

Habakkuk 1 Commentary

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HABAKKUK: THE RIGHTEOUS LIVE BY FAITH "From Worry to Worship"		
Problems of Habakkuk Hab 1:1 -2:20		Praise of Habakkuk Hab 3:1-19
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The Prophet Wondering & Worrying		The Prophet Watching & Waiting		The Prophet Worshiping & Witnessing
Habakkuk's First Question Hab 1:1-4	God's First Answer Hab 1:5-11	Habakkuk's Second Question Hab 1:12-2:1	God's Second Answer Hab 2:2-2:20	Habakkuk's Prayer of Praise
Habakkuk Speaks: Why Does God not Punish Wicked Judah?	God Speaks: Judah Will Be Punished!	Habakkuk Speaks: Why Will God use Pagans to Punish Judah?	God Speaks: Yes Pagans Will Punish Judah!	Word of Praise 1-15 Words of fear & faith Hab 3:16-19
Oracle Related to Judah ca 607BC				

Habakkuk moves from burden to blessing, from wonder/worry to worship, from restlessness to rest, from a problem to God's Person, and from a complaint to consolation. God turns sighing into singing if we (like Habakkuk) take time to wait before Him in prayer and listen to His Word.

Timeline of Habakkuk

BC

722: Northern Kingdom of Israel (10 tribes) falls & is exiled to Assyria

627: Jeremiah begins his prophetic ministry

621: Rediscovery of Book of Law which had been lost in House of God! Josiah's reformation (but not lasting revival)

612: Fall of Nineveh, capital of Assyria

609: Death of godly King Josiah

607: Habakkuk begins his prophetic ministry

605: Nebuchadnezzar defeats Pharaoh Necho of Egypt at Battle of Carchemish = "the turning point of world history"

605: First invasion of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylon; Daniel taken captive

597: Second invasion of Judah by Babylon; Ezekiel and 10,000 taken captive

592: Ezekiel begins his prophetic ministry to Babylonian exiles

586: Fall of Jerusalem, Destruction of Temple

538: Exiles return from Babylon to Judah (relatively small number return)

Note that Habakkuk's message was uttered just prior to Judah's 3 exiles.

Habakkuk 1:1 The oracle which Habakkuk the prophet saw.:

- Isa 22:1, Na 1:1
- [Habakkuk 1 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Oracle (Dictionary articles) (04853)(**massa'** from **nasa'** = lift up to carry or to bear) means that which is carried and thus a burden or load, focusing on the effort needed to transport something. Figuratively refers to a prophetic utterance. Massa' is used literally to describe a load or burden on an animal (Ex 23:5, 2Ki 5:17, 8:9) or man (Parts of the Tabernacle to be carried - Nu 4:15, 19, 24, 27, 31, 32, 47, 49).

NET Note: Since massa' derives from a verb meaning "to carry," its original nuance was that of a burdensome message, that is, one with ominous content.

Notice also that the root Hebrew verb **nasa'** can mean either to bear or to lift up. Focusing on the first meaning (to bear) has led to the meaning of *massa'* as burden, a message speaking predominantly of judgment. Other scholars have focused on the second nuance of **nasa'** (to lift up - "lifted his voice" Jdg 9:7, "cry out" in Isa 3:7) and conveys the sense of lifting up (with one's voice) whether in the form of a threat or a promise.

Oracle: a word or message from the Lord (2Chr 18:4; 34:21) or from a pagan god (2Kgs 1:3, 6, 16); the means by which this was delivered was not always the same and could sometimes take the form of a prophecy (Nah 1:1; Zech 9:1)

The **Septuagint (Lxx)** translates the Hebrew noun **massa'** in Hab 1:1 with the Greek noun **lemma** (as in Nah 1:1, Zech 9:1, 12:1, Mal 1:1) which means something received (material gain, profit, income) but can also convey the sense of a burden or commission received, (2Ki 9:25, Jer 23:33, 34, 36, 38), the burden of the Word of the LORD (Zech 9:1). **Lemma** in Lam 2:14 describes "*the false and misleading oracles*" of the prophets of Judah which had they been true **oracles** may have reproved and corrected Judah's errant ways. **The point is powerful - Preach** the Word in season and out - the true and righteous oracle of God, for all else has no impact on the hearer's inherently wicked heart (flesh) (2Ti 4:2-note).

Dear modern day "oracle bearer" are you redeeming the time in these evil days (Eph 5:16-note) **by preaching the powerful life changing Word in the power of the Spirit? Don't be like those described by Jeremiah in Lam 2:14 - the falsity of their message resulted in the failure of their hearer's release from captivity! Heed the words of the psalmist "My soul cleaves to the dust. Revive me according to Thy word."** (Ps 119:25-note) "Righteousness exalts a nation, **but** sin is a disgrace to any people." (Pr 14:34)

Spurgeon on Ps 119:25: The Word of God shows us that He Who first made us must keep us alive, and it tells us of the Spirit of God Who through the ordinances (the Word of God) pours fresh life into our souls; we beg the Lord to act towards us in this His own regular method of grace (**Ed:** A great prayer for of us to pray with persistence!) ([Psalms 119:25 - Treasury of David](#))

In a more figurative sense as used by Habakkuk **massa'** refers to divine messages which were often of a negative nature (Isa 13:1, 14:28, 15:1, 17:1, 19:1, 21:1, 21:11, 21:13, 22:1, 23:1) but not always (Pr 30:1, 31:1).

Massa' can refer to that which causes hardship or distress (Nu 11:11, Job 7:20, Ps 38:4), "as a figurative extension of the weariness occurring when carrying a load." (Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains).

In Ezekiel 24:25 the literal phrase is "the uplifting of their soul" and refers to delight of one's heart. NET Note offers another possible meaning noting that the term "uplifting" refers to "that to which they lift up their soul, their heart's desire." However, this text is the only one listed for this use. It seems more likely that the term has its well-attested nuance of "burden, load," here and refers to that which weighs them down emotionally and is a constant source of concern or worry."

Massa' - 68x in 60v in the **KJV** - burden 57, song 3, prophecy 2, set 1, exaction 1, carry away 1, tribute 1; 66.

Ex 23:5; Num 4:15, 19, 24, 27, 31f, 47, 49; 11:11, 17; Deut 1:12; 2 Sam 15:33; 19:35; 2Kgs 5:17; 8:9; 9:25; 1Chr 15:22, 27; 2Chr 17:11; 20:25; 24:27; 35:3; Neh 10:31; 13:15, 19; Job 7:20; Ps 38:4; Pr 30:1; 31:1; Isa 13:1; 14:28; 15:1; 17:1; 19:1; 21:1, 11, 13; 22:1, 25; 23:1; 30:6; 46:1f; Jer 17:21f, 24, 27; 23:33f, 36, 38; Ezek 12:10; 24:25; Hos 8:10; Nah 1:1; Hab 1:1; Zech 9:1; 12:1; Mal 1:1

NAS has a different "Strong's Number" (04853b) which it lists in only 25v translating it as burden(3), oracle(25), oracles(1).

The English word **oracle**

"Among pagans, the answer of a god or some person reputed to be a god, to an inquiry made respecting some affair of importance, usually respecting some future event, as the success of an enterprise or battle... Among Christians, **oracles**, in the plural, denotes the communications, revelations or messages delivered by God to prophets. In this sense it is rarely used in the singular; but we say, the **oracles** of God, divine oracles, meaning the Scriptures." (Webster, 1828)

THE PROPHET'S MESSAGE: AN ORACLE or BURDEN

John Piper gives two reasons explaining why the OT prophet's message was called a "**burden**"...

One is that the word of God is never light and trifling. It is always weighty and serious and heavy. I don't mean dull, or boring, or morose. I mean it is always substantial. There is no mirage in the word of God. It's always meaty—even the milk is meaty. The word of God comes to a prophet as a burden because it is so thick and rich with truth.

The other reason that the word of God is called a **burden** is because even when it's good news, it will be rejected by many. You remember how Isaiah groaned under the weight of his preaching ministry (in Isa 6:11-note)? Why? Because even the glorious things that he spoke made the heart of the people fat and their ears heavy and their eyes shut (Isa 6:10-note). And he cried out (in Isa 53:1), "Who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" So the word of the Lord is a **burden** because it meets with opposition. Words designed for life become the aroma of death for those who are perishing.

My understanding of what it means to be a faithful pastor is that I should take up the **burden** of each text that I preach on, and deliver it to you as my own **burden** with as much of the spirit and truth of the text as God gives me. So I come this morning with a **burden**—a burden first because the word of God in this text is weighty and because I know that not all will believe what I say. ([The Greatness of God's Electing Love](#))

Spurgeon adds...

The prophets of old were no triflers. They carried a **burden**. The servants of God mean business; they have something to carry, worth carrying. Those who speak for God must not speak lightly. God's true servants, who are **burdened** with His Word, right willingly and cheerfully carry that burden. We bear a **burden** indeed, but we should be sorry not to bear it.

ISBE Article on **Oracle**

(1) A divine utterance delivered to man, usually in answer to a request for guidance. So in 2Sa 16:23 for **dabar** ("word"). The use in this passage seems to indicate that at an early period oracular utterances were sought from Yahweh by the Israelites, but the practice certainly fell into disuse at the rise of prophecy, and there are no illustrations of the means employed (1Sa 14:18,19,36-42, etc., belong rather to **divination**). In the Revised Version margin of such passages as Isa 13:1, "**oracle**" is used in the titles of certain special prophecies as a substitute for **Burden** (*massa*), with considerable advantage (especially in Lam 2:14).

(2) In heathen temples "**oracle**" was used for the chamber in which the utterances were delivered (naturally a most sacred part of the structure). This usage, coupled with a mistake in Hebrew philology (connecting *debir*, "hinder part," with *debar*, "speak"), caused English Versions of the Bible to give the title "oracle" to the Most Holy Place of the Temple, in 1Ki 6:5, etc., following the example of Aquila, Symmachus and the Vulgate (Jerome's Latin Bible, 390-405 A.D.) But the title is very unfortunate, as the Most Holy Place had nothing to do with the delivery of oracles, and the Revised Version (British and American) should have corrected (compare Ps 28:2 margin).

