his chaotic world. Could he be trusted? He wanted to know how the people of God should respond to these adversities. That's the message of Habakkuk. And it's the message that we need to hear today.

Now, we don't know much about Habakkuk the person. We don't know anything about his family. We don't know where he came from or when he lived exactly. We know that he prophesied to Judah sometime before the Babylonian invasion and exile. He was most likely a contemporary of Jeremiah, but we're not sure.

But here's what we do know about Habakkuk. He was frustrated. Habakkuk was frustrated with the world around him and, on top of this, he was frustrated that God seemed slow to respond. Where was God?

And so Habakkuk engaged God in a conversation. This is what makes the book of Habakkuk different than most of the prophets. Most of the prophets brought a message

from God to the people. But Habakkuk worked the opposite way. He brought the people's complaints, as well as his own, to God.

And the first complaint that Habakkuk has is questioning whether or not God cares about what is going on? Does he notice all the troubles that take place on our planet?" If you have ever asked questions similar to these, then you are not alone. Habakkuk struggled with these same questions and doubts, and he was a prophet! If so, let's look at this book together and let's see what God has to say to us in his word this morning. If you are able, please stand with me as I read the word of God from the Book of Habakkuk beginning in vs. 1 of chapter 1. [Read Hab. 1:1-11]

Habakkuk begins, "The oracle that Habakkuk the prophet saw," or other translations have the word "received" there. Habakkuk is saying from the very first verse that the message in this book is not a message of his own creation. Rather, it is a message from the Lord.

There are several Hebrew words that can be translated "oracle" or "prophecy," but this particular word also conveys the idea of a burden. It is used especially to describe prophecies that carry a warning or a rebuke for the audience. It also points to the fact that bringing a prophecy of judgment upon a people was a burden for the prophet as well. It is never easy to be the bearer of bad news.

Habakkuk tells us that he "received" or "saw" this oracle, and this word literally means "to see or perceive something." And so, it is possible that Habakkuk received this message as part of a vision. Either way, this points us to the fact that God is the ultimate source of the message and the prophet Habakkuk was only the channel through whom God brought his word. And so, Habakkuk begins by presenting his message as a prophecy that comes straight from God. This is the "oracle," literally, "the burden" that Habakkuk the prophet received from the Lord.

And the first part of this prophecy, the section we are covering today, contains two parts. In vs. 2-4 Habakkuk brings his complaint before the Lord. And in vs. 5-11 God graciously answers Habakkuk's complaint. And once again, if we were to sum up Habakkuk's complaint in these verses, it all comes down to the single question, "God, do you really care?"

So, let's begin with Habakkuk's complaint. In this complaint, we'll see the same components that cause us to ask the same questions as Habakkuk. So, let's start out by asking the question from this perspective. Why do we sometimes think that God does not care? One reason is when we pray but do not see God's answer right away. Look at the beginning of vs. 2. Habakkuk cried out to God, [Read vs. 2a]

Apparently, Habakkuk had been praying to God for quite some time, but he did not see any answer coming. He began to wonder if God was even listening. Do you ever wonder if God is listening when you pray? Have you ever prayed for something, I mean really prayed, and then when the answer didn't come, you questioned whether God even heard you at all? When God does not answer our prayers right away, or in the way that we want him to, we sometimes think that God does not care.

Another reason we sometimes think God does not care is when we are in trouble and God does not deliver us right away. Look at the second half of vs. 2 where Habakkuk continues his "how long" prayer, [Read 2b]

The word translated “violence” here also carries the ideas of cruelty and injustice. It is used to speak of violence in a sinful context, where one person wrongfully does violence to another. One of the most difficult things to deal with in life is when someone harms you intentionally and unjustly. This describes what was going on in Israel and this was Habakkuk’s situation, and in his experience nothing is being done about it. And so, he cried out, “How long, Lord, how long?” You can hear the desperation and pain in his cry.

Have you ever prayed a “how long” prayer? “How long, O Lord, until I finally find a job? How long until I get better? How long until my marriage improves? How long until my loved ones come to Christ? How long until this burden is lifted from me?” We go through many troubles in this life. And when we are in trouble and God does not deliver us right away, we sometimes think that God does not care.

