

HABAKKUK 1:1-3:19

Faith and doubt?

Are doubts, questioning and fears compatible with faith? Are you facing problems with your marriage (or lack of marriage), your family, your job, your health, your finances or a combination of all of these? Does this make you doubt the existence of God? Should you stop believing?

Many people regard faith as unquestioning. They think faith and doubt are opposites. In fact, faith and doubt are two sides of the same coin. There is no doubt that $2 + 2 = 4$. However, it does not take any faith to believe it. On the other hand, to believe that someone loves you is open to an element of doubt. To put your faith in God is similar to loving a person. There is always the possibility of doubt. Without doubt, faith would not be faith.

Likewise, it is not wrong to question God within the context of faith. The book of Habakkuk starts with a man who believes, yet questions. It ends with a towering expression of faith, scarcely equalled anywhere else in the Old Testament.

Habakkuk looked at the world and was perplexed and fearful. He saw 'violence' (1:2), 'injustice' (v.3a), 'destruction' (v.3c), 'strife' and 'conflict' (v.3d). Yet the Lord did not seem, to him, to be doing anything about it (vv.2–4). He saw pain and suffering and asked, 'How long, O Lord...? Why...?' (vv.2–3).

He took the problem to God and asked genuinely heartfelt questions. God replied that he was going to do something amazing, but not what Habakkuk expected (v.5). He was raising up the Babylonians (v.6). Consequently, Israel was to be overwhelmed and would go into exile.

Habakkuk was perplexed. Surely God was in control of history and all-powerful (v.12)? How could a pure God use the cruel and idolatrous Babylonians to punish a godly nation? 'God, you chose Babylonians for your judgment work? ... You can't be serious. You can't condone evil!' (vv.12–13, MSG). Habakkuk didn't seem to get a direct answer. However, he took his puzzled complaints and problems to God and left them with him as he waited (2:1).

God told him first to write down the vision (v.2). When you sense God speaking to you and giving you a vision, it is good to write it down so that you can refer back to it and hold on to it. Second, God told him that he may have to wait for the answer: 'Wait for it; it will certainly come and not delay' (v.3).

God wants you to bring your doubts and questions to him. You may not always get immediate answers to all your questions. While you wait for answers you are called to trust in God, even when you don't fully understand what he is doing.

Faith involves believing what God has said in spite of the difficulties you face: 'The righteous will live by their faith' (v.4). Habakkuk foresaw that judgment was coming on the ungodly Babylonians. He also foresaw that, one day, the outlaws would be destroyed and 'the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea' (v.14). He foresaw the ultimate triumph of good over evil.

Until that time, he resolved to stay close to God whatever happened.

He committed himself to praise and not complaint. He resolved to take the long-term view and be patient. He resolved to rejoice whatever the circumstances. He committed himself to faith, even when there was no fruit (3:17–19).

God is concerned, not so much about the harvest as about your heart. Even if you can find nothing else, you can rejoice over your relationship with the Lord. Habakkuk says, 'I will rejoice in the Lord, I

will be joyful in God my Saviour' (v.18). God made him sure-footed and light-hearted: 'The Sovereign Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights' (v.19).

As Joyce Meyer writes, 'We need to allow our difficulties to help us develop "hinds' feet". When we have hinds' feet... we will walk and make progress through our trouble, suffering, responsibility, or whatever is trying to hold us back.'

Lord, help me trust completely in you as I honestly express my doubts and questions to you, and to rejoice in you even when I do not immediately see an answer.

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