

“How Can You Trust God When Your World Is Falling Apart?”  
The Book of Habakkuk, a Dramatic Monologue  
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I was so upset with God! We were supposed to be his people and live up to his standards. We were supposed to be his lights in this world. But God was letting our people go deeper and deeper into evil. I had cried out to God again and again about the problem, but God seemed to be silent and he seemed not to be doing anything. Have you ever felt that way? Have you ever cried out to God again and again about an important problem and then felt that he ignored you? He wasn't doing anything about your problem and you were so discouraged! My name is Habakkuk. I was a prophet in Judah in the years before the Babylonians came in and destroyed us. Here is what I wrote about my struggle:

*“How long, O LORD, must I call for help, but you do not listen?  
Or cry out to you, ‘Violence!’ but you do not save? Why do you make me look at  
injustice? Why do you tolerate wrong? Destruction and violence are before me;  
there is strife, and conflict abounds. Therefore the law is paralyzed, and justice  
never prevails. The wicked hem in the righteous, so that justice is perverted.”*  
(Habakkuk 1:2-4)

We had been decrying the evil, violence and injustice in our land, asking God to transform our country and bring our people back to him. But God seemed oblivious to our pleas. Didn't he hear us? Wouldn't he do anything about this situation?

Well, God did answer me, but it was not an answer that I expected. It was not an answer I wanted or could understand. Here is what he said:

*“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.  
I am raising up the Babylonians,  
that ruthless and impetuous people,  
who sweep across the whole earth  
to seize dwelling places not their own.  
They are a feared and dreaded people;  
they are a law to themselves  
and promote their own honor.  
Their horses are swifter than leopards,  
fiercer than wolves at dusk.  
Their cavalry gallops headlong;  
their horsemen come from afar.  
They fly like a vulture swooping to devour;*

*they all come bent on violence.  
Their hordes advance like a desert wind  
and gather prisoners like sand.  
They deride kings  
and scoff at rulers.  
They laugh at all fortified cities;  
they build earthen ramps and capture them.  
Then they sweep past like the wind and go on—  
guilty men, whose own strength is their god.” (Habakkuk 1:5-11)*

What? Was God kidding me? I mean our nation was corrupt, but we were not as bad as those Babylonians. What would you think if you prayed for revival in your nation and God told you he was raising up a godless enemy to invade you and destroy your land to get rid of the evil among you? Well, I felt about how you imagine you would. I was horrified! These Babylonians were proud, arrogant men who worshiped their own strength.

Just as God said, I couldn't believe his answer. What God said he would do did not fit with his character. So I complained again to God and tried to reconcile all this with his character. It just was not making sense.

*“O LORD, are you not from everlasting?  
My God, my Holy One, we will not die.  
O LORD, you have appointed them to execute judgment;  
O Rock, you have ordained them to punish.  
Your eyes are too pure to look on evil;  
you cannot tolerate wrong.” (Habakkuk 1:12-13a)*

God is everlasting. He has no limits like men or created things. He is our covenant God, the one I had a relationship with. That is why I could call him “my God.” In contrast to the pagan gods of the surrounding nations, our God is holy. He will not do wrong. He is also sovereign over all peoples. He can appoint one people to execute his judgment on another people and that is what he was going to do. He was our rock, our firm foundation, our immovable point. He is too pure to look on evil or tolerate wrong. So I was meditating on what God is like, trying to make sense of all this.

Sometimes this method of dealing with problems is all you need. You can ponder God's character traits and find comfort and direction to your perplexities. But this didn't work for me this time! What God had told me he was doing just didn't make any sense! So I complained to God:

*“Why then do you tolerate the treacherous?  
Why are you silent while the wicked  
swallow up those more righteous than themselves?  
You have made men like fish in the sea,*

*like sea creatures that have no ruler. [We seemed to be of no more worth to God than mere fish.]*

*The wicked foe pulls all of them up with hooks,  
he catches them in his net,  
he gathers them up in his dragnet;  
and so he rejoices and is glad.*

*Therefore he sacrifices to his net  
and burns incense to his dragnet,  
for by his net he lives in luxury  
and enjoys the choicest food.*

*Is he to keep on emptying his net,  
destroying nations without mercy?" (Habakkuk 1:13b-17)*

The Babylonians had no regard for their captives. They treated them about as well as fishermen treat their fish! I was so confused! I had to do something else to find an answer. So I said:

*"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)*

Like a watchman looking over the ramparts on the walls of the city to see any movement, any approach from anyone who might be dangerous, I would set myself firmly in my heart and look to God. I didn't have an answer but I determined to keep faith and trust that God would give me one in due time. Waiting is not easy. Trusting when you can't see the answer is hard. I could guess that some of you right now are wrestling with God as I was. Things are happening in your life or in your family that don't seem to fit with what you know of the love and faithfulness and compassion of God. You can't figure things out. It seems like God is deaf to your prayers and ignores your problems. If you get a hint that he is up to something, what seems to be happening just does not make sense! How could God do such things? That is how I felt. So I determined to keep watch for an answer like a watchman keeps watch over a city.

