

FEARFUL AND WONDERFUL:

THE GOD OF OUR SALVATION

AMY DUNHAM

 REGULAR BAPTIST
Press

Scripture taken from the New King James Version®.
Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc.
Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Fearful and Wonderful: The God of Our Salvation
© 2020 Regular Baptist Press • Arlington Heights, Illinois
www.RegularBaptistPress.org • 1-800-727-4440
Printed in U.S.A. All rights reserved.
RBP5181 • ISBN: 978-1-64213-670-8

All rights reserved. Except as permitted under U.S. Copyright Law, no part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, or stored in a database or retrieval system, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Contents

	<i>Introduction</i>	5
	<i>God's Plan of Salvation</i>	7
<i>Lesson 1</i>	God Hears Our Laments	9
<i>Lesson 2</i>	God Sees Our Suffering	23
<i>Lesson 3</i>	God Is Unshaken by Our Doubts	37
<i>Lesson 4</i>	God Is Working in Our Waiting	51
<i>Lesson 5</i>	God Judges All Sin	63
<i>Lesson 6</i>	God Remembers Mercy	75
<i>Lesson 7</i>	God Saves	87
<i>Lesson 8</i>	God Shepherds His Sheep	99
	<i>Leader's Guide</i>	109
	<i>Answers</i>	112

Introduction

Fearful and wonderful—this is the God we serve. This fearful and wonderful God is the always listening, all-seeing, incomprehensible, immutable, holy, merciful, powerful God of hope. And, in all of this awesomeness, He is a God Who sings over us and bends low to rescue us. Us!

As an Old Testament prophet to God's Chosen People, Israel, Habakkuk had some understanding of the fullness and depth of God's character. However, in the small book of three short chapters that bears his name, we get a picture of a very real man with very deep cries in very dark circumstances.

The book of Habakkuk reveals the intimate relationship between a man with a grieving heart and the God Who loves him. The boldness of the prophet's cries, the suffering heard in his questions and doubts, and his final surrender shown in light of his awe and faith in God take us on a journey of discovering God a little more for ourselves.

Whether we are riding high in the mountains, trudging through the muck of the valley, or simply wading through the mundane, God is still God. He still hears us. He still sees us. He is unshaken and constant. He is a merciful judge. The power of His salvation gives us hope. We hope in *Who* He is, not just in what He can *do*.

It is my earnest prayer that through this study, you will get a beautiful picture of the God Who loves you, Who rejoices over you, and Who made you with His fearful and wonderful power. He molded you according to His will—He knows you better than anyone else—and He wants you to get to know Him.

At the beginning of each lesson, you will be asked to read the entire book of Habakkuk. This is meant to help you begin to picture the book and its verses in your mind's eye, to get you so familiar with the book that Habakkuk feels like a good friend.

As you read and study, I pray that you will find the arms of your Heavenly Father open to your suffering, doubts, fear, praise, and faith, no matter how small. And that, in the words of the prophet, you can say, “Though the fig tree may not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines; though the labor of the olive may fail, and the fields yield no food; though the flock may be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stalls—yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation.”

God's Plan of Salvation

Carefully ponder these Scripture verses, as they explain how you can have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. God loves you and wants you to enjoy the abundant life He offers you.

- John 3:16—“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”
- John 10:10—Jesus said, “I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.”

All people are sinful, and their sin separates them from God.

- Romans 3:23—“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”
- Romans 6:23—“For the wages of sin is death [spiritual separation from God].”

Jesus Christ's death is the only provision God has made to pay for man's sin.

- Romans 5:8—“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”
- John 14:6—“Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.’”

You must receive Jesus Christ as your Savior before you can personally experience His love for you and the abundant life He has planned for you.

- John 1:12—“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.”

You can invite Christ into your life right now by an act of faith.

- Ephesians 2:8–9—“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.”