And then, another reason we sometimes think God does not care is when we see the wicked prosper all around us. In the next two verses, Habakkuk changes the question. He goes from asking God, “How long?” to asking God, “Why?” Look at vs. 3-4, [Read]

Habakkuk was writing at a time when the people of Judah had almost completely abandoned their loyalty to God and God’s laws. Habakkuk was surrounded by violence, destruction and conflict. He could not look to the leaders of the nation for help because the leaders were equally corrupt. The law was virtually paralyzed in this situation, and justice hardly, if ever, prevailed. The wicked not only outnumbered the righteous; they surrounded the righteous few, hemming them in, cutting them off, twisting and distorting things until justice was no longer recognizable. And so, Habakkuk cries out to the Lord: “Why? Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrong? Lord, don’t you care?”

Do you ever ask God the “why” questions? Do you ever wonder why God allows evil in the world? Do you ever wonder why people who have no concern for God and his laws seem to prosper and get ahead? Meanwhile, you are doing your best to serve God, and you feel like you are falling behind. And you begin to wonder if it is even worth it all. Does God really care? These are some of the same questions Habakkuk was struggling with at the beginning of his journey from doubt to faith.

So, how do we know God does care? When we pray, and we don’t see God’s answer right away? When we are in trouble, and God does not deliver us right away? When the wicked continue to triumph over the righteous? I mean, in those situations it really could seem like God doesn’t care.

But of course, looks can be deceiving. In vs. 5-11 God graciously responds to Habakkuk’s complaint. And in answering Habakkuk’s questions God shows Habakkuk, and he shows us, that yes, he does notice; yes, he is concerned; yes, God does care.

So, how does God do this? First of all, God assures us that he hears our every prayer. Remember, Habakkuk wondered if God was listening to his prayers for justice, but God was listening all along. Look at vs. 5 where God tells Habakkuk, [Read]

Not only had God been listening, but God was also moving entire nations around in answer to Habakkuk’s prayers. God told Habakkuk, “You just watch and see how I am going to answer. You are going to be utterly amazed.”

Isn’t that just like God? While we are busy crying out “How long?” and wondering if he is even listening, God is already in the process of answering. This is playing out today,

before our very eyes, although on a much smaller scale. I began to plan out this whole year of messages last September. Not every chapter and verse for every Sunday, but the overall theme and the order of how we would tackle the Minor prophets. I had no idea then what would transpire in the life of our church this week and the message that would need to be brought to us as we grieve the loss of our sister Kelly. But God knew, and he orchestrated all the details so that we would end up in this obscure, small book at the end of the OT discussing a question that, I'm sure, has been on our minds throughout this whole ordeal. Does God really care?

Now, that's just a small example but God often answers in the most amazing ways. If someone told us in advance how God was going to answer our prayers, we probably wouldn't even believe it. It's because, most of the time we're too focused on the valley and we can't see the mountain that lies in the distance that awaits God's children. God's ways are higher than our ways; his thoughts are higher than our thoughts. (Isa. 55:9) I want to emphasize that when I use the word amazing, I'm not talking about the results in our experience, for they are not always amazing, but amazing in scope and the ultimate end which is the promise of perfect restoration in eternity for those who are in Christ Jesus.

When we pray and God does not answer right away, we may sometimes think that God does not care. But God assures us in his word that he hears our every prayer. 1 John 5 tells us: "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have what we asked of him." (1 John 5:14-15)

Now understand this, God is not some kind of cosmic vending machine in which we just plug in the right formula and God will give us whatever we want. It's "according to his will" not our own. There are no multiple universes where God has to splice together all our wants and desires but one linear redemptive plan in which he allows for our own choices of free will and sin and the results of those choices, ultimately death, to be part of his perfect plan that leads to perfect unity with the father. This doesn't not make God cruel and unfeeling but the most loving for it gives everything meaning and purpose. If there was no hope of eternal life, then this life would be meaningless. But thanks be to God that we have an eternal hope today, and his name is Jesus. And because of that hope, every hurt and pain and all the suffering is a bridge to the glory that awaits us in his eternal kingdom. God assures us that he hears our every prayer and answers according to his good and perfect will. God cares.