*"Then the LORD replied:  
"Write down the revelation  
and make it plain on tablets  
so that a herald may run with it.  
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.  
See, he is puffed up;  
his desires are not upright—  
but the righteous will live by his faith—  
indeed, wine betrays him;*

*he is arrogant and never at rest.  
Because he is as greedy as the grave  
and like death is never satisfied,  
he gathers to himself all the nations  
and takes captive all the peoples.” (Habakkuk 2:2-5)*

God finally told me how it all fit. Yes, God was going to use this ungodly people, the Babylonians, as his tools. I remember that Isaiah, who lived many years before me, had said that God would use the Assyrians in his time as his tool to punish Isaiah’s people. But Isaiah said that God was going to hold these Assyrians responsible for their evil, even as they carried out God’s judgment. [See Isaiah 10] Now, in my day, he was going to use the Babylonians to purge our nation, but they would come under God’s judgment as well. God would not let them get away with these things forever. He asked us to live by faith and trust him to do what was right even when we did not feel that it was right.

God then gave me words of judgment for these wicked Babylonian people. Using the form of a taunt song, like a child making fun of a fallen playmate, God told me to speak of the Babylonians concerning their certain fate. They would not get away with their evils forever. Woe unto them! And woe unto all who selfishly take advantage of other people while pushing God out of their lives. Be careful lest this describes you!

*“Will not all of them taunt him with ridicule and scorn, saying,  
‘Woe to him who piles up stolen goods  
and makes himself wealthy by extortion!  
How long must this go on?’  
Will not your debtors suddenly arise?  
Will they not wake up and make you tremble?  
Then you will become their victim.  
Because you have plundered many nations,  
the peoples who are left will plunder you.  
For you have shed man’s blood;  
you have destroyed lands and cities and everyone in them.  
Woe to him who builds his realm by unjust gain  
to set his nest on high,  
to escape the clutches of ruin!  
You have plotted the ruin of many peoples,  
shaming your own house and forfeiting your life.  
The stones of the wall will cry out,  
and the beams of the woodwork will echo it.  
Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed  
and establishes a town by crime!  
Has not the LORD Almighty determined  
that the people’s labor is only fuel for the fire,  
that the nations exhaust themselves for nothing?*

*For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD,  
as the waters cover the sea. [In other words, eventually, God's kingdom is going to win out, and all those who have been counting on their ill-gotten gain as the worthwhile goal of life will regret their shortsighted decision.]  
Woe to him who gives drink to his neighbors,  
pouring it from the wineskin till they are drunk,  
so that he can gaze on their naked bodies.  
You will be filled with shame instead of glory.  
Now it is your turn! Drink and be exposed!  
The cup from the LORD's right hand is coming around to you,  
and disgrace will cover your glory.  
The violence you have done to Lebanon will overwhelm you,  
and your destruction of animals will terrify you.  
For you have shed man's blood;  
you have destroyed lands and cities and everyone in them.  
Of what value is an idol, since a man has carved it?  
Or an image that teaches lies?  
For he who makes it trusts in his own creation;  
he makes idols that cannot speak.  
Woe to him who says to wood, 'Come to life!'  
Or to lifeless stone, 'Wake up!'  
Can it give guidance?  
It is covered with gold and silver;  
there is no breath in it.  
But the LORD is in his holy temple. [In other words, the LORD is the God before whom we must stand in silence, in contrast to the gods of the nations, which are just man-made idols.]  
let all the earth be silent before him.'" (Habakkuk 2:6-20)*

The coming judgment of the Babylonians was of some comfort to me. God was not going to let them win forever. But it did not remove the terror I felt over what was coming to my nation. I reflected on God's work in the past on behalf of his people, Israel. I put those reflections into a poem in what you call chapter three of my prophecy. But as I reflected on what was coming, I felt sick. This was going to be horrible. God does not promise to remove us from grave suffering.

*"A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet. On shigionoth.  
LORD, I have heard of your fame;  
I stand in awe of your deeds, O LORD.  
Renew them in our day,  
in our time make them known;  
in wrath remember mercy.  
God came from Teman,  
the Holy One from Mount Paran. [These were areas to the south of the promised land, through which route the Israelites came.]*

*Selah*

*His glory covered the heavens  
and his praise filled the earth.  
His splendor was like the sunrise;  
rays flashed from his hand,  
where his power was hidden.  
Plague went before him;  
pestilence followed his steps. [These were the plagues which God  
unleashed on the Egyptians.]  
He stood, and shook the earth;  
he looked, and made the nations tremble.  
The ancient mountains crumbled  
and the age-old hills collapsed.  
His ways are eternal.  
I saw the tents of Cushan in distress,  
the dwellings of Midian in anguish. [These were tribes living near Edom  
who were frightened about what God was doing as he was bringing his people  
across the desert to the promised land.]  
Were you angry with the rivers, O LORD?  
Was your wrath against the streams? [ God parted the Red Sea and  
stopped the Jordan River so his people could enter the promised land.]  
Did you rage against the sea  
when you rode with your horses  
and your victorious chariots?  
You uncovered your bow,  
you called for many arrows. [referring to thunderbolts]  
*Selah**