Are you ready to invite Christ into your life to be your Savior? Use the following prayer as a guide to help you express your desire to God: “Lord God, I know I am a sinner and need Your forgiveness. I believe Jesus died for my sins. Right now I receive Him as my Savior. Take control of my life, and replace all the restlessness and anxiety with peace and contentment.”

If you have prayed this prayer, tell your Bible study leader or a friend who has been trying to help you.

Learn to trust God’s Word—not your feelings—when doubts come.

- Romans 10:13—“Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”
- 1 John 5:11–13—“And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.”

God Hears Our Laments

Read the book of Habakkuk.

“Where are you? I need your help, and you’re not here. I can’t do this anymore.”

These aren’t words I said to my kids. These aren’t words I said to my husband. These aren’t even words I said to a parent, counselor, or friend. Rather, these are words I said to God in a journal entry during one of the most difficult times of my life. Those words were hard to write, but they are even harder to share because they honestly reflect what was turning inside me. They were a result of heavy doubts, questions, and fears. These words were a heart cry to God. They were real and full of confusion and conflict. But I am not the first person to utter such a cry to God, and I certainly will not be the last. And I’ll go out on a limb to say that you have probably uttered some heart cries of your own in a similar fashion.

We are not alone, friend.

Job said, “If I cry out concerning wrong, I am not heard” (Job 19:7).

The psalmist said, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? Why are You so far from helping Me, and from the words of My groaning? O My God, I cry in the daytime, but You do not hear; and in the night season, and am not silent” (Psalm 22:1–2).

And Jeremiah, in chapter 3 of Lamentations—a book with a name that literally means “weeping”—wrote, “I am the man who has seen affliction by the rod of His [God’s] wrath” (v. 1).

These three great men of the faith at some point wondered

where God was and what He was doing. They felt abandoned by God. They felt like He had left them to fend for themselves in situations that were completely out of their control.

1. Have you ever felt that way? If so, in what way?

The Prophet

Reread Habakkuk 1:1–4.

The intro to the book of Habakkuk is so short that if you sneeze, you'll miss it. It's as if the man Habakkuk didn't want us to know anything about him. The intro in this short book is literally seven words. Seven. That's all the information we get about the man who gives us such a look into his heart.

I want to know more about this man! Was he married? Did he have kids? Where did he live exactly? How old was he? Did he have a sweet tooth, or did he prefer salt to honey? I want details! But here is what we do know.

First, he was a prophet. Based on the prophecy he received, we gather that he was a contemporary of Jeremiah, Zephaniah, and Nahum. He would have prophesied to Judah just prior to the invasion and destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, also known as the Chaldeans, in 587 BC.

The only other thing we know about him is that he referred to the prophecy he was called upon to deliver as a "burden" (1:1). And a burden it was. He was a man deeply grieved both by the world in which he lived and by the way his world was about to change.

The Complaint

Following his short, barely there introduction, the prophet gets right on with what he came for. He complains to God in head-shaking desperation. "What is going on?" he asks.

2. According to Habakkuk's words in verses 2–4, what is his complaint?

3. In these verses, how does Habakkuk describe God?

The people are evil, violent, selfish, angry, perverted, and unrighteous in all their ways. And, what's worse to Habakkuk, God seems to have disappeared from the scene.

In his head Habakkuk knows Who God is. He knows God is powerful, yet his words seem to blame God for not doing anything when God has it perfectly within His power to end all the injustice and unrighteousness. To Habakkuk God was silent and unhearing.

The Prayer

On the first glance at the first four verses of Habakkuk, someone might think Habakkuk was being quite impertinent—pushy, demanding, and speaking way out of turn—when addressing the God of the universe. Certainly there may be some truth to that, but I wouldn't hold too firmly there.

If we are honest, we all have prayed lamenting prayers like this one: "O LORD, how long shall I cry, and You will not hear? Even cry out to You, 'Violence!' and You will not save" (Habakkuk 1:2).

