

Planet Earth may look marvelous from a satellite, but for those who live on the dusty globe things tend to look rather grim. Increased turmoil, rising terrorism, mounting tragedies, unprecedented trauma, increasing pollution, deepening trials, and unparalleled tensions cast dark shadows over earthlings. The world looks more and more like some ominous black sphere with a very short fuse, a time bomb sizzling to explode. It is little wonder thinking people begin to ask questions. Why is there so much oppression? Why all the injustice? Why do evil men prosper? Why do the righteous suffer? Why doesn't God do something? Why doesn't God clean up this mess? Why? Why? Why? These penetrating questions are hardly new.

The Psalmist struggles with the same questions in Ps. 37 & 73.

How can a good God permit the affliction of the godly and the prosperity of the ungodly? Centuries before Christ visited this planet, an ancient prophet looked around at the violence and wickedness of the world and cried out to God, "Why do You make me look at injustice? Why do You tolerate wrong? Why are You silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?" (Hab. 1:3, Hab. 1:13) The prophet not only asked the mysterious whys that plague mankind; he also received answers to his questions. The answers given by the Creator of the universe are carefully recorded in the little book called Habakkuk."

It is considered a Theodicy: a defense of God's goodness and omnipotence in view of evil.

Habakkuk, a contemporary of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, means 'embracer.'

As Spurgeon says "he truly was one who saw the promises afar off and was persuaded of them and embraced them. He took fast hold upon the goodness of the Lord and rested there."

He wrote his book just before the Babylonians swooped down upon Judah to punish them for their idolatry. The message of Habakkuk is unique; it records a conversation between the prophet and His Lord - God Almighty. It starts off quite high on the 'gloomy' scale (for difficult days ahead were foreseen by the prophet). He unburdens his soul to God - telling God his emotion when it seems God isn't listening - he tries to grasp the agonizing of his spirit over issues that seem to have no solution. In spite of things he couldn't understand, he embraces God. He concludes his book with tremendous hope and expectation that fittingly backs up the central message of the text: "The just shall live by his faith".

The topics are eerily reminiscent today. These timeless words of God and His prophet apply equally to today's world and situation as they did for the generation 2600 years ago.

The Message of Habakkuk - Then & Now

Chapter 1: God is Moving and Judgment is Coming

The Puzzled Prophet's Perplexing Problem: Sweeping A Dirty Nation

His Burden:	Wrestling with God's silence, Judah's sinfulness and God's character
His Confession:	LORD...you confuse me.
His Perspective:	Horizontal
His Direction:	Looking around & worrying

Habakkuk 1:1-4 The oracle [burden] that Habakkuk the prophet received.

- ❖ Burden means a message from God that is weighted with important words of judgment and deliverance.

Habakkuk's 1st Complaint & God's Answer

O LORD, How long shall I cry, and You will not hear! I cry [shavah = Scream] out to you, "Violence!" yet You do not save? [Violence = Hamas = Injustice = Oppressor]

Why do you make me see iniquity, and cause me to look on wickedness? Why do you tolerate wrong? Yes, Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and contention arises. Therefore the law is ignored (paralyzed), and justice is never upheld. The wicked surround the righteous, therefore justice comes out perverted.

Habakkuk lived when Israelites had moved far from God and the principles on which their nation was founded. He stood in the midst of the decay of Israel and he cried against the sin of his generation but no one heard him and wickedness continued to increase. He saw his nation in decline and he was overwhelmed with frustration. As Habakkuk surveyed the world in which he lived, he saw unbelievable injustice, violence and inequality that never seemed to be judged. He sought God's help in life only to see days/months go by without anything being communicated back.

There are three steps to the downfall of a nation (read Judges; Isaiah, et al.):

1) Spiritual apostasy; 2) Immorality; and, 3) Political anarchy.

It begins with spiritual apostasy: turning away from the true and living God. Surely we begin to apprehend a painful parallel to our own predicament. Like Israel we began by first tolerating and then following other gods. Like Israel we started out by including them with Him in our worship and moved from there to excluding Him altogether in favor of them.

Result: our system of justice has failed and evil is triumphing over good all too often.

In short we're as ripe for judgment as they were. [Amos 7:8; 8:1-2]

Habakkuk's first question was: 'How long God?' 'How long do I cry out without an answer?' 'Why don't you do something?' He thinks God is indifferent and inactive.

It was a question that was asked quite frequently by some of God's 'stars' in the Bible.

King David: Ps. 13:1-2 How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me?

Job: Job 19:7 Behold, I cry out of wrong, but I am not heard: I cry aloud, but there is no judgment.

Jeremiah: Lam 3:8-9 Even when I call out or cry for help, he shuts out my prayer. He has barred my way with blocks of stone; he has made my paths crooked.

On a national or on a world scale, the same question can be asked. Like Habakkuk surveying the situation in his day, so we too look at the increasing immorality, injustice and violence of ours and say 'How much longer will this go on for?' 'How long Lord before you judge this world?'

