

**BUT I DON'T UNDERSTAND!**

Habakkuk

**INTRODUCTION**

I don't understand why God doesn't do something in our country. We constantly have shootings, as we again did last week. We are at the point when we hear of a shooting and it doesn't impact us much. The opioid crisis continues to addict ever-increasing numbers of people. The number of couples—either married or living together—that break up is so high and frequent that we aren't fazed by the number any more. Church attendance—even among committed Christians—is down to about twice/month because there are so many other things that people are doing.

I don't understand why God doesn't do something. Millions of committed Christians are praying to God to bring revival. Jesus said the harvest of people is plentiful. But I look at the harvest of people in our community and the harvest looks more like weeds.

Why doesn't God do something?!

That was on the heart of a prophet named Habakkuk. Habakkuk railed at God, “Why don't you do something?”

That was an audacious, almost insolent question to ask God. But it's probably a question each of us has asked of God, or at least thought of asking. God, why don't you do something about my boss or fellow worker? God how can you let ungodly men and women get voted into office? And our complaints go on and on.

As we continue in our series on Prayers of the O.T., I want us to look at Habakkuk's prayer, which is really a major complaint to God, about the way God isn't doing what he should be doing. But it's one that can teach us some lessons on prayer.

**Setting**

The prophet Habakkuk lived at the end of the seventh century and likely prophesied between 610 and 605 B.C. during the reign of the Judean king Jehoiakim. Habakkuk was a contemporary of the prophet Jeremiah. This was during the period of time when the Assyrian empire was weakening and the Babylonian empire was becoming a powerful force.

The book of Habakkuk is a bit unique among the prophetic books. Normally, a prophet spoke to the people on behalf of God. But Habakkuk spoke to God on behalf of himself and the righteous people.

During this time, society in Israel was a mess. Look at how the book opens, with Habakkuk's complaint to God:

*How long, LORD, must I call for help,*

*but you do not listen?*

*Or cry out to you, “Violence!”*

*but you do not save?*

<sup>3</sup> *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.*  
<sup>4</sup> *Therefore the law is paralyzed,  
 and justice never prevails.  
 The wicked hem in the righteous,  
 so that justice is perverted.*  
*Habakkuk 1:2-4<sup>NIV</sup>*

Habakkuk saw all the violence and injustice around him in society and complained to God about it. The majority of the Israelites were rejecting God's truth and rebelling against the commandments of God. The people never seemed to be punished by God. Habakkuk wondered, did God not care? Did he not notice? He felt that God should do something to shape up Israel as God had said many times that he would do.

### **1<sup>st</sup> Lesson: It's all right to complain to God about things that don't seem to be what God says should be happening**

I like the honesty of Hab. He saw things that didn't make sense according to God's word. God says that he would punish evil doers, yet all Habakkuk saw were evildoers ruling society and getting away with murder, literally.

Have you ever been honest with God about how things were or weren't going? It's all right to complain to God. It's all right to point out things that seem to be inconsistent with the way God says things should or will be.

In vv 1:5 – 11, God responds and tells Habakkuk what he is going to do:

*“Look at the nations and watch—  
 and be utterly amazed.  
 For I am going to do something in your days  
 that you would not believe,  
 even if you were told.*  
<sup>6</sup> *I am raising up the Babylonians,  
 that ruthless and impetuous people,  
 who sweep across the whole earth  
 to seize dwellings not their own.*  
<sup>7</sup> *They are a feared and dreaded people;  
 they are a law to themselves  
 and promote their own honor.*  
<sup>8</sup> *Their horses are swifter than leopards,  
 fiercer than wolves at dusk.  
 Their cavalry gallops headlong;  
 their horsemen come from afar.*

*They fly like an eagle swooping to devour;*  
 9 *they all come intent on violence.*  
*Their hordes advance like a desert wind*  
*and gather prisoners like sand.*  
 10 *They mock kings*  
*and scoff at rulers.*  
*They laugh at all fortified cities;*  
*by building earthen ramps they capture them.*  
 11 *Then they sweep past like the wind and go on—*  
*guilty people, whose own strength is their god.”*  
*Habakkuk 1:5-11 NIV*

I imagine when Habakkuk heard God, his mouth just hung open. He was shocked. God hadn't overlooked or turned aside from what was happening in Israel. He was going to bring judgment on Israel. But, the way he was going to do it stunned Hab. Habakkuk could not believe that God was going to do it that way. He responds: *LORD, are you not from everlasting?*

*My God, my Holy One, you will never die.*  
*You, LORD, have appointed **them** to execute judgment;*  
*you, my Rock, have ordained **them** to punish.*  
 13 *Your eyes are too pure to look on evil;*  
*you cannot tolerate wrongdoing.*  
*Why then do you tolerate the treacherous?*  
*Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?*  
*Habakkuk 1:12-13 NIV*

## **2<sup>nd</sup> Lesson: We must be prepared for God's way of handling things**

Habakkuk had to be happy that God was going to do something about the evil around him, but he wasn't prepared to hear how God was going to do it.