To lament is to cry out in deep grief to God. My pastor defines *lament* in this way: "A lament is a long and loud cry that ascends to God from a person who endures unspeakable pain or loss."

In other words, a lament is a passionate expression of pain to God.

Thirty years ago my sister was involved in a terrible accident that left her with a severe brain injury. Once a bright and

energetic ten-year-old, in a matter of moments she was dramatically changed. For months my family wasn't even sure she would live; and then, when she did, we wondered what kind of life she *could* live.

In those days, my parents (and many others) cried out to God in prayers of lament. Why had God allowed this to happen? How was anything good going to come from this? Where was God? These questions and laments weren't always pretty, but they were always directed to a God Who heard those prayers and loved each person behind them.

He Hears

Yes, God hears our prayers. It's true that we don't always feel like He is listening, but if you are a believer in Jesus as your Savior, God hears your prayers.

Put Psalm 55:16–17 to memory. Write it on the tablet of your heart (Proverbs 7:3). At the very least, write it on a card and stick it on your fridge.

4. Now write Psalm 55:16–17 in your own words, putting yourself into them.

God hears your prayers. I said it again because I think you need to hear that today. I also think you need to hear that it's okay to *feel* like He doesn't hear you. The great men I mentioned earlier didn't feel like God heard them either. They felt abandoned and left behind. But their feelings weren't telling them the truth, and neither are yours. It is our duty to remind ourselves of the truth despite what our feelings try to tell us.

At the beginning of this section, we read verses from three men. Now we will look at more verses from these men to see how each responded to his lying feelings.

Job, also in Job 19, declares that his Redeemer lives, saying,

“For I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth” (v. 25).

In continuing Psalm 22, David reminds himself that God is holy and a deliverer, saying, “You are holy, enthroned in the praises of Israel. Our fathers trusted in You; they trusted, and You delivered them. They cried to You, and were delivered; they trusted in You, and were not ashamed” (vv. 3–5).

And, finally, in Lamentations 3, Jeremiah goes on to say, “Through the LORD’s mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. ‘The LORD is my portion,’ says my soul, ‘Therefore I hope in Him!’” (vv. 22–25).

You see, one reason these men were great is that they didn’t always let their feelings replace the truth. They may have felt like God didn’t hear, but they reminded themselves of the truth that God does hear and that He still is and always will be good.

Lived-Out Belief

There are things we believe about God with our heads. Then there are things we believe about God by the way we live. I am going to call this our lived-out belief.

If I am completely honest, there are times that I act like, live like, and feel like God doesn’t hear me. This lived-out belief is not what I really believe in my head and my heart. But it is something that shows in the way that I live.

By not praying as I should, by not trusting God with my laments, by not offering Him the praise and worship He deserves, I am living as if He doesn’t hear me. And, at other times, I feel like He doesn’t hear when, through tears, I cry out only to continue to feel alone. It is in these times I have to use the truth of God’s Word to counteract my lived-out belief system and move my heart and actions back toward my actual belief—back to what is actually true—and back to the truth “God hears.”

True Lamenting

When I first read Habakkuk, I was taken aback by the true confessions and overt questioning of this man. At first glance I thought this guy was arrogant in the way he complained before God. However, as I've studied, I've learned a few things about the difference between a lament and a complaint.

To draw a complete comparison between lamenting and complaining, we need look no further than to the Israelites in Numbers 11. There we find the Israelites in the desert, just having escaped the Egyptian army by the miraculous parting of the Red Sea. They've also been experiencing the daily miracles of manna (bread) from Heaven and a heavenly cloud by day and an appearance of fire by night to cover the tabernacle. They literally had daily visits and miracles from God, but these people—God's people—couldn't stop complaining.

5. Read Numbers 11:1–10.

(a) What two things did the Israelites complain about?

(b) To whom did they complain?

