

Key idea:

FCF:

Application:

PRAY

1. Habakkuk knows (1:12-13a)

Habakkuk knows certain truths about God's character and nature
– **look at verses 12-13a... READ.**

God is eternal – he has no beginning or end, he has no creation or death. He is not affected by the decay that we feel and know. He is not limited by time or geography.

God is personal – he has a name by which his people know him ('Yahweh', or 'the LORD'). God might be eternal, but he is also personally committed to this world, personally invested in it, and personally knowable.

God is the 'Holy One' – there is no-one and no thing that is like God. Put simply, God is unique, in every aspect and part of his character and being. As Habakkuk connects this to 'death', he knows God will not die: God has no sin in him. He is pure in goodness, the only one who is eternally right and good and pure.

God is the one who is in charge, personally, of all the events of the days of this world. He places people here and there. He appoints powers to rule and to bring order.

God is the one who deals with sin. Sin is the attitude and action that we humans display, always and by nature, that says, 'I am God and God is not'. It is the complete rejection of God. And God judges sin – even in his own mob!

God is constantly faithful – he always does as he says. He is as unchanging as a 'rock' seems to be, but even more so! God is relentlessly faithful.

God cannot stand sin or the sinner in his presence.

Habakkuk knows all this about God. He has read it. He has seen it. He has experienced it.

In fact, these truths that Habakkuk knows about the LORD's character and nature have been displayed in the history pages that Habakkuk knows intimately:

- Because of his nature, the LORD chose to commit to a broken world. He made a commitment to deal with the root cause of this brokenness: sin.
- Because of his nature, the LORD has committed to achieving this through the family of Abraham. There was nothing to recommend Abraham – a childless, idol-worshipping nomad who, at 75, had little prospect of family when the LORD called him. In this sense, the LORD displays his total initiative – his grace: giving humans something that they do not deserve. The LORD made a commitment (a promise) to deal with sin through the family of Abraham

- Because of his nature, the LORD rescued Abraham's family from slavery in Egypt. He constituted them as his people. He gave them a job – to represent the LORD to the world, so that the world would know God and come back to him (cf. Ex.19:1-8).
- Because of his nature, the LORD gave his people – Abraham's family, the nation of Israel – his 'law' – a series of clear commandments which, obeyed, would enable them to show the character of the LORD to the world.

On the basis of what he knew of the LORD's nature, Habakkuk had cried out to him – remember Habakkuk 1:1-4?

Habakkuk was distressed by the complete failure of the LORD's people, Abraham's family, to represent the LORD to the world. Habakkuk was distressed because the LORD's people were broken. Habakkuk was distressed because he was fearful for the hope of the world: if Abraham's family was broken, then where could the commitment of the LORD be? Where was the answer to sin?

Because of his nature, the LORD answered Habakkuk – remember Habakkuk 1:5-11?

The LORD reaffirmed his commitment to dealing with sin – the sin of his very own people – in an astounding way! He would bring the Babylonians to destroy his people, as judgement for their sin, as he had already warned them he would (Deuteronomy 28)

Habakkuk knows these truths. Habakkuk has understood this nature of the LORD.

2. Habakkuk is perplexed... (1:13b)

And, yet, God's astounding judgement of sin through the Babylonians has caused Habakkuk a deep and confronting problem – **look at verse 13b... READ.**

On the one hand, this is God. On the other hand, this is what God has committed to doing – he is 'tolerating the treacherous', he is 'silent' as the wicked Babylonians eat up men like Habakkuk. How is this possible? How is this reasonable? How is this consistent?

How can God be this, and how can God do this – all against the commitment God has already made to deal with sin in this world through Abraham's family, Habakkuk's people, God's people?

Have you ever had the same confusing problem?

You know something to be true about God, and then God does something, and you scratch your head and wonder, 'How? Why?'

It is not that Habakkuk doesn't trust the LORD. It is not that Habakkuk has a 'weak faith'. It is not that Habakkuk is turning his back on the LORD. It is this: what Habakkuk knows about the LORD and what Habakkuk sees the LORD doing have created a perplexed theology – and it pains him to see and hear it!

Does that sound familiar to you?

