

*Life is filled with little everyday mysteries, according to Douglas B. Smith in an article in the Reader's Digest. For example, why does a bride always stand on the groom's left? Why are most pencils hexagonal? Why is a gift that is unproductive in nature called a "white elephant?" Most people have no idea. Brides began standing on the groom's left during the days when men sometimes captured women from neighboring villages. The groom wanted his sword hand free – the right one during the wedding to fight off a possible attack by the bride's relatives or jealous suitors. Nine hexagonal pencils can be made from the same amount of wood as eight round ones. Thus, pencils are hexagonal because they are cheaper to produce and also less likely to roll off a desk. If displeased with members of his court, the king of Siam reportedly gave them elephants to ruin them. The animals were sacred and not permitted to work, but they still had to be maintained.*

*Wouldn't it be wonderful if all of life's mysteries were as simple to solve as these? Unfortunately, they are not. Sometimes, the harsh circumstances of life, the troubles we face, the losses we experience are very hard to understand and accept, leaving us with very real and honest questions for God – the kinds of questions that the prophet Habakkuk was asking.*

If you recall from last week, Habakkuk was complaining to God – actually, he was also complaining about God regarding the people of Judah. Habakkuk didn't like what he saw in the nation, for its people – God's people, had become wicked and violent and corrupt. The nation had become full of hate and anger and fighting. They were coming apart at the seams, and as far as Habakkuk could tell – God appeared to be distant, and unresponsive, and unconcerned about what was going on. From Habakkuk's perspective, God wasn't doing anything.

Now, Habakkuk was correct in what he had observed in the nation, for it had become wicked and violent and corrupt, but he was dead wrong when it came to God. Unbeknownst to Habakkuk, God saw everything that was happening in the nation, in fact, history tells us that God foreknew what would be happening in the nation, and He had given many warnings to His people that trouble was coming if they went down that road and did not repent – but God's warnings were ignored. So, God drops a bombshell on Habakkuk and tells him the people of Judah will be punished for their sin, and He is raising up the Babylonians to do it. The Babylonians will serve as God's rod of correction, and if you remember, they were a terrible bunch of people – extremely violent and cruel, predatory like wolves, very swift and efficient in the destruction of their enemies, and there was no hope of stopping them. This was God's doing. Trouble was coming.

Well, after hearing this shocking revelation about the Babylonians, Habakkuk had something to say about it. So, if you have your Bible, turn to **Habakkuk 1** and we will begin this morning with **verse 12**. Let's see what Habakkuk has to say to God.

**<sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> 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?**

After hearing about the Babylonians, Habakkuk had a response for God, and it was mixed. At first, Habakkuk considered the character of God which is something we should do when we don't understand what God is doing in our lives. He found some comfort in knowing he could trust the **everlasting Lord** – the God of eternity who has no beginning and no end. Habakkuk also acknowledged God as the **Holy One**, knowing that God could do no wrong, and with that understanding and most certainly aware that God had made a covenant with Abraham, Habakkuk had confidence that God would not allow Judah to be completely annihilated during this time of punishment, but with that said, Habakkuk still had some heartburn about this punishment coming through the hands of the Babylonians. Here is my interpretation of what he's saying:

*“God, You are going to use the evil Babylonians to discipline Your own children? Sure, the people of Judah are bad, I get that, but the Babylonians are really bad. Why would a holy and just and righteous God use an evil people like the Babylonians to punish His own people? Since You hate sin so much, why would You allow this? God, this doesn't make any sense.”*

Habakkuk tells the Lord that He shouldn't use the Babylonians to punish Judah because they are far worse than Judah – in other words, *“Lord, their sin is worse than our sin.”* It didn't seem right that God would do this, and as far as Habakkuk was concerned – the cure was worse than the disease, and he explains why. In **verses 14-17**, he says,

**<sup>14</sup> Why have You made men like the fish of the sea, like creeping things without a ruler over them? <sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> Will they therefore empty their net and continually slay nations without sparing?**

In this passage, Habakkuk explains to God that if He proceeds with His plan, He will make Judah like helpless fish caught in a net, and in this net, both the wicked and the righteous of Judah will be caught together and they will suffer the same dreadful fate from the Babylonians. But it doesn't stop there, for Habakkuk claims the Babylonians will simply **empty** their nets and **slay** other nations as well, and of course, they will take all the credit for their victories. *They aren't going to worship You Lord, so how can You tolerate this evil?* Lord, in light of Your righteous character, Your plan doesn't seem right.