(3) In the New Testament English Versions of the Bible employs "**oracle**" as the translation of *logion*, "saying," in four places. In all, divine utterances are meant, specialized in Acts 7:38 as the Mosaic Law ("living oracles" = "commandments enforced by the living God"), in Ro 3:2 as the Old Testament in general, and in Heb 5:12 as the revelations of Christianity (Heb 6:2,3). In 1Pet 4:11 the meaning is debated, but probably the command is addressed to those favored by a supernatural "gift of speech." Such men must keep their own personality in the background, adding nothing of their own to the inspired message as it comes to them.

The oracle (burden) - In sum, it is God's judgment on His chosen people (Judah) and His chosen instrument (Babylon) with which He will discipline Judah.

Habakkuk means *embrace* or *wrestle* and is derived from the Hebrew verb **chabaq** (02263) which means to **physically embrace** another "one who strongly enfolds" (12x in OT - Ge 29:13; 33:4; Ge 48:10; 2Ki 4:16; Job 24:8; Pr 4:8 speaking of wisdom presenting a striking contrast with the next use in Pr 5:20; Eccl 3:5; 4:5; Song 2:6; 8:3; Lam 4:5).

In this short book we see the prophet in effect "**wrestling**" with God in the first two chapters with questions about why God is doing what He is doing. In Habakkuk 3 the prophet's heart is transformed by God's replies and instead of resisting, now he **embraces** his God.

Habakkuk has been referred to by some as the "*doubting Thomas*" of the Old Testament, but in reality he is better called "*the prophet of faith!*" Yes, he had doubts and questions for God, but in the end, He trusted God and it caused him to worship God with one of the most magnificent descriptions of the glory of God in all the Bible (In reverential awe be still and know that He is God as you read - Hab 3:3-15)!

Martin Luther

Habakkuk signifies an embracer, or one who embraces another, takes him into his arms. He embraces his

people and takes them to his arms, i.e., he comforts them and holds them up, as one embraces a weeping child, to quiet it with the assurance that, if God wills, it shall soon be better.

Edward B Pusey comments on Habakkuk's name as "strong embrace"...

The word (Hebrew verb **chabaq**, root of the prophet's name) in its intensive form is used both of (Solomon) enfolding (the woman he loves in) tender supporting love (Song 2:6, 8:3), and of man clinging and holding fast to divine wisdom (Pr 4:8). **It fits in with the subject of his prophecy, faith, cleaving fast to God amid the perplexities of things seen.**

"He who is spiritually Habakkuk, cleaving fast to God with the arms of love, or enfolding Him after the manner of one holily wrestling, until he be blessed, enlightened, and heard by Him, is the seer here."

"Let him who would in such wise fervidly embrace God and plead with Him as a friend, praying earnestly for the deliverance and consolation of himself and others, but who sees not as yet, that his prayer is heard, make the same holy complaint, and appeal to the clemency of the Creator." "He is called 'embrace' either because of his love to the Lord; or because he engages in a contest and strife and (so to speak) wrestling with God." For no one with words so bold ventured to challenge God to a discussion of His justice and to say to Him, "Why, in human affairs and the government of this world is there so great injustice?" ([E. B. Pusey in his excellent commentary - Notes on the Old Testament: The Minor Prophets, Volume 2: Micah to Malachi](#))

John Kitto has an interesting comment on Habakkuk's name...

It has sometimes appeared to us matter of regret that this prophet had not a more sonorous name. No people ever had finer proper names than the Hebrews, whether we regard the sound or the signification. But this, as regards the sound, is certainly an exception, and it seems the very worst of all their names—it is, in fact, difficult to pronounce such a collocation of syllables with gravity; and so offensive was it to the delicate organs of the Greeks, that translators and others who had occasion to produce it, modified it almost beyond recognition. Persons who like to give Scripture names to their children, have shunned this one; while it has been eagerly seized by novelists and play-wrights as a suitable denomination for characters they designed to exhibit in some absurd point of view. The poet asks, "What is there in a name?" But there is something in a name, and the longer any one lives, the more cause he has to find that names are things. We apprehend that this name has been a great disparagement to our prophet; and has in no faint degree operated in causing many readers unconsciously to hold the book in less regard than they might otherwise have done, and to entertain a very inadequate notion of the peculiar claims of this great prophet to their attention. We call him "great," because it is only in the small extent of his book of prophecy, that he is in anything behind the very chiefest of the prophets. ([Daily Bible illustrations](#))

The prophet saw - The title, **the prophet**, is added only to the names of **Habakkuk**, **Haggai** (Ezra 5:1, 6:14, Hag 1:3, 12, 2:1, 10), **Zechariah** (Zech 1:1, 7). The description "the prophet saw" indicates that the burden was given in the form of a vision, one of "the many portions and in many ways" God spoke to the prophets, giving them special revelation which reached its culmination and consummation in "in these last days (when God spoke) "to us in His Son, Whom He appointed heir of all things, through Whom also He made the world." (Heb 1:1-2-note) These visions were seen by Habakkuk as if they were already present, so sure and accurate is God's Word about the future. Beloved, this truth about God's **omniscience** (and **omnipotence**) should greatly encourage you when times are difficult (you've not seen the end of His story in your life yet).

In **Isaiah God** says...

Behold, the former things have come to pass. Now I declare new things; Before they spring forth I proclaim them to you. (Isaiah 42:9)

In **Hosea God** says...

I have also spoken to the prophets, and I **gave numerous visions**; And through the prophets I gave parables. (Ho 12:10)

G Campbell Morgan...

While it constituted a message to the people of God, its method was not that of direct address. This is seen at once if we put it into contrast with that of Hosea. In the prophecy of Hosea we have the notes, or general outlines, of a public ministry extending over more than half a century; and in all there are the elements of public address, of messages delivered to men. These are absent from the book of Habakkuk. Like the book of Jonah, it tells the story of a personal experience.

- The book of Jonah gives the account of a man's failure to sympathize with God, and therefore of his failure to sympathize with Nineveh.
- The book of Habakkuk is the story of a believer's conflict of faith, and of the ultimate triumph of faith. The very character of the book makes it easier than usual to discover its permanent value. That is crystallized in one definite statement which lies at its heart:-

"Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith."

Habakkuk moves from burden to blessing, from wonder/worry to worship, from restlessness to rest, from a focus on the problem with God to a focus on the Person of God, and from a complaint to consolation. God turns sighing into singing if we (like Habakkuk) take time to wait before Him listening to and trusting in His Word. The Spirit uses our time in the word to bring about supernatural transformation (2Cor 3:18-note).

Habakkuk goes from worrying to watching and waiting to worshipping! Habakkuk is a changed man! Instead of complaining, he is praising the Lord.

Habakkuk 1:2 How long, O LORD, will I call for help, and You will not hear? I cry out to You, "Violence!" Yet You do not save.:

- **how long:** Ps 13:1,2 Ps 74:9,10 Ps 94:3 Rev 6:10
- **do not save:** Ps 22:1,2 Jer 14:9 La 3:8 <> Contrast the supernatural transformation in Hab 3:18 "**the God of my salvation!**"
- [Habakkuk 1 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

HABAKKUK SPEAKING TO GOD WE CALL IT PRAYER TODAY

Call ([07768](#)) (**shava'**/**sawa'**) means to cry for help, plead for relief, i.e., ask or request something, with a focus that the asking is intense or desperate, imploring for aid in a difficult or dangerous situation. The intensity of the action conveyed by **shava'** is aptly illustrated by the fact that the verb occurs only in the Piel.

James Swanson - (Shava signifies a) cry for help, plead for relief, i.e., ask or request something, with a focus that the asking is intense or desperate, imploring for aid in a difficult or dangerous situation. ([A Dictionary of Biblical Languages w- Semantic Domains- Hebrew](#))

Shava' is most often in first person singular ("I cried out"), occurs most often in the **Psalms** and **Job**, and most often describes one crying out to Jehovah.

Shava'/sawa' - 22 verses - Job 19:7; 24:12; 29:12; 30:20, 28; 35:9; 36:13; 38:41; Ps 5:2; 18:6, 41; 22:24; 28:2; 30:2; 31:22; 72:12; 88:13; 119:147; Isa 58:9; Lam 3:8 (uses both verbs for cry out - shava' and za'aq discussed below); Jonah 2:2; Hab 1:2.

Shava'/sawa' is rendered as follows in the NAS95 - call for help(2), cried(3), cried for help(3), cried to him for help(1), cried to you for help(1), cries for help(1), cry(5), cry for help(3), cry out for help(1), cry to you for help(1), help(3), shout for help(1).

Cry out ([02199](#)) (**za'aq**) means to cry out, to call out for help (especially when in distress), to appeal (even making public sounds of physical and/or emotional anguish - Ex 2:23, 2Chr 20:9, Job 35:9). **Za'aq** can be summoned in the sense of to be assembled (Jos 8:16; Jdg 6:34, 35; 18:22, 23) Finally, **za'aq** can mean to issue a proclamation by sending out an official written document with instructions or principles (Jonah 3:7)

The **Septuagint (Lxx)** translates **za'aq** in Hab 1:2 with the verb **boao** which means to cry out for help, to cry out in anguish (Mk 15:34, Mt 27:46)

Swanson - 1. (qal) cry out, call out for help, appeal, wail, weep, i.e., make public sounds of physical pain and emotional anguish, with a focus that one may possibly respond to the cry (Ex 2:23); (nif) cry out (2Ch 20:9); (hif) cry out in agony (Job 35:9); 2. (qal) summon, call to, i.e., tell another to come and gather (Jdg 12:3); (nif) be called, be summoned, be assembled (Jos 8:16; Jdg 6:34, 35; 18:22, 23; 1Sa 14:20); (hif) summon, cause to gather together (Jdg 4:10, 13; 2Sa 20:4, 5; Zec 6:8); 3. (hif) issue a proclamation, i.e., send out an official written document with instructions or principles (Jonah 3:7) ([A Dictionary of Biblical Languages w- Semantic Domains- Hebrew](#))

Vine - **zaaq** (02199 ,זָאָק), "to cry, cry out, call." This term is found throughout the history of the Hebrew language, including modern

