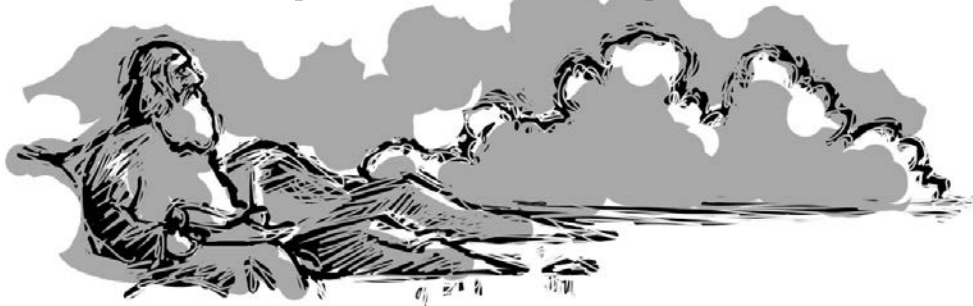


Trusting God's Goodness (Habakkuk)



SABBATH—MAY 18

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Habakkuk 1:1–17; Habakkuk 2:2–4; Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 11:1–13; Habakkuk 3; Philippians 4:11.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘The oceans are full of water. In the same way, the earth will be filled with the knowledge of my glory’ ” (Habakkuk 2:14, NIV).

KEY (IMPORTANT) THOUGHT: We may not always understand why bad things happen, but when they do, we always can trust God.

A PASTOR WAS PREACHING ABOUT HOW GOD WAS WITH PEOPLE EVEN AS THEY SUFFERED THROUGH HARD TIMES. Afterward a woman tearfully asked him, “Pastor, where was God on the day when my only son died?” The pastor read a deep sorrow on her face. He was silent for a while and then he answered, “God was in the same place where He was on the day His only Son died to save us from the eternal death.”

Like us, Habakkuk witnessed injustice, violence, and evil on earth. Even worse, God seemed to be silent through it all. But He did ask Habakkuk to trust in His promises.

The prophet (special messenger) did not live to see the fulfillment (keeping) of those promises. But he learned to trust in them anyway. His book begins with a complaint to God but ends with one of the most beautiful songs in the Bible. Like Habakkuk, we must wait in faith until the time when the world will be “filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea” (Habakkuk 2:14, NASB).

SUNDAY—MAY 19

PUZZLED PROPHET (Habakkuk 1)

Read Habakkuk 1. What does the prophet ask of God? His situation is different from ours, but how often do we find ourselves asking these same kinds of questions?

Habakkuk is different from other prophets because he does not speak for God to the people. Instead, he speaks to God about the people. Habakkuk begins his struggle to understand God's purposes with a cry: "O LORD, how long?" (NIRV). In the Bible, this question is a cry of sadness (Psalm 13:1; Jeremiah 12:4). It suggests that the speaker wishes to be set free from a situation of crisis.

Habakkuk calls for help from God about the violence (cruel force) everywhere in society. The original Hebrew word for "violence" is *hamas*. It is used six times in Habakkuk's book. The word suggests acts of injury, both physical and moral,¹ done to others (Genesis 6:11).

Because he is a prophet, Habakkuk really knows how much God loves justice and hates unfairness. So, he wants to know why God lets injustice continue. All around, Habakkuk notices violence and law-breaking. It seems to him that the wicked always win over the righteous (holy). And it seems that justice is ignored by the powerful, just as it was in the time of Amos (Amos 2:6–8). And that is how it often is today.



Habakkuk spoke to God about the people.

God's answer shows His future plans. The Lord will use the army of Babylon to punish the people. This announcement surprises Habakkuk. He did not expect God to use such a cruel army to punish Judah. In verse 8 the Babylonian army is compared² to a leopard, wolf, and eagle. They are the three animals whose speed and power bring terrible death to the animals they have captured.

Babylon does not answer to anyone for the cruel and terrible things it does. It breaks the most basic laws of created life. God had said that Babylon's army will be used as a "war club that carries out my [God's] anger" (Isaiah 10:5, NIRV). But the punishment takes place during Habakkuk's lifetime (Habakkuk 1:5). This use of Babylon's army raises even more difficult questions about God's justice.

How can we learn to trust in God's goodness and justice when the world seems so full of badness

1. moral—having to do with what is right or wrong.

2. compared—showed how two or more things are the same or different.

and injustice? What is our only answer?



Babylon's army is compared to a leopard, wolf, and eagle.

MONDAY—MAY 20

LIVING BY FAITH (Habakkuk 2:2–4)

In Habakkuk 1:12–17, God's answer to Habakkuk's questions brings up an even more puzzling question: can a righteous God use the wicked to punish people who are more righteous than they are? Habakkuk's question in verse 17 had to do with God's justice.

