

In Darwin, recently, we witnessed a few exciting electrical storms. One day, the lightning and the thunder came at exactly the same time. The lightning flashed directly outside. The thunder crashed. The house shook. Ginny jumped. I jumped. Even the dog jumped. And I wondered, would we have been killed if we'd been outside? Usually, storms in Melbourne are not so severe.

If stormy weather was all that we had to endure here, then I'm sure we could cope with life. But our problem is that there is increasing violence in our state. The newspapers regularly contain articles dealing with violence. Like Habakkuk, we want to know the meaning of this. And, why is there so much injustice in our society? Note 1:3b, ***Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict abounds.*** These words could easily have come straight from our daily newspaper. 1:4b, concludes Habakkuk's first complaint to God. ***Justice is perverted.***

Habakkuk doesn't suggest that Judah didn't deserve to be punished. The problem lay 'squarely in their camp.' They had turned away from God. They deserved whatever punishment God would bring upon them. But, Habakkuk wasn't expecting the punishment God would send. God says to Habakkuk (1:6), ***I am raising up the Babylonians, that ruthless and impetuous people, who sweep across the whole earth to seize dwelling places not their own.***

That was not good news to Habakkuk. The Babylonians' sins were far worse than Judah's. And so, in his second speech, Habakkuk rephrases his first question. In essence, he asks, 'Why do you tolerate a people more treacherous (evil) than Judah?' Note 1:13bc, ***Why do you tolerate the treacherous? Why are you silent while the wicked swallow those more righteous than themselves?***

By 586 BC the Babylonians had destroyed Jerusalem. Many of the people in Judah were taken to Babylon, into exile. So, Habakkuk has been told that in his lifetime he'd see his country and his people ruined. Imagine the grief, the pain and the suffering that this news caused him. Yet these horrors are also a modern day reality for us. Cultural displacement and loss affect many people today. Just take a look at Syria and other Middle Eastern countries

There are two ways to look at what's happening in Habakkuk's lifetime. Both are instructive for us, so we'll take the time to consider each one.

The first way deals with how we grieve over loss. That loss may be due to the death of a loved one. Or, it might be the loss of your health, your money or some other possession. Loss can also include the loss (death) of a friendship or relationship. Moving to live in another country, as some of you have done, can also cause much grief. Habakkuk is now grieving over the loss that Judah will experience at the hands of the Babylonians. There will be pain and destruction and loss of life.

In 1969 Elisabeth Kübler-Ross published a book entitled, *On Death and Dying*. In her book, she set out the usual stages to healthy grieving. James Bruckner notes how Habakkuk led believers through these stages more than 2,500 years ago.

At first, Habakkuk feels his isolation. 1:2, ***How long, O LORD, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, "Violence!" but you do not save?***

Second, anger begins to show in his speech. 1:3, ***Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrong?*** Do you hear his anger? 'Why! Why!' It's almost as if he's saying, 'Why me? Why am I the only one concerned about all this violence and injustice? Doesn't anyone else care? Does God even care?'

Third, having heard about the Babylonians, Habakkuk goes into denial. (At the same time, this may be a cry of hope.) 1:12, ***O LORD, are you not from everlasting? My God, my Holy One, we will not die.*** Before I had a bad car accident I thought that I was invincible. Just like many young people, I thought that accidents only happened to other people.

Fourth, Habakkuk begins to bargain with God. Note what he says in 1:12b, 13a, ***You have appointed them to execute judgment.*** And so Habakkuk argues his case with God, ***Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong.***

Fifth, unable to cope with what will happen to his people, Habakkuk becomes depressed. 1:13b, ***Why do you tolerate the treacherous? Why are you silent...?*** The situation seems hopeless.

Note 1:14, ***You have made men like fish in the sea, like sea creatures that have no ruler.*** When God created the heavens and earth He commanded Adam and Eve to rule over the fish of the sea. But now, God's chosen people are being treated like those fish. 1:15, ***The wicked foe pulls all of them up***

with hooks, he catches them in his net, he gathers them up in his dragnet; and so he rejoices and is glad. It's all too much for Habakkuk.

