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“WHY? HOW LONG?”
Habakkuk 1:1-11

? **“How long, LORD?”**

How long until our leaders prioritize the common welfare over special interests and personal gain?

How long until we actually live out our vaunted ideals of liberty and justice for *all* regardless of race, national origin, gender, social class, or creed?

How long until there is no more homelessness?

How long until gang violence ends?

How long until there are no more mass shootings?

How long until our nation wakes up and the Church in the U.S. is saved from cultural captivity?

■ Habakkuk 1:2:

**How long, LORD, must I call for help,
but you do not listen?
Or cry out to you, “Violence!”
but you do not save?**

“How long?” is the desperate cry of a man who loves his people and whose heart is broken by their moral insanity.

? **“Why do you tolerate wrongdoing?”**

Why do you allow the obscenely rich to get richer while the poor get poorer?

Why do you allow the strong to prey upon the weak?

Why do you allow hypocrites to claim your approval for their false teachings, self-indulgence, pride, and hate-mongering?

Why do you allow Islamic jihadists and “Christian” crusaders to kill in the name of heaven?

Why do you allow us to persist in our immorality, our injustice, and our idolatry?

■ Habakkuk 1:3-4:

³ **Why do you make me look at injustice?**

Why do you tolerate wrongdoing?”

**Destruction and violence are before me;
there is strife, and conflict abounds.**

⁴ **Therefore the law is paralyzed,
and justice never prevails.**

**The wicked hem in the righteous,
so that justice is perverted.**

“Why?” is the urgent plea of a man who longs to stop his people from destroying themselves but is powerless to do so.

? **“How long, LORD ...?”**

? **“Why do you tolerate wrongdoing?”**

{Col 3:5} Habakkuk is a prophet sometime between the years 608 and 597 B.C., during the reign of King Jehoiakim. The kingdom of Judah is severely infected with inequality, injustice, and **“greed, which is idolatry.”**

The most obvious symptoms of Judah’s spiritual sickness are disharmony and corruption.

■ The pervasive spirit of discord frequently erupts in acts of physical aggression. Verse 3:

**Destruction and violence are before me;
there is strife, and conflict abounds.**

Doubtless this involves an epidemic of interpersonal conflict and incivility, and skyrocketing rates of divorce, domestic abuse, banditry, rape, manslaughter, murder, and cycles of vengeance.

Does any of this sound familiar?

■ The priesthood, bureaucracy, and courts are thoroughly corrupt. By and large they serve the interests of the rich and powerful. Verse 4:

**the law is paralyzed,
and justice never prevails.
The wicked hem in the righteous**

– in the Minor Prophets, “**the righteous**” is virtually a synonym for ‘the poor and oppressed’ –

so that justice is perverted.

{Mic 3:11; 7:3} His words are reminiscent of Micah’s lament, spoken ninety years earlier:

- **Her leaders judge for a bribe,
her priests teach for a price,
and her prophets tell fortunes for money.**
- **Both hands are skilled in doing evil;
the ruler demands gifts,
the judge accepts bribes,
the powerful dictate what they desire –
they all conspire together.**

Does any of this sound familiar?

☑ It has been said that “**The fish rots from the head down.**” That is merely an adage, not ironclad truth. Still, in this instance it is all too accurate.

{Jer 22:15-16; Ex 22:21-23} Israelite monarchs are called to do “**what is right and just**” by “[defending] **the cause of the poor and needy,**” especially the widow, the orphan, and the alien; but Jehoiakim is not doing so. Just the opposite, he is exploiting them.

{Jer 22:13, 17} Jeremiah, whose ministry overlaps that of Habakkuk, vigorously denounces the king’s materialism, greed, and injustice:

¹³ **“Woe to him who builds his palace by
unrighteousness,
his upper rooms by injustice,
making his subjects work for nothing,
not paying them for their labor.
¹⁷ “...your eyes and your heart
are set only on dishonest gain,
on shedding innocent blood
and on oppression and extortion.”**

◆ {23:37} The author of Second Kings summarizes his reign in damning terms: “**And he did evil in the eyes of the LORD, just as his predecessors had done.**” His evil actions are not itemized, but many of “**his predecessors**” were guilty of sexual immorality, economic injustice, bloodshed, and gross idolatry.

