

## **Our Response When God Doesn't Make**

**Sense** Habakkuk 1:1-4; 2:1-3; 3:16-19

Lynda Randle – Gaither Homecoming Music  
[/watch?v=g\\_yLk4iWw3s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g_yLk4iWw3s) God of the Mountains

Tennis superstar Arthur Ashe died of AIDS, which he contracted from a blood transfusion during heart surgery. More than a great athlete, Ashe was a gentleman who inspired and encouraged many with his exemplary behavior on and off the court.

Ashe could have become embittered and self-pitying in the face of his disease, but he maintained a grateful attitude. He explained, "If I asked, 'Why me?' about my troubles, I would have to ask, 'Why me?' about my blessings. Why my winning Wimbledon? Why my marrying a beautiful, gifted woman and having a wonderful child?"

Ashe's attitude rebukes those of us who often grumble, "Why me? Why is God allowing this to happen?" Even if we're suffering acutely, we must not forget the mercies God pours into our lives - such things as food, shelter, and friends - blessings that many are deprived of.

And what about spiritual blessings? We can hold the Word of God in our hands & allow it to shape our thoughts and habits. We have the knowledge of God's saving grace, the comfort of the Holy Spirit, and the joyful assurance of life everlasting with Jesus. Think about God's blessings and ask, "Why me?" Then our grumbling gives way to praise. Or say to yourself, "There, but by the grace of God go I."

But we have all probably thought, "When I get to heaven, I'm going to ask God why ...." Or "I just want to know why God would let this happen." Doesn't God care? The 'why' question is a tough one for us. How can we trust God when so often life is unfair. If these questions are not for us – we just have to know a little history and listen to the news to wonder about God's presence & power & love in some situations & with some people. Like what sense

is there in the Humboldt Bronco's bus accident or the violence and starvation in Yemen or the Rohingya people's homeless situation?

The book Habakkuk reflects an exceedingly traumatic time in Israel's history. Not long before, the mighty Assyrian army destroyed one city after the other, brutally killing people. And we know that not long after Habakkuk was written, the Babylonians under king Nebuchadnezzar would attack Jerusalem three times, taking the leaders and skilled citizens into exile. Then in 587 before Christ, the city and temple were destroyed. Violence was all around – internally from corruption & injustice, plus from outside violent nations. It was not a great time to be a Jew living in Palestine.

We hardly know anything about the prophet Habakkuk. We aren't even sure what his name means. We know it is prophecy, the result of revelation given to a person by God, who then proclaims the inspired message to the people. But Habakkuk is unique among the prophets. He doesn't speak for God to the people. Instead he spoke to God about the people & the nation. In some ways it's like the book of Job. Here there is a dialogue between Habakkuk and the Almighty, with Habakkuk trying to make sense of life and of God. But we can also consider this book a prayer. Let's go through these three chapters. You might want to follow along in your Bible and the outline in the bulletin insert.

**The book begins**, with a familiar lament, a complaint. "O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen?" In the middle of the nightmare at that time, the only thing the prophet can do is to help his people voice their pain, to cry over the anguish they experience. Echoing the Psalms of lament as well as the book of Lamentations, we hear how the prophet cries out to God: "Lord, how long do we have to suffer?" Habakkuk's lament joins laments from all around the world where people name their situations of starvation, violence, flood & injustice. They resist whatever and who ever is threatening their well-being and happiness. There is wrong doing, destruction and disputes.

*Then verse four* describes the difficult times the Israelites faced. “So the law becomes slack and judgment never comes forth.” Plus: “The wicked surround the righteous, therefore judgment comes forth perverted.”

So Habakkuk laments first that judgment & justice does not occur when it should. And then he complains in classical Hebrew parallelism that when judgment & justice does occur, it's twisted and a mockery of justice.

The second critical piece of this verse, has to do with how judgment & justice occurs. The Law, the Torah, has been misappropriated by the wicked. Judgment and justice is not just prevented, it is perverted. The complaint is that when God does not listen, when God does not save us from our times of trial, it is not simply the lack of the Law that hurts, but that in God's apparent absence the Law is twisted, applied with perverted force: brutally, relentlessly, gracelessly, and unfairly against the innocent.

This is the problem, and a present reality not only for Habakkuk but in any time and place, including our own. I suspect we have all complained that people just need to be rich enough to get a good lawyer & be influential to pervert the law and judgment and justice today.

Then we hear **God's first response** to this “why” question and plea, chapter 1, verses 5-11. In brief, God replies by saying – “Look at the nations and be amazed. I'm going to do something you will not believe. I'm going to raise up the Babylonians to conquer the Assyrians.” The bulk of the verses describe how powerful the Babylonians are. At first and second view – that's not the answer we want!