Hebrew. The word occurs approximately 70 times in the Hebrew Old Testament. Its first occurrence is in the record of the suffering of the Israelite bondage in Egypt: "... And the children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried [for help] ..." (Ex. 2:23). Zaaq is perhaps most frequently used to indicate the "crying out" for aid in time of emergency, especially "crying out" for divine aid. God often heard this "cry" for help in the time of the judges, as Israel found itself in trouble because of its backsliding (Jdg. 3:9, 15; 6:7; 10:10). The word is used also in appeals to pagan gods (Jdg. 10:14; Jer. 11:12; Jonah 1:5). That zaaq means more than a normal speaking volume is indicated in appeals to the king (2 Sam. 19:28). The word may imply a "crying out" in distress (1 Sam. 4:13), a "cry" of horror (1 Sam. 5:10), or a "cry" of sorrow (2 Sam. 13:19). Used figuratively, it is said that "the stone shall cry out of the wall" (Hab. 2:11) of a house that is built by means of evil gain. ([Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words](#))

Za'aq - 74 verses in NAS95 - Ex 2:23; Josh 8:16; Jdg 3:9, 15; 4:10, 13; 6:6f, 34f; 10:10, 14; 12:2; 18:22f; 1 Sam 4:13; 5:10; 7:8f; 8:18; 12:8, 10; 14:20; 15:11; 28:12; 2 Sam 13:19; 19:4, 28; 20:4f; 1Kgs 22:32; 1Chr 5:20; 2Chr 18:31; 20:9; 32:20; Neh 9:4, 28; Esther 4:1; Job 31:38; 35:9; Ps 22:5; 107:13, 19; 142:1, 5; Eccl 9:17; Isa 14:31; 15:4f; 26:17; 30:19; 57:13; Jer 11:11f; 20:8; 25:34; 30:15; 47:2; 48:20, 31; Lam 3:8; Ezek 9:8; 11:13; 21:12; 27:30; Hos 7:14; 8:2; Joel 1:14; Jonah 1:5; 3:7; Mic 3:4; Hab 1:2; 2:11; Zech 6:8

Za'aq is rendered as follows in the NAS95 - assembled(1), assembled together(1), call(2), called(1), called and together(1), called together(4), complain(1), cried(28), cries(3), cry(25), cry aloud(2), crying aloud(1), issued a proclamation(1), rallied(1), shouting(1), wailed(1).

Brenton's English translation of the **Septuagint** reads...

How long, O Lord, shall I **cry out**, and Thou wilt not hearken? How long shall I **cry out** to Thee being injured (*adikeo* = suffering wrong or injustice), and Thou wilt not save?

Comment: As in the original Hebrew, the Greek also has two verbs for "cry" - **Call** in Hab 1:2 is translated with **krazo** which means to cry out, to entreat and is an onomatopoeia (word whose sound is imitative of the sound of the noise or action designated, such as *hiss*, *buzz*) imitating the hoarse cry of the raven. **Krazo** was used of inarticulate cries (from fear - Mt 14:26, pain Mt 27:50, abhorrence = Acts 7:57), of the cry of demoniacs (Mk 1:26, 5:5, 9:26). **Krazo** described words uttered with a loud voice (Mk 10:48, 15:13-14, Acts 7:57). Finally, **krazo** was used of urgent prayer (Ro 8:15, Gal 4:6). **Krazo** is used in prayers of those in Judah who will cry out when God brings destruction, but at a time when it is too late (read Jer 11:11-12).

Cry out is translated with the second verb **boao [word study]**, which raise a cry, call or shout of joy, pain, etc, by using one's voice with unusually high volume. In several of the NT contexts (and many more of the **Septuagint = LXX** uses) crying out was in the context of one seeking help or assistance. Some uses mean simply a loud cry but in some of these situations the cry reflects a state of agitation.

Thayer makes an interesting comparison between 3 Greek words that all convey the idea of calling or crying out:

It is not un-instructive to notice that in classic usage **kaleo** denotes 'to cry out' for a purpose, to call; **Boao** to cry out as a manifestation of feeling; **Krazo** to cry out harshly, often of an inarticulate and brutish sound; thus **kaleo** suggests intelligence; **boao** sensibilities; **krazo** instincts; hence, **boao** esp. a cry for help. **kraugazein**, intensive of **krazo**, denotes to cry coarsely, in contempt, etc.

Notice that Habakkuk is not speaking to the people about God but to God about his/His people. This is a unique situation, for most of God's prophets did it vice versa - spoke a message to the people either about God or from God.

Habakkuk is praying, crying out to God and the intensity of his plea is such that it takes two Hebrew (and Greek - see above) words to express his crying out. Beloved, could such be said of our prayers to Jehovah?

Spurgeon well said that "*The best thermometer of your spiritual temperature is the intensity of your prayer.*" Habakkuk's temperature was **"red hot!"**

How long - Literally "how long have I cried so intensely?" The idea is "Why isn't God answering?" The implication is that Habakkuk had been repeatedly calling out to God for His help and so far without apparent divine response. The prophet is impatient! But does this not describe all of God's children from time to time. We are in distress. We cry out. And yet there is no apparent response from God. Indeed several passages record that a "cry" to the Lord, without immediate or obvious answer: Hab1:2 and the following passages...

Job 19:7-[note](#) "Behold, I **cry**, 'Violence!' but I get **no answer**; I shout for help, but there is **no justice**."

Job 30:20-[note](#) "I **cry out** to Thee for help, but **Thou dost not answer me**; I stand up, and Thou dost turn Thy attention against me.

Ps 18:41 They (Context = David's enemies = Ps 18:39, 40) **cried for help**, but there was none to save, even to the LORD, but **He did not answer them**.

Spurgeon: Prayer is so notable a weapon that even the wicked will take to it to in their fits of desperation. Bad men have appealed to God against God's own servants, but all in vain; the kingdom of heaven is not divided, and God never succours his foes at the expense of his friends. There are prayers to God which are no better than blasphemy, which bring no comfortable reply, but rather provoke the Lord to greater wrath. Shall I ask a man to wound or slay his own child to gratify my malice? Would he not resent the insult against his humanity? How much less will Jehovah regard the cruel desires of the enemies of the church, who dare to offer their prayers for its destruction, calling its existence schism, and its doctrine heresy!

Lam 3:8 (See [Unheard Prayer](#)) Even when I **cry out** (za'aq) **and call** (shava'/sawa') **for help, He shuts out my prayer**.

**Though darker, rougher, grows the way
And cares press harder day by day,
With patience in His love I'll rest,
And whisper that He knoweth best.**

—Pentecost

**God does not have to answer our questions,
but He will always keep His promises.**

I cry for help - May the Spirit grant each of us a sensitive heart like Habakkuk, a heart that is willing to cry out to God for help (even for a long time - "*How long?*"). In Hebrews 2:18-note we read about the value of calling out to God for help...

For since He Himself (Jesus) was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is (continually) able to **come to the aid** (this is one word in Greek = **boetheo** which means to come to help one who has cried out - **What is our responsibility?** To CRY OUT! Pride too often prevents us from doing this!) of those who are (continually being) tempted (tested).

This is the first part of the big question -

**How long and why will God allow evil
to flourish unabated, not judged?**

This was godly Asaph's problem (Ps 73:2, 3-[note](#)). Even from Job's myopic viewpoint God appeared to be an inactive and indifferent spectator. (See Job 30:20-[note](#)) To be sure the the silence of God is difficult to understand. But **divine silence** is definitely not **divine indifference**. Or to put it another way, **delay** is not always **denial**. Far from being an unconcerned spectator, God is intimately, energetically at work implementing His designs which are never too early, never too late, and never in error (cf. Hab 2:3).

Habakkuk's question is similar to that voiced by the saints in heaven who have lost their life for the Word of God and their testimony (Rev 6:9-[note](#))...

Rev 6:10-[note](#) and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, '**How long, O Lord**, holy and true, wilt Thou refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?'

I cry out to You - First he said "call for help" but this word for "cry" means to scream, to cry out with a loud voice, to cry with a disturbed heart. Habakkuk is becoming more burdened in light of the great wickedness in the land and God's seeming indifference or apathy to the pressing problem.

Save (03467)(**yasha'** or [v;y]) means to save, rescue, deliver and is the root of the Name of Jesus, Yeshua (see **yeshua**), Jehovah saves. (Cp OT uses of yasha' as a title for God - a title of God 2Sa 22:47; 1Ch 16:35; Ps 18:46; Ps 24:5; Ps 25:5; Ps 27:9; Ps 65:5; Ps 79:9; Ps 85:4; Isa 17:10; 62:11; Mic 7:7) Here Habakkuk says God does not save, but by chapter three he has had a change of heart and uses the related word yasha' declaring "Yet I will exult in the LORD, I will rejoice in the God of my **salvation**." Quite a change of perspective from Chapter 1 to Chapter 3! That's what a personal encounter with the Living God (as occurs twice in the intervening passages) will do to a person!

Note that the related word **yeshuah** (03444) appears 4 times in Habakkuk's crescendo of praise (Hab 3:8, Hab 3:13-2x, Hab 3:18). The prophet by faith proceeds from crying out for God to save to acknowledging God as the "God of my salvation"! (Hab 3:18). This transformation is what can happen to any saint who chooses to focus on God, spend serious time (i.e., with a quiet heart, not

allowing distractions, etc) in His Word, believe His Word (cp Hab 2:4), obey (enabled by His Spirit) His Word, as a result be transformed from glory to glory by the Spirit (2Cor 3:18) and be given a new perspective on temporal problems (2Cor 5:7-note, see also 2Cor 4:16-note, 2Cor 4:17-note, 2Cor 4:18-note).

G Campbell Morgan...

That ("How long, O LORD?) is faith's agnosticism, belief's problem. Every man of faith faces a similar problem sooner or later. Faith is the underlying principle of the life, but it is bewildered by the circumstances, and it says so. In answer to its challenge it receives a declaration, and so is confirmed. The story of Habakkuk is that of a movement from the experience of doubt and questioning, to that of certainty and praise, and the doorway between the two is found in the statement already quoted (Hab 2:4).

- All the first part of the book leads to that door.

- All the latter part of the book proceeds from that door into ever widening experience.