Habakkuk wasn't feeling good about this situation, but Habakkuk probably thought he had presented a good argument to God, and now he waits for God to reply. So, let's continue with **Chapter 2**, beginning with **verse 1** to see how successful he was in his argument.

**<sup>1</sup>I will stand on my guard post and station myself on the rampart; and I will keep watch to see what He will speak to me, and how I may reply when I am reproved. <sup>2</sup>Then the Lord answered me and said, "Record the vision and inscribe it on tablets, that the one who reads it may run. <sup>3</sup>"For the vision is yet for the appointed time; it hastens toward the goal and it will not fail. Though it tarries, wait for it; for it will certainly come, it will not delay."**

We are told that Habakkuk waited for God to reply like a guard at his military post. In his confusion about God and the ways of God, he's stopped arguing and complaining and he's waiting and watching for God to respond, and sure enough, He does. God commands Habakkuk to write this conversation down for the benefit of others, and then God tells Habakkuk something he didn't want to hear.

*"It's a done deal. It's going to happen. At the appointed time, at the right time, according to My plans, trouble is coming just as I have said."*

Habakkuk didn't want to hear that. Yes, he wanted God to do something about His wayward people – and yes, they most definitely deserved correction by God, but not like this – not through the Babylonians.

**And what about the Babylonians? Will these evil people prosper while God's own people suffer?**

Well, God had something to say about the fate of the Babylonians starting with **verse 4**. He said,

**“Behold, as for the proud one, his soul is not right within him; but the righteous will live by his faith.”**

God acknowledged that the Babylonians are an arrogant and morally twisted people – they are evil. They trust in their own power and might – they look only to themselves, but in contrast, **the righteous will live by faith**. Instead of pridefully looking inward like the Babylonians do, the righteous look upward to God.

In the day of trouble, when for a time it seems that evil triumphs over good and it’s difficult to understand what God is doing – the righteous are obligated to live by faith in God no matter how we feel, what we see, or what the consequences may be. When things don’t make sense and we don’t have all the answers to all of our questions, and quite frankly – we won’t, we are called to live by faith in God.

*Jeff Simms tells this story: Back in 1995, I was having a difficult time understanding what God was doing in my life, and as God so often does, He used something simple to teach me a great truth. I was taking my cat to the sink to give it a bath. Our cat Madeline had a skin condition that required weekly baths. She hated them and fought me like crazy. The vet said to put the special cat shampoo on her and let her soak in it for a few minutes. In order to do that I would place the cat in a cat carrier with a blanket and let it sit there for a few minutes. As I was placing the soaked and upset cat in the carrier, God spoke to my heart and said; “Tell the cat what you’re doing.”*

*I replied, “I can’t God. I don’t speak cat.”*

*God said to me again, “Go ahead, tell the cat why you’re doing that.”*

*I said, “I can’t Lord, I can’t explain why, but it’s for its own good though.”*

*Just then, it hit me that God was saying that while I couldn’t understand His ways, they are always for my good. Just like for the cat, the circumstances may be well beyond our understanding, they may not make sense to us, but if we really get to know God, we can rest in the fact that He truly is kind and good, and He does things for our benefit even though the circumstances in life may suggest otherwise.*

The righteous will live by faith in God because God is good and He knows what is best for us.