Yet Habakkuk still has hope. He learns through his pain that God has His purpose in all that happens. Perhaps he finally realises that though the Babylonians are a wicked race, Judah deserves her punishment. *Finally*, Habakkuk comes to accept that God knows what He is doing. 2:1, ***I will stand at my watch and station myself on the ramparts; I will look to see what he will say to me, and what answer I am to give to this complaint.***

We are never in a position to question God's sovereignty in life. This side of eternity, we'll never fully understand the meaning of pain and suffering. And so we're troubled by questions such as why some people are healed and others die due to disease. Why are we well-off, here, while other nations suffer with poverty, persecution and disease? Is it some simple chance of birth? This is where Habakkuk helps us. He digs deep into the mysteries of God's ways. Why does God do what He does? How long must they endure this suffering? And the interesting thing is that God never answers Habakkuk's question why. He does, however, answer 'How Long?'

We're drawing close to the centre of Habakkuk's message. So, here's a preview of what's to come. 2:4b, ***The righteous will live by his faith.*** But, like Habakkuk, we're not there yet. Along with him, we must wait.

So, how can we deal with the problem of understanding God's apparent lack of action? In view of His moral standards, it certainly seems strange that God would allow the Babylonians to overrun Judah. How would we feel if our nation were to be destroyed by another one? We'd be asking the same questions that Habakkuk asked. At a personal level, we already *do* question God. Very often our questions are, *Why me? Why doesn't God bless Christian people, with good health and prosperity, and with lovely happy families?*

It's more important to consider the questions rather than worrying about the answers. For, at the heart of these questions is the idea that God owes us something. Yet, that's not true. God is fully satisfied within Himself, within the Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He is no debtor to anyone. The only thing we can call upon is the covenant that God has made with His people. At the heart of His covenant are His promise, 'I will be your God and you will be my people.' [See, for example, Genesis 17:7; Revelation 21:3.]

If you're not a Christian, maybe you'll use your difficulties as an excuse to blame God when something goes wrong. And when you see Christians suffering (in some way), you may feel confirmed in your unbelief. That's faulty thinking! Apart from a lack of faith, it's putting yourself on a higher level than God. You're pretending to understand life far better than God. Remember, He created the heavens and the earth and all that lives on His earth.

What if you *are* a Christian? You may think that life should be fair. And you struggle. Life is not fair. Bad things happen to good people. Good things happen to bad people. Or, you may struggle with faith because God doesn't seem to answer prayer. Others have their prayers answered, but to you, God is silent. Maybe you feel like pulling back from anything spiritual.

This is where Martin Lloyd-Jones helps us to understand this book, Habakkuk. [Martin Lloyd-Jones was a great preacher in the 20th century.] In turn, we'll see how Habakkuk gives us a biblical approach to solving problems that are beyond us. Based on Habakkuk, Dr. Lloyd-Jones suggests four steps for us to take.

1. Stop to think.
2. Go back to basic principles.
3. Apply these principles to the problem.
4. If you're still in doubt, commit the problem to God

in faith. Leave the matter with God.

First, Habakkuk stopped to think. We read in James 1:19, ***Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.*** Our problem is that we're slow to listen, quick to speak and quick to become angry. Note 2:1, Habakkuk says that he ***will stand watch... I will look to see what he [God] will say to me.***

Second, Habakkuk reminds us of God's qualities that set God apart from His creation. Habakkuk reminds us of these basic facts. 1:12a, ***O LORD, are you not from everlasting?*** Habakkuk uses God's

covenant name, LORD. This is the God who told Moses (Exodus 3:14, 16b), ***“I AM WHO I AM... I have watched over you and have seen what has been done to you in Egypt.”***

In Habakkuk 1:10-11 God told Habakkuk about the power and might of the Babylonians. Now, he reminds himself, and us, about who God really is. (1:12) God is ***from everlasting***. He is eternal, without beginning and without end. Compared with God, the god of the Babylonians is merely an idol, nothing at all.

More attributes of God follow in 1:12b, ***My God, my Holy One...*** We read in 1 John 1:5b, ***God is light; in him there is no darkness at all***. He is perfect and absolutely righteous and holy. Could He do something that's unrighteous? Never! Thus, Habakkuk refers to God at the end of 1:12, as ***Rock***. A rock provides a solid foundation, a firm footing. God the ***Rock*** speaks of His faithfulness. He is trustworthy and true.

This is the God who created the whole world out of nothing, for He spoke it into being. Therefore, the Babylonians didn't rise up on their own. Note 1:12b, ***O LORD, you have appointed them to execute judgment; O Rock, you have ordained them to punish***.