Habakkuk does not end with a wail; he ends with a song. He does not end with enquiry; he ends with affirmation (Hab 3:17-18). ([Living Messages](#))

A C Gaebelein writes that...

The prophet begins his message with a prayer-cry to Jehovah. He whose name is "the embracer" embraces the Lord and cries to Him on account of the conditions prevailing in Judah. (**Ed: If you are a follower of Christ in America, would you consider embracing God and crying out for a Third Great Awakening in America before it is too late!**) The Spirit of God stirred up the heart of Habakkuk on account of the moral conditions in Judah (**Ed: May He stir ours also over the moral corruption and general decadence in America!**). He is jealous for Jehovah's glory, which manifested itself in hating the evil.

"There is no prophetic delivery among the twelve lesser books more peculiar and characteristic than that of Habakkuk. It has no longer the occupation with the enemy as its main feature, although the enemy is referred to; but for its prominent topic we find the **soul of the prophet**, as representing the **faithful** among Judah, brought into deep exercise, and indeed a kind of colloquy (**Ed: a high-level serious discussion**) between God Himself and the prophet, so as to set out not only that which gave him trouble of heart, but also divine comfort, as well as into exulting hope into which he was led by the communications of the Spirit of God."

Like [Jeremiah](#), the weeping prophet, Habakkuk is deeply stirred on account of the declension among the people of God, and that led him to cry to Jehovah, to tell Him all about it. He begins with "How long, O LORD." It is the cry of the saints of God in all generations. We, too, in the midst of the increasing apostasy, the perilous times, cry to Him, "How long, O Lord." He had cried and there seemed to be no answer. Heaven was silent. And with him the righteous among the Jews had cried for help and for a change of conditions, under which they were suffering affliction. Wickedness and violence were evident on all sides. Strife and contention were the continued order of things. They injured each other wherever they could. The law of God was completely flouted; there was no more justice, and the wicked compassed about the righteous.

WHY DON'T YOU ACT GOD? - TODAY IN THE WORD (Moody Bible Institute) - An old saying declares that "out of sight" is "out of mind"—people do not concern themselves with what they cannot see. In our case, however, it is the fact that we lose sight of God that sometimes causes us to think that He doesn't have us in mind. Our circumstances don't always immediately reveal God's purpose. This is especially true when these circumstances appear to favor the wicked. The prophet Habakkuk, who uttered the complaint in today's key verse (Read Hab 1:2), wrestled with this problem as he watched the ruthless Babylonians literally get away with murder.

The prophet's question was essentially the same as Job's query in today's reading (Read Job 24:1-25). In essence, they both asked,

**"God, if you are as good and just as we know you are,
why don't you do something?"**

Job wanted to know when God would finally set the time for judgment. In exasperation, he lists a variety of situations in which the "bad guys" appear to be winning. Job's question was not without ulterior motives. He wondered why such tragedies had befallen him, despite his righteous behavior, when others who blatantly ignored God's righteous standard seemed to go free. The prophet Habakkuk described the social and political climate of his day and wondered why God would tolerate such wrongs. The answer for both men was not a comfortable one.

In Job's case, the answer was silence. God does not respond to Job's questions until the end of the book. (**Ed:** God breaks in and

speaks in Job 38:1-41, Job 39:1-30, Job 40:1-2 noting Job's response in Job 40:3-5, 42:1-6) Even then, He does not explain Himself. For Habakkuk, God outlined His plan but warned:

"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" (Hab 1:5).

Paul quoted this verse while preaching in the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch as a caution against the danger of unbelief (see Acts 13:13-52).

Faith recognizes that God is working out His plan according to His own timetable. We know that a day is coming when both the righteous and the unjust will be held accountable for their actions.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY- Today's passage and key verse remind us of the need to look at our circumstances through the lens of faith. Not only will those who lack faith have trouble seeing God's hand in the midst of their circumstances, they would fail to grasp His plan, even if He told them. We have an advantage that both Job and Habakkuk did not. We possess the completed Scriptures. The Old and New Testament both warn of a coming day of judgment. Learn more about it by looking up the term *judgment* using a concordance or Bible software ([Bible Software TheWord = Highly recommended free program!](#)). ([Copyright Moody Bible Institute. Used by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Habakkuk 1:3 Why 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.:

- Ps 12:1,2 Ps 55:9-11 Ps 73:3-9 Ps 120:5,6 Ec 4:1 Ec 5:8 Jer 9:2-6 Eze 2:6 Mic 7:1-4 Mt 10:16 2Pe 2:8
- [Habakkuk 1 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

WHY GOD?

Why? - Why did God allow the sins of Judah to continue so openly without judging them? Notice that God does allow questions. I went to a Bible conference years ago and the leader (who in retrospect was somewhat "cultish") absolutely refused to allow or answer questions after each of his talks that week! God is not like that. Fortunately Habakkuk questioned God and lived to tell us about his face to face encounter with the Living Lord. And we are the beneficiaries of Habakkuk's testimony, for if we are honest, all of us question God from time to time. The prophet gives us a "template" for questioning God, which brings to mind the exhortation of the writer of Hebrews...

And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end, that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. (Hebrews 6:11-12-note)

David ask a question similar to Habakkuk's and it is a question many followers of Christ ask (or at least think about asking) in light of the rapid decline of moral values in America...

For the choir director; upon an eight-stringed lyre. A Psalm of David. Help, LORD, for the godly man ceases to be, For the faithful disappear from among the sons of men. They speak falsehood to one another; with flattering lips and with a double heart they speak. (Ps 12:1-2)

Jeremiah asked "Why God?"...

Righteous art Thou, O LORD, that I would plead my case with Thee; Indeed I would discuss matters of justice with Thee: **Why** has the way of the wicked prospered? **Why** are all those who deal in treachery at ease? (Jer 12:1)

Asaph in essence asked the same question "Why God?" Observe carefully for the great transition in this Psalm. What happened to Asaph? How did this change his perspective on the fate of the wicked, wealthy and powerful? **How can this transform my perspective on my circumstances?**

Behold, these are the wicked; And always at ease, they have increased in wealth.

Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure, And washed my hands in innocence;

For I have been stricken all day long, And chastened every morning.

If I had said, "I will speak thus," Behold, I should have betrayed the generation of Thy children.

When I pondered to understand this, It was troublesome in my sight

Until I came into the sanctuary of God; **Then** I perceived their end. (Ps 73:12-17-note)

Look at Habakkuk's "vice list" and think of the moral landscape of America today (a nation that once had as its motto *'In God we trust'*). How does America compare to ancient Judah?

Iniquity, wickedness, destruction, Violence, strife, contention.

Sounds all too familiar! As an interesting aside the Hebrew word for **violence** (Pr 3:31) is **hamas** (02555), the very name of the evil forces seeking to destroy Israel in our day!

Pusey comments that...

Punishment does not come without sin, nor does sin endure without punishment. It is one object of the Old Testament to exhibit the connection between sin and punishment. Other prophets, as commissioned by God, **first** denounced the sins and **then** foretold the punishment of the impenitent. Habakkuk appeals (first) to God's justice, as requiring its infliction.

Steven Cole rightly reminds us that...

Every Christian wrestles with two problems: **Why** doesn't God answer my prayers sometimes? And, **why** does God allow the evil to prosper while the righteous suffer? We especially wrestle with these two questions when they converge on us personally. When an evil person is harming us or someone we love and we pray, but God does not answer, it is especially tough. Just recently Martin Burnham, a missionary to the Philippines, was killed in an attempt to free him and his wife from terrorists who had taken them hostage over a year before. His wife escaped with a bullet wound in the leg. Those close to him are left wondering, "Why didn't God get him out of there alive?" God's people were praying for his release. The men who kidnapped him are evil to the core, bent on killing others to obtain their objectives. God could have protected him, but He did not...

Habakkuk took his questions and complaints to the Lord and worked through them in prayer, waiting on God for answers. When you wrestle with doubts on difficult issues like the problem of evil, you must proceed with caution. Some wrongly withdraw from God and His people into their own world of depression and pouting. Others angrily pull the plug on God entirely and go their own way into the world, convincing themselves that God must not exist or He wouldn't allow the terrible things that go on every day in this evil world. Still others hang on to their faith, but it becomes a mindless, anti-intellectual, subjective experience where they just don't think about disturbing questions. But as James Boice puts it (The Minor Prophets [Baker], 2:401), we must proceed as we do after a snowstorm, when the walks have been cleared but are still icy. You walk carefully, putting your feet on safe ground. Remind yourself of the things that you know to be true. Think and live carefully in line with the solid truths of God's Word, working through the difficulties by prayer and waiting on the Lord. That's what Habakkuk did. ([The Man Who Rejoiced in Spite of an Invasion](#) - this sermon deals primarily with the problem of evil and why God would allow it since He is holy and omnipotent?)

Habakkuk 1:4 Therefore the law is ignored and justice is never upheld. For the wicked surround the righteous; Therefore justice comes out perverted.:

- **the law:** Ps 11:3 119:126 Mk 7:9 Ro 3:31
- **For the wicked:** 1Ki 21:13 Job 21:7 Ps 22:16 Ps 58:1,2 Ps 59:2,4 Ps 82:1-5 Ps 94:3,20,21 Isa 1:21-23 Isa 59:2-8,13-15 Jer 5:27-29 Jer 12:1,6 Jer 26:8,21-23 Jer 37:14-16 38:4-6 Eze 22:25-30 Hos 10:4 Am 5:7,12 Mic 2:1,2 Mic 3:1-3 7:2-4 Mt 23:34-36 Mt 26:59-66 Mt 27:1,2,25,26 Acts 7:52,59 Acts 23:12-14 Jas 2:6,7
- **Justice... perverted:** Ex 23:2,6 Dt 16:19 Eze 9:9
- [Habakkuk 1 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

The law is ignored - NIV is better here - "the law is **paralyzed**". *Paralyzed* law, *perverted* justice! What a sad but powerful word picture! In effect the efficacy and effectiveness of the righteous law was paralyzed by the corruption of Judah's unrighteous leaders (Eccl 8:11).

Ignored (06313) (**pug**) means to be (grow) numb, to be stunned, describing Jacob's reaction when he finds out Joseph is still alive (Ge 45:26). Like the "stun guns" used to control violent criminals, the law had been effectively "stunned" by the majority of Judah.

