

September 18th, 2016. A man enters a Minnesota mall and violently stabs 9 people. Fortunately, an off-duty police officer shoots the perpetrator dead. As was mentioned in the news, “he was a soldier of the Islamic State”, according to an ISIS-linked news agency. With all the illegal immigration going on in our country, no secure borders, and the lack of extreme vetting, America is becoming more and more a dangerous place to live. Just this past week, my wife Jeanne asked me, what time I thought was the best time of day to do shopping at Walmart, where she wouldn’t have to fear some crazy guy coming in and shooting up the place, or trying to assault or rape her. Why such hatred and violence, Lord? The killing of the unborn in the United States, couples living together outside marriage, homosexuals and lesbians given status to marry, transgender bathrooms, families, who are more concerned about making money and having fun, than worshipping Jesus Christ. Lord, why do you tolerate such wrong? Why don’t you take action? Why do you seem to have your hands in your pockets?

So if you really love us Lord, why don’t you destroy the evil in the world so that we can live in peace? Why do you allow terrorists to operate and immorality, materialism, and false religions to thrive in our country? Why does my family get hit with so many calamities and the unbeliever down the street is having such a good life. It just isn’t fair. I am a Christian. If you’ve ever asked yourself or God those questions you’re not alone. The prophet Habakkuk also struggled to understand why God seemed to do nothing as the wicked overran the righteous. Well, what started out as a sob turned into a song; that’s because the Lord led Habakkuk from confusion to calm. How did he do that? By teaching Habbakuk to live his life by faith. Let us follow Habakkuk’s example. “Live your life by Faith in Dark Days!”

Today we turn our attention to the prophet Habakkuk. Habakkuk lived some 600 years before Christ was born. Habakkuk ministered to the southern kingdom of Judah. By this time already the northern kingdom of Israel had been carried off into captivity because of their impenitent sins of foolish boasting, and self-indulgent living. It seems clear from the situation Habakkuk described that he wrote this prophecy sometime after the decline of the Assyrian Empire and the rise of the Babylonian (or Chaldean) Empire. During the earlier part of Habakkuk’s life there had been wonderful spiritual reforms instituted under the leadership of the boy king Josiah. But Josiah died in 609 BC and spiritual decline set in and Judah reverted to ungodly, worldly ways. This was the era in which Habakkuk wrote his book. Habakkuk’s was upset with the spiritual and moral decay in his nation.

Apparently, after a long period of time the Lord answered Habakkuk. The Lord tells Habakkuk that a foreign power named Babylon is going to come in and bring judgment upon God’s people. It would be like today, God would allow China or Iran to attack the United States, and conquer us, because of the ungodly actions of our country. Imagine having all your possessions taken from you, and being made a servant of the Chinese or Iranian government? What a situation. You live in a world around you where everyone is living for themselves and has no time for Jesus Christ, and now a foreign government comes in to discipline your ungodly nation. Interestingly Habakkuk’s sob has been echoed by Christian martyrs in heaven. The Apostle John reports, “I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. 10 They called out in a loud voice, “How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?” (Revelation 6:9, 10)

Just as the northern kingdom of Israel had been carried off by Assyria because of their sins so God would allow Judah to be carried off by the Babylonians. The Babylonians, Lord? Aren’t they even worse than the wicked that we have to deal with right now?” Habakkuk wasn’t

so sure that God's cure was preferable to the disease. Although the Babylonians had yet to become a superpower their reputation as being cruel and ruthless fighters was already well known and to fall into their hands would not be an enjoyable experience!

Has that ever happened to you where you pray for God to deliver you from some hardship only to see things get worse? You are told you have cancer, you treat it with chemo, it seems to be in remission for a while, but then it returns with a vengeance. Or, your spouse is diagnosed as having Dementia. Every month, their memory gets worse and worse. They then go through a stage of paranoia, and actually physically hit you. Eventually, you are alone, as they are spending their last days in an assisted living home. Or you are driving along minding your own business, when someone who is texting while driving, hits your car head on. Now you have physical disabilities that you will carry the rest of your life. Or one of your grandchildren, who at onetime loved Jesus, now doesn't go to church, nor gives a rip about a closer relationship with the Lord. Finally, you thought you and your spouse would enjoy the Village lifestyle you're your 80's or 90's, now your spouse suddenly is taken from you. What's happening here? I am a Christian. I am on the winning team. Has God become so busy that he's forgotten about me? Or even worse, are the events of my life beyond his control? We of course know that neither is true but we do see through the experience of Habakkuk that God is not shy about using hardship to draw us closer to him. Yes, the Babylonians would inflict pain on his people but in the end God would deliver them. Therefore he wanted Habakkuk and other believers to be patient. God said, "Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it. 3 For the revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay. 4 "See, he is puffed up; his desires are not upright— but the righteous will live by his faith

