

MAJOR ON THE MINORS | HOPE CHAPEL

THE BOOK OF HABAKKUK

When God's Answer Is Not the Answer You Expected
Pastor Andrew Cole | Sunday 17 August 2026 | 9AM Gawler

Big Idea: *Habakkuk is the only prophet who spends the whole book arguing with God - and God doesn't rebuke him for it. He answers. The righteous will live by faith - not by sight, not by circumstances, not by answers - but by a settled trust in who God is, even when what he is doing makes no sense.*

Introduction - The Prophet Who Argued with God

Most of the Old Testament prophets deliver God's word to the people. Habakkuk is different. He delivers the people's complaints to God - and then waits for an answer. He is the only prophet in Scripture who spends the entire book in direct dialogue with God, wrestling with what he sees and demanding to know why God isn't doing something about it.

And God doesn't rebuke him for it. He answers him. Twice.

Habakkuk was writing around 605 BC, just as the Babylonian Empire was rising to dominance. The southern kingdom of Judah was corrupt - injustice everywhere, the law ignored, the powerful trampling the poor. And Habakkuk was crying out: God, how long? Why aren't you doing anything?

Habakkuk is the book for every believer who has ever looked at the world and asked: God, do you see this? And if you do - why aren't you doing something?

The Structure of Habakkuk

Chapter 1:1–11 Habakkuk's first complaint - God, why aren't you dealing with Judah's sin?

Chapter 1:12–2:1 God's answer - I am raising up Babylon to deal with it. Habakkuk's second complaint - but Babylon is worse!

Chapter 2:2–20 God's answer - I see Babylon too. Five woes against evil. The earth will be filled with the knowledge of God.

Chapter 3 Habakkuk's prayer and song - trembling, but trusting. The righteous will live by faith.

1 | Habakkuk's First Complaint - How Long, Lord?

Habakkuk 1:2–4 *How long, Lord, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you 'Violence!' but you do not save? 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. Therefore the law is paralysed, and justice never prevails. The wicked hem in the righteous, so that justice is perverted.*

This is not a polite, carefully worded prayer. This is a man at the end of his rope, bringing his raw frustration directly to God. And notice what God does not say: he does not say, how dare you speak to me like that. He does not rebuke Habakkuk for his honesty. He answers him.

Andrew pointed out that 'how long' is one of the most repeated phrases in the Psalms too. It is the language of people who genuinely trust God - and yet cannot reconcile what they see with what they know of him. Habakkuk is not a doubter. He is a wrestler. There is a significant difference.

God can handle your honest questions. What he cannot work with is polite silence that looks like faith but is really distance.

The First Answer - and the Shock

Habakkuk 1:5–6 *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. I am raising up the Babylonians, that ruthless and impetuous people, who sweep across the whole earth to seize dwellings not their own.*

God's answer is so surprising that he warns Habakkuk in advance that he won't believe it. He is going to use Babylon - a nation more wicked than Judah - to discipline his own people. This is not the answer Habakkuk was expecting. He wanted God to fix the problem in Judah. Instead, God tells him the solution is going to look like an even bigger problem arriving from the east.

Reflect: *Has God ever answered one of your prayers in a way that seemed worse than the original problem? What did that do to your faith - and looking back, how do you see it now?*

2 | Habakkuk's Second Complaint - But They're Worse Than Us!

Habakkuk 1:13 *Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrongdoing. Why then do you tolerate the treacherous? Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?*

Habakkuk's second complaint is theologically sophisticated. He isn't just upset - he is making a case. You are holy, God. You cannot tolerate sin. So how can you use a nation that is even more sinful than the one you are judging? It doesn't add up.

Standing on the Watchtower

Habakkuk 2:1 *I will stand at my watch and station myself on the ramparts; I will look to see what he will say to me, and what answer I am to give to this complaint.*

This is one of the most remarkable moments in all of Scripture. Having lodged his complaint, Habakkuk doesn't walk away in frustration. He climbs up to the watchtower and waits. He is expectant. He genuinely believes God will answer - he just doesn't know what the answer will be. And he is already preparing to receive it, even before he knows what it is.

A watchtower in the ancient world was the highest point in the city - built for one purpose: to see further than you could from the ground. Habakkuk is deliberately positioning himself to receive a perspective he does not currently have. He is climbing higher so he can see what God sees.

When you can't understand what God is doing, climb higher. Get a perspective you don't currently have. Wait expectantly. He will answer.

Andrew shared that this is one of the most practical images he has found for what it means to pray when you don't have answers. You don't have to resolve it. You don't have to understand it. You climb to where you can see further, and you wait. The watchtower is a posture - not a place.

Reflect: *Are you currently standing at a watchtower - expecting God to answer - or have you walked away from the wall in frustration? What would it look like to station yourself expectantly this week?*

3 | God's Second Answer - The Earth Will Be Filled

Habakkuk 2:2-4 *Then the Lord replied: Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it. For the revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay. See, the enemy is puffed up; his desires are not upright - but the righteous person will live by his faithfulness.*

God's second answer has three movements: write it down so others can carry it, wait for the appointed time even if it lingers, and live by faith in the meantime.

The Verse That Changed History

Habakkuk 2:4 - 'the righteous will live by his faithfulness' - is one of the most quoted verses in the entire New Testament. Paul quotes it in Romans 1:17 and Galatians 3:11. The writer of Hebrews quotes it in Hebrews 10:38. Martin Luther read it and the Reformation began.

In its original context it was a word to a prophet who could not understand what God was doing and could not see how it would end. The answer was not a fuller explanation. It was a call to a different way of living: the righteous will live by faith. Not by sight. Not by circumstances. Not by resolved answers. By faith.