That's the cry of the souls under the altar in the book of Revelation when they cried out "*How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?*" (Rev 6:10). It is a common question indeed asked by the saints of all generations.

It is one that you have no doubt asked when faced with extended periods of difficulty and uncertainty. It is a common question because God works to His own timetable.

Always remember that He works to and for eternity. Thus things often seem to take a LOOOONG time yet His purposes are achieved.

Suffering produces perseverance. Perseverance produces character; Character, hope.

[Romans 5:3-4] You want to have godly character? You will have to learn perseverance for that is its source. Perseverance takes time and leads to questions like the one Habakkuk had!

The source of injustice in Habakkuk's day - Habakkuk states that '*...the law is paralyzed, and justice never prevails. The wicked hem in the righteous, so that justice is perverted.*'

Is God's law paralyzed in our day amongst our judicial system? God has been marginalized in our society. What about in our schools when laws are passed to prevent prayer or study of the Bible in schools (yet the children are forced to learn about Islam, the Koran and other religions under the guise of 'multi-cultural studies')? As Western society moves further from the Christian foundation the result is sadly the same as it was when Israel was departing from God's law in the days of Habakkuk. God's absolute morality has given way to relative morality. Our laws defend the wholesale slaughter of unborn babies condoned on the right of a woman to choose.

The age old question:

Psalm 11:3: "If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?"

This is a hard question to answer for the foundations of society are never destroyed overnight. They take decades to breakdown. We do know from Habakkuk and Bible prophecy that in the end, God Himself will step in and judge just as He did when the wickedness and departure from the truth erupted into a terrible state during the days of Noah.

Ps. 119:126 "*It is time for You to act, O Lord, For they have regarded Your law as void.*"

Nothing stretches our faith like the apparent silence of God. It gives the many ungodly sinners the occasion to blaspheme. Many weary believers are tempted to give up their faith.

God's answer - Prepare to be amazed!

Habakkuk 1:5-11 Behold ye among the heathen. Look at the nations and watch-- and be utterly astounded. For I will work a work in your days which you would not believe, even if you were told. I am raising up the Babylonians (Chaldeans), a bitter and hasty nation, who march through the breadth of the earth to possess dwelling places that are not theirs. They are terrible and dreadful; Their judgment and their dignity proceed from themselves. Their horses are swifter than leopards, fiercer than wolves at dusk. Their chargers charge ahead; their calvary comes from afar. They fly as the eagle that hastens to eat. They all come bent on violence.

[Note: Purpose of the invaders is to perpetrate VIOLENCE in the land. Violence was Judah's Sin & Will Be Her Punishment. V. 2 & 3] Their faces are set like the east wind; they gather captives like sand. They scoff at kings and princes are scorned by them.

They laugh at all fortified cities; they heap up earthen mounds and seize it. Then his mind changes, and he transgresses; He commits offense, ascribing this power to his god.

Feinburg: "For one to make his own strength his god is to commit suicide of the soul."

God's reply is not one that Habakkuk had been expecting. Habakkuk thought that God was strangely silent and absent yet the truth was quite the opposite. The truth was that God was already raising up the nation of Babylon to come against Judah. Habakkuk was hoping God would send a revival to His people. [Hab. 3:2], judge the evil leaders and establish righteousness in the land. Then the nation would escape punishment; the people and the cities would be spared.

However, God had warned His people time and again, but they didn't listen. Prophet after prophet had declared the Word [II Chron. 36:14-21] only to be rejected. God had sent various natural calamities and military defeats, but the people wouldn't listen. Instead of repenting, the people hardened their hearts more and turned to the gods of the nations around them for help. They had tried God's longsuffering long enough and it was time for God to act.

Wiersbe: When God's people [Judah] deliberately disobey Him, they sin against a flood of light and an ocean of love.

Habakkuk's Response -

Habakkuk 1:12-17 Are You not from everlasting, O LORD, my God, my Holy One? We will not die. You, O LORD, have appointed [ordained] them to judge; And You, O Rock, have established [marked] them to correct. Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity. wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously? Why are You silent when the wicked swallow up those more righteous than they? Why have You made men like the fish of the sea, like creeping things without a ruler over them? The Chaldeans bring all of them up with a hook, drag them away with their net, and gather them together in their fishing net.

Therefore they rejoice and are glad. Therefore they offer a sacrifice to their net and burn incense to their fishing net; Because through these things their catch is large, and their food is plentiful. Will they therefore empty their net and continually slay nations without sparing?

If we thought Habakkuk had a problem earlier (when he thought God wasn't doing anything), after hearing God's response he really has a problem now! His anguish is multiplied.

As He dwells on what Babylon has done to other nations he likens them to a large net that catches and drags all men away without mercy. Jonah went AWOL because he didn't want any of them to convert because they were so wicked. He didn't want them saved. Chaldeans were cruel & brutal people. It is said that when they were at war with other nations, a soldier who thought he was going to be captured would commit suicide rather than be a prisoner of Chaldeans.

This is who God is going to use? As he mulls this over our good prophet struggles with two main issues:

1. How could a pure, holy God, approve and use those that are wicked?
2. How could God judge Judah using a nation that was more wicked than they?