*You split the earth with rivers;  
the mountains saw you and writhed.  
Torrents of water swept by;  
the deep roared  
and lifted its waves on high.  
Sun and moon stood still in the heavens [an allusion to Joshua 10]  
at the glint of your flying arrows,  
at the lightning of your flashing spear.  
In wrath you strode through the earth  
and in anger you threshed the nations.  
You came out to deliver your people,  
to save your anointed one.  
You crushed the leader of the land of wickedness,  
you stripped him from head to foot.  
*Selah**

*With his own spear you pierced his head  
when his warriors stormed out to scatter us,*

*gloating as though about to devour  
the wretched who were in hiding.  
You trampled the sea with your horses,  
churning the great waters.” [a reference to the destruction of Pharaoh’s  
army in the Red Sea] (Habakkuk 3:1-15)*

As I pondered the coming destruction of my land, of my people, I trembled.  
This horrible expectation made me feel sick and my body shook.

*“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)*

There are so many things we cannot change in life. I would have changed the spiritual tone in our nation and brought about a national revival if I could have. I would have changed God’s plan for our nation if I could have. But I could not change such things. I had to wait patiently for the disaster to come. But that is not all I could do. I could also renew myself in God’s love and goodness. Finding joy in the Lord is a personal choice. Directing my heart to him and letting his goodness soak into me was something I could do no matter what difficult circumstances were coming. And you know, it is something you can do as well. Some of you are living through circumstances that seem absolutely overwhelming to you. Things have not gone as you had hoped. Your good plans have all been dashed into the ground. Maybe you are waiting for the disaster that is coming your way and you can’t change it. I couldn’t change my horrifying circumstances, but I could change what I was allowing my mind and my heart to focus on. So this is what I wrote about what I was experiencing:

*“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,  
yet I will rejoice in the LORD,  
I will be joyful in God my Savior.” (Habakkuk 3:17-18)*

As I thought about rejoicing in the Lord and finding him as my strength, I thought of David’s words in Psalm 18:

*“As for God, his way is perfect;  
the word of the LORD is flawless.  
He is a shield  
for all who take refuge in him.  
For who is God besides the LORD?*

*And who is the Rock except our God?  
It is God who arms me with strength  
and makes my way perfect.  
He makes my feet like the feet of a deer;  
he enables me to stand on the heights.” (30-33)*

These words inspired me to take my refuge in the Lord and to find my strength in him. King David knew troubles. He was on the run for his life for months while King Saul was hunting him down to kill him. He had to trust in God. The idea of the deer going on the heights encouraged me to get above my miserable circumstances in the Lord's power. So I finished my prophecy with these words:

*“The Sovereign LORD is my strength;  
he makes my feet like the feet of a deer,  
he enables me to go on the heights.” (Habakkuk 3:19)*

Have you ever watched a deer in the rocky hills? You and I find the way hard to transverse. But the deer seems to bounce along over rocks and tree limbs, undaunted by the barriers it faces. I was finding that as I strengthened myself in the Lord, I, too, was rising above the circumstances and finding a joy and peace that those who do not know God cannot know. I wasn't literally bouncing above all stress and worry, but this is poetry. The uplift was very real and you can have it, too. Do you know that this experience is available for you? Oh, I don't mean that finding joy in the Lord removes all tears. Life can still be very hard. Our future was going to be horrific.

So as you face your times of trouble, think about the things that I did. First, I meditated on what God is like. He has told us much about himself. We can sometimes reason from such considerations and come to understand what he is doing. But sometimes things still just don't make sense. I couldn't reason my way to peace about what God had told me was coming. So I took my stand and waited on God. Sometimes we just have to wait and trust. God made known to me that the Babylonians were going to come under God's justice. They were not going to get away with their evil deeds forever. But I still had to wrestle with the reality of what was coming for us. It was going to be awful! I knew what the Babylonians were like and what they would do to us. I could hardly stand it. But then I turned my spirit to God. I decided to take my joy in him. I let my heart take joy in all that he is - his compassion, his righteousness, his faithfulness. As I did, I found my spirit lifted above the tragedies and disappointments that surrounded me. It is my hope that you can go back again and again to my little book of prophecy and take many of these words as your own and find comfort and help as you face life circumstances that might be disappointing or even devastating.

*“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,  
yet I will rejoice in the LORD,  
I will be joyful in God my Savior.  
The Sovereign LORD is my strength;  
he makes my feet like the feet of a deer,  
he enables me to go on the heights.” (Habakkuk 3:17-19)*