3. The perplexity intensified... (1:14-17)

The problem is intensified for Habakkuk as he looks out at the world, at his very own people – **look at verses 14-17... READ.**

Sometimes it is hard to know where Habakkuk is standing in history, in relationship to these events in time and space. But it would be very easy to picture him in Jerusalem and watching as the Babylonians marched in, sometime around 586BC. Surrounded by the rubble and smoke and smell of war and invasion and occupation, feeling the damage and deprivation of a siege that had stretched the capital of Judah (Jerusalem), Habakkuk couldn't avoid the image of humans as a bunch of marine creatures, fish, in a barrel. And they all bear the image of God – God made them. Even more so, as he watches his own people, Abraham's family, the people of God, he knows that God committed to them. And, yet, here they are – hemmed in, caught, struggling, flapping, waving, drowning.

The Babylonians move amongst them with the practiced ease of conquerors, like fishermen who have mastered their craft. They rejoice as they drag these humans in their wake, gathering and grinding them. As they slaughter and destroy, they sing and delight in their very own power. And God's image-bearers and his very own people are wiped out!

In fact, the Babylonians are so perverse in their pride that they worship the very power and instruments that gather up humans like fish. And there seems to be no end in sight – this is one endless slaughter session, with the glee of the Babylonians over all. There seems no end.

God, what are you doing?

Does that sound familiar? Have you ever had that deep and perplexing and anguished conflict in your own heart and soul as you wrestle with what you know of God and his nature, and then look at his work in this world?

4. Habakkuk waits (2:1)

Habakkuk knows how forward he is being with God – **look at 2:1... READ.**

Habakkuk is waiting for an answer. He has already posed one question and the LORD has answered. The LORD's answer has created a second, perhaps deeper, conundrum for Habakkuk. He has posed this question to God. And he waits for the answer.

It is a remarkable image. It is almost Habakkuk is bracing himself on the walls of Jerusalem, gazing out over the smoke and destruction and devastation, looking and looking for what the LORD will say.

He is certain the God will answer. But he is also certain that the word that God speaks will create the need for change in his own life. Did you catch that in his words?

'What I should reply about my complaint' is a very clear statement by Habakkuk. He expects, and knows, that God's reply will change him. In this sense, Habakkuk is a model for any of God's people. His interaction with God has established the truth that God's people can come before God and ask him their perplexing

personal questions. God's response has made clear that he will answer. And Habakkuk makes sure we realise that the answers of God must change us, as we hear them.

5. Know, ask, wait...

Habakkuk's second question of the LORD lays out some guidelines for dealing with perplexing theology – the times when what we know of the LORD's nature seems to sit roughly and awkwardly with what we see the LORD doing.

First, Habakkuk starts with what he knows of the LORD. Did you notice that?

Too often, across history, people start with what they are experiencing and work back to the knowledge of the LORD. Habakkuk sets a good pattern for dealing with the perplexing theology he has: start with the knowledge we have of the LORD's consistent nature and character. And, in this, Habakkuk doesn't doubt that revelation – it is actually the baseline for how he raises his questions.

We are not facing an invasion by a nation of judgement, raised by the LORD to wipe out the sin of his people. We are not in Habakkuk's situation. But Habakkuk does lay out for us, as the LORD's people today, a strong exhortation: start with the knowledge we have of the LORD as we deal with our theological perplexity.

Habakkuk rehearses it. Habakkuk reminds himself of it. Habakkuk states it: this is what the LORD is! Can I encourage you to remind

yourselves of the nature of the LORD by reading the LORD's word. In fact, that is a question you can ask of any passage in the Bible: 'What does this tell me about the nature of the LORD?'

In turn, and second, this provides Habakkuk with the right framework for raising his question before the LORD. A right starting point will lead to rightly raised questions. Whilst Habakkuk's confusion is palpable, and his emotion is tangible, his question is not disrespectful nor is it beyond the bounds of the privilege of asking questions of the One who has committed to dealing with the sin of the world.

We can ask such questions. It is appropriate, given the right starting point and given the r-pre-existing commitment of the LORD to his creation, through the people of Abraham. In fact, to whom else could such questions be asked? Where else could we go with such questions?

Third, we must wait for an answer. Habakkuk is under the clear understanding that the LORD will answer him. Moreover, he knows that the LORD's answer will lead to some necessary change in himself. God's people cannot take the privilege of questioning without the responsibility to listen and respond. As we raise our question(s) of the LORD, with the LORD, as we bring before him our perplexed theology, be prepared for an answer, and be prepared for the change that this will necessarily bring.