

THANKSGIVING IN THE WILDERNESS (2)

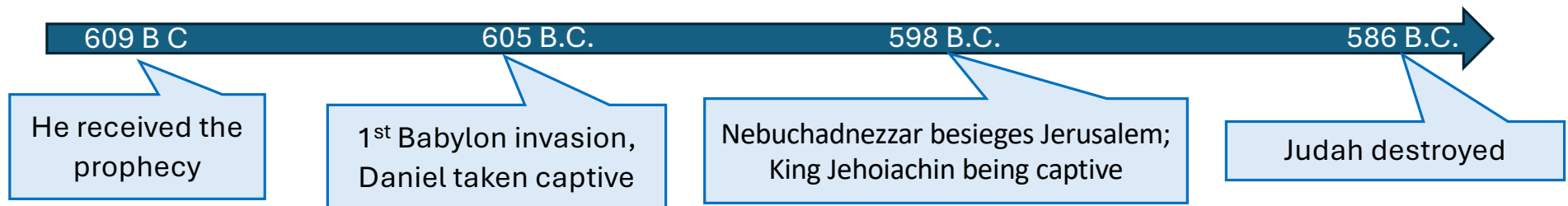
FINDING GRATITUDE WHEN LIFE IS HARD



Who is Habakkuk?

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- An Old Testament prophet between 609-598 B.C. (during the reign of Jehoiakim), just before the first Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem.
- Like Jeremiah, he lived to see the destruction of Jerusalem.
- Judah was suffering from widespread moral decay, injustice and violence. Babylon was becoming the dominant world power, replacing the declining Assyrian Empire.
- Unlike the other prophets, Habakkuk doesn't accuse Israel or even speak to the people on God's behalf. The book of Habakkuk tells us about his personal struggle to believe that God is good when there is so much tragedy and evil in the world.



Two Questions Habakkuk Asked God

- Q1: Does God care?

- Habakkuk is upset about all the violence and the injustice he sees in Judah. During all the wickedness, he asks God a question.
- How long, LORD, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, Violence! but you do not save? Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrongdoing? Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict abounds (Habakkuk 1:1-3).

- God's answer

- I am raising up the **Babylonians**, that ruthless and impetuous people, who sweep across the whole earth to seize dwellings not their own... they sweep past like the wind and go on, guilty people, whose own strength is their god (Habakkuk 1:6 & 11).
- Habakkuk was pleased that God intended to judge the sins that he had described. God is about to do something so incredible that it would be hard for Habakkuk to believe.
- This unexpected answer is a lesson in trusting God's larger plan, even when it's difficult to understand, as His purpose is often greater than what we can see.

Q2. Does God Fair?

- Habakkuk's complaint

- LORD, you have chosen the Babylonians to punish people....So how can you put up with those evil people? How can you be quiet when the wicked swallow up people who are better than they are? (Habakkuk 1:12-13).
- How can you use the Babylonians to judge your people? They are even worse than the people of Judah! How can you use a more wicked nation to judge a less wicked nation? God, that is not fair!

- God's answer

- But all the nations the Babylonians have hurt will laugh at them. They will make fun of the Babylonians... Babylonians will be filled with disgrace, not respect. It's your turn to drink and fall to the ground like a drunk person. The cup of anger from the LORD's right hand is coming around to you. You will receive disgrace (Habakkuk 2:6 & 16, NCV).
- God answers Habakkuk a second time, explaining that the Babylonians will also be judged for their sin, in God's timing. Meanwhile the righteous will live by faith, trusting God to act justly in his own time.

A Model for Prayer and Faith

- From questioning God's justice to confidence in His power
 - I heard and my heart pounded, my lips quivered at the sound; decay crept into my bones, and my legs trembled. Yet I will wait patiently for the day of calamity to come on the nation invading us. Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, **yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior.** The Sovereign LORD is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to tread on the heights (Habakkuk 3:16-19).
- A prayer from lament to praise
 - Transitions from worry to worship, doubt to confidence, and complaint to consolation.
- A prayer from doubt to faith
 - Habakkuk's initial questions are replaced by an awe of God's might and power, which leads him to praise.

From Confusion to Conviction

- I heard and my heart pounded, my lips quivered at the sound; decay crept into my bones, and my legs trembled. Yet I will wait patiently for the day of calamity to come on the nation invading us (Habakkuk 3:16).
 - I heard (what dreadful destruction God threatened against Judah).
 - Habakkuk trembled all over (his heart, lips, bones, legs).
 - He patiently wait the day of calamity (He could do nothing but wait patiently for the Babylonians to grow stronger and for judgement to come on Judah).
- The circumstances didn't change
 - Judah was still rebellious.
 - Babylon was still coming.
 - God didn't change His mind.

Thanksgiving in the Wilderness

- Habakkuk changed
 - Though the fig tree (Judah) does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior (Habakkuk 3:17-18).
 - Even though everything would get worse in Judah, he determined to praise God and to rejoice in the Lord, who would save him.
 - Faith means loving and serving God regardless of circumstances.
- Lessons we need to learn
 - Thanksgiving doesn't depend on circumstances. It depends on the Lord.
 - Thanksgiving amidst desolation: It is a choice.
 - Very truly I tell you, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy (John 16:20).

God Provides Strength to Overcome Obstacles

- Habakkuk made God his strength
 - The Sovereign LORD is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer; he enables me to tread on the heights (Habakkuk 3:19).
- Reasons why he is thankful God
 - The Lord gives him stability in unstable times. “He makes my feet like the feet of a deer.”
 - The Lord gives him mountain top experiences though he is living in the valley. “God enables me to tread on the heights.”
- Look for God's strength in difficult times:
 - The imagery of the deer on high places suggests finding stability and a way forward through faith, even in the most challenging and seemingly barren circumstances.
 - God enables believers to rise above their circumstances and find an elevated, secure perspective through faith.
 - The enemy is puffed up...but the righteous person will live by his faithfulness (Habakkuk 2:4).

Finding Gratitude When Life is Hard

- Trust God
 - God's answers are not always what we expect, but they are part of a divine plan. The key is to trust God's character and purpose, even when the answer seems harsh or confusing.
- Find thankfulness independent of circumstances
 - Yet I will rejoice in the Lord (Habakkuk 3:17).
 - Thanksgiving comes not from possessions or circumstances, but from God's goodness and salvation.
- Choose faith over fear
 - Have faith even when he is terrified and things are falling apart, actively choosing to trust God's plan over despair, panic, or doubt.
- Recognize God as your source of strength
 - The Sovereign LORD is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer (Habakkuk 3:19).
 - When your own strength fails, you can rely on God's strength to help you navigate life's challenges.