Now, for the rest of **Chapter 2**, God tells Habakkuk don't worry about the Babylonians, for they will get what's coming to them in due time, and He explains this in a series of five **woes**. We don't use that word "woe" very often, instead we might say, "*what a tragedy*." Now, these woes are directed to the Babylonians for God knows exactly what they are doing; however, they can also apply to any person who pridefully lives for themselves.

So, let's jump down to **verse 6**, where God says,

**“Will not all of these take up a taunt-song against him, even mockery and insinuations against him and say, ‘Woe to him who increases what is not his—For how long—and makes himself rich with loans?’<sup>7</sup> ‘Will not your creditors rise up suddenly, and those who collect from you awaken? Indeed, you will become plunder for them.’<sup>8</sup> ‘Because you have looted many nations, all the remainder of the peoples will loot you—because of human bloodshed and violence done to the land, to the town and all its inhabitants.**

That perfectly described the greedy Babylonians. When they captured a city, they took all of its wealth. They took the crops and the livestock – they carried off anything value to them to include people like Daniel. In essence, they prospered through the misery of others. The Babylonians thought they were taking from the nations they conquered, but God said it was simply a loan, and there will come a time when the loan is due with interest. There will come a time when the Babylonians become the victims and they will suffer in the same way they had inflicted suffering on others. They will reap what they have sown.

The *second woe* is found in **verse 9** and we are told,

**“Woe to him who gets evil gain for his house to put his nest on high, to be delivered from the hand of calamity!”**

The Babylonians were intent on building a dynasty that would protect them from disaster, and in their arrogance, like an eagle whose nest is high and inaccessible to predators, they considered themselves untouchable, thinking no enemy could ever come against them, but many years later, the last king of Babylon threw a wild party which was interrupted by the sight of a finger writing on a wall. The partygoers were stunned and the king summoned all the wise men to explain this

strange phenomenon. They could not, but someone remembered Daniel and he was summoned to interpret the writing on the wall. Daniel explained to the king that he did not measure up and that very night the king died and the Babylonians were conquered by the Medes and Persians. Pride comes before a fall.

Let's drop down to **verse 12** to find the *third woe*. God says,

**“Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed and founds a town with violence!”**

In their power-hungry desire for world domination, the Babylonians used their military might to conquer the weak and the defenseless, and they used murder, and cruelty, bloodshed, and oppression as tools in building their empire. In essence, they used violence to achieve what they wanted, but in the end, all their work will be turned into kindling for God's fire of wrath. In the end, God will be honored, but they will be doomed, dragged away by their own violence.

The *fourth woe* we see in **verse 15-16**. It reads,

**<sup>15</sup>“Woe to you who make your neighbors drink, who mix in your venom even to make them drunk so as to look on their nakedness! <sup>16</sup>“You will be filled with disgrace rather than honor. Now you yourself drink and expose your own nakedness. The cup in the Lord's right hand will come around to you, and utter disgrace will come upon your glory.**

The Babylonians had deceived the neighboring nations so they were able to take advantage of them. They behaved like a man who gets a woman drunk so she will lose her self-control and he can then undress her. This is God's condemnation of those, like the Babylonians, who used substances such as alcohol as tools for immoral purposes. God promises judgment on those who use alcohol or drugs to take advantage of others. When you entice another person to drink or to use drugs so that they will lower their standards, you come up against God Himself.

The *last woe* is found beginning with **verse 18**.

**<sup>18</sup>“What profit is the idol when its maker has carved it, or an image, a teacher of falsehood? For its maker trusts in his own handiwork when he fashions speechless idols. <sup>19</sup>“Woe to him who says to a piece of wood, ‘Awake!’ To a mute stone, ‘Arise!’ **And that is your teacher?** Behold, it is overlaid with gold and silver, and there is no breath at all inside it.**



This passage doesn't start with a woe, instead it begins with a question about idolatry. **Who in their right mind would believe that praying to lifeless wood or stone could make any difference?** Even though the images may be beautiful in appearance – in the end, they are still nothing more than wood and stone. They can't hear you; they cannot guide you, they cannot act on your behalf, and they most certainly cannot save. If anything, an idol is merely an outward extension of trusting in your own strength instead of living by faith in the living God.