◆ {36:8} Second Chronicles is equally disparaging. It refers to “**the detestable things [Jehoiakim] did and all that was found against him ...**”

With his debased character and **“detestable”** deeds, he is accelerating the nation’s deterioration. Yet he is not solely responsible for the decline, not by a long shot.

Jehoiakim is fueling the fire, but he did not start it. He personifies Judah’s problems, but he is not their cause. The people have a king made in their own image.

Wherever Habakkuk looks, **“Destruction and violence are before”** him. Day after day **“the law is paralyzed,”** and it seems **“justice never prevails.”**

Hence the anguished prophet cries out, **“How long, LORD?” “Why do you tolerate wrongdoing?”**

{Eccl 1:9} And to think he spoke more than 2,600 years ago! **“There is nothing new under the sun.”**

YHWH is all-powerful and utterly holy. So we might expect him to answer Habakkuk’s complaint with silence, or a verbal rebuke, or even a lightning bolt.

■ Instead, the LORD gently and patiently engages in a dialogue with him. Verse 5:

**“Look at the nations and be 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.”**

Habakkuk must be greatly relieved when God begins to speak. ‘Whew! I am still in one piece!’

He is also breathless with expectancy. What is Sovereign God going to do?

Is the King of the Universe going to replace Jehoiakim with a righteous leader who has the character and competency to spark a spiritual revival?

Is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob going to give the Judahites ears to hear his prophets and hearts to heed their call to repentance?

{Mic 6:8} Is the Almighty going to compel the Hebrew people **“to act justly and to love mercy and walk humbly with”** him, as he has commanded?

■ Imagine Habakkuk’s shock at what the LORD says next. Verse 6: **“I am raising up the Babylonians.”**

Do we feel the gut-wrenching horror this induces in the prophet? It is tantamount to saying, **“I am raising up”** Hitler and the Nazis. **“I am raising up”** Stalin and the Soviets. **“I am raising up”** ISIS.

■ Hear the word of the LORD in verse 6:

**“I am raising up the Babylonians,
that ruthless and impetuous people,
who sweep across the whole earth
to seize dwellings not their own.”**

■ The word of the LORD in verse 7:

**“They are a feared and dreaded people;
they are a law to themselves
and promote their own honor.”**

■ The word of the LORD in verses 8-9:

**“...they all come bent on violence.
Their hordes advance like a desert wind
and gather prisoners like sand.”**

- The word of the LORD in verse 11:

“... guilty people, whose own strength is their god.”

Babylonian armies wipe out households, grind cities to dust, and erase nations from the map. Judah is wicked; Babylon is exponentially worse.

“How long, LORD?” “Why do you tolerate wrongdoing?”

? What do you do when God replies, ‘My solution is to send in the Babylonians’?

✎ First, in verse 5 the Lord invites us to **“look and watch.”** This is akin to biblical *waiting*.

📖 To “wait” for the LORD is to stand firm in faith and hope, patiently enduring trial and temptation, trusting God to accomplish his perfect plan. It is looking forward with anticipation, confident that he will exercise divine goodness, wisdom, justice, grace, and power in the right ways at the right times.

✎ Second, again in verse 5, the LORD invites us to **“be utterly amazed.”**

Amazement is the feeling of genuine surprise. It is, by definition, a response to the unexpected.

Yet, as strange as it sounds, we can prepare to **“be amazed.”** We do so by cultivating humility.

Remember what God declares in Isaiah 55:8:

**“My thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways.”**

Our awesome God’s actions are amazing in every sense of the word. Presuming that he will do what I expect, how I expect it, when I expect it is the height of creaturely arrogance.

✎ Third, the LORD invites us to keep asking questions.

In 1:12-21 the astonished prophet presses YHWH on his plan: Yes, our nation deserves to be punished for our sins, but how can you use Babylon to do it? They are so much worse than us!

This is not skepticism or impudence. The prophet is not defying God or denying his goodness.

This is faith seeking understand. It is righteous anguish seeking solace in the only One who can give it.

? **“How long, LORD ...?”**

? **“Why do you tolerate wrongdoing?”**

Habakkuk 1:1-11 is the word of the Lord.