

Pastor Randy Frazee shared this with his congregation several years ago:

“My mother was dying. I went to God and made a special request. By her bedside I prayed 50 times. I counted. Fifty times I asked God to grant my request. I did this because I had studied the teaching of Jesus on prayer; He admires someone who knocks at the door continuously. This gave me the notion that if I knocked continuously, eventually God would arise from His seat and fix my problem. I asked God specifically to give my mother one of two things. The first of my requests was my desired request. The second was a concession. The first request was that he would give my mother 18 more years. I prayed 50 times, “God, give her 18 more years.” Or I told him, “Take her today.”

“I asked for 18 more years for a particular reason. Number one, my mother was 62 and 18 more years would make her 80. I thought that was a good round number. But more specifically, my oldest brother just had a baby girl. I thought it would be great if my mother could see her graduate from high school.”

*“This request did not just come out of the air as it might sound. I received the request from a creative prayer that was done by a man named Hezekiah in **2 Kings 20**. In **2 Kings 20:1-6**, Hezekiah lies on his deathbed and prays to the Lord, “Remember, O Lord, how I have walked before you faithfully with wholehearted devotion and have done what is good in your eyes.” And Hezekiah wept bitterly. Before Isaiah had left the middle court, the word of the Lord came to him. “Go back and tell Hezekiah the leader of my people, this is what the Lord the God of your father David says, ‘I have heard your prayer and seen your tears. I will heal you. On the third day from now you will go up to the temple of the Lord, and I will add 15 years to your life. And I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria. I will defend this city for my sake and for the sake of my servant David.’”*

“God heard his prayer, saw his tears, and gave him 15 more years. Now, I asked for 18. But He didn't give me 18 more years, not even 18 months, not even 18 days. Within 18 hours my mother passed away.”

*“I had to ask myself the question: **What's that all about? Does God not love me? Have I not served Him like Hezekiah did? Did He not see my tears when I turned my face to the wall and wept bitterly? Why did God come through for Hezekiah and not for Randy Frazee?**”*

These kinds questions are tough questions, they are honest questions, they are real questions, and they are the kinds of questions I know many of you have asked of God because life for you did not turn out as you had expected or God did not come through for you as you may have hoped, and you are left feeling frustrated, and confused, and hurt.

This morning we are going to look at a man in the Bible who can most certainly relate – who just like many of you was facing some very difficult and troubling issues – issues that did not seem right to him, issues that went way beyond his control, and like us, he had some real honest questions for God.

So, if you have your Bible, turn to the book of **Habakkuk**. I will give you a few moments to find it because it's not a well-known book, and if it helps, it's toward the end of the Old Testament, sandwiched between **Nahum** and **Zephaniah**.

Habakkuk is considered a “minor prophet” meaning his book is short in length, only three chapters long compared to the “major prophets” such as Isaiah and Jeremiah whose books are very lengthy. That's why some prophets are considered minor and some considered major – simply because of the length of their books, but all are important because all Scripture is inspired by God and given to us for a reason.

When we think of the ministry of a prophet – minor or major, we imagine that the prophet receives a message from God then he speaks to the people on God's behalf. That's what we tend to think, because that is largely what happens, but in the case of Habakkuk, we are not told he spoke *to* the people, instead we are told he spoke to God *about* the people. Unlike any other prophetic book in the Bible, Habakkuk records a conversation about God's people between one man – that being Habakkuk and the Lord God Almighty, and in a round-about way, we are given an opportunity to listen in.

Now, before we go any further, I need to give you some historical background information so this book will make sense to you. In Habakkuk's day, the Promised Land was divided into two kingdoms – the Northern Kingdom known as *Israel* which was made up of ten tribes, and the Southern Kingdom known as *Judah* which was made up of two tribes. In 722 B.C., the Northern Kingdom – *Israel* had fallen to the Assyrian Empire. The Assyrians were the “bullies on the block” at the time, and they were a vicious bunch, known for a cruelty and a brutality that is hard to fathom. If you recall, they were so terrible, so wicked, that Jonah ran away from God because he hated the Assyrians so much.