Like many of you, I pray for people who have turned away from the Lord, including a few of my children. I pray for people who have not come to Christ yet. And sometimes I think of how God might work to bring someone to Christ or back to Christ. I think, well, God could just convince them of the truth; or the Holy Spirit could convict them of their sin and make it obvious and easy for them to turn to Christ. That would be a nice, easy way for people to get right with God.

But God doesn't always deal with a person the way I want; sometimes it's not very pretty. God's plan to work in their life may involve some kind of tragic incident. It may involve a crushing hardship that finally gets their attention.

Rick Rutter, becoming an alcoholic before he came to Christ.

How many of us have kids who have strayed away from God? How would we feel if God revealed to us that he was going to bring them back to Christ? I would be excited! But what if the way he was going to do that was to let them get addicted to an opioid

and live on the streets for the next couple of years until they finally realize their need to come back to Christ?

How would you feel about that? Could you accept if the way for your child or your spouse to get back with following Jesus would be fired or have a heart attack? Or your child would flunk out of college? That's a tough pill to swallow.

As I pray for people, I have learned to never dictate to God how I think God should accomplish his purposes. I am content to accept and rejoice over the end result of an answer to prayer, and let God take care of the means and methods of how he is going to do that. God always knows best.

Habakkuk hears God and then says:

*I will stand at my watch*

*and station myself on the ramparts;*

*I will look to see what he will say to me,*

*and what answer I am to give to this complaint. Habakkuk 2:1 <sup>NIV</sup>*

Habakkuk positions himself to hear what God will do.

<sup>2</sup> *Then the LORD replied:*

*“Write down the revelation*

*and make it plain on tablets*

*so that a herald may run with it.*

<sup>3</sup> *For the revelation awaits an appointed time;*

*it speaks of the end*

*and will not prove false.*

*Though it linger, wait for it;*

*it will certainly come*

*and will not delay.*

*Habakkuk 2:2-3 <sup>NIV</sup>*

God tells him to write down this revelation, but he also tells him that the timing of when all this is going to happen is according to God's plan. It *awaits an appointed time*.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Lesson: We must be patient to wait for God's timetable**

God reveals to Habakkuk that he would do something about the evil in society. But it was going to be on his timetable—*his appointed time*.

It was about 20 years after this, that the Babylonians crushed Jerusalem and deported the people to Babylon. It didn't happen as quickly as Habakkuk wanted, but it happened—according to God's time.

God doesn't act on our timetable. And, to us, God may seem to drag his feet. But God will always fulfill his promises. Peter reminds the Christians about the seemingly slowness of God's timing:

*The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. 2*

*Peter 3:9 NIV*

While society is falling apart around us, we need to be reminded that Jesus is coming back, but if his coming seems long in delay, it's so that more people have the opportunity to come to Christ. But, Jesus is coming—make no mistake about that. It is going to be a glorious time for all of us who look forward to that day, where sin, unrighteousness and injustice will be vanquished along with all evil people.

What is important for us to understand is that God will honor his word; God will fulfill every promise. But it is going to be on his timetable, not ours.

In the midst of God explaining the details of his coming judgment, he slips in an almost unnoticeable statement:

*“See, the enemy is puffed up;  
his desires are not upright—  
but the righteous person will live by his faithfulness —  
Habakkuk 2:4 NIV*

That leads us to a final lesson:

#### **4<sup>th</sup> Lesson: While we wait for God's time, we are to live faithfully, trusting in God**

God is telling Habakkuk that God will accomplish his plan; until he does, Habakkuk is to trust God and keep living by faith.

E.g. We just had our mid-term elections. I have no idea what the future is going to bring over the next two years until our next presidential election. Do I care? Yes. Am I anxious? No. Am I worried? No. I can rest in the simple fact that God is God; he has a plan for all of human history, including the U.S.; and he is going to work his plan in his time frame.

In the meantime, I am going to keep trusting God. I will live by faith, trusting that God has everything under control.

The book of Habakkuk ends in a unique way because the final chapter is a psalm which could easily have been joined to the Book of Psalms. The psalm shows how Habakkuk took God's responses to his prayer of inquiry and shows us how we should respond:

- Be reminded of and in awe of God's deeds in history:

*LORD, I have heard of your fame;  
I stand in awe of your deeds, LORD.  
Repeat them in our day,  
in our time make them known;  
in wrath remember mercy.*

*Habakkuk 3:2 NIV*

- Await eagerly the astonishing and dazzling coming of Jesus

Read through the description of the coming of God in vv. 3 and you will be overwhelmed with the power and majesty and glory of God's coming that will be displayed in Christ.

Note Habakkuk's response:

*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<sup>NIV</sup>*

- In spite of anything that comes, let us rejoice and keep trusting in God

*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,*

<sup>18</sup> *yet I will rejoice in the LORD,  
I will be joyful in God my Savior.*

<sup>19</sup> *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 3:17-19<sup>NIV</sup>*

In spite of any calamity or catastrophe that comes, Habakkuk says, *yet I will rejoice in the LORD*. We can rejoice no matter what will happen because it all reveals our great and Sovereign God. And the LORD will give us strength in all of life as we wait for all this happen.

**Next Steps:**