In Numbers 11:1–10, the Israelites gripe and complain. They sound like a whiny child who didn't get that toy in the check-out line he just had to have. In fact, the Israelites have quite a reputation for being professional complainers, and they earned it honestly. But before we get too arrogant, let's remember how often we act in much the same way. Let's be careful to not point the finger before examining our own hearts and before taking a hard look at the difference between a lament and a complaint as demonstrated by the Israelites and Habakkuk respectively. A complaint places blame on God. A lament acknowledges the power of God.

In Numbers 11:5 we get a hint that the Israelites blamed God for their “misfortunes”; they say, “We remember the fish which we ate freely in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic.” Isn’t it interesting that they describe freely eating in a place that had them in bondage and the chains of slavery? Isn’t it also interesting that they seem to blame God because He is the One Who has delivered them from Egypt, away from their precious cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic.

In verse 6, they go on to insult the manna that God provided, by saying, “There is nothing at all except this manna before our eyes!” Their words are dripping with disgust, and you can picture the finger pointing.

In contrast, Habakkuk’s prayers acknowledge not just what it seems God wasn’t doing but also that He has every power to act and move. Habakkuk laments his situation while also giving honor and praise where it is due. He acknowledges that God has the power to make everything right if it is within His will to do so.

6. Look at verse 12 of Habakkuk 1. Write four descriptors Habakkuk used for the Lord.

While lamenting, Habakkuk still acknowledges God’s power, eternity, and holiness.

*A complaint is shared with another sinful person.
A lament is shared with holy God.*

While complaining points the finger at God instead of acknowledging God’s power, it also does so in the presence of others instead of in the presence of God.

In Numbers 11 the Israelites are complaining to each other, giving the impression that the only thing they talked about was

how hard their lives were and how nasty the manna was. They wanted meat and easy living—oh, and onions and leeks too! Unfortunately, not once do we see them go to Moses with their complaints or cry out to God. They go to Moses for only one reason: to get him to ask God to remove the punishment of fire that consumed parts of the camp (v. 2).

When they griped about their misfortunes to each other and though they didn't go to Moses, the Lord still heard them (Numbers 11:1). As punishment for their complaining and ingratitude, the Lord sent a fire to burn parts of their camp. Only then did they go to Moses to seek the Lord on their behalf.

In contrast, the first two words of Habakkuk 1:2 are "O LORD." Here we see Habakkuk go straight to God. We see him laying out all of his questions and concerns to God Himself. He isn't griping and complaining to those around him, but tugging on the listening ear of a hearing God.

7. What about you? How often do you go to God? Or is it your habit to go to others first?

*A complaint elevates sin or selfish living.
A lament elevates righteousness or godly living.*

As we go back to Numbers 11, we see in verse 5 the people complaining about what they don't have. No big deal, right? We are all born doing that, aren't we? The baby cries for the milk she doesn't have. The toddler cries for the toy he doesn't have. The teenager cries for the clothes she doesn't have. The mom cries for the sleep she doesn't have. The list goes on. However, the Israelites weren't just complaining about something they didn't have. They were complaining about not being in slavery to a pagan nation.

They longed to be back among a nation that enslaved them,

killed their children, and worshiped other gods. God had rescued them, freed them, loosed their bonds, and was giving them a promised land; but in their minds, the sinful nation was still greater. Their complaining hearts made plague-ridden Egypt better than a land flowing with milk and honey (Exodus 3:17).

In contrast, Habakkuk's prayer is a lament against the evil around him, not a longing for it.

8. In verses 2–4 of Habakkuk 1, Habakkuk lists eight atrocities. What are they?

Habakkuk longed for evil to get its rightful due and for justice to win. The Israelites longed for full bellies no matter what it cost or where they came from.

A complaint creates discord. A lament seeks unity.

Perhaps one of the most noticeable differences between a complaint and a lament is one of unity versus strife. In Numbers 11 we read the following: “Now the mixed multitude who were among them yielded to intense craving; so the children of Israel also wept again. . . . Then Moses heard the people weeping throughout their families, everyone at the door of his tent” (vv. 4, 10).

