

Dear friends, how can a holy, faithful, all-powerful, all-wise, all-loving God remain silent when the wicked swallow up those more righteous than they? How are we to deal with it when the character of God seems to be contradicted by His *silence* or by His *actions*? In Habakkuk we have a man greatly troubled by what was happening. The prophet was trying to reconcile what he saw with what he believed. In these verses we see how he grapples with this problem. What's the problem? First, why do the sins of God's people (the Judeans) go unpunished? "God, why aren't You answering my calls for help? Why aren't You delivering? Your people are violent, wicked, destructive; they ignore Your law, the wicked surround the righteous." God's answer was that the Chaldeans (the Babylonians), a godless, horrible enemy, would be used to discipline Judah. That answer caused Habakkuk to face an even tougher problem to resolve: How can God use the more wicked to punish the less wicked? "How can this be reconciled with Your character? Is Your plan best? What can I hold on to when I'm confused? What are steps to take when I don't understand Your ways?" Let's begin by "Practicing His Presence and cultivating silence before Him." What do you need to 'turn off'?

I'm indebted to pastor and writer Martyn Lloyd-Jones (From Fear to Faith) for the following steps. **1st**, STOP TO THINK. Think instead of speak. Use your mind that God gave you! Back away from the problem and begin with God; what do you know about His character? Restate basic principles. What are you certain of? If you begin with God and His character, you begin to lose your sense of panic. God is good, present, all-knowing; His purposes can't be thwarted. He's all-loving, all-powerful, all-wise. He's everlasting, holy, the Rock, sovereign. **2nd**, APPLY THE FACTUAL PRINCIPLES TO THE PROBLEM. Put your problem into the context of God and His character. **3rd**, (if you still have not come to an answer, if you're still in doubt), COMMIT THE PROBLEM TO GOD IN FAITH. Take it to God in prayer and *leave it there* with Him. Wait, trust. He'll lead us to the conclusion that "the righteous DO walk by faith; He can be trusted." Let's observe the prophet deal with his questions this way and apply his methods to ourselves. This is one way to deal with perplexities, when you just don't have a clue.

Read 1:12-2:1. HABAKKUK'S SECOND PROBLEM: HOW CAN A HOLY GOD USE AN UNHOLY INSTRUMENT? Just as Yahweh said he would be (1:5), Habakkuk was astonished, stunned; he couldn't believe it! Instead of answering his questions and responding as Habakkuk hoped, God added to the prophet's burden. Originally he couldn't reconcile Judah's sin and God's inaction and silence. Now, "How can You use someone worse than us to punish us?" God's words sound like the Supreme Judge's death sentence upon the nation Judah. "This doesn't sound like You. What about Your covenant, Your promises, with our forefathers—Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, etcetera?"

:12 "Are You not from everlasting, O Yahweh, my God, my Holy One? We will not die. You, O Yahweh, have appointed them to judge; and You, O Rock, have established them to correct." Habakkuk first stops to think. Instead of relying on his feelings, he uses his mind and concentrates on the

facts about our Lord he knows to be true. He doesn't think about the problem first; he thinks about his God! "What do I know about Him; what am I certain of?" He reviews the character of God. In doing so, he'll be able to walk in faith because Biblical faith rests upon Biblical facts. He reviews the facts about God, the Biblical facts. These are the facts that Habakkuk reviewed:

God is everlasting—God is greater than any span of human events. He preceded the beginning; He lasts beyond the end. History doesn't change Him. His throne is outside of time. He always has been. He always will be. "Have You, the Unchangeable, changed? Of course not! You're everlasting."

O Yahweh—the personal One who is. Habakkuk thinks about God's name and what it means. Yahweh means "I AM that I am. He which is." Yahweh is not dependent on anything or anyone. He is all we need. We may not have all the answers but we have all we need *of Him!* "You are the absolute, the self-existent One, Yahweh, the personal LORD."