Finally, in the **verse 20**, we are told this,

**“But the Lord is in His holy temple. Let all the earth be silent before Him.”**

God is not deaf, dumb, blind and powerless like an idol, instead He is sovereign. God sits on the throne in His holy temple, and He knows and He foreknows the activities of the nations, and here He says, **“be silent”** or we might say *“hush.”*

For Habakkuk, the message was clear – stop arguing. Stop doubting! God is not excusing the sin of Judah or the Babylonians. He's not insensitive to suffering. God is at work, He is in control, and in His perfect time, He will accomplish His divine purpose.

*“So, Habakkuk, hush, I have given you My answer. I know you don't understand, I know this seems unreasonable to you, I know it doesn't seem right to you, **but can you trust Me anyway? Can you live by faith?**”*

So, for a time, it may seem that evil has the upper hand, but it's only for a time, and that brings up the broader issue of evil. Habakkuk had a lot of questions for God related to evil in the world. He had questions related to evil amongst God's people and he had questions related to God's use of evil people to carry out His divine purposes, and quite frankly, these questions are still being asked today.

**How could a good and loving God allow evil to exist if He has the power to stop it?** A lot of people, to include Christians, wrestle with this question.

*A college philosophy professor walked up to the board and wrote: God is good. God has all power. There is evil in the world. Therefore, there is no God!*

We know that God is loving and good and all-powerful, and yet we also know that evil exists. Surely, a good and loving and all-powerful God would not want evil to

exist and He would be able to get rid of it. That seems simple enough, it appears logical, but what we fail to realize is that we are also a huge part of the equation.

God did not create evil – or let's call it for what it really is: *sin*. He is not the author of it, there is no shadow of darkness in Him; however, with that said, God created us with freewill, and freewill is what has made sin possible.

Well, that begs the question, “**Why, then, did God give people freewill?**” Because He didn't want puppets. Freewill – although it makes sin possible, is also the only thing that makes any love worth having possible. God created us to have a true loving relationship with Him, and true love always involves a choice. True love is only an act of freewill.

**Could God give us freewill but do away with sin?** Well, I guess He could, but once again we have a problem, for He can't do away with sin without doing away with those who commit sin. We might as well say our “*good-byes*” right now for none of us would be left because we all sin by choice. All sin is against God, whether it be murder, theft, a lie, or a lustful thought – and none of us would be left. So, we are right back where we started – either we have freewill to love God or to sin if we so choose, or God removes all sinful people from this earth – which includes all of us. That's why sin exists – because we exist.

Now, with regard to Habakkuk's problem of God using the evil Babylonians – yes, a good and loving and all-powerful God can use sinful evil people to accomplish His divine purposes, and the best example of this actually occurred for our behalf.

Our heavenly Father sent His Son Jesus into this fallen world. Jesus submitted Himself to the evil acts of the self-righteous religious leaders, of Judas, and of the Romans. Jesus was sinless – an innocent man who willingly endured torture and murder at the hands of evil people, so that through His sacrificial death on the cross, you and I – who are sinners by choice might be made right with God, forgiven of our sin, and saved by grace through faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ.

I fear I may have given you too much this morning, but if there is one take away, I want to circle back to something Habakkuk did. In his confusion about God and the ways of God, Habakkuk was reminded of the character of God.

When we don't understand what God is doing in our lives, when God seems unreasonable, when evil appears to be flourishing, when it seems that God does not



care, when it appears He is doing nothing on our behalf, consider the character of God – for He is true and perfect in all of His ways and His goodness is unmatched. He is gracious, and kind-hearted, and merciful. God is patient, slow to anger, unyielding in His great love for us, and He is ever faithful. God is forgiving, but at the same time, He is holy and just and cannot ignore sin, and all of this was fully expressed in the character of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. When in doubt, think on Christ and what He has done for you.

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