*Note verse 7.* “Their justice & dignity proceeds from them.” God is raising up the Babylonians – who are not good people, to do the Lord's work, and they have their own form of justice – not God's. Anyway you look at these verses; they do not convey our standard definition of comfort and justice. God hears Habakkuk's lament. And responds by saying, another more

powerful empire is going to sweep over Israel. This is why knowing some of the timing and history of the Bible is so important.

But *notice verse 11.* The message from God says the Babylonians are guilty because they transgress. Plus their power is their god. They acknowledge no accountability to God, offer no repentance, give no reparations, while violating God's order for created life. Habakkuk had to wonder what God was saying. This affirms who the Almighty is; it's good news; but what about immediate help?

To recap: Habakkuk asks God why he is allowing his own people the Israelites, to do wrong and be violent. Where is justice? Why isn't God listening to the cries of the righteous?

God answers Habakkuk: “I'm coming. I am going to act through the Chaldeans against Judah.” What? Hold up! Habakkuk is confused about God's decision to use an even more unjust and violent people than Israel and the Assyrians, to chastise & save the Israelites.

Next, chapter 1, verses 12 to chapter 2, verse 1, gives us **Habakkuk's second lament.** He basically says to the Lord, “Wait a minute God. Those Babylonians are just as bad, if not worse than us. Isn't this just going to making things worse, spreading more violence and strife? The Babylonians aren't reflections of what I know to be true about you God! You are holy and you have told us that your ways are holy.”

Then for the rest of chapter 1, Habakkuk describes to God how awful his chosen foreign agents actually are, as if God didn't know that. These verses give more detail to Habakkuk's initial complaint about the wicked oppressing the righteous. He's concerned that injustice rules Israelite political, economic and legal systems, as well as the Babylonians oppression.

Another tidbit is the *pattern of this second lament.* It's what is called an A – B – A pattern. A is a statement of faith in God's covenantal justice – verse 12. The B section –

verses 13 – 17 are questions about the existence of injustice. And then section A again, a kind of faith statement closes this part of the text. Chapter 2 verse 1, is another statement of faith: “I will stand in the watch tower & watch what God will answer concerning my complaint.”

This is a common Hebrew style of communication. And here, instead of keeping watch for enemies, Habakkuk says, “I’m going to watch and wait to see what God does with my complaint.” Habakkuk is thinking – I believe this but, I’m going to have to see this to believe it.

Next, we have **God’s second response** in Chapter 2, verses 2 - 20. First, in the *prologue*, verses 2 & 3, God instructs Habakkuk to write the vision down. God wants a clear record of what he reveals so it can be taken around, read and remembered. We are told there is a vision for the appointed time. It does not lie. It speaks of the end. If it delays, wait.

This is another answer to Habakkuk and our questions of why?, How Long until....?, Where are you God? “It will surely come.” Be patient.

Then God answers with a powerful *indictment*. Verses 4 - 5. It condemns the arrogant; warns that wealth is treacherous; the greedy and proud cannot survive and prevail; plus political power and aggression, are in contrast to the righteous who live by faith. This pretty much describes any empire in history and even powerful nations today, doesn’t it?

Next God answers by *sentencing* these kinds of nations and these kinds of people – a plural condemnation. Verses 6–20. God is not fooled about who they are. God gives 5 accusations, woes of the wicked. They tell what sins receive God’s anger. We can apply them to the Babylonians, the nation of Judah, and to us today.

*The first one* is verses 6 – 8. It can be summarized with the title, Theft and a Lust for Control. Babylon destroyed lands, cities, nations and people for the resources that they could gain. Sound familiar? This is what all of the world

powers do, or try to do, throughout the ages. Sadly, this still goes on today.

*The second woe*, verses 9 – 11, we could title, Greed and Unjust Gain. God utters this against those that seek to feather their own nests by exploiting others, thinking that they would be so high that they would be beyond the reach of problems or ruin. Isn’t this what we see in many countries today? Haven’t we seen around the world increasing protests that those who have been exploited will eventually rise up against those feathering their own nests at the expense of others? An example would be everyone who got rich off opioids, at the expense of others. God warns, judgment will come. Eventually, escape is not possible.