Indeed, the divine Law had in effect suffered a "knockout." The greatest tragedy, however, was the people's neglect of God's Law. King Josiah was still fresh in his grave (died 609BC) and now in 607BC even as the book of the Law had been lost in the House of God in Josiah's reign, now the reforms of Josiah had been lost on the insensitive hearts of Judah! And that in only 2 years! (however recall that 607BC for the writing of this book is an estimate). God's Word (and Law) was certainly no longer the standard in Judah, a deterioration that describes America today (August, 2012). Among other things, it is now illegal to have the Ten Commandments hang on the wall in a public school or even in many courts of law which ironically is based on these very commandments!

It is notable that Habakkuk's commentary on the rampant social injustice in Judah is similar to the comments of Amos issued against the northern kingdom of Israel almost a century earlier. (Amos 2:6-8, 5:12).

Justice (misphat) is never upheld - The very requirement called for among the leaders of the nation (Micah 3:1).

Job asked

Why do the wicked still live, continue on, also become very powerful? (Job 21:7)

The wicked surround the righteous - NLT "The wicked far outnumber the righteous"

Therefore justice comes out perverted - NLT "justice is perverted with bribes and trickery."

J. Vernon McGee - The people of Judah apparently felt that they were God's little pets and that He would not punish them for their sins. Probably the first time they did something evil they were apprehensive, wondering if God would punish them. When He did nothing, they assumed that He hadn't noticed or didn't care. In (Ec8:11) Solomon notes that "Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed quickly, therefore the hearts of the sons of men among them are given fully to do evil." Human nature does not change. The sins which were committed undercover in the backyard are now done openly in the front yard. Does that change the fact that sin is wrong in the sight of God and that He is going to judge every sin? No, God has not changed His standards or His procedures. Even though His execution against an evil work is not performed speedily, His judgment is sure to come eventually. In our day very few people believe in the judgment of God. They feel like Habakkuk did when he saw his nation getting worse and worse until sin was flagrant and God was doing nothing about it. Don't you feel that way about conditions as they are? Is God doing anything about it today? It doesn't look as if He is. He even let a group of theologians up in New England come up with the idea a few years ago that God was dead. What they actually meant was that there is no God and there has never been a God. What made them arrive at such a conclusion? It is because they don't see Him interfering in the affairs of men today. But isn't He interfering? Isn't God overruling in the affairs of mankind today? He permitted us to go through a period of affluence, and folk became careless—even God's people became careless. Now we are in such a state that we wonder how much longer we are going to survive as a nation.

Matthew Henry - In families and among relations, in neighbor-hoods and among friends, in commerce and in courts of law, every thing was carried with a high hand, and no man made any scruple of doing wrong to his neighbor, so that he could but make a good hand of it for himself. It does not appear that the prophet himself had any great wrong done him (in losing times it fared best with those that had nothing to lose), but it grieved him to see other people wronged, and he could not but mingle his tears with those of the oppressed. They... foment divisions, widen breaches, incense men against one another, and sow discord among brethren, by doing the work of him that is the accuser of the brethren. Strifes and contentions that have been laid asleep, and begun to be forgotten, they awake, and industriously raise up again, and blow up the sparks that were hidden under the embers. And, if blessed are the peace-makers, cursed are such peace-breakers, that make parties, and so make mischief that spreads further, and lasts longer, than they can imagine. It is sad to see bad men warming their hands at those flames which are devouring all that is good in a nation, and stirring up the fire too.

Habakkuk 1:5 "Look among the nations! Observe! Be astonished! Wonder! Because I am doing something in your days-- You would not believe if you were told.:"

- **Look among the nations:** Dt 4:27 Jer 9:25,26 Jer 25:14-29
- **Observe:** Isa 29:14 La 4:12 Da 9:12 Acts 13:40,41
- **Because:** Isa 28:21,22 Jer 5:12,13 Jer 18:18 Eze 12:22-28 Zep 1:2 Acts 6:13,14
- [Habakkuk 1 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

GOD'S FIRST ANSWER

Look... observe! Be astonished! Wonder! - These are all in the form of commands and are all in the plural indicating God desires

not just Habakkuk but all of Judah to obey these commands - all Judah and Jerusalem were to take note of the imminent invasion.

Brenton's English translation of the Septuagint translation reads...

Behold, ye despisers (scoffers ~ those who think lightly of), and look, and wonder marvelously, and (vanish) faint with fear: for **I WORK A WORK** in your days, which ye will in no wise believe, though a man declare it to you.

Observe (05027) (**nabat**) describes that which one does with the eye, everything from a mere glance (1Sa17:42) to a careful, sustained, contemplation. The Lxx uses epiblepo which means to direct one's attention to something.

Pusey - There were no tokens of the storm (coming Babylonian invasion) which should sweep them away, yet on the horizon. No forerunners yet. And so He bids them gaze on among the nations, to see whence it should come. They might have expected it from Egypt. It should come whence they did not expect, with a fierceness and terribleness which they imagined not.

Because - Whenever you encounter this **term of explanation**, ("*because*" occurs 1426x and "*for*" some 9583x - although not all of latter are explanatory) pause to ponder the text asking **questions**, like what is being explained?, etc. In this passage, God is explaining why He has just issued a series of "staccato-like" commands. Clearly these are given to arrest and focus the hearer's attention on what He is getting ready to say.

Paul quoted Hab 1:5 in his "word of exhortation" (Acts 13:15) before the Jews in the synagogue at **Pisidian Antioch** (Acts 13:14) declaring...

Take heed (Beware!) (present imperative = command calling for continual attention - something only possible as one is enabled by the Spirit) therefore, so that the thing spoken of in the Prophets may not come upon you: 'BEHOLD, YOU SCOFFERS, AND MARVEL, AND PERISH (**aphanizo** = blot out of a name, remove from one's sight!); FOR I AM ACCOMPLISHING A WORK IN YOUR DAYS, A WORK WHICH YOU WILL NEVER BELIEVE, THOUGH SOMEONE SHOULD DESCRIBE IT TO YOU.'" (Acts 13:40-41)

Comment: In Hab 1:5 God is warning that the Babylonians are coming. Paul takes this same warning and in the context of Acts 13, applies it as a warning to his Jewish audience in essence not to reject the Gospel, for their fate would be far worse than a Babylonian invasion. Rejection of the Gospel would result in their everlasting death and separation from the presence of God! The Lord stirring up the Babylonians to discipline Judah was a great work, but the saving work of the Gospel of Jesus Christ was an even more incredible work "which you will never believe." **MacArthur** adds that "Paul used it (Quote from Hab 1:5) to illustrate the destruction that the Old Testament pledges to sinners who refuse to repent and submit to the Lord."

You would not believe if you were told - The revelation is going to be so incredible that if a man told Habakkuk, he would not believe it! But this is God speaking, so he must believe it! (cp Nu 23:19a)

Habakkuk 1:6 "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.:"

- **Raising up** - Dt 28:49-52 2Ki 24:2 2Ch 36:6,17 Isa 23:13 39:6,7 Jer 1:15,16 Jer 4:6,8 5:15 6:22,23 21:4 25:9
- [Habakkuk 1 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Kitto - Habakkuk begins his poem with one animated portraiture, and closes it with another. Surely there is no poet who ever described the march of a conqueror—mighty and full of arrogance, in more vivid colors than he has done that of the Chaldeans—"That bitter and impetuous nation, which traverseth the wide regions of the earth, to seize upon habitations belonging not to it," etc.; riding upon horses "swifter than leopards, and fiercer than evening wolves," etc. Who has ever uttered more derisive taunts than those in which the prophet proclaims the eventual triumph of the oppressed people over their proud tyrants—fallen from the height of their grandeur, and trodden beneath the feet of their enemies. (Hab 2:8-17) What poet has traced with so much force and sublimity as this one, the dread solemnity of universal nature when the Lord descends upon the earth. (Hab 3:3-15). ([Daily Bible illustrations](#))

For - Again we encounter a **term of explanation**, which causes us to pause to ponder the passage (the "3P's") asking the **question**, "What is God explaining to Habakkuk?" Clearly God is answering Habakkuk's original questions, explaining that (1) He will punish wicked Judah for her sins and (2) He will use the even more wicked Chaldeans (Babylonians).

Behold (hinneh) is used to call attention to the text and specifically to direct the reader to give special attention to what is being

said. "Listen up" is the idea.

I am raising up the [Chaldeans \(Babylonians\)](#) - This is clear evidence that God is Sovereign over nations and kings (cp Pr 21:1-[note by Bridges](#)). This is a reiteration of the prophecy Moses had spoken to the second generation of Israel as they prepared to enter the land of Canaan, a land whose enticements to sin and idolatry would prove too much for them to resist (Read Dt 28:49-52). And so some 800 years earlier through Moses, God had predicted the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians, who He now specifically identifies.

Fierce... impetuous... seize - These are words which should make anyone tremble! And remember that although God is speaking to Habakkuk, He has used the plural signifying that this was a message to all Judah, all who had ears to hear what the Spirit was saying. It is now too late to avert divine discipline, but presumably those who heard and heeded could have made some preparations for the coming invasion, although they too would not be able to avoid it.

Moses had warned this would come to pass declaring...

They (the Chosen People) have made Me jealous with what is not God; They have provoked Me to anger with their idols. So I will make them jealous with those who are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation, (Dt 32:21)

Habakkuk 1:7 "They are dreaded and feared; Their justice and authority originate with themselves.:

- Jer 39:5-9 Jer 52:9-11,25-27 Dt 5:19,27
- [Habakkuk 1 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

NLT - They are notorious for their cruelty. They do as they like, and no one can stop them.

In response to Habakkuk's **perplexity and pleading**, God broke His **silence**, stating He was not indifferent to Judah's sin; but rather than revival, He was sending "**dreaded and feared**" judgment.

They are dreaded and feared - And rightly so! Zedekiah would have done well to hear and heed Habakkuk's prophecy for he made the mistake of trying to flee Nebuchadnezzar who overtook him and "passed sentence on him" (Nebuchadnezzar was a law unto himself! Woe to those who must suffer the "justice" of evil men!), slaying Zedekiah's sons before his eyes (!), slaying all the nobles of Judah, blinding the king and binding him in shackles, and finally burning the king's palace and breaking down the walls of Jerusalem (no walls in the ancient world = no defense). (See Jer 39:5-9)

Criswell comments on the character of the Babylonians as described in Hab 1:7-11...