Romans 1:17 *For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed - a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: the righteous will live by faith.*

Paul took these words and saw in them the entire logic of the gospel. The just will live by faith - not by keeping the law, not by earning favour, not by resolving every question first. By faith. The same principle that carried Habakkuk through the Babylonian crisis carries us through every crisis that defies our understanding.

Five Woes Against Evil

Before the chapter closes, God pronounces five woes against the kind of wickedness Babylon represents - woe to the one who enriches himself by plunder, who builds his city with bloodshed, who makes his neighbours drunk to look on their shame. God sees every act of injustice. He has not looked away. And the earth will be filled with the knowledge of God as the waters cover the sea.

Habakkuk 2:14 *For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.*

This is God's ultimate answer to Habakkuk's complaint about injustice. Not just that Babylon will be dealt with - but that the end of the story is the whole earth filled with the knowledge of his glory. The temporary triumph of wickedness does not have the final word. God does.

Reflect: *Habakkuk 2:4 says the righteous will live by faith - not by answers, not by sight, not by circumstances resolving. Is there a situation in your life right now where you are waiting for an answer before you will trust? What would living by faith look like in that situation today?*

4 | Habakkuk's Prayer - Trembling, but Trusting

Habakkuk 3:2 *Lord, I have heard your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds, Lord. Renew them in our day, in our time make them known; in wrath remember mercy.*

Chapter 3 is a psalm - a prayer set to music, marked for the worship leader. Habakkuk has heard God's answer. He has not resolved every question. But something has shifted. He is no longer demanding that God explain himself. He is standing in awe of a God whose ways he cannot fully grasp - and asking him to act again, as he has acted before.

'In wrath remember mercy' - this is one of the most beautiful phrases in the Minor Prophets. Habakkuk knows judgment is coming. He is not asking God to stop it. He is asking God, in the middle of it, not to forget mercy. He has moved from accuser to worshipper.

The Closing Song

Habakkuk 3:17-19 *Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Saviour. The Sovereign Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to tread on the heights.*

This is one of the most extraordinary acts of worship in all of Scripture. Everything has gone wrong. The agricultural economy has collapsed. There is no food, no harvest, no livestock. By every visible measure, God has not come through in the way Habakkuk hoped.

And Habakkuk says: yet I will rejoice.

Not 'I will rejoice when.' Not 'I will rejoice if.' Yet I will rejoice. The yet is everything.

This is not naive optimism. This is not pretending things are fine. Habakkuk named every failure specifically - the fig tree, the vines, the olive crop, the flocks, the herds. He did not skip over the pain. He named it, and then he chose to rejoice in the God who had not changed, even though everything around him had.

Andrew pointed out that the phrase 'he makes my feet like the feet of a deer' is an image of sure-footedness on treacherous terrain. The deer doesn't avoid the mountain - it climbs it. And on the very ground that would trip a person up, the deer finds its footing. God gives Habakkuk that kind of stability - not by removing the difficult ground, but by giving him the feet to navigate it.

Reflect: *Is there a 'yet' in your life right now? Something that has not gone the way you prayed - and yet you can still choose to trust? What would your version of Habakkuk's closing song look like, naming the real failures and still choosing to rejoice?*

Conclusion - The Journey of Habakkuk

CHAPTER 1 COMPLAINT

How long, Lord? Do you see this?

CHAPTER 2 WAITING

*I will stand at my watch and wait for
his answer*

CHAPTER 3 WORSHIP

*Yet I will rejoice in the Lord my
Saviour*

Habakkuk begins the book crying out in frustration and ends it singing a song of trust. He has not received every answer. Babylon is still coming. The fig tree is still bare. But something has been settled in his soul that circumstances cannot shake: the righteous will live by faith. The yet is everything.

This is the journey God invites every believer into. Not from confusion to certainty. Not from question to answer. But from complaint - through honest waiting - to worship. Faith is not the absence of struggle. It is the decision to trust the character of God through the struggle, until you find yourself singing on the other side.

Reflection & Discussion Questions

Use these on your own during the week, or with your LifeGroup.

1. Habakkuk brings his raw frustration directly to God - and God answers him rather than rebuking him. Does it feel safe to you to bring your honest complaints and questions to God? What makes it hard?
2. God's first answer was to use Babylon - something that looked worse than the original problem. Has God ever answered one of your prayers in a way that felt like a worse situation before it got better? What did that season teach you?
3. Habakkuk climbed to the watchtower and stationed himself expectantly, waiting for God's answer. Are you currently standing expectantly at a watchtower, or have you walked away from the wall? What would returning to expectant waiting look like this week?
4. Habakkuk 2:4 says the righteous will live by faith. Martin Luther read this verse and history changed. What would genuinely living by faith - rather than by sight, circumstances, or resolved answers - look like in your specific situation right now?
5. Habakkuk 2:14 promises that the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord. How does the certainty of God's ultimate purposes help you hold the present injustices and difficulties you see with more peace?
6. Habakkuk's closing song names every specific failure and still says 'yet I will rejoice.' Is there a 'yet' you need to speak out loud this week? What would your version of his song look like - honestly naming the hard things and still choosing to trust?

Key Scriptures This Week

- Habakkuk 1:2–4 - Habakkuk's first complaint: how long, Lord?
- Habakkuk 1:5–6 - God's first answer: I am raising up Babylon
- Habakkuk 2:1 - I will stand at my watch and wait for what he will say
- Habakkuk 2:2–4 - Write it down; wait for it; the righteous will live by faith
- Habakkuk 2:14 - The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord
- Habakkuk 3:2 - In wrath remember mercy
- Habakkuk 3:17–19 - Yet I will rejoice in the Lord my Saviour
- Romans 1:17 - The righteous will live by faith
- Galatians 3:11 - Clearly no one who relies on the law is justified before God
- Hebrews 10:38 - My righteous one will live by faith

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