

MAJOR MESSAGE, MINOR PROPHET: HABAKKUK

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Habakkuk 1:1-4 - 2:1-4

1 The oracle that the prophet Habakkuk saw. ²O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen? Or cry to you “Violence!” and you will not save? ³Why do you make me see wrong-doing and look at trouble? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise. ⁴So the law becomes slack and justice never prevails. The wicked surround the righteous—therefore judgment comes forth perverted.

2 I will stand at my watchpost, and station myself on the rampart; I will keep watch to see what he will say to me, and what he will answer concerning my complaint. ²Then the Lord answered me and said: Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so that a runner may read it. ³For there is still a vision for the appointed time; it speaks of the end, and does not lie. If it seems to tarry, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay. ⁴Look at the proud! Their spirit is not right in them, but the righteous live by their faith.

REFLECT & DISCUSS

Context

Habakkuk continues the prophetic tradition of concern for justice. Only Habakkuk turns the question to God in a poignant and painful conversation. Just as Job challenges the justice of God as evil befalls him--Job's family is killed, he gets sick, he loses his wealth--Habakkuk challenges the justice of God when violence and destruction decimate the people of Israel. Job argues with God from an experience in his personal life, Habakkuk argues with God from the social and political landscape.

“How long?” is a complaint to God that stands in a long scriptural line of argument (see Psalms 13:1-2, Psalms 62:3, Job 19:2). How can God be good if there is so much evil? The question of evil is not unique to the Jewish or Christian faith. It challenges and vexes all philosophical, ethical, and theological thinking.

Habakkuk 2:4 is famously taken up by the Apostle Paul in Galatians (3:11) and Romans (1:17). In quoting Habakkuk, Paul transforms the meaning into the saving work of Jesus Christ. Faith in Christ will make one right before God--rather than a religious identity one is born into or a ritual act one might regularly perform. For Habakkuk, faithfulness to God will make life--even a life suffering injustice--possible to the very end.

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Big Ideas

1. Arguing with God is **not fatal** to **faith**, it reflects **faithfulness** to a **relational** God.
2. There is **not a logical explanation** for all suffering and injustice, but there is **a faithful response**.
3. God is not the **unmoved** mover **over** all that is. God is the **most moved** mover **in** all that is.

Reflect

1. Read the scripture passage carefully and slowly. What word or image stands out to you? Why?
2. Have you argued with God? If so, what about and why?
3. Habakkuk complains to God that there is so much injustice and suffering in the world--and it never seems to end. How might this tradition of complaint, lament, and arguing with God be nourishing to our faith and deepen our relationship to God?
4. What does it mean that the righteous will live by their faith? (Hab 2:4)
5. Where is God in the suffering of the world?
6. How can we respond faithfully to the suffering and injustice of the world around us and that we ourselves experience?

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