

Where are you, God?

A study from Habakkuk Chapter 1

Woodrow Wilson was the American President during World War I (WWI) and is often associated as using the phrase to describe that terrible war as “the war to end all wars.”

Now, WWI took place between 1914 and 1918. But what has happened since WWI ended? Did President Wilson’s words come true?

Well, not really. Can anyone guess how many wars we’ve had since 1918?, not counting minor skirmishes. Since 1918 we’ve had approximately 224 wars, some of these wars resulted in the deaths of a few hundred, while other wars, such as World War 2 resulted in the deaths of over 50 million dead.

That list of 224 wars took place around the world only outlines wars from 1918 on. Imagine if we had a new list, but this time we counted the number of wars that took place before 1918 or worse, what if to the same list we also included not just deaths caused by wars but also suicides, homicides, executions, accidents resulting in death and so on.

It is no wonder looking at the state of the world now that some people, including believers, cannot help but ask the burning questions which have been bugging us for ages, “Where are you, God? - Where are you when all these atrocities are taking place? When will we have a moment of peace?”

It makes living on this earth seem extremely bleak and raises the question – is this really what God intended for this earth?

One man did dare ask the question we’ve all at some point or other have thought. He dared ask the question to God. Seeing so much pain and suffering around him, he had had enough and questioned the Lord about it.

Read: Habakkuk Chapter 1

Habakkuk is regarded as one of the minor prophets, but you will agree there’s nothing minor about the issues he raises with God.

The few facts we do know about Habakkuk is that his name means ‘embracer’, he possibly wrote his book during the reign of the evil king Jehoikim who ruled the kingdom of Judah from approximately 609 to 598 BC. He lived during a period that can only be described as a spiritual decline for his nation that only got worse.

This little book is unique in that it records a conversation between the prophet and the Lord. Just man and His Creator. That image in itself may seem peaceful and surreal to some but it should not take the focus away from the issues that were weighing heavy on Habakkuk.

Question time (hand out notes and give few mins to study them).

Complete as a group

In completing this little group exercise I hope we can understand what was going through Habakkuk's mind and more importantly what was weighing his heart.

You see, what was bothering the prophet is issues that should bother us too. Habakkuk was well aware that the further away Israel was moving from obeying God's laws, the more it was forcing itself to come under God's judgement – leaving our Lord little choice but to act.

Psalms 119: 126 says it clear that

“It is time for You to act, O Lord, for they have regarded Your law as void”

While questioning God's reasons for bringing this judgement down upon His own people, Habakkuk would soon learn from God's answer to him that when we don't force ourselves to change in the manner God wants us to, then change is forced upon us.

And we may have the audacity to rebuke and direct our anger towards God without fully understanding what He does is for our own good – but what parent would turn a blind eye to a disobedient child rather than correct them?

And to make matters worse, partly for Habakkuk's own comprehension of the situation and to show Israel what they were to endure, God's instrument of punishment was to be none other than the Babylonian nation. If this seems acceptable or not such a big deal to you, then allow me to clarify why it should be.

God's own people were to learn a harsh lesson at the hands of an outwardly pagan nation with God's blessing!

How humiliating that must have been for Israel.

Israel's stiff-necked attitude, total disregard to God's laws and lack of humility, would be nothing compared to having their noses rubbed into the ground by a nation that didn't know or even care follow the one true God.

Before we begin to question God's motives or wonder why there is no action on His part, we need to take a few steps back and arrive to the starting point of where our problems commenced in the first place: you may be surprised to know that you need look no further than at yourself!

Habakkuk started his book by asking God questions like, “Where are you, God?”, “Why do you ignore all the violence and sin that is taking place and are no where around?”, when in reality he should have been asking God, “What can we do to rectify our broken relationship with You?”

But let me address the other issues that Habakkuk also raised with God, that of questioning whether God wants or takes delight in seeing suffering in the world. Whether God really wants to see those already lost to the world, become permanently lost with no hope of ever receiving salvation.

2 Peter 3: 9 says,

“The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. Instead He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”

Does that sound like a cruel and heartless God?

And if this is not enough, then the Lord Himself declares that in Ezekiel 33:11,

“Say to them, ‘As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, people of Israel?’”

It took God’s own reply for the prophet Habakkuk to fully understand why the Lord allowed what was to happen to Israel eventually take place.

The instrument chosen to punish Israel was God’s own choice, the path that led God to make this difficult decision was Israel’s own choosing.

And what was the fruit of all this? We know in the end the Babylonians did come, invade and enslave the southern kingdom, Judah, just like the Assyrians had done to the ten northern tribes.

So when you hear those questioning where are you, God? Why do you allow all this violence and sin to take place?

God’s answer to that? 1 Timothy 2:4,

“... who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”