Now the Southern Kingdom – that being *Judah* had formed an alliance with their neighbors to the south – the Egyptians to make a stand against the Assyrians, but the Assyrians were just too strong and in 701 B.C., *Judah* was eventually defeated and became a slave nation to the Assyrian Empire until they later fell in 612 B.C.

After the Assyrians fell, *Judah* was now on their own as a nation, at least for a short time. They had an evil king named Jehoiakim, and the people under his rule had become wicked, and violent, and corrupt, and Habakkuk didn't like what he saw. He didn't like what was happening in his nation – he knew it was headed for disaster, and he complained *to* God – or more accurately as we will see in a moment, he took the chance to complain *about* God.

Habakkuk, like Job, is one of the few who was given the chance to complain about God's decisions and God's behavior, and it's all recorded for our benefit, so let's follow along beginning with **verse 1**. We are told,

The oracle which Habakkuk the prophet saw.

This passage starts out with the word “**oracle**” which in Hebrew means a burden or a heavy load. This oracle is a vision or a message from God, but it's also a heavy burden for Habakkuk once God opens his eyes and his ears to understand what is about to happen. In other words, God gives Habakkuk this prophecy – God reveals the future to Habakkuk, and it's such a heavy thing for Habakkuk to deal with.

So, let's listen in as Habakkuk begins with some honest questions for God. He prays beginning with **verse 2**,

²How long, O Lord, will I call for help, and You will not hear? I cry out to You, “Violence!” Yet You do not save. ³Why do You make me see iniquity, and cause me to look on wickedness? Yes, destruction and violence are before me; strife exists and contention arises. ⁴Therefore the law is ignored and justice is never upheld. For the wicked surround the righteous; therefore justice comes out perverted.

In this passage, Habakkuk reaches out to God because he is troubled by what he sees and he begins by saying,

“How long, O Lord, will I call for help, and You will not hear?”

He gets right to the point, doesn't he? I think for many of us, Habakkuk is speaking our language. *"Lord, I've been praying to You day after day for a long, long time. I've been crying out to You, pleading to You, but it seems that You're not listening. It's like I'm talking to the ceiling because nothing is happening."*

Habakkuk is being honest here, and fortunately, he feels he can cast his cares and his anxieties upon God, and even share his frustrations and complaints about God, and here is the amazing thing – God wanted this all written down for you and me to see. God is big enough to deal with our complaints and I think more importantly, God wants us to know we can come to Him with open and honest hearts – even hearts that are troubled because of Him – so don't shy away, don't be afraid to come.

Well, Habakkuk continues and in essence he says,

"Lord, this nation is in shambles – it's falling apart. It's full of violence, and corruption, and wickedness. It's full of hate and anger and fighting. The righteous – Your people Lord, are suffering and the wicked are prospering. The nation has rejected You. Your law – Your word, God's Word is completely ignored and the legal system is a joke. Lord, this nation is falling apart, there's so much evil in it, and You aren't doing anything about it."

"Lord, if You are good and You are in control, then why does it appear You simply don't care?" In a nutshell, that's what Habakkuk is asking because he doesn't understand why God appears to be so distant, so unresponsive, and so unconcerned about what's going on.

Habakkuk prays and prays and then he prays some more, and yet there doesn't seem to be an answer from God. He prays and prays, and the situation doesn't get better, rather it seems to be getting worse, and he's crying out, he's screaming in frustration, *"God, why are these terrible things happening? Don't You hear my cries for help? Why do You force me to look at all of the disturbing filth and violence that's around me? How long, O Lord, is it going to take for You to do something?"*

To Habakkuk, maybe it seems like God is up there in heaven with His arms folded, maybe He's preoccupied with other things or other people, but whatever the case, as far as Habakkuk can tell, God's not doing anything to deal with His own people.