Autocratic arrogance, impetuous barbarity, and unquenchable lust characterize the Chaldeans. No fortress is too high, because with ferocity and speed they heap up mounds of earth to scale the height and conquer (Hab 1:10). Puffed up by their triumphs, they deify their own power ("ascribing this power to his god," Hab 1:11).

Their justice and authority originate with themselves - To borrow a common expression, the Babylonians who recognized no superiors were "a law unto themselves!" They did what was right in their own eyes (cp Jdg 21:25) and it mattered not if it was wrong in God's eyes!

Habakkuk 1:8 "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.:

- **Horses:** Dt 28:49 Isa 5:26-28
- **evening:** Ge 49:27 Jer 5:6 Zep 3:3
- **like an eagle:** Jer 4:13 La 4:19 Eze 17:3,12 Ho 8:1 Mt 24:28 Lk 17:37
- [Habakkuk 1 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Their horses are swifter than leopards - The Babylonians will "come with speed swiftly" with "chariot wheels like a whirlwind" (Isa 5:26, 28)

Keener than wolves in the evening - This is clearly a metaphor. Whenever you encounter a **figure of speech** use your observation as an opportunity to practice the **"3P's"** (pause to ponder the passage) What is the picture God is painting? **"Keen"**

(02300 - hadad) is a verb meaning to slash or sharpen and pictures that which is quick and in the present passage wolves that are "more alert" and so which are "fierce." Wolves prowl at night. Not having eaten all day, they are obviously ravenous and driven by their strong desire for food. We've all seen a pack of hungry wolves attacking their prey and it is not a pretty site to put it mildly! The Babylonians will not be "genteel" or "polite" invaders! This helps us understand why God had told Habakkuk that he would have difficulty believing this description (Hab 1:5).

They fly like an eagle swooping down to devour - Moses prophecy in Dt 28:49 presented a vivid picture of the speed of these invaders "as the eagle swoops down". Have you ever seen an eagle dive on prey which was attempting futilely to escape?! Note that the Hebrew word for eagle (nesher) can also signify "**vulture**" which would certainly even more accurate given the context!

Habakkuk 1:9 "All of them come for violence. Their horde of faces moves forward. They collect captives like sand.:"

- **Violence:** Hab 1:6 Hab 2:5-13 Dt 28:51,52 Jer 4:7 Jer 5:15-17 Jer 25:9
- **Collect:** Hab 2:5 Ge 41:49 Jdg 7:12 Job 29:18 Ps 139:18 Jer 15:8 Jer 34:22 Ho 1:10 Ro 9:27
- [Habakkuk 1 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Their horde of faces moves forward - The NET Bible has "every face is determined."

The NET Bible Note says that more literally the phrase is

"The totality of their faces is to the east" (or "is forward"). The precise meaning of the Hebrew term *megammat* (Hebrew word translated "horde" in NAS) is unclear... **NEB** has "a sea of faces rolls on"; **NIV** "their hordes advance like a desert wind"; **NRSV** "with faces pressing forward."

All of them come with violence - In other words "violence" is their goal, their intent! Judah's violence would be repaid with Babylonian violence (Same word **hamas** 02555 used in both verses, the name of the foe of modern Israel - [-Hamas](#)). Judah had sown the wind of internal violence but would now reap the dread whirlwind of external violence! (See Hos 8:7 = [What Shall the Harvest Be? Spurgeon Sermon](#), cp Gal 6:7-note, Gal 6:8-note)

They collect captives like sand - Figure of speech (pause to ponder the passage). Pictures how easy the Babylonians take prisoners. It's as easy as scooping up sand in one's hand. Also could speak of the large numbers of prisoners "like sand."

Habakkuk 1:10 "They mock at kings and rulers are a laughing matter to them. They laugh at every fortress And heap up rubble to capture it.:"

- **Mock:** 2Ki 24:12 2Ki 25:6,7 2Ch 36:6,10
- [Habakkuk 1 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

They mock (cp same Hebrew word **qalac** in 2Ki 2:23, Ezek 22:5) - disparage, ridicule: mock, scoff, scorn.

Rulers are a laughing matter to them - The Babylonians compiled an imposing list of vanquished kings. In 612 they had defeated Sinsharishkun at Nineveh, and in 609, his son Ashur-uballit at Haran; at Carchemish, in 605, it was to be the Egyptian, Neco. They were known to put captured kings in cages and exhibit like animals!

Heap up rubble to capture it - This describes a common technique used to besiege ancient walled cities which were made vulnerable by piling up dirt, etc, to produce mounds which would serve as long "earthen" ramps to the city's wall, enabling the enemy to easily scale the wall and capture the city (Jer 32:34, 33:4 Jer 52:4-7)

Habakkuk 1:11 "Then they will sweep through like the wind and pass on. But they will be held guilty, They whose strength is their god.:"

- Da 4:30-34
- **Held guilty:** Da 5:3, 4, 20
- [Habakkuk 1 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

NLT - They sweep past like the wind and are gone. But they are deeply guilty, for their own strength is their god.

They (Babylonians) **whose strength is their god** - At Belshazzar's last drinking party in Daniel 5 the party goers "drank the wine and praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood, and stone."

Marduk (Jer 50:21, cp which some feel is the deification of the Nimrod of Ge 10:8-12) was the primary god of Babylon, later called Bel (Baal, but not to be confused with the earlier Canaanite Baal); the Babylonian creation epic (Enuma Elish) commemorates Marduk's victory over the forces of evil and honors him as "king of the gods"

MacArthur - Though the Chaldeans were God's instruments of judgment, their self-sufficiency and self-adulation planted the seeds for their own destruction (described in 2:2–20), as they stood guilty of idolatry and blasphemy before the sovereign Lord.

Wiersbe - God had warned His people time and time again, but they wouldn't listen. Prophet after prophet had declared the Word (2Chr 36:14–21), only to be rejected, and He had sent natural calamities like droughts and plagues, and various military defeats, but the people wouldn't listen. Instead of repenting, the people hardened their hearts even more and turned for help to the gods of the nations around them. They had tried God's long-suffering long enough and it was time for God to act. (Be Amazed)

Habakkuk 1:12 Are You not from everlasting, O LORD, my God, my Holy One? We will not die. You, O LORD, have appointed them to judge; And You, O Rock, have established them to correct.:

- **Are you not from everlasting:** Dt 33:27 Ps 90:2 93:2, Isa 40:28 57:15 La 5:19 Mic 5:2 1Ti 1:17 6:16 Heb 1:10-12 13:8 Rev 1:8,11
- **My God** - Isa 43:15
- **We will not die** - Hab 3:2 Ps 118:17 Isa 27:6-9 Jer 4:27 Jer 5:18 Jer 30:11 Jer 33:24-26 Jer 46:28 Eze 37:11-14 Am 9:8,9
- [Habakkuk 1 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

HABAKKUK'S SECOND SET OF QUESTIONS

Habakkuk's questioning of God is a reflection of his **doubt** which we should distinguish from overt **unbelief**. Habakkuk is not exhibiting so much a weak faith (or lack of faith) but a *perplexed faith*. **Wiersbe** explains it this way...

Keep in mind that there's a difference between **doubt** and **unbelief**. Like Habakkuk, the **doubter** questions God and may even debate with God, but the doubter doesn't abandon God. But **unbelief** is rebellion against God, a refusal to accept what He says and does. **Unbelief** is an act of the will, while **doubt** is born out of a troubled mind and a broken heart.

Habakkuk is confused by the fact that God will use the more evil Babylonians against His evil people. It's as if Habakkuk is thinking "two wrongs do not make a right!" And so he was perplexed.

Are You not from everlasting (qedem), O **LORD**, (God's Covenant Name) - **Why does Habakkuk begin this section with a question?** First note that he is not questioning God but is asking a **rhetorical question** which expects an affirmative reply - Yes, God is the **Everlasting God** (**See in depth study**) is the idea. Habakkuk is confused by why God is going to use the evil Babylonians to discipline His people.

How often we find ourselves in a similar state - confused by events the sovereign God has allowed into our life - Why me God? Why now? What did I do to deserve this? etc.

We need to take a "clue" from Habakkuk. When we are perplexed by the Lord's "strange dealings" with us, it is essential to begin with the right approach to God. We need to begin with "right thinking" about God. And so the prophet begins by thinking of God as the **everlasting One**.

My God - God is **Elohim** which speaks of His supreme might. Note that Habakkuk uses the personal possessive pronoun **'my'** which reflects intimacy.

My Holy One - His essential being is that He is **Holy**, sinless and set apart from sinful humanity and righteous in all his dealings - Anticipating this same Name in Hab 3:3

We will not die - There is some difference of opinion on how this should be translated. Thus some version ascribe this to God, the idea being "You shall not die." However the **Septuagint** is rendered "we shall not die" and most of the common translations agree

(ESV, NIV, KJV). And so this is Habakkuk's declaration which in context is based on what he has just said about God, what he knows to be true about "his" **Holy God** and his God's **everlasting** faithfulness to the unconditional covenant He had made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (cp Ge 12:1-3, Ge 17:7, 19). In other words, even though God would bring the Babylonians to discipline Judah, He would not totally destroy them. Throughout the OT, we see that God always retains a **remnant** of genuine believers.

You, O LORD, have appointed them to judge - God has ordained that Babylon judge Judah. As alluded to above, we again see God's sovereignty over the nations. By way of application, in light of this truth, how much more should we consider Him as sovereign over the lives of individuals!

And You, O Rock - In 1Cor 10:4 Jesus is the "Rock" (**See Scripture chain on God as our Rock**)

Have established them to correct - Habakkuk is not arguing with God, but recognizes the fact that God had ordained for the Babylonians to be His agent of punishment. Notice also that it does not say "*destroy*" but **correct** (03198 - **yakah**) which conveys the idea of chastise or discipline. **Yakah** is translated *reproves* in Pr 3:12 and in the **Septuagint (Lxx)** with the verb **paideuo** which was the Greek verb used to describe training or disciplining of children, even using correction and punishment if a necessary part of the training. Here in Hab 1:12, the **Septuagint** translates **yakah** with the related word **paideia** which also means discipline, training, chastisement, correction. This conveys the idea that Judah's exile to Babylon was meant to be "corrective training", so to speak.