This prophecy was first fulfilled when the Babylonians were defeated by the Persians and God's children were allowed to return from Babylon to Jerusalem to rebuild the city and its temple. This would not be the last time that the prophecy would be fulfilled, however. It's also on Judgment Day that God will put an end to all the strife and violence that we have to put up with right now.

God wants us to know that we can count on victory – so much so that he told Habakkuk to "make it [the prophecy] plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it" (Hab. 2:2) In other words write this message in big letters so that even someone running by could read the message clearly. If God were speaking to Habakkuk today he might have directed him to put the message on a billboard. God is so certain that what he says will come true that he's willing to put his predictions in writing. You can take it to the bank. I, the Lord, keep my promises. Live your life in faith. I will never leave you or forsake you.

Still, what God shared with Habakkuk is something that we have to take on faith isn't it? We don't have any proof that God will return, or that he will punish all evildoers and put to rest all strife. In fact recent world events would seem to indicate what God promised is not true. That's why God told Habakkuk that the righteous will live by faith, not by sight (2:4). As Christians we are to focus on God's promises, not on what we see happening around us. If we focus on what God has told us then we will be able to remain calm though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea (Psalm 46:2).

Habakkuk took God's promise to heart and look at the difference it made in his life. He waited patiently on the Lord, and the Lord kept his promise. Again and again we see that those who wait on the Lord, do see His promises fulfilled. Look at the faith of some of God's people. Noah waited 120 years until it began to rain. Abraham wait 99 years before the promise son

(Isaac) came. Moses waited 40 years in the desert before the promise deliverance of Israel from Egypt took place. Joseph spent several years in prison before he became ruler of Egypt. David waited until the death of Saul before he became king. Even Jesus waited for 30 years before He started His ministry. I like the attitude of Prophet Habakkuk when he said: "Though the fig-tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Saviour. God's delay is not God's denial. While he had started out his book with a sob he ended it with a song – literally. The last chapter of the book of Habakkuk is a Psalm that he wrote in response to God's words of encouragement.

What had moved Habakkuk from confusion to such calm? God's promise of deliverance. Habakkuk realized that even if the crops failed and nothing went well in his life he could still rejoice because God remained in charge and had promised to deliver him. Doesn't Habakkuk's words remind you of Paul's words in Romans 8:31, 32? There he wrote, "What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?"

God has already given to the world an incredible gift, the biggest gift ever given – he sacrificed his own Son, in order to take away our sins. If God gave this huge, generous gift to the world, won't he also, give to us some of the smaller things of life? Of course He will.

Remember, God is for you. Not maybe, not has been, or would be, but God is! He is for you today. At this hour. At this minute. No need to wait in line or come back tomorrow. He is with you. He could not be closer to you than he is at this second. Had he a calendar, your birthday would be circled. If he drove a car, your name would be on his bumper. If there a tree in heaven, he's carved your name in the bark. We know he has a tattoo, and we know what it says. "I have written your name on my hand", he declares in Isaiah 49. God is with you. Knowing that, who is against you? Can death harm you now? Can disease rob your life? Can your purpose be taken or your value diminished? No. Though hell itself may set itself against you, no one can defeat you. You are protected. God is with you. He will take care of your needs.

So have we answered the question why God doesn't destroy evil? Well for one, he is a patient God. He wants all to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. There are still people in our world, who need to know Jesus. In the meanwhile he reassures us that he remains in control and that in the end he will punish all those who have rebelled against him and refused to believe in his Son. Therefore when you become disturbed at what's going on around you, turn to God's promises. Replace turmoil with trust; frustration with faith. For through the Word the Lord will lead us from confusion to calm and turn our sobs into songs. Live your life by faith, Christian. It's the best way to live. Amen.