Habakkuk reminds us that God is sovereign. He controls nations and uses history for His glory. Having gone back to basic principles, Habakkuk will apply them to the situation in Judah. But first he reviews the Babylonians' cruelty and violence. Habakkuk 1:15, ***The wicked foe pulls all of them up with hooks***. He then continues with this fishing metaphor, ***he catches them in his net***. One commentator notes that they'd drive a hook through the lower lip of their captives. Then they'd string them out single file to make them submit.

Finally, in 1:15, ***he rejoices and is glad***. Having inflicted these humiliating cruelties, the Babylonians rejoice in what they've done. To Habakkuk this is a mockery. How can a righteous God allow such brutality? Furthermore, these ungodly Babylonians worship the creature, not the Creator.

In 1:16 we have Habakkuk's description of their idolatry and pagan revelry. ***Therefore he sacrifices to his net and burns incense to his dragnet, for by his net he lives in luxury and enjoys the choicest food***. The Babylonians show no mercy as they slaughter the nations. Habakkuk wonders how long God will allow this happen. 1:17, ***Is he to keep on emptying his net, destroying nations without mercy?*** Habakkuk is describing a holocaust, something like what the world witnessed under the rule of Hitler in Germany. Hitler's aim was to destroy the Jewish race. The Babylonians showed no mercy to the Jews. Hitler was no different.

O. Palmer Robertson notes that the source of such evil is Satan. ***If Cain killed his brother because he belonged to the evil one (1 John 3:12), certainly the merciless slaughter by the Babylonians must be inspired of the archenemy of the Lord Himself***. We could say the same thing about Hitler, Pol Pot and Idi Amin, and the ethnic cleansing that occurred in Rwanda in 1994.

Habakkuk wrestles with God's motives. His final question in 1:17 again concerns the Babylonians. ***Is he to keep on emptying his net, destroying nations without mercy?*** Habakkuk has dared to question God. Now he must await God's response. It's as if he realises that he must leave his problems with his Lord.

Perhaps for months or years, you and I may be in the same position as Habakkuk. It often happens, particularly on the mission field. Many missionaries struggle for years in the cause of Christ before they see some results.

As Christians, we take our lead from the Lord Jesus' life. He had a big problem. He was to be made sin in order to save us. Sin would fill His body with pain and suffering. He knew that the Father could have rescued Him at any time. Instead, in obedience, the Lord Jesus would be separated from the Father who loved Him and whom He, in turn, loved.

What did the Lord Jesus do? Just what Habakkuk did. He prayed. Matthew 26:39, ***“My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”*** In effect, the Lord Jesus was saying, 'I could wish that there was another way, but if this is Your way, then Your will be done.'

Habakkuk can only wait on God. 2:1, ***I will stand at my watch and station myself on the ramparts; I will look to see what he will say to me, and what answer I am to give to this complaint***.

It is not enough just to pray and tell God about our problems. We must go further than just cast our burden upon the Lord. Like Habakkuk, we must detach ourselves from the problem. He pictures

himself on a high tower. From there he can see everything that's going on. *I will look to see what he will say to me.*

Martin Lloyd-Jones notes that this is important for us as we fight our spiritual battles. **Once we have taken a problem to God, we should cease to concern ourselves with it.** We've done all we can do. We've sought the guidance of Scripture, the Holy Spirit and the wisdom of Christian friends. Now, there's nothing more to do than take it to God in prayer. But, having prayed, we often start worrying about our problems once again. If you do that, then why bother praying? Habakkuk says, 'I'm going to get out of this rut of depression; I'm going to my watch-tower; I am going to look to God and to God alone.'

Martin Lloyd-Jones goes so far as to say, **If you have committed your problem to God and go on thinking about it, it means that your prayers were not genuine.** So, refuse to think about it! Don't keep going over the same problem time and time again with your friends. Don't discuss it. Instead, wait on God. Soak in the words of Scripture in Philippians 4:6, 7, ***Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.***

Habakkuk looks for an answer. Earlier (1:5), God had told him to *look... watch—and be utterly amazed.* At last, Habakkuk has got the message. He will watch and see how God works this out.

You and I would do well to do the same. (2:1) *I will look to see what he will say to me.* God may speak to you through His Word. He often speaks to His people in this way. Sometimes He will speak directly to your spirit. At other times He will order your life so that it becomes plain what God is saying to you.

Martin Lloyd-Jones again: **God never calls us to do any work without opening the door... Our whole life will be directed to that end.** So let us watch and wait. God is true to His promises and His promises never fail. God not only hears our prayers, but, in His timing, He also answers. Amen