My God—Elohim. His name is Yahweh. One title is Elohim, which means the supreme deity, sovereign, in control of all. In **Gen. 50:20** Joseph says to his brothers, "**You meant evil against me, but God (Elohim) meant it for good.**" Jesus, in **Jn. 19:11**, says, "**You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above.**" Yes, there is evil in the world, yet the supreme Deity uses even that evil to accomplish His purposes. He will hold evil people accountable (remember in **:11**, "**They will be held guilty**"?), but God as mighty

God has a purpose in what He's doing, whether we see it or not. He's God, Elohim! **My Holy One**—"Using the Babylonians, and You say You're holy! Go figure! But I KNOW You abhor sin and demand purity." **We will not die**—

As a prophet representing his people the Judeans, he realizes that they all can't die! "That would contradict Your very nature. We're Your chosen people." God had made a one-sided covenant with Abraham; and God is faithful. "**I will be their God and they will be My people (Jer. 31:33).**" He's a faithful, covenant-keeping God who we KNOW will keep His Word. Through the descendants of Abraham and the house of David, the Redeemer would come...and He did!

You, O Yahweh, have appointed them (the Chaldeans) **to judge**—"You are sovereign. Nations are in Your hand. This is Your work." **And You, O Rock**—almighty, strong, all-powerful. "You're stable, secure, reliable, firm, immovable, unshakeable. We can build on You." **You have established them to correct**—not to demolish but to judge, not to annihilate but to correct, to establish what is just or right. God disciplines those He loves.

As Habakkuk reviewed the character of God, he became assured that Judah would not be completely destroyed. He realized that God is spirit, life, self-existent, infinite, changeless, truth, love, righteous, present everywhere, all-knowing, all-powerful, good, merciful, gracious, sovereign, just, supreme, imminent, personal, independent, incomprehensible, all-wise, and faithful.

Our response to this God and His character should be to fall on our knees and worship Him! When in a tough situation, this is the best thing to do! At least it's the best place to start. As I stop to think and review God's character, I realize that I can trust Him, that He knows best, that no mistakes are ever made

by Him, that nothing is out of His control, that He only does right. So, *why does* God allow such sin to exist without immediately intervening or why does He deal with people the way He does? I need to rest in the truth of who God is. It is not that God is not powerful enough, or loving enough, or wise enough. God is using everything for His own purposes. So Habakkuk stopped to think and stated the facts about God he knew to be true. Remember, YAHWEH GOD is the place to start!

:13 “Your eyes are too pure to approve evil, and You cannot look on wickedness with favor. Why do You look with favor on those who deal treacherously? Why are You silent when the wicked swallow up those more righteous than they?” With these Biblical facts about God in mind, Habakkuk stated his dilemma. “It doesn’t make sense to me. How can You use that person/nation/situation in my life? What good can come of this? How can You, being holy, use an unholy instrument?” How could the wicked Chaldeans be used by a God who can’t by His very nature approve of wickedness? “Why would You do this? You have no sin and cannot do evil.”

The Chaldeans’ greatest delight was to inflict hardship upon others. “How could we share the fate of Nineveh, which was leveled? That’s not fair, that’s not the way I would do it. They’re the bad guys. We’re the good guys.” It’s amazing how quickly he has forgotten his own people’s sins listed in **1:1-4**. “My people may be bad, but the Chaldeans are worse!! I admit I’m not everything I should be, but so and so is worse.” God’s own people were dispensers of injustice; now they were going to be victims of injustice. Though deserving of judgment, in Habakkuk’s eyes they were more righteous than the inhumane, godless Chaldeans. “Would not Your use of the Chaldeans result in great damage to Your righteous character?”

:14-16 “Why have You made men like the fish of the sea, like creeping things without a ruler over them? :15 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. :16 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.”

:14 “Why would You endorse a people like this? Just in case You’ve forgotten, God, let me remind You of their evil character and behavior! Before the Chaldeans, men are as helpless as fish, vulnerable. There is no defense, no protection, no leader, people are helpless. They are only food for others.” Life was cheap to the Chaldeans. “Is that just, right, God?” **:15** Like a fisherman armed with a fishing rod and nets, the Chaldean sits beside a stream stocked with human fish. Like a stocked pond. They bring them up with a hook. They sweep them into a net (one cast by hand). The larger net was weighted to sink to the bottom and dragged to the boat or the shore. Mesopotamian reliefs portray their rulers holding the captured enemy in fishnets. How heartless! “Is that just, right, God?” **:16** The Chaldeans rejoiced and were glad with their catch; they worshiped the *means* that brought them success. Instead of turning to the true God in gratitude, they sacrificed to their

net, to their war machinery. They worshiped the instruments. Large and plentiful mean fat, suggesting prosperity. They had a dinner pail that was spilling over. Their conquests provided not only a livelihood but also luxury. “Is that just, right, God?”