One group among the many Israelites was able to stir up strife between the nation, Moses, and God. Have you ever been in a situation where the murmuring and complaining of one person or one small group of people spread like gangrene? I have. It isn't pretty how easy it is to succumb to someone else's complaining. The next thing you know, there is strife and contention everywhere—even in your own heart.

Habakkuk is already living among strife and contention,

which he laments. His prayers are for unity and justice to win out. His heart is breaking over the lack of unity among the people of Judah, and he longs for the people to live the way they were meant to live with each other—in love (Psalm 133:1).

Why Lament

In my own life, the real question that rises in times of suffering is why I lament: Why do I feel the need to? Why is it important? What does it accomplish?

You could switch this out to ask, “Why pray?” The answers would be the same. Simply, why we pray and why we lament have so much to do with Who God is.

First, we lament to God because He hears our prayers. Yes, He does hear.

9. In 1 John 5:14 we get an explanation of why we can have confidence in God. What is it?

10. In 1 Peter 3:12 we read that the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous. What do we read about His ears?

11. In Psalm 66:17–20 why did the psalmist praise God?

He hears us. He hears us. He hears us!

Second, we lament to God because His Word tells us to bring all our prayers and laments to Him. Simply put, He wants us to pray; He commands us to. The following verses show us these commands.

12. Romans 12:12 gives three imperative (commanding) statements that start with “Be” (v. 10). What are they?

13. According to Philippians 4:6, how can we be anxious for nothing?

14. First Thessalonians 5:17 simply tells us to do what?

And finally, we bring our laments to God because He knows what we are going through. God the Son has experienced pain, suffering, grief, disappointment, loneliness, anxiety, and abandonment. A person who grieves longs for a God Who also knows grief, and we have one. Jesus suffered in life as well as in death, as demonstrated in the following passages.

He was rejected by others (John 6:60–66).

He was pushed to the point of exhaustion (John 4:6).

He was heartbroken (John 11:35).

He was abandoned by His friends (Mark 14:50).

He was anxious over the future (Mark 14:32–36).

He suffered great pain (Mark 15).

It is true that Jesus suffered like we do. Because of this, we are empowered to be like Habakkuk and bring our laments, questions, doubts, concerns, and pleas before our Great High Priest, Who prays for us and with us.

One of my favorite passages of Scripture is Hebrews 4:14–16, which says,

Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

However, there is one way that Jesus suffered that we don't have to suffer. On the cross He bore the ultimate suffering of being separated from the Heavenly Father (Mark 15:34).

On the cross, for a moment in time, Jesus was separated from His Heavenly Father. During our lives we will face much of the suffering that Jesus did, but we have an opportunity to avoid the suffering of separation from God. Instead we have the opportunity to live in a right relationship with Him, one that brings light and freedom from sin in this life, but also freedom from the penalty of sin in eternity. This only happens by grace through faith in Christ alone. If we acknowledge Him as Savior (Romans 10:9) and surrender our life, confessing our sins and repenting, seeking His forgiveness, and turning from our wickedness, He will forgive us, making sure that we will never suffer separation from the Father.

This is the lament He longs to hear most—the lament of grief over personal sin and a longing for a right relationship with Him.

Our God

“For the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers” (1 Peter 3:12).

This is our God—the One we cry to and the One Who hears. This is the One Whom we do not approach timidly, but come boldly to Him, knowing that He not only hears but wants to hear and that He understands the deepest cries of our hearts with a solidarity we can't begin to comprehend.

We all have hurt; we all have pain; we all have something we can lament over. Right now, take the time to pour out your heart in a written lament or prayer to God. Let Him be your Great High Priest who *hears*.

For Further Reflection

Answer the following questions.

1. What did I learn about God from Habakkuk 1:1–4?

2. How does what I learned change my view of myself?

3. Do I trust God to hear my laments?

4. How should I respond to what I learned?

Write a prayer of response here.