

Habakkuk 1:2

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

O LORD, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear! even cry out unto thee of violence, and thou wilt not save!

Analysis

O LORD, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear! even cry out unto thee of violence, and thou wilt not save! Habakkuk opens his prophecy with a raw, honest lament that resonates with believers throughout history who have wrestled with God's apparent silence in the face of injustice. This is no flippant complaint but a profound theological struggle—how can a righteous God allow wickedness to flourish unchecked?

The prophet's cry "how long" (עַד-אָנָה/ad-anah) appears frequently in the Psalms and prophetic literature, expressing not doubt in God's existence but perplexity about His timing. Habakkuk witnessed the decline of Judah under corrupt kings like Jehoiakim, where violence, injustice, and covenant-breaking had become normalized. Yet God seemed distant, unresponsive to the prophet's prayers.

This verse establishes a crucial biblical principle: honest questioning before God is not unfaith but deep faith. Habakkuk doesn't turn away from God in his confusion—he turns toward God, pressing into prayer even when answers seem absent. The prophetic tradition affirms that lament is a form of worship, trusting God enough to bring Him our hardest questions.

Theologically, this verse introduces the problem that the entire book addresses: theodicy—God's justice in a world filled with evil. Habakkuk's complaint will receive an answer, though not the one he expects. God will reveal that He is indeed working, using the Babylonians as His instrument of judgment. This raises

even deeper questions about how God works through wicked nations, questions that ultimately point toward the cross, where God's justice and mercy meet.

Historical Context

Habakkuk prophesied during the late 7th century BC, likely between 609-605 BC, during the final years of Judah's independence before the Babylonian exile. This was a period of profound moral and spiritual decay. King Josiah's reforms (622 BC) had brought temporary revival, but after his death, Judah quickly reverted to idolatry and injustice under his sons Jehoahaz and Jehoiakim.

The political situation was volatile. Egypt had killed Josiah at Megiddo (609 BC) and briefly controlled Judah. Then Babylon defeated Egypt at Carchemish (605 BC), establishing Nebuchadnezzar as the dominant power. Habakkuk lived in this transitional period, witnessing violence, legal corruption, and the oppression of the righteous by the wicked within Judah itself.

Unlike most prophets who delivered God's message to the people, Habakkuk engages in dialogue with God on behalf of the people. His book is structured as a conversation—complaint, divine response, further questioning, and finally submission and praise. This literary form makes Habakkuk unique among the prophetic books, more akin to Job's wrestling with divine justice.

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. How does Habakkuk's honest lament challenge modern assumptions that faith means never questioning God?
2. In what areas of life are you tempted to believe God is silent or inactive, and how does Habakkuk's approach to prayer speak to that?
3. What does it mean to bring our hardest questions to God while still trusting His character and sovereignty?
4. How does living in a time of moral decline and injustice test your faith, and what can you learn from Habakkuk's example?

Interlinear Text

עַד H5704	אָ נָה H575	יְהוָה O LORD H3068	שׁוֹ עֲתִי how long shall I cry H7768	וְלֹא H3808	תִּשְׁמָע and thou wilt not hear H8085
אֲזַע קוֹ even cry out H2199	אֵל יְיָ H413	חֲמָס unto thee of violence H2555	וְלֹא H3808	תוֹשִׁיעַ: and thou wilt not save H3467	

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 14:9 (Salvation): Why shouldest thou be as a man astonished, as a mighty man that cannot save? yet thou, O LORD, art in the midst of us, and we are called by thy name; leave us not.

Lamentations 3:8 (Parallel theme): Also when I cry and shout, he shutteth out my prayer.

Revelation 6:10 (References Lord): And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?

Psalms 94:3 (References Lord): LORD, how long shall the wicked, how long shall the wicked triumph?