:17 “Will they therefore empty their net and continually slay nations without sparing?” Even after they’ve dined excessively, they continue to fish! The surplus they dump out on the shore to die. What a seeming waste of human life, and the Jews would be next! Boundless greed, capturing and slaughtering at will. They empty their net so they can fill it again and again. A hard insensitivity. A ruthless, aggressive, unmerciful, and warlike nation. “How can You let this happen? I’m confused. Somehow who You are, God, and the instrument You’re going to use don’t make sense to me. Will You tolerate the sins of the Chaldeans? Will you allow Judah to be caught as fish? The Chaldeans...they whose god is their strength, they whose justice and authority originate with themselves? Is that just, Yahweh/God/my Holy One?”

So Habakkuk places his problem in context with who God is. He’s applied the principles to the problem. Yet he still isn’t satisfied. What do you do now?

Step three! *You take it to God in prayer and leave it with Him.* And that’s exactly what Habakkuk did! **2:1 I will stand on my guard post and station myself on the rampart; and I will keep watch to see what He will speak to me, and how I may reply when I am reproved.** Still confused—first at God’s initial silence and seeming indifference, now by God’s dispenser of correction—Habakkuk makes one of the most significant decisions of his entire ministry. *He decides to stand back and wait and watch.* Habakkuk doesn’t insist on an immediate answer. He doesn’t tell God how to respond. He just trusts that Yahweh God will answer, at the right time, in the best way. He takes his problems to his God in prayer and leaves them with Him.

“I’ll be like a watchman on the city walls who watches for enemies during the night, like a sentry who will warn the citizens of danger. I’ll use a tower with a wide view. First, I stopped to think. I reviewed Your character, God. Second, I shared my concerns in light of Your character. And now, I’ll wait for Your answer. I’ll center my attention on You and Your coming answer. This problem is Yours, not mine. I’ve gone as far as I can. I’ll wait and let You explain it to me.” Habakkuk prayed, confident that God’s will is always good and acceptable and perfect (**Rom. 12:2**). Waiting is an action word, not passive! “I’ll keep watch to see what You will speak to me, and how I may reply when I’m corrected.” How could he prophesy to his people if he himself was perplexed? He just went to God and told Him he didn’t understand. But he knew God would give him the right answer. Begin with God! End with God! Trust Him throughout! “I must wait upon Him.” Isn’t waiting hard! When we review His character, it makes waiting easier. Pray, cast our burden, watch, wait upon God—who is everlasting, personal, self-existent, sovereign, holy, faithful, Ruler of all, the Rock. “I’ll wait on You.” Are we waiting?
Read Ps. 62:5-8.

Let's summarize. Far from resolving Habakkuk's initial problems and questions, God's solution only raised new questions. Yet Habakkuk didn't allow the perplexity to turn him away in unbelief from Yahweh. Even though Yahweh's ways were incomprehensible to him and seemed to be in conflict with His character, Habakkuk decided to stop to think, to reflect on God's character as revealed in the Bible and from His work in history, then to rest in God alone and wait on His answer. Waiting, with our minds centered on God, broadens our perspective. We need to keep our eyes fixed on God, not the problem. Habakkuk believed the facts he knew about God and acted on them. His trust was seen by his attitude and his actions. Faith is taking God at His word and acting on it. Trust and obey.

Now let's think through personal application. If we have committed our problem to God and yet go on thinking about it alone, we are not believing who God is and we are also not acting on His truth. Watch and wait, after we have reminded ourselves of Who God is: Yahweh! When we know God is loving, God is all-powerful, God is all-wise, God is holy, God is the Rock, God is faithful, and God is sovereign, we can watch and wait. He'll answer at the right time and in the best way. We KNOW that! It may help to memorize His attributes mentioned in Habakkuk. **Read Dt. 31:8 and Prov. 3:5-8.**

Let's remind ourselves of Moses' words in **Dt. 32:3-4**: "**For I proclaim the name of Yahweh; ascribe greatness to our God! The Rock! His work is perfect, for all His ways are just; a God of faithfulness and without injustice, righteous and upright is He.**" We could also read **Ex. 34:6-8**. Let's once again close by reading **Hab. 3:16-19**. Let's encourage one another with these truths. Joel

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