And then, another way we can know that God cares is because God promises us that he will deliver us in his time. This is the answer to Habakkuk's "How long?" question: "How long must I wait?" God has his purposes, and we must learn to trust his timing. Look at vs. 6 where God tells Habakkuk how he will deliver him. God says, [Read]

This was the "amazing" something that Habakkuk would not have believed even if told. While Habakkuk was busy crying out, "How long?" God was orchestrating the events of history so that the Babylonians would come to power and finally bring an end to the violence and injustice in Judah. Habakkuk had to wait for God's timing in all this, but God assured him that once the Babylonians came, the deliverance would be quick and sure.

Look at all the words relating to speed and quickness spread throughout vs. 6-11. The Babylonians are "hasty," "or in a hurry." They "sweep" across the earth. Their horses are

“more swift than leopards.” Their horsemen “press on,” they “fly” like an eagle. They “sweep by” like the wind.

When we are in trouble and God does not deliver us right away, we may sometimes think that God does not care. But God promises to deliver us in his time and he will use his ways that are, again, higher than ours. Psalm 34:19 says: “A righteous man may have many troubles, but the LORD delivers him from them all.” And 1 Peter 5 reminds us that we need to look to God’s timing for our deliverance, not our own, realizing that our deliverance may not come in this life but in the new heavens and the new earth when Jesus comes again as we are reminded of 1 Peter 5:10: “And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.” God promises us that he will deliver us in his time. God cares.

And then a third way that God shows Habakkuk that he cares is he affirms that he will judge all evil in the world. This is the answer to the “Why?” question: “Why, Lord do you tolerate wrong?” (Habakkuk 1:3) God’s answer to Habakkuk is basically this: “I do not tolerate wrong. In fact, I will judge all the wrongs in this world.” The nation of Judah was full of violence and injustice. Judah had turned away from God and his law, and now God would judge Judah for her sins. God was raising up the Babylonians to do this.

Again, in vs. 6-11, God describes what the coming Babylonian invasion will be like. Notice how the descriptions of the Babylonians correspond in many ways to the people of Judah. The people of Judah were full of violence. The Babylonians are described as ruthless and “all bent on violence.” The people of Judah distorted justice and undermined the law. Now they will be overcome by a people who are a law unto themselves. (vs. 7)

You might wonder why God waited so long to judge the people of Judah. We know from our look at the Minor Prophets that God did not judge the nations of Israel and Judah right away because he was giving them time to repent and to turn from their sins. The whole reason why he sent the prophets, like Habakkuk, was to warn them of the coming judgment so that they would turn and repent of their sin.

The same situation exists today. God, in his mercy, is giving the world time to turn away from their sins and to come to Christ for salvation. 2 Peter 3:9 says this concerning Christ’s return and the final judgment: “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” (2 Peter 3:9) Make no mistake, God does care about sin and evil, and he affirms that he will judge, once and for all, all evil in the world. But, in his mercy, every moment he waits, he is giving the opportunity for repentance.

Habakkuk struggled with his seemingly unanswered prayers, with trials and troubles in life, and with the problem of evil. This caused him to doubt, and he began to question: “Does God really care?” God answered Habakkuk’s question with an overwhelming “Yes!” He assures Habakkuk that he has heard every prayer, that he will deliver him from his troubles in his time, and that he will ultimately bring an end to all evil in the world.

Perhaps you have been struggling with doubts just like Habakkuk. Perhaps you have been wondering, “What am I supposed to do with all my questions and doubts?” I believe Habakkuk presents a good example for us. Too often when we are struggling with doubts in life, we walk away from God. But Habakkuk did just the opposite. He went to God with all of his questions and doubts. And God answered and reassured him. It may not have been the

answer he was looking for. In fact, God's answer actually prompted a whole new set of questions for Habakkuk which we will look at next week.

But the important thing is that Habakkuk kept coming back to God. And I believe that is the key when you have questions. Bring your doubts and your questions to God. Come to Jesus in faith believing. Because God listens. God notices and God cares. Let's pray.

Benediction: And now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus; and the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, rest upon you and remain, now and always. Amen.