When God seems to be crushing us or bewildering us with life-threatening providences, how should we respond? Habakkuk teaches us to go back to the truth we know about God and he began with the truth that God is everlasting, eternal. Run into the strong tower of the truth about God, the great doctrines of God, the great Names of God, for they are the [warp and woof](#) of our existence and the foundation of our day to day survival. As the beautiful old hymn [Like a River Glorious](#) rightly reminds us ("*stayed*" = secured upright as if with a "stay" a large strong rope used to support a mast! Apply that picture to your life dear storm tossed saint!)

Stayed upon Jehovah,
Hearts are fully blessed
Finding as He promised,
Perfect peace and rest
([Like A River Glorious Vocal](#))

Ries describes Habakkuk's response...

Assuring himself of the reality of God, he proclaims boldly, **we shall not die**, no matter what may happen.

And in this day of turmoil and gross and blatant wickedness, we, too, need a fresh view of God. We, too, need to see Him as personal, sovereign, holy, eternal, all-caring—the covenant-keeping Jehovah.

The early Church, too, faced most trying days, but did exploits because it had a similar view of and faith in God (cf. Acts 4:24–31). (The Wesleyan Bible Commentary)

Note that the Hebrew word **everlasting** in Hab 1:12 is not **olam** but **qedem**, which in this context is essentially synonymous with **olam**. As discussed above, Habakkuk's opening question is **rhetorical** (for effect), expecting a resounding "**Yes!**". Though Habakkuk could not see God, He trusted God, because He knew Him through His Names and attributes, choosing to recall **six** of His Names/Attributes in Hab 1:12. This truth about God enabled the prophet to walk not by sight but by faith (2Cor 5:7-note, 2Cor 4:18-note, see Ro 10:17-note). Indeed **Elohim, Jehovah** (His covenant Name and God does NOT break covenant!), **the Holy One**, is from **everlasting (olam)**. Even His Name **Rock** speaks of His **everlasting** nature. He is our **Rock** (Dt 32:4 = first description of **Rock** as a Name of God; cp Dt 32:15, 18, 30-31 - "[Jeshurun](#)" is Israel). As such He is permanent, dependable, secure, stable, steadfast, One Who can be counted upon, and an immovable, unshakeable Source of protection in time of trouble! (cp Ex 33:22; Ps 18:2) His attributes and character are forever (eternally) unchangeable! And so Habakkuk's conclusion based on the truth he knew about God is "**We will not die**"

Beloved, we can apply this truth to our life, for Habakkuk's confident declaration is the same declaration every child of El Olam can triumphantly proclaim. Because He is El Olam, the everlasting God, and we are in Him, in the everlasting Christ, we too are now everlasting and will not die - we may die physically but we will not experience the [second \(eternal\) death](#), which results in everlasting separation from the Everlasting God!

Notice also that Habakkuk twice employed the personal, possessive pronoun (**my**) describing the **everlasting** One as "**my** God, **my** Holy One," a God Who is not impersonal, disinterested, uninvolved, but One Who in a mysterious sense can be "*possessed*" by the man or woman who trusts in Him (ultimately of course trusting in Christ). The **Everlasting God** is *actively* (not *passively* like

"[Deism](#)" teaches) involved in our lives. He is not just "up there" and disinterested. The **Everlasting God** has been interested in and intimately involved with His creation from **everlasting to everlasting** (Amen!). **There is not a day that goes by that God is not interested and involved in the life of His children, including your life, dear follower of Christ!** In other words, the ancient prophet clearly had faith in God's character as revealed in and through His glorious Names, and based on that truth, he was able to confidently testify that Judah would not be completely destroyed. Yes, God would discipline His disobedient chosen people, but He would not annihilate them, for He had cut an **everlasting covenant** with their fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and He would not break the covenant promises!

The Everlasting God has also cut an Everlasting New Covenant (Heb 13:20-note) with all who by grace believe in the Eternal One, Christ Jesus. The upshot is that El Olam will keep us safe forever! The eternal God assures us eternal security based on His eternal covenant. And He is not a man that He should lie. Beloved, do you wrestle with the doctrine of eternal security, believing as some teach that you can lose your salvation? If so, may the truth about His great Name, El Olam, give you an unshakeable hold on the great truth that El Olam's hold on you is eternally unbreakable!

As a corollary: Habakkuk was wrestling with a difficult question - Why would God use an evil nation to punish His chosen people? Notice that in the process, the prophet appeals to God's names (and/or attributes) - Everlasting, Jehovah, Elohim, Holy One, Jehovah (second time) and Rock. This is a good pattern to practice when you are confused and cannot understand your circumstances, which may (often do) include trials and afflictions. Make the conscious choice (enabled by the Holy Spirit) to focus on God's character as revealed in His glorious Names.

John Gill comments on **everlasting** in Habakkuk 1:12: (Based on the truth he knows about God, Habakkuk declares)

"**we shall not die**" meaning not a corporeal death, for all men die, good and bad; and even the Jews did die, and no doubt good men among them too, at the siege and taking of Jerusalem by the Chaldean army, either by famine or pestilence or sword. ("We shall not die") a death of affliction, which the people of God are subject to, as well as others; (affliction, testing)... is for their good, and in love and not wrath. (On the other hand) spiritual death, which none who are quickened by the Spirit and the grace of God can ever die. Though (their) grace may be "low," it is never lost. Though saints may be in dead and lifeless frames, and need quickening afresh, yet they are not without the principle of spiritual life. Grace in them is a well of living water, springing up to **everlasting** life. Their spiritual life can never fail them, since it is secured in Christ: and much less shall they die the second or an eternal death. They are ordained to eternal life. Christ is come and given His flesh for it, that they might have **everlasting** life. It is in His hands for them. They are united (Ed: by the oneness of covenant) to Him, and have both the promise and pledge of it: and this may be argued, as by the prophet here, from the eternity of God, art "**Thou not from everlasting?**"

F B Meyer - Our Daily Homily -

Art not Thou from everlasting, O Lord my God? Thou diest not. Habakkuk 1:12

Note the attributes of God, which are enumerated in these words. His eternity—He is from everlasting; He is the Holy One—of purer eyes than to behold evil; the Almighty—the Rock. Is it not wonderful that mortals should be permitted to put the possessive pronoun before these wonderful words, and claim this glorious God for themselves! My God; mine Holy One.

But the most remarkable is the reading suggested above by the words, "Thou diest not"; "He only hath immortality." Time cannot lay its hand upon his nature, or death dissolve it. His hair is white, but not with the whiteness of decay, but of unutterable purity. He need not tremble at the summons of man's great last foe. Unchangeable! The same yesterday, today, and for ever! The death of death! The destruction of the grave! He dies not.

All this is true; but it is true also that in the person of his Eternal Son He died. He laid down his life, though none took it from Him. He bowed his glorious nature beneath the yoke of death. Because the children were partakers of flesh and blood, He took part in the same, that through death He might destroy death. Though He ever liveth, yet He became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross.

There are many mysteries like those at which the prophet hints. He holds his peace whilst the wicked swallows up the man that is more righteous than himself. It is the problem of all ages why God should permit it; but whatever be the explanation, it cannot be because He has vacated the throne of the universe, or that his arm is weakened by disease. From everlasting to everlasting He is God. (**Habakkuk Commentaries**)

Our Daily Bread devotional on Habakkuk 1:12-2:4 - **Waiting For God:**

They soon forgot His works; they did not wait for His counsel (Psalm 106:13).

A friend found it difficult to be patient during a long hospital stay. She was a Christian, but she feared that some sins from her past were too bad to be forgiven. I assured her that when she confessed them to God He forgave her. And her doctors reassured her that her depression would lift and she would get better. Still she found it difficult to wait for the light to break through.

Habakkuk was perplexed and impatient too. First he complained to God about the evils of the Israelites (Hab 1:2, 3, 4). The Lord responded by saying that He would use the Babylonians to scourge them (Hab 1:5-11). Then the prophet raised a new problem—Babylon was more wicked than Israel (Hab 1:12-17). Though frustrated, Habakkuk didn't act rashly. Instead, he showed reverence for God by declaring that he would wait for Him to make things clear. When God spoke to Habakkuk again, He assured the prophet that He would give him the answer. He commanded him to write it clearly so that he could proclaim it speedily. But He also told Habakkuk that he would have to wait awhile before seeing all the wrongs made right. This delay was a trying experience for Habakkuk, but the answer eventually came, and at just the right time.

When waiting for God to work, we must exercise patience and steadfast faith, leaving matters in His hands. God will reward us for our patience—but not too soon nor too late. —H. V. Lugt ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

**Patience is a virtue
that carries a lot of wait.**

Habakkuk 1:13 Your eyes are too pure to approve evil, and You can not look on wickedness with favor. Why do You look with favor on those who deal treacherously? Why are You silent when the wicked swallow up those more righteous than they?:

- **Your eyes are too pure:** Job 15:15 Ps 5:4,5 Ps 11:4-7 Ps 34:15,16 1Pe 1:15,16
- **Why do You look with favor:** Ps 10:1,2,15 Ps 73:3 Jer 12:1,2
- **Deal:** Isa 21:2 33:1
- **Why are You silent:** Es 4:14 Ps 35:22 Ps 50:3,21 Ps 83:1 Pr 31:8,9 Isa 64:12
- **The wicked:** Hab 1:3,4 2Sa 4:11 1Ki 2:32 Ps 37:12-15, Ps 37:32,33 Ps 56:1,2 Acts 2:23 3:13-15
- [Habakkuk 1 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Your eyes are too pure to approve evil - In other words, He can only look on things that are pure. Whereas the previous verse expressed Habakkuk's faith and trust in his God, he now expresses his confusion over God's actions. Habakkuk says that the Lord's character is so pure that he cannot bear to behold evil. Compare Abraham's question to God in Ge 18:23-25.

