

“Lord, why don’t you do something?! . . . NO! Not THAT!” (Habakkuk)

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What is the smallest thing you have ever asked God for? Praying for small things is GOOD! Sometimes it’s an indication that we believe God is with us and cares for us. Who has ever asked God to help them find a parking spot? Who has asked God to help them find their phone? Their keys? Their wallet or purse? A lost document on their computer? Who has asked God to help them find a missing toy?

We believe God is near, and when we feel at wits end, we ask for help. Even for small things.

What is the largest thing you’ve ever asked God for? Who has asked God to remove them from an impossible situation? Who has asked God to end a war? Who has asked God to remove a world leader from power? Who has asked God to remove a world leader from the planet?

On the one hand, we’re asking God to find parking spots. On the other, we’re asking him to end wars. The parking spot finding prayers seem to get answered. The war-ending prayers, not so much.

We believe God is immense! We believe nothing is too big for God. We believe God is compassionate! We believe God cares about us and our world. So why do the big prayers feel like they go unanswered? We ask God: aren’t you paying attention? Are you awake? Don’t you see what is going on in our world?

Habakkuk is bold enough to ask these kinds of questions to God. Habakkuk the prophet lives in Israel and sees Israelites doing evil things to one another. Justice is ignored. Lawlessness is everywhere. Evil abounds. Habakkuk begs God to intervene.

How long, 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 wrongdoing?

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 1:1-4)

Habakkuk exclaims: **“Don’t you see?! Why aren’t you doing something?!”**

God hears the prophet Habakkuk’s prayer. And God responds! God doesn’t respond with a “there, there” or “thoughts and prayers” kind of answer. God responds with an actual plan. **God responds:**

**“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 dwellings not their own.
They are a feared and dreaded people;
they are a law to themselves
and promote their own honor. (Habakkuk 1:5-7)**

God will punish and judge the Israelites by sending the Babylonians to punish them. The mighty Babylonian empire will be sent by God to bring judgement. God has a plan, and God tells Habakkuk what that plan will be. Habakkuk should be happy that he gets to hear God’s solution, right?

Habakkuk is NOT happy! He’s more frustrated with the answer than he was by his original question. Habakkuk cries out, **“Wait!! Why are you doing THAT?!”** Habakkuk responds:

**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 1:13)**

For Habakkuk the problem is that the Babylonians are even WORSE than the Israelites! How can God make things right by sending an evil empire? How can God punish bad deeds by sending people with even worse deeds? *Give Habakkuk credit for posing one of the most important theological questions of the Bible: If you’re so good, God, why are you “silent when the wicked swallow those more righteous than they?” (Good Book, David Plotz, p. 226)*

Wow, does this conversation between Habakkuk and God ever feel relevant to our world today! This conversation is one with relevance to every era of history. This is the pattern repeated, endlessly. Babylon does not stand alone in history as an evil nation. Most nations experience a Babylon. In history, most nations become Babylon in their evil, their oppression, their crushing of nations better than themselves.

Habakkuk’s new complaint, “How can you use a nation worse than us to judge us?” is not news to God. God is aware of how bad Babylon is. God even responds to Habakkuk with a list of the ways that Babylon is a criminal nation. **God lists Babylon’s crimes:**

- *They are arrogant and greedy and want to take over the world (2:5)*

- They steal, cheat and murder (2:6-8)
- *They lure their neighbours into traps so that they can strip them of everything they own* (2:15)
- They destroy the trees and the animals (2:17)

This behaviour is familiar to us. It's not just limited to nations. It's any organization or power that treads on others for its own gain. One commentator even noted, "The Babylonians sound astonishingly like the multinational, greedy, rapacious corporations of today." (*The MAP, Nick Page, p. 228*)

God is aware of Babylon. God is aware of Babylon's evil. God is aware of what they do to people. And as powerful as Babylon seems at the time, their reign will not last forever. They are not eternal. They are not inevitable. One day they will come crashing down in calamity. **"No matter what those in power might think, they cannot escape judgement."** (*The MAP, Nick Page, 227*)

We easily forget that MOST of the Bible was written to people in times of exile or oppression. Much of the Old Testament is written when Israel is in exile, removed from their homeland and held captive in other places. All the New Testament is written during the rule of the Roman Empire. Most Scripture is composed directly to the underdog, the person under oppression, the person under the rule of a nation that is not their own. As people in the western world, we forget this. We are reading the mail sent to oppressed, exiled, threatened people. The Bible is written to peoples who feel powerless!

Time and time again, God speaks to power in unflattering ways. God certainly says to the exiled people, behave well in the situation you are in. At the same time, God intervenes on behalf of the underdog in only ways that God can. God intervenes not through political might but miraculous power. God lampoons and mocks the cruel rulers in charge. Many of the most powerful meet comedically violent ends. Their power is not just removed from them – they are disposed of in truly humiliating fashion.

God reminds Habakkuk that Babylon, too, will one day face the judgement of God and it will not go well for them. Like every empire before them, and every empire to follow, they will meet their end.

Having heard all of this, Habakkuk responds for a final time. He's still scared of the consequences that will face Israel. He's scared of Babylon. He's kind of lost in what all of this means. But he responds in awe of God, in both a fearful and grateful way. Here's some of his response as he thinks these things through.

**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.**

**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. . . (Habakkuk 3:16-18)**

He's fearful. He knows very bad things are around the corner, which I think we can relate to. We too often feel like bad things globally and nationally await us. We are scared that what was once abundant will become scarce. Many of us, in this moment, are anxious for the future of our country and our world. As Habakkuk lists the things he foresees Israel lacking, he keeps saying, "though". "Though" what??

**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.**

This has not been an easy conversation with God for Habakkuk. But Habakkuk entered the conversation by badgering God and God responded. God gave Habakkuk perspective about the ways of the world. God reminded him that injustice happens, and injustice is dealt with. And in all of this, Habakkuk responds with worship and responds with joy. Joy in knowing that no matter what happens, Emmanuel, God is with us. He continues to worship.

**The Sovereign Lord is my strength;
he makes my feet like the feet of a deer,
he enables me to tread on the heights.**

*[The book of Habakkuk] is a conversation – it is set out as a dialogue between man and God. Habakkuk argues with God, trying to understand God's actions, which seem to him meaningless and mysterious. God replies to Habakkuk and the prophet responds with a moving, passionate declaration of faith. (The MAP, Nick Page, p. 227) Habakkuk recognizes just how dark and chaotic the world and our lives can become, and he invites us into a journey of faith, of trusting that God loves this world more than we do and that he will one day deal with its evil. **The Bible Project: Habakkuk (YouTube)***

Like Habakkuk asked God for answers about our broken world, and we ask, "Don't you see?! Aren't you paying attention?!" God answered us by giving us Jesus. Jesus takes all the evil and cruelty and sin of the world, Jesus takes it on himself, and Jesus takes it to the cross. We look to Jesus and we KNOW that he cares about the world, to the expense of his own life. When we know the extent that God goes to make all things right gives us hope – and even JOY! – in uncertain times. The cross reminds us: God sees injustice in the world. God will not let that injustice go unresolved. No matter what happens to us, no matter what happens to our world, God is with us deeply, making possible inner joy and peace that passes all understanding. My we like Habakkuk worship God joyfully as we live in a chaotic world.