Habakkuk is puzzled by the fact that his country will be judged by another nation, one that is worse than Israel. The prophet knows about Judah's sins. But he believes that his people are not as wicked as the pagan³ Babylonians.

Read Habakkuk 2:2–4. What hope is given there?

Habakkuk 2:2–4 are some of the most important verses in the Bible. Verse 4 shows the true meaning of the gospel. It is the foundation of the verse that could have started the Protestant Reformation.⁴ When we have faith in Jesus Christ, we receive God's righteousness.⁵ We are given the righteousness of God Himself. His righteousness becomes ours. This is what is known as justification by faith.⁶

Verse 4 is a summary statement of the way of salvation. It also is the biblical teaching of justification by faith. How did the New Testament writers use this in Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; and Hebrews 10:38?

Among all these questions about evil, justice, and salvation, Habakkuk 2:4 shows a sharp (big) difference between the righteous and the proud. The action of each group decides its future: the proud will fail while the righteous will live by faith. The Hebrew word for faith (*'emuna*) means "faithfulness." This means that the person who lives by faith is not saved by his works. Instead, a person's works show that he or she lives by faith. A person's faith is shown in his or her

3. pagan—having to do with the worship of idols or nature instead of God.

4. Protestant Reformation—the period during which many Bible thinkers, such as Martin Luther, rebelled against Catholic teachings during the Middle Ages.

5. God's righteousness—God's perfect character (who God is); holiness.

6. justification by faith—when a person receives full forgiveness from God by accepting Jesus Christ as his Savior.

works. And so he or she is promised life eternal.

TUESDAY—MAY 21

FOR THE EARTH SHALL BE FILLED (Habakkuk 2)

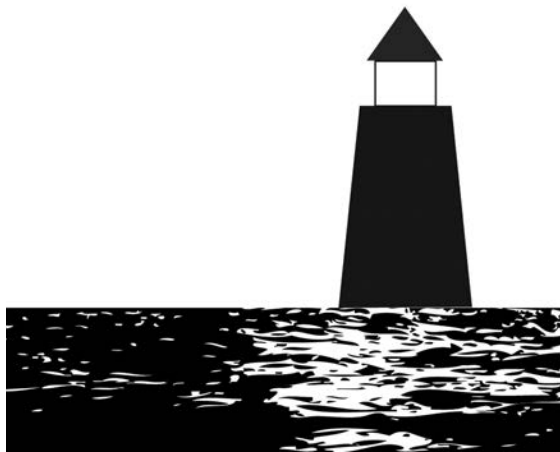
God's answer to Habakkuk's questions in Habakkuk 1:17 continues in chapter 2. It is in the form of a song that makes fun of the proud oppressor.⁷ No fewer than five woes (problems or troubles) (Habakkuk 2:6, 9, 12, 15, 19) support the message that Babylon's doom (downfall) is sealed (certain). The enemy will be punished for what it has done. What the wicked do to their victims will, in the end, be done to them. They will get what they have given because God cannot be mocked (made fun of) by proud humans (Galatians 6:7).

So, the oppressor will be judged by God. But the righteous have been promised eternal life in Christ. It does not matter what happens to the righteous here in this life. The book of Revelation describes the Lord's faithful people at the time of the end by using the words, "the patience of the saints" (Revelation 14:12). And the righteous are patient and faithful as they wait for God's action, even if they will see this action only at the Second Coming.

Read Hebrews 11:1–13. How do these verses help us as we wrestle with the same questions as Habakkuk did?

God's final answer to Habakkuk's questions is that He is always with His people. Put trust in God's presence and confidence in His judgment, even when it seems to be the "wrong" thing to do. That is the message of Habakkuk's book. It is the message of all Bible prophecy (special messages from God). It is the message to trust in the Lord and His unchanging character (holiness).

"Habakkuk's faith and the faith of the people gave them strength and hope in those days of terrible trouble. This same faith supports God's people today. In the darkest hours, under the most difficult situations, the Christian believer may keep his or her soul focused on [paying attention to] all the light and power of God. Day by day, through faith in God, his hope and courage may be renewed."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pages 386, 387.



In the darkest hour, the Christian can keep his or her soul focused on (paying attention to) the light and power of God.

⁷ oppressor—someone who treats a person or a group of people in a cruel or unfair way.

WEDNESDAY—MAY 22**REMEMBERING GOD'S FAME
(Habakkuk 3)**

Read Habakkuk 3. What is Habakkuk doing here? Why is that so important, especially when you consider the tough situations and difficult questions that he is facing?

