

Week Eight

Conversations with God

HABAKKUK

READ

Have you ever established a new friendship with an old acquaintance? This is the person you've known for years, but for one reason or another, you never became friends. Then something happens. You strike up a conversation or you stumble into a shared experience, and the longtime acquaintance becomes a treasured friendship. Oddly, Scripture can be a lot like that.

Every time you thumb through a Bible you pass through a genre of Scripture known as the prophets. For most, they are mere acquaintances. Titles like Jeremiah or Ezekiel are seen as the pages flip by, but a friendship has yet to be established. Those who truly engage the prophets often discover the unexpected. These writings are profound and worthy of lifelong friendship.

The prophets are commonly considered in two categories: major prophets and minor prophets. The distinction has nothing to do with value and is simply a matter of length. Isaiah (sixty-six chapters), Jeremiah (fifty-two chapters), and Ezekiel (forty-eight chapters) are examples of major prophets. Joel (three chapters), Jonah (four chapters), and Micah (seven chapters) are examples of minor prophets. This week, we will read the minor prophet Habakkuk—a mere three chapters. Yes, it is small, so small you may need to turn to the table of contents to find it. But yes, it is rich, so rich you'll likely find a new friend.

Little is known about Habakkuk as a person, but we do know he lived sometime before the nation Israel was overrun by their neighbors, the Babylonians. This may sound like ancient history (as it is), but it is highly relevant to our lives today. The Babylonians sacked Israel for a reason. The Israelites had drifted from God. Rather than letting God be their God, they were carrying God's name in vain, and God then allowed the invasion. To see this drifting from God, and to best get the context of Habakkuk, the first day's reading will not be Habakkuk itself but a few chapters from 2 Chronicles where you'll see Israel stairstepping down and away from God. This context is rich within itself and will enhance your experience with Habakkuk.

Because of both its richness and brevity, you're asked to read Habakkuk fully through three times. On day two, you're encouraged to read all of Habakkuk in its entirety simply to gain the broad context. Don't spend too much time on the details on this day. Just read through with an eye for the big picture of what is on this prophet's heart. On days three through five, you'll have a chance to read each chapter more slowly. If a particular verse or phrase catches your attention, let your thoughts and questions linger. Finally on day six, you're asked to read Habakkuk through in its entirety one final time. As you do, consider how all of the insights that you've gained over the week's reading are brought together into a seamless work of inspiration.

MEMORIZE

As you finish this *Morph* module, you'll notice there are additional memory verses remaining. The purpose of this is twofold. First, this will assist you in continuing the practice after this *Morph* module ends. And second, if you continue through all four *Morph* modules, you'll have one hundred passages committed to memory—not a magical number but a worthy goal.

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If you're starting a second *Morph* module immediately after finishing this one, you'll want to wait on the additional passages here and pick them up later. But if you have a few weeks before starting the next, the additional verses are a great way to bridge the time.

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 (Habakkuk 3:17-18).

Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight (Proverbs 3:5-6).

MEDITATE

One of the more profound aspects of Habakkuk is how he interacts with God. The three chapters record a conversation between Habakkuk and God. Habakkuk's heart is heavy with questions: "How long, O LORD, must I call for help, but you do not listen?" (Habakkuk 1:2). And later: "Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?" (Habakkuk 1:13). Not only do we gain insight by reading the exchange, but it also serves as a model for our own conversations with God.

This week, as you converse with God, consider asking him questions about matters that are heavy on your heart. Your questions may be similar to Habakkuk's, but consider more of what Habakkuk did and not just the particular questions he asked. He asked questions highly relevant to his own life and experience. The questions were not simply theological mind benders. He was seeing and experiencing life, and this experience inspired questions. Habakkuk didn't stuff these questions; he brought them before God and waited.

Asking these penetrating questions of God will feel risky to some. Is it good to question God in this way? On the one hand, we want to be authentic with God, and if we have questions, they should be asked. On the other hand, we recall times in Scripture where people questioned God, and God's response was strong. The Israelites, for example, complained about lack of food in the desert, and they were told by Moses that they were not "grumbling against us, but against the LORD" (Exodus 16:8). No one enjoys listening to whiners and complainers, and God apparently is no exception. But what if that's simply where we are? We're frustrated with God or frustrated with life. Should we not complain?

If we're in a place of frustration or we have a grumbling spirit, God knows this and there's no sense pretending it's not true. The last thing God would want is a plastic prayer. Instead, consider another option. Consider letting your frustration be your initial question, "God, I want to grumble. I want to complain. I want to roll on the ground and whine like a three-year-old. Why shouldn't I? I bring you this desire and ask that you speak to it." A question like this is simultaneously bold and faithful. It brings an honest question with a desire for healing.

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