Consider: There is a difference between doubt and unbelief. The doubter may question God, but he does NOT abandon God. Unbelief is rebellion against God and a refusal to accept what He says and does.

- Unbelief is an act of the will.
- Doubt is born out of a troubled mind and a broken heart.

National and international events were affecting his personal walk with God. This was a great cause of concern. Wrestling with these challenges is the way for our "faith muscles" to grow. To avoid tough questions or to settle for half-truths and superficial pat answers is to remain immature. To face questions honestly and talk through them with the Lord is to grow in grace and knowledge of Christ.

Habakkuk Waiting for a Reply from the Lord

Hab. 2:1 "I will stand my watch (resolutely waits) and set myself on the rampart, and watch to see what He will say to me, and what I will answer when I am corrected.

- ❖ Habakkuk spoke of himself as if he were a sentry on guard duty.
- ❖ After hearing from the Lord, he will report the information to the people.

Jeremiah, a contemporary of Habakkuk, also spoke to Judah as a watchman on the wall.

Jer. 6:16-17 Thus says the LORD: "Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where the good way *is*, and walk in it; Then you will find rest for your souls.

But they said, 'We will not walk in it.' Also, I set watchmen over you, saying, 'Listen to the sound of the trumpet!' But they said, 'We will not listen.'"

Components to Habakkuk's Posture:

1. Determination - He stood his watch and waited now.

Jer. 29:13 And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.

2. Isolation - (tower) Away from all distractions -quiet time, place and a quiet heart

3. Expectation - I will see what the LORD will say to me.

There are many ways to please God, but NEVER apart from faith in Him. (Heb. 11:6)

Spurgeon comments: "one of the devices of Satan" is that "he seeks to lull God's prophets into slumber, for he knows that dumb dogs that are given to sleep will never do any very great injury to his cause. The wakeful watchman he always fears, for then he cannot take the city by surprise; but if he can cast God's watchman into slumber, then he is well content, and thinks it almost as well to have a Christian asleep as to have him dead: he would certainly sooner see him in hell, but next to that, he is most glad to see him rocked in the cradle of presumption, fast asleep." (Are you a slumbering sentinel at your Gospel guard post?)

I will stand - Keep a lookout, keep his eyes and ears open so he would not miss the answer that he was confident would come even though circumstances confused him.

Too often we ask questions, and do not wait for replies; shoot prayer-arrows into the air.

F.B. Meyer - "How often God's answers come and find us gone! We have waited for a while, and, thinking there was no answer, we have gone our way but as we have turned the first corner the post has come in. God's ships touch at our wharves; but there is no one to unload them . . . It is not enough to direct your prayer unto God; look up, and look out, until the blessing alights on your head."

His declaration also reflects the prophet's willingness to submit to God's Word. He has a definite desire to hear from God and know how to reply when he is corrected. How do you respond when God gives you an answer that is not "easy to swallow?" [Hab 1:17]?

God endeavors to speak to His people today through the Bible — all sixty-six books of it.

The Scriptures have a definite, specific purpose — that we might grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior:

II Tim. 3:16-17 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness [how I should behave], ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Jehovah's Reply: The Prophet's expectation is met with a definite answer to the request.

Hab. 2:2 Then the LORD answered me and said:

"Write the vision and make it plain on tablets, that he may run who reads it.

Habakkuk is told to write the vision (Hab. 1:5-11) on clay tablets and put them in some public place in order that "he may run who reads it:" All could know about what was being done, and the situation that was confronting the nation. Also, that it might be notified to those in distant places and transmitted to those in future ages.

As Habakkuk processes what he has heard, he rightly reminds God of the eternal promises made to the nation of Israel that they would not be cut off completely even though he understands that Judah requires judgment and correction. Thank God that He is always faithful to His promises. When it comes to His own people to whom He has given His promises, even in judgment He will remember mercy (Hab. 3:2). God always retains a remnant of genuine believers.

Habakkuk 1 started with the puzzled prophet asking God why He isn't doing anything and ends, after God tells him what He is doing, with Habakkuk shocked at what God is going to do! When God seems to be crushing us or bewildering us with life-threatening providences, how should we respond? Take a "clue" from Habakkuk. When we are perplexed by the Lord's "strange dealings" with us, it is essential to begin with "right thinking" about God. The prophet begins by thinking of God as the everlasting One. Concentrate on the things we KNOW about our God. Run into the strong tower of the truth about God, the great doctrines of God, the great Names of God, for they are the basis of our existence and the foundation of our day to day survival. Things in our life have a purpose; concentrate on the POWER of God; His love, justice, mercy & grace. Thank him for his longsuffering patience.

Habakkuk's latest question will be answered in Chapter 2 as God outlines clearly why this judgment must come. It is a chapter that could have been written a month ago about our own world. Yet it is also a chapter that gives hope as it outlines that the righteous MUST live by faith in this difficult age. One day, the whole world will be FILLED with the KNOWLEDGE and GLORY of God. [Hab. 2:14]