*The third* accusation, verses 12-14, we could label – Violence. Habakkuk knew well this woe from Israel’s experience with the Assyrians. God says it’s what the Babylonians will do. This warlike method of building wealth at the expense of others is common throughout history. This woe & our logic can be stretched out & brought up to date and fitted like a glove on any modern nation we choose. We can invent all kinds of reasons to justify our actions

Next, *the fourth woe*, verses 15 – 17, we could call Drunkenness, Lust and Corrupting Others. The specific sins mentioned are getting others drunk for the purpose of lust and sexual sins. We know drunkenness leads to violence. A recent study discovered when people didn’t have employment, robberies increased. When they had employment, robberies decreased, but drunkenness & murders increased. Probably so did rapes, which was not part of the study.

Today acts of immorality are wide spread everywhere across the world. The easy access of porn today is contributing to its rapid spread across the globe. It’s more popular today than ever. So when God comes to judge in the last days, the judgement will be worldwide.

Then in *the fifth woe*, chapter 2, verses 18 -20, Habakkuk heard God say, Idols are Futile. This

is a common biblical theme. Idolatry is abandoning God for false religions. It's trying to replace the irreplaceable with something that can never satisfy. The Creator simply cannot be replaced. Wealth, Pleasure, Materialism, Power and other religions, are common idols. In fact anything that dominates our lives taking the place of God, is an idol. False religion, in whatever forms it takes is deceptive, worthless.

So imagine you are Habakkuk listening to this message from the Almighty. It's a lot to take in. I don't think it's the kind of answer he expected from his simple question - How long before you will make things right in Judah?

God's answer is pretty heavy stuff. The woes spelt out difficult times for Habakkuk's generation. He had previously thought God was inactive, blind to the sins being committed. How wrong he was! In laying out the five 'woes' God outlined specific reasons for the coming judgement of Assyria, Babylon and Judah. These same reasons apply to nations and governments today.

If the days ahead get darker, the key verses of Habakkuk will become more important. It will become critical that followers of Jesus have a close walk with the Lord. We trust Him and His sovereign will despite all that occurs on this planet. Let's stand, watch, listen and be patient. "The righteous shall live by their faith." (2:1-4) Let's keep reminding ourselves that one day, "The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea." (2:14) And we are reminded, "The Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him." (2:20)

**Verse one** tells us the Creator's answer led to **Habakkuk's prayer** in chapter 3. **Part A.**

**Verse 2** shows us Habakkuk renews his original request. "In our own time make revival known; in wrath may you God remember mercy." But this is God's revival – not Habakkuk's. **Part B.**

Then **verses 3 – 15, Part C**, is a theophany. This is a visible manifestation and declaration to us of God's power and love. Habakkuk reviews Israel's salvation history in a poetic fashion. He remembers God's great works. A lament has turned into a reminder of how God intervened in the past - which is a way of saying - God can and will do so again on our behalf - sometime. We could call this prayer a worshipful faith and praise hymn.

In **verses 16 - 19, Part B**, we see three other responses by the prophet Habakkuk. The first ties in with his personal statement in verse 2 of chapter 3. He says, "I have heard and my heart pounded, my lips quivered at God's sound, decay crept into my bones, my legs trembled." I think this would describe us if we had this kind of conversation with God.

And second, we can tell that he accepted God's answer when he responded by declaring, "Yet I will wait patiently for the day of calamity to come on the nation invading us." We don't hear Habakkuk lamenting any more.

This sets up his third response - this wonderful Declaration of Trust and Joy in the Middle of Trouble. The story is told of Benjamin Franklin – who was not a Christian, though he had great respect for the Bible. He used Habakkuk 3:17-19 to confound a group of sophisticated, cultured despisers of the Bible. When he was in Paris he heard this group mocking the Bible, and mocking Franklin for his admiration of it.

One evening he went to them and said he had a manuscript with an ancient poem that he was quite impressed with and he wanted to read it to them. When he read Habakkuk 3:17-19, his listeners received it with praise and admiration. "What a magnificent poem!" they said. They wanted to know where they could get copies. Franklin told them to look in Habakkuk 3.

At one point in our church planting work, when little seemed to be going right, Rose posted these words in our office as a daily reminder.

It's important to notice, Habakkuk's final words are not a grim resigned, I'll stick it out, stubborn faith. He models what our response should be when God doesn't make sense. Instead they are a jubilant triumphant, "I will rejoice in the Lord; I will exult in the God of my salvation. God the Lord is my strength."

Habakkuk teaches us that the final resting place of hope and faith is not found in the course of events. Instead, it's the testimony of the Holy Spirit of God within each of us.

The final line in the book is, Part A, "For the director of music. On my stringed instruments." It's an editorial conclusion from the Hebrew. And it helps make the A, B, C, B, A outline possible.