Again, Habakkuk is being honest with God isn't he, but who hasn't asked similar questions like this of God or at least thought them when facing your own difficult and troubling circumstances? *Lord, why is this happening? God, where are you? Why don't you do something?* Sound familiar? I suspect we have all asked questions like these at one time or another.

Well, God is gracious and patient with Habakkuk, and He responds. Listen to what God says beginning with **verse 5**.

“Look among the nations! Observe! Be astonished! Wonder! Because I am doing something in your days—You would not believe if you were told.”

Habakkuk thought God didn't care and wasn't involved, but God has seen everything and unbeknownst to Habakkuk, God was already working on the solution, in fact, God is going to do something that will shock Habakkuk when he hears about it.

God told Habakkuk to open his eyes, to take a good look around him, and to see the big picture. There's something much greater at stake, there's something bigger going on, and Habakkuk, it's just not all about you and your part of the world. Your view is limited, so you need to pay attention because I'm doing something and you won't believe it when I tell you.

Now, taken by itself, those words might lead Habakkuk to think that God is going to do something glorious like sending a righteous king to lead the people in a godly direction or by sending a sweeping spiritual revival that will rid the nation of its wickedness and bring them back to God. That would be awesome, and God is going to send something, but it's not a righteous king or a spiritual revival as Habakkuk might have hoped for.

Let's see what God is sending, look at **verse 6**.

“For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans, that fierce and impetuous people who march throughout the earth to seize dwelling places which are not theirs.”

Without an explanation, God drops a bombshell on Habakkuk and gives him a very surprising revelation – *you think it's bad now, you haven't seen anything yet*. You wanted Me to do something, well here it comes. Trouble is coming, and I am raising up the dreaded **Chaldeans**, also known as the Babylonians, whose empire will change the face of the known world.

Habakkuk had pleaded with God to deal the wickedness in Judah, to fix the nation, to do something about the problem, but as we will learn next week – Habakkuk didn't want God to intervene like this – not with the Babylonians of all people, which brings up a couple of good points: What God does may sound completely unreasonable to us, but if you think about it, that should be expected for God says ***“My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways.”*** Secondly, don't make the mistake of assuming your plans are the same as God's plans – for most likely they are not.

God was planning to punish His own people with a godless foreign nation. Now, let's put this shocking news about the Babylonians in perspective for a moment. We pray about our own nation and we ask God to fix our nation, but imagine after praying that God said to us, *“Yes, I'm going to bring Hamas and al-Qaeda into America to attack and destroy your nation as punishment for your wickedness.”* **How would you react to that?** I assume not well, and in a sense, that's what God is telling Habakkuk. This is why this is such a heavy burden.

This sounds like the worst-case scenario for Judah, and need I remind you – this is God's doing – He has raised up the Babylonians – so, make no mistake, God is in control here.

So, who are these Babylonians that God is raising up? Let's see how they are described by God and so burdensome to Habakkuk. Look at **verses 7-11**.

⁷“They are dreaded and feared; their justice and authority originate with themselves. ⁸“Their horses are swifter than leopards and keener than wolves in the evening. Their horsemen come galloping, their horsemen come from afar; they fly like an eagle swooping down to devour. ⁹“All of them come for violence. Their horde of faces moves forward. They collect captives like sand. ¹⁰“They mock at kings and rulers are a laughing matter to them. They laugh at every fortress and heap up rubble to capture it. ¹¹“Then they will sweep through like the wind and pass on. But they will be held guilty, they whose strength is their god.”

Well, I think it is fair to say that the Babylonians are not friendliest bunch of folks you would ever want to meet. They were an arrogant people who recognized no higher authority than themselves. As far as they were concerned – they were the law, and they followed their own code of what is right and what is wrong. They were a power-hungry, wicked people, who loved to terrorize their victims. They

were like wild pack animals – predators whose speed and power brought a violent and merciless end to their prey.