Habakkuk shows his acceptance of God's ways in a prayer put to music (Habakkuk 3:19). He knows God's power. So, he asks the Lord to remember His mercy when the judgment begins. Habakkuk remembers reports of God's great acts in the past. And he is praying to Him to bring salvation now. In doing this, Habakkuk seems to stand between the past and future. He thinks back to the Exodus event. And he also thinks ahead to the day of the Lord. He wishes to experience God's power in his present situation.

The hymn from chapter 3 describes how God saves Israel from slavery in Egypt. What happened at the time of the Exodus is an example of the great judgment day. It shows that the godly should not worry about the day of the Lord. Instead, they must wait, be patient, and stay happy in the hope that is theirs.

The hymn also celebrates the power, glory, and victorious nature (who someone is) of God. Here, the Lord is described as King over the whole earth. Habakkuk compares His glory with the glory of the sunrise (Habakkuk 3:4).

God judges the nations that treat other nations cruelly. But at the same time He brings about the salvation of His people in His "chariots of salvation" (Habakkuk 3:8). On the surface God's power is not always seen. But the person of faith knows that God is there, always. Habakkuk calls us to look expectantly for the Lord's salvation. This is when He will establish His righteousness on the earth and fill the world with His glory.

By singing praises to the Lord, the people of God encourage one another (Ephesians 5:19, 20; Colossians 3:16) to remember God's past acts and to hope for the glorious future. Habakkuk's own example shows how we can continue by living with a vision of hope.

Think about God's past leading in your life. How does this help you to learn to trust Him and His goodness, no matter what the near future brings? Why is it always so important for us to look to the final and eternal future that awaits us?



Habakkuk's hymn celebrates God's glory and power.

THURSDAY—MAY 23**GOD IS OUR STRENGTH
(Habakkuk 3:17–19)**

What is so good about Habakkuk's attitude (thought or feeling) here? How can we develop the same sort of attitude for ourselves? Read also Philippians 4:11.

The closing words in Habakkuk's book (Habakkuk 3:16–19) show the prophet's reaction to God's power and goodness. A fresh look at God's saving acts gives Habakkuk courage as he waits for the enemy's attack. But also he is filled with fear as he waits for God's judgment to fall upon his nation. Invasion may lead to the fig and olive trees being destroyed. These trees are very valuable in Palestine. So are the vines, grain, and cattle. But the prophet's faith remains strong because he has had a vision of the living Lord.

Based on his past experiences, Habakkuk knows of God's faithfulness. That is why he resigns (surrenders) himself to God's present purposes (Habakkuk 3:16–19). Habakkuk decides to put his trust in the Lord and in His goodness no matter how hopeless his situation appears.

Habakkuk waits in faithful trust even though there are no immediate signs of salvation. In this way, he is a prophet who has instructed the faithful over the ages to develop a deeper living faith in the Savior. By his own example, Habakkuk encourages

God's people to talk with Him, to test their loyalty to Him in harsh times, to develop hope in the Lord, and also to praise Him.

Habakkuk closes his book with a beautiful example of faith. No matter how hard life may become, a believer can find joy and strength in God. The message of Habakkuk's book is that we need to wait patiently for God's salvation in a time of hardship that has no end. The theme of "waiting on the Lord" fills Habakkuk's book. How important is that theme for us, as Seventh-day Adventists. Even our church name shows our faith in the coming of Jesus.

FRIDAY—MAY 24

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Read the following comments and discuss how they help us to understand Habakkuk's messages better.

"There is an answer to Habakkuk's question. It is an answer, not in words, but in events. God's answer will happen, but it cannot be spelled out in words. The answer will surely come; 'if it seem[s] slow, wait for it.' True, the waiting is hard to do. And the righteous person is upset by what he sees. To this the great answer is given: 'The righteous shall live by his faith.' It is an answer, not in words but in how a person lives. Faith is trust in God. Waiting on God is a form of worshipful understanding." —Adapted from Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets*, page 143.

"We must cherish and cultivate

the faith that prophets and apostles [teachers and leaders] have shown. It is the faith that lays hold to the promises of God and waits for salvation [freedom] in God's chosen time and way. The sure word of prophecy will meet its final fulfillment in the glorious coming of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, as King of kings and Lord of lords. The time of waiting may seem long. The soul may suffer from discouraging situations. Many who have lost their faith may fall by the way. But with the prophet Habakkuk, who tried to encourage Judah during terrible times, let us in faith say, 'The Lord is in His holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before Him.'"—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pages 387, 388.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Summarize Habakkuk's conversation (talk) with God. What is his basic complaint? How does he deal with God's answers?
- ② Could it be that honest questions and even doubts are more acceptable in God's eyes than a false belief? Defend your answer.
- ③ Seventh-day Adventists from earlier days all believed that Christ would have been back by now. They thought that they would have experienced the final fulfillment of all these wonderful promises. How do we learn to keep faith as we move forward in time and wait for Jesus' second coming?