Morris - God had to veil the earth in darkness when His Son was "made sin" on the cross for us. But it was a problem for Habakkuk, as for many since, that God would punish sin in His own people by means of those even more sinful (Matthew 27:45,46).

NET Bible Note - God's "eyes" here signify what He looks at with approval. His "eyes" are "pure" in that he refuses to tolerate any wrongdoing in His presence.

David has a similar description of God...

For Thou art not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness. No evil dwells with Thee. (Ps 5:4, cp Ps 34:15, 16)

You can not look on wickedness with favor - The word **look** is literally to gaze or behold but in this context is used figuratively in the sense of "tolerate." Habakkuk repeats the idea that God could **not look on** (tolerate, put up with) wickedness, saying in essence "You cannot stand the sight of people doing wrong."

Why do You look with favor on those who deal treacherously - "Why do you put up with such treacherous people?" (NET Bible) The ESV renders it "Why do you idly look at traitors?" This and the following question are not rhetorical. Habakkuk is looking for an answer. The idea is why do you look without taking action against them?

Treacherous (0898)(**bagad**) describes unfaithfulness in several different relationships. **Bagad** is often used of those who are disloyal or who violate agreements. For example it is used in context of marriage meaning to commit adultery (Jer 3:9 = "spiritual adultery"). The English definition of **treacherous** is close to the Hebrew idea, in describing one who is likely to betray trust.

Why are You silent when the wicked swallow up those more righteous than they - In other words, because of the fact that God's eyes are too pure to behold evil, how can He use wicked men to swallow up those more righteous? This question has a clear parallel with the crucifixion of the Righteous One by evil men. Habakkuk wanted God to say something and do something, but God was silent and seemingly inactive. Remember however that *divine silence* does not signify *divine indifference*.

Swallow up (01104) (**bala'**) refers to normal swallowing but here is figurative implying utter destruction (e.g., Pr 1:11-12). Bala' was used to describe the destruction of the Egyptians (Ex 15:12) and of the rebel Korah (Nu 16:30, 32, 34) who was swallowed up by the earth! **Bala'** was used by Jeremiah to describe the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar. The Septuagint translates the Hebrew with *katapino*, the verb used to describe Satan "drinking down" believers (1Pe 5:8-note).

Constable - The prophet's first question (Hab 1:2-4) arose out of an apparent inconsistency between God's actions and His character. He was a just God, but He was allowing sin in His people to go unpunished. His second question arose out of the same apparent inconsistency. Yahweh was a just God, but He was allowing terrible sinners to succeed and even permitted them to punish less serious sinners. These questions evidenced perplexed faith rather than weak faith. Clearly Habakkuk had strong faith in God, but how God was exercising His sovereignty baffled him.

Warren Wiersbe notes that Habakkuk needed to remember two truths...

(1) God had used other tools to chasten His people—war, natural calamities, the preaching of the prophets—and the people wouldn't listen;

(2) the greater the light, the greater the responsibility. Yes, the Babylonians were wicked sinners, but they were idolaters who didn't know the true and living God. This didn't excuse their sins (Ro 1:18ff), but it did explain their conduct. The Jews claimed to know the Lord and yet they were sinning against the very law they claimed to believe!

Sin in the life of a believer is far worse than sin in the life of an unbeliever. When God's people deliberately disobey Him, they sin against a flood of light and an ocean of love.

Hiding My Face - I'm a news junkie. I like knowing what's going on in the world. But sometimes the atrocities of life make me feel as if I'm a kid watching a scary movie. I don't want to see what happens. I want to turn away to avoid watching.

God reacts to evil in a similar way. Years ago, He warned the Israelites that He would turn away from them if they turned toward evil (Dt. 31:18). They did, and He did (Ezek. 39:24).

The prophet Habakkuk had not forsaken God, but he suffered along with those who had. "Why do You show me iniquity," he asked the Lord, "and cause me to see trouble?" (Hab. 1:3).

God's response to His confused prophet indicates that even when evil obscures the face of God, our inability to see Him does not mean He is uninvolved. God said, "Look among the nations and watch—be utterly astounded! For I will work a work in your days which you would not believe, though it were told you" (Hab 1:5). God would judge Judah, but He would also judge the invading Babylonians for their evil (see Hab 2). And through it all, "The just shall live by his faith" (Hab2:4).

When world events cause you to despair, turn off the news and turn to Scripture. The end of the story has been written by our holy God. Evil will not prevail.— Julie Ackerman Link

Lord, we praise You for Your displays of power in the
past and Your promises of victory in the future,
for they replace our fear of the world
with confidence in You. Amen.

**Don't despair because of evil;
God will have the last word.**

Habakkuk 1:14 Why have You made men like the fish of the sea, like creeping things without a ruler over them?

- Pr 6:7
- [Habakkuk 1 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Why have You made men like the fish of the sea - When combined with the following verse, it is clear that Habakkuk is describing Judah as helpless against the Babylonians.

ESV Study Bible - Habakkuk's charge against God is that he allows mankind to act like lower creatures (fish and crawling things) with no rulers or judges, so that wickedness goes unchecked.

Habakkuk 1:15 The Chaldeans bring all of them up with a hook, drag them away with their net, and gather them together in their fishing net. Therefore they rejoice and are glad.:

- **Bring:** Jer 16:16 Eze 29:4,5 Am 4:2 Mt 17:27
- **Therefore:** Jer 50:11 La 2:15,16 Eze 25:6 Ezek 26:2 Ezek 35:15 Rev 11:10
- [Habakkuk 1 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

The Chaldeans bring all of them up with a hook - This refers to the ancient practice by conquering nations of leading away their captives with hooks in their noses or lower lips, which was not only painful but also very humiliating. Mesopotamian monuments depict long lines of captives with hooks through their lips being dragged off to Babylon.

Amos prophesied removal by hooks...

The Lord GOD has sworn by His holiness, "Behold, the days are coming upon you when they will take you away with meat **hooks**, And the last of you with fish **hooks**. (Amos 4:2)

Drag them away with their net - This is a vivid picture of the conquered victims being treated like fish caught in a net. Mesopotamian rock reliefs often portray prisoners being hauled off to captivity in nets.

Their net... fishing net - The first net is a "throw net" as used by a fisherman standing on the shore. The second net is a "dragnet" used by men in a boat.

Constable - Babylonian monuments depict the Chaldeans as having driven a hook through the lower lip of their captives and stringing them single file, like fish on a string.

Therefore (term of conclusion) they rejoice and are glad - Their joy is circumstantial (they are victorious), but temporal and therefore transient. In stark contrast, in that coming day when God exacts perfect retribution from the godless, idol worshipping Babylonians. Jeremiah writes...

And Chaldea will become plunder; All who plunder her will have enough," declares the LORD. Because you are glad, because you are jubilant, O you who pillage My heritage, Because you skip about like a threshing heifer And neigh like stallions, Your mother will be greatly ashamed, She who gave you birth will be humiliated. Behold, she will be the least of the nations, A wilderness, a parched land, and a desert. Because of the indignation of the LORD she will not be inhabited, But she will be completely desolate; Everyone who passes by Babylon will be horrified And will hiss because of all her wounds. (Jer 50:10-13)

In a similar way God will come against all non-believing evil-doers who have transient joy over their "victories", for in that day "all joy turns to gloom. The gaiety of the earth is banished." (Isaiah 24:11, context Isa 24:1-10 = coming judgment on the entire earth)

Habakkuk 1:16 Therefore they offer a sacrifice to their net and burn incense to their fishing net; Because through these things their catch is large, And their food is plentiful.:

- **They offer sacrifice:** Hab 1:11 Dt 8:17 Isa 10:13-15 Isa 37:24 Eze 28:3 29:3 Da 4:30 5:23
- [Habakkuk 1 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

The offer a sacrifice - Describes the Babylonians worship of the "gods" of power and violence.

Ronald Blue comments that "'Idolatry is not limited to those who bring sacrifices or burn incense to inanimate objects. People of position, power, and prosperity often pay homage to the business or agency that provided them their coveted status. It becomes their constant obsession, even their 'god.'" ([Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., et al: The Bible Knowledge Commentary, 1985. Victor](#))

Their net... fishing net - These are figurative allusions to the implements of war and military prowess and power. (cp Hab 1:11)

Habakkuk 1:17 Will they therefore empty their net and continually slay nations without sparing?:

- Hab 1:9,10 Hab 2:5-8,17 Isa 14:16,17 Jer 25:9-26 Jer 46:1-49:39 Jer 52:1-34 Ezekiel 25:1-30:26
- [Habakkuk 1 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Will they... continually slay nations? - Will Babylon's cruelty and warfare go on unabated?

Constable - Yahweh's policy of not interfering with Babylon's wickedness baffled Habakkuk more than His policy of not interfering with Judah's wickedness. It was Yahweh using a nation that practiced such excessive violence to judge the sins of His people that Habakkuk could not understand.

Wiersbe paraphrases Habakkuk's question - How could God honor them by giving them a victory over Judah? God was filling their net with victims, and the Chaldeans were emptying the net by destroying one nation after another

What the Bible Teaches - Having used the analogy of fish and fishing in Hab 1:14-16 to illustrate the activity and cruelty of the Chaldeans, Habakkuk, in Hab 1:17, resumed his questioning by asking, "Would such activity and cruelty continue unchecked?; Would the Chaldeans continue to prosper from their oppression and violence?; Would the Lord allow them to go on in this unmerciful and idolatrous way?". The prophet seems to say, "Since they attribute all their success to themselves and not to Thee, wilt Thou allow them to continue to succeed?". Habakkuk knew that the Chaldeans would continue their onslaughts if they could, but he also knew that for God to allow this would be inconsistent with His character. Jewish tradition translates this opening statement as, "Is it because of this that he empties his net?". The idea here is that of emptying a full net in order to use it again and again to catch more and more fish. Leaving the metaphor, Habakkuk's question then goes on to address the conduct of the Chaldeans. Would they continue to slaughter whole nations unmercifully? Whereas the prophet fully expected the answer to his first question in this section (Hab 1:12) to be in the affirmative, he now expected a negative answer to this last question. God could not and would not allow the Chaldean onslaughts to continue unabated. Jehovah would, in His time and in His way, intervene and deal righteously with the Chaldeans.