The Babylonians are coming and there was no hope of stopping them, even the Assyrian Empire, the previous “bullies on the block”, were crushed by the Babylonians. They are coming like a fiery whirlwind, consuming everything in their path, and they will gather prisoners like the sand – too numerous to count. They are going to march upon the land, upon Israel and Judah, they will laugh at your kings, they will turn your strongholds into rubble, they will give credit to their own gods for defeating you, and you’re not going to be able to stop them.

Oddly enough, this trouble was predicted by Moses some 800 years earlier when he spoke to God’s people as they prepared to enter the Promised Land. Moses told them back in **Deuteronomy 28:49-52**,

⁴⁹ “The Lord will bring a nation against you from afar, from the end of the earth, as the eagle swoops down, a nation whose language you shall not understand, ⁵⁰ a nation of fierce countenance who will have no respect for the old, nor show favor to the young. ⁵¹ Moreover, it shall eat the offspring of your herd and the produce of your ground until you are destroyed, who also leaves you no grain, new wine, or oil, nor the increase of your herd or the young of your flock until they have caused you to perish. ⁵² It shall besiege you in all your towns until your high and fortified walls in which you trusted come down throughout your land, and it shall besiege you in all your towns throughout your land which the Lord your God has given you.

God had warned His people time and time again about their wickedness and their idolatry, but they just wouldn’t listen. Beginning with Moses – then prophet after prophet, God’s people were clearly warned, but they ignored the warnings. God sent natural disasters like droughts and plagues, and various military defeats, but the people still wouldn’t listen. Instead of repenting, the people hardened their hearts toward God, and now they have tried God’s patience and it was time for Him to intervene in this way.

God’s people are going to reap what they have sown. They sowed a wind with their wickedness and their idolatry, and as a consequence, they will reap a whirlwind raised up by God. **Does this mean that God does not love His people?** Well, I guess if you are on the receiving end of His punishment – from that perspective it may seem that way, but the truth is – from God’s perspective, God is

madly in love with His people, and His actions prove it. We are told in **Proverbs 3:12**,

“For whom the Lord loves He reproveth, even as a father corrects the son in whom he delights.”

As God brings punishment upon His own people, even at the hands of the Babylonians, it must be seen from the perspective of God’s love, for this action is a reminder that God has not given up on them, God has not abandoned His people, and He has not given them over to their sinful lives – instead God loves them as a Father, He’s still working in their lives – even through punishment, and He’s proving Himself to be faithful and true to His word – even faithful and true regarding His warnings of trouble against them.

So, it’s a matter of perspective. We are challenged to see our trouble from God’s point of view – a point view that must be seen in the context of His great love – especially when facing our own Babylonians; otherwise, we find ourselves seeing trouble from our limited and skewed point of view, questioning and doubting God, assuming that He no longer listens, and no longer cares.

Now, there is one more thing I would like to say to challenge your perspective on God’s working in your life. Back in **verse 5**, God tells Habakkuk,

“Look among the nations! Observe! Be astonished! Wonder! Because I am doing something in your days—You would not believe if you were told.”

God tells Habakkuk to look past himself – to look beyond his part of the world, for there is something bigger going on, something greater at stake. Habakkuk was only seeing part of the picture, for his perspective was very limited.

The other day I read something from Pastor Ray Stedman which I found very insightful and I want to close with this. He said,

“When it comes to understanding what God is doing in the world, we are like ants on a Rembrandt painting. We crawl across the dark brown and think all of life is dark brown. Then we hit green and think, ‘Oh, this is better. Now all is green.’” But soon comes the dark blue and then a splash of yellow, a streak of red, and then another patch of brown. On we journey, from one color to another, never realizing that God is actually painting a masterpiece in our lives using all the colors of the palette. One day we will discover that every color had its place, had a reason,

nothing was wasted or out of place. Just as there is a time and a season for everything, there is also a color for every stage of life's journey. When the painting is finished, we will discover that we were part of His masterpiece from the very beginning."

It's a matter of perspective, isn't it?

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