

BIBLE CHALLENGE

A 1 week study of the books of Habbakkuk and Job

The story so far: We continue this week to read through the prophets and books written in the aftermath following the end of the nation of Judah. Many of the writers last week, and again this week, are trying to come to terms with how such a complete and devastating tragedy could have taken place.

When we suffer, our most common question is “why?”. We believe that if we can understand the reason for tragedy we will be better able to live with it. We want to know why God is doing what he is doing, or why he is not doing what he ought to do. We think that having an answer to the “why” of suffering will make sense of it.

Both Habakkuk and Job deal with the problem of suffering and our need to know why. They both come to the same conclusion, that knowing why it happened is less important than knowing how to get through it. We cannot now why God does what he does, but we *can* know that God will be present in the suffering to bring us through.

Monday:

Read: Habakkuk 1:1-6, 13, 2:1-4, 3:17-19

What to look for:

- Habakkuk is written at about the same time as Lamentations and Obadiah
- Note the format in which Habakkuk is written. Habakkuk lodges a complaint filled with questions of “why”, followed by God’s answer.
- Habakkuk asks “why”, but God does not respond directly to his questions. Note that Habakkuk never gets a direct answer to his “why”, but instead gets an answer to a different question, “how”.
- 1:6 – God admits that he is behind all this, that he is the one who has raised up the Babylonians.
- 1:13 – Habakkuk’s argument is that while the people of Judah might have been bad, the Babylonians were even worse, and yet it’s the Babylonians who destroy Judah. Habakkuk wants to know why God would do this, why God would put up with this?
- 2:1 – Habakkuk is saying, “I’m going to wait right here and see what God has to say about all this.”
- 2:4 – God does not answer the “why” question. His response instead is to answer the question, “How can you live through this?” His answer: by faith. When you don’t understand what God is doing, live by faith.
- What does faith look like? 3:17-19 says that faith is something that flourishes when all has failed and it seems as if darkness has the last word.

Tuesday:

Read: Job 1

What to look for:

- This chapter makes it clear from the very beginning that Job is a righteous and just man. He deserves no punishment. It is important to establish this fact since the remainder of the book will deal with questions of undeserved suffering.
- 1:6 contains one of the first of only a few specific references in the Old Testament to Satan. Satan's argument in vs. 9-12 is that of course Job will be faithful if God has protected him and blessed him every step of the way.
- 1:13-17 – Job loses everything with no warning and no cause, at least as far as Job knows. Established early on is that not everything bad that happens to human beings is deserved. In fact, Job is singled out precisely *because* he is good and innocent (1:8)

Wednesday:

Read Job 2:1-3:3

What to look for:

- Having failed to make Job give up on God in chapter one with the loss of his possessions and family, Satan now causes Job to lose his health.
- The three friends who arrive in 2:11-13 begin by simply sitting with Job in silence. Sometimes the best thing we can offer someone who is hurting is our silent presence. We don't always have to say something (though we almost always feel like we should.) The problem we will discover tomorrow (and when we are too quick to speak in the face of suffering) is that when Job's friends finally open their mouths, what they say in an effort to explain to Job why he is suffering is both wrong and unhelpful.

Thursday:

Read Job 4:7, 6:1-3, 8:3-4, 9:14-16, 11:5-6, 13:23-24, 20:4-5, 21:7, 23:3-5, 25:4, 27:5-6, 33:15-19

What to look for:

- Today we are tracing some of the arguments that Job's friends offer to explain his suffering, common arguments we still use to explain pain. We also are looking at Job's responses to those claims.
- 4:7 – only sinners suffer. If you are suffering, you did something to deserve it. Job's reply in 6:1-3 is that his suffering is out of proportion to anything he deserved.
- 8:3-4 – perhaps Job is suffering because of what his children did. Job responds in 9:14-16 that he is innocent, but his problem is that God won't give him a hearing.

- 11:5-6 – God knows you sinned and you really deserve more punishment. Job in 13:23-24 wonders if that is the case, why God won't tell him what he did.
- 20:4-5 – The wicked perish. Job in 21:7: Actually, the wicked seem to do quite well.
- 23:3-5 – Job's lament – if he could just hear from God, but God is silent.
- 25:4 – No one is righteous before God, therefore Job cannot claim to be so, thus his suffering. Job's response (27:5-6) is that there is nothing over which his conscience is troubled.
- 33:15-19 – God sends suffering in order to warn you and bring you to repentance. But by now, Job has run out of words.
- Which of these arguments, or others like them, do you hear most often to explain suffering? Do you think it is helpful to try to explain to people why they are hurting? What harm might it do?

Friday:

Read: Job chapters 38 and 42 (read chapter 38 slowly. Drink it in.)

What to look for:

- Job's need boiled down to his lament which we read yesterday in 23:3-5. Rather than knowing the "why" to his suffering, which his friends insisted on trying to provide, Job simply needed to know if God was present. If God cared. If God could be trusted. After 37 long chapters of silence, God finally speaks. But when he does, it is not to provide answers, but to ask some questions of his own.
- When God asks his questions he shifts Job's focus from suffering as the defining characteristic of his life to his place as a part of a vast creation sustained by God day after day. Instead of only seeing what God is *not* doing for him, Job is able to see what God *is* doing for all living things. God is a God of continual care.
- God does not answer Job's questions. The mysteries remain. But God's response convinces Job that God hears and God cares. We are part of a world that is beyond our comprehension, but which is in the hands of a gracious creator. In the end, God does not provide the answers to Job's questions, but he provides something better, something that was at the heart of Job's deepest need. God provides himself, and HE becomes the answer.