

Delay, Not Denial

Habakkuk 1:2-4

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A. God is Silent, Not Absent (v. 2):

1. How long oh Lord - Habakkuk cries out to the Lord because he knows (long history proves) the Lord has all power, and authority to fix all the injustice and evil he is seeing among the people, especially when they come into the temple. He knows that the Lord would desire to do this because He wants to have a relationship with Israel.

a) “How long, O Lord” seems to imply Habakkuk believes the Lord is slow in His response and that has caused Habakkuk to become impatient with the Lord God.

b) The prophet’s long-standing concern which finally erupted into a volcanic complaint was twofold. First, he wanted to know why God seemed so indifferent: Why doesn’t God hear? Second, he wanted to know why God seemed so insensitive: Why doesn’t God help? Habakkuk’s words, “How long” show his agony over God’s seeming delay in responding to the prophet’s concerns.

2. Call for help – Because Habakkuk knows that the Lord is all powerful he intensely and desperately beseeches the Lord to provide him His complete undivided attention so that the Lord comes to a full knowledge of all that is taking place.

a) There “to listen” implies “to respond.” Habakkuk knows that God hears his complaint. What he cannot understand is why God does not act in response to his plea.

b) You and I typically will not know just why when there seems to be no answer to our prayers, but we can be sure that God does hear and has reasons for any apparent delay.¹¹

3. Call for help – Habakkuk’s passion for justice and for the Lord to rise up against wickedness is intense. He does not look to anyone; he adamantly and persistently with no intent on ever stopping, implores God even though he does not believe the Lord is listening. We see the same passion with Nehemiah.

a) Habakkuk’s concern was not only that his cries went unheeded, but that the corruption continued unchecked. He cried out to God, Violence! but God seemed to do nothing. The stark word “violence” sums up all the chaos Habakkuk witnessed around him. The word is sprinkled throughout the book (1:2-3, 9; 2:17) like ink blots on a crumpled page in history.

4. Cry out to you - The passage repeats “I cry out” (meaning continuously with no plans to stop), but this time it highlights that the circumstances have created an emergency which has completely disturbed Habakkuk’s heart. He needs divine aid because what is going on is so horrible.

5. Violence! – His petition to God is directly related to the violent wrong doing that is opposed to the will of God.

6. Yet you do not save – Habakkuk is accusing the Lord of continuously knowing of all that is taking place but yet He totally does not seek to remove the oppression, nor the burden that the violence has placed upon them.

a) The clause in [tev](#) “*save us from violence*” can then be translated as “help us to escape from those who would treat us cruelly” or “prevent our enemies from doing cruel things to us.” The exclusive pronoun “us” is not present in the Hebrew, but it is permissible to include it, because the prophet is speaking not only for himself but also for the minority of people in Judah, who are honest and who share his outlook. ^[2]

B. Faith is Tested (vs. 3-4):

1. Why do you make me see – Habakkuk asks the Lord why He would continuously make him come to a complete understanding of all that is before Him. In other words, if the Lord is not going to do anything, why let Habakkuk have a complete intellectual comprehension of what is taking place?
2. Iniquity – What Habakkuk completely understands is that men and women are planning and executing deceitful practices that outwardly violates the Word of God.
3. Cause me to look upon wickedness – Habakkuk felt that the Lord is making him, like a person laboriously working outside in the heat, to in drudgery be constantly exposed to all the wicked schemes that were taking place.
4. Cause me to look upon wickedness – The Lord constantly makes Habakkuk have spiritual discernment leading to sustained evaluations of the wickedness that was taking place around him.
5. Destruction and violence – The wickedness and violence are done by those who know what the Lord is saying but they purposefully seek to violently disrupt the Lord's plans creating injustices that seriously damages those around them.
6. Before me – Habakkuk can so clearly understand these things there is no possibility that he can misinterpret what is taking place.
7. Strife exists – There are people that Habakkuk has full exposure to that dispute and quarrel with each other.
8. Contention – The quarrels and disputes were so argumentative that it created dissension which spread throughout the community (Proverbs 17:14; 19:19; 10:12; 15:18). People did not care to talk to each other anymore.
9. Arises; Carry; Stirred – The arguments are so intense and the dissension is so divisive; it is very visible.
10. The law is ignored – The word of the Lord that is written to direct our everyday lives so that we learn how to please the Lord by walking righteously is paralyzed. There is no effort to learn it or to walk in it.
11. Justice is not upheld – The government does not seek to demonstrate a constant desire to do what is right under the law. It quickly abandons the Lord's governmental structure and His word to act wickedly.

12. Wicked – Wickedly here means those who willfully break the law with no desire to seek the Lord; they are violent, and don't respect any of the challenges the Lord places before them.

13. The wicked – These are also individuals, because they have no respect for God, who violate the social rights of others; they are willfully oppressing, exploiting, and abusive; they carry out deceitful practices while doing business; they have no regrets and no desire to change.

14. Surround the righteous – These wicked people go after those who have respect for the will of God because they desire to have a good relationship with God and are committed to execute true justice.

15. Surround the righteous – Habakkuk concludes that because the righteous are faithful to believe and live in accordance with the Word of God, the only way they can sustain in these evil, wicked times is to live by faith (Habakkuk 2:4)

16. Justice is perverted – Because the wicked seem to prosper and have a strong hold on those who execute the law the culture will be crooked, morally twisted and the truth will be distorted.

17. Justice is perverted - Because there is no heart to do what is right Habakkuk is crying out for the Lord, who seems silent, to do what is righteous (Habakkuk 2:1-5). If we remain faithful we will hear from the Lord (Chapter 3) and it will lead us to worship (3:18-19).

C. God is at Work (v. 5):

1. Look – The Lord instructs Habakkuk to take a careful look that brings him to a full understanding about what is going to take place.
2. Look – It is Habakkuk's turn to listen. He must clearly understand God's message and trust that it is credible.
3. Observe – He must make a careful evaluation of what is about to take place. We see all the devastation in California, Turkey etc. We must keep an eye on how frequent the birth pains are taking place.

4. Astonishment/wonder – What the Lord is going to allow to take place is going to be so profound, they would have a hard time imagining the devastation that is to come. It would be so terrifying that they would be fearful at the sight of it.
5. Doing - The Lord is actively putting a lot of energy into what He plans to do.
6. Something – God is making a specific plan to be at work to address the wickedness and injustice that is taking place.

a) In response to Habakkuk's cry for answers to his people's plight, God in turn responds (1:5–11) by saying that the Babylonians (lit., Chaldeans), then moving to supplant the remnants of the Assyrian empire, have been chosen to punish Judah as well as the other nations (cf. Isaiah's similar reference to the Assyrian threat in Isa. 10:5 and the assertion in the Cyrus Cylinder that Marduk "named" Cyrus and the Persians to capture Babylon and restore the proper celebration of the New Year's *Akitu* festival).^[3]

7. You would not believe it if I told you - If the Lord was to continuously narrate and exhibit all that He plans to do, Habakkuk, because what is about to take place is unimaginable, would find it incomprehensible. It would be difficult to find it as true or trustworthy.

^[1]Richards, Lawrence O.: *The Bible Readers Companion*. electronic ed. Wheaton : Victor Books, 1991; Published in electronic form by Logos Research Systems, 1996, S. 562

[tev](#) Today's English Version

^[2]Clark, David J. ; Hatton, Howard: *A Translator's Handbook on the Book of Habakkuk*. New York : United Bible Societies, 1989 (Helps for Translators), S. 70

^[3] Walton, J. H. (2009). [Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary \(Old Testament\): The Minor Prophets, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs](#) (Vol. 5, p. 167).

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