



THE *Jesus*  
CODE



52 Scripture  
Questions Every Believer  
Should Answer

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## 26 O LORD, HOW LONG SHALL I CRY, and YOU WILL NOT HEAR?

—HABAKKUK 1:2



**T**his question, asked by Habakkuk, was born out of a “burden” that consumed him. He faced a moral dilemma: how could a holy God—who had called Israel the “apple of His eye” (Deuteronomy 32:10)—now allow the pagan Babylonians to besiege and ultimately destroy the city of Jerusalem and take away the Jews into captivity? If we are honest, most of us have felt like Habakkuk. We too have been burdened by the seeming inactivity of our God. We too have bombarded the throne of grace with our own prayers for deliverance . . . only to feel as though they bounced back at us off the ceiling. Thus we too are prone to ask, “O Lord, how long shall I cry, and You will not hear?”

If there really is a God who is all good and all powerful, why doesn't He always answer our prayers for good and right things? Why does He allow evil and suffering? Here is the age-old skeptic's argument: *Either God is all powerful but not all good (therefore He does not stop evil), or He is all good but not all powerful (thus He cannot stop the evil around us).* That statement sounds so logical. If He is really all powerful, then He could eliminate all evil, pain, and suffering.



In fact, He could absolutely eradicate all evil in an instant. But suppose He were to decree that, at the midnight hour tonight, He would radically stamp out all evil. On the surface that appears a wonderful idea, but is it? If He did, do you realize that not one of us would be here at 12:01? How thankful we can be that “He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities” (Psalm 103:10).

But God has done something about the problem of evil. He has done the most dramatic, costly, and loving thing possible: He surrendered His only Son to die in the place of sinful, evil human beings.

The book of Habakkuk contains only three brief chapters, but in them the prophet showed us that the real issue at hand is not one of evil, but one of focus. Habakkuk outlined the route from focusing *on* our circumstances . . . to focusing *through* them . . . and finally, to reaching the place where we focus *beyond* them.

## SOME FOCUS ON THEIR PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES

This is Habakkuk’s consuming focus in chapter one of his book. Listen to him: “O LORD, how long shall I cry, and You will not hear? . . . And You will not save. . . . The law is powerless, and justice never goes forth. . . . The wicked surround the righteous” (Habakkuk 1:2, 4). His cry may have been yours at times: “Where are You, God? Why don’t You do something?” He was asking what so many are asking today. He was asking what we have already heard Gideon ask in this volume: “If



the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us?” (Judges 6:13).

When unfair circumstances begin to swirl around us, our tendency is to put our entire focus on our problem. It begins to consume our thoughts. But just because you are in a storm does not mean you are not in the middle of God’s will. There are storms of *correction*. Ask Jonah. A storm was God’s way of correcting his path. There are storms of *perfection*. Ask the disciples about a late night on the rough seas of Galilee. A storm was God’s way of refining the disciples’ faith.

When difficulties come and, like Habakkuk, we focus our attention upon them, it simply leads us to ask a multitude of questions that have no satisfying answers.

## SOME FOCUS *THROUGH* THEIR PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES

As Habakkuk moved into the second chapter, we see his focus changing. He started to look *through* his problem and no longer just *at* it.

The first step in directing our focus through our problems is *perspective*. When Habakkuk said, “I will stand my watch and set myself on the rampart [watchtower]” (2:1), he began to look at his circumstances from an elevated perspective, from God’s viewpoint and no longer only his own. Joseph offered a good illustration of this. Nothing that happened to him was—from the human perspective—good. But down in Egypt, when he revealed himself to his brothers, who had betrayed him, he said, “God sent me before you to preserve



life” (Genesis 45:5) and “You meant evil against me; but God meant it for good” (50:20). Perspective is the first step in looking through the storms of life.

Next is *patience*. Habakkuk continued: “The vision is yet for an appointed time. . . . Though it tarries, wait for it” (2:3). The true test of our Christian character may well be how we respond when we lose our blessings or, in this case, when we don’t see an immediate and—in our eyes—acceptable answer to our prayers.

Patience is followed by the *promise*: “It will surely come!” (v. 3). In the kingdom of God, we live by promises, not by explanations.

Next comes the element of *participation*: “The just shall live by his faith” (v. 4)—yet this is one of the most misquoted verses in Scripture. It does not say “the just shall live by faith,” but “the just shall live by *his* faith.” The Lord is with us. We don’t have the love, but He does. We don’t have the faith, but He does. And He invites us to let Him share in His very being with us.

Finally, in focusing through the circumstances of life, there is the element of *perception*. Habakkuk saw that “the LORD is in His holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before Him” (v. 20). God is still in charge. He has not abdicated His throne.

## SOME FOCUS *BEYOND* THEIR PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES

Listen now to how this man concluded his book:



Though the fig tree may not blossom,  
Nor fruit be on the vines;  
Though the labor of the olive may fail,  
And the fields yield no food;  
Though the flock be cut off from the fold,  
And there be no herd in the stalls—  
Yet I will rejoice in the LORD,  
I will joy in the God of my salvation.

—HABAKKUK 3:17–18

This is the same man who, three chapters earlier, was shaking his fist in the face of God and blaming Him for his difficulties. Now Habakkuk's focus was beyond the present circumstances, and he came to realize why that recurring phrase "And it came to pass!" is on practically every page of the Bible: this too will pass.

On a given evening some time ago, I woke up in the night very nauseated. I went into the bathroom, grabbed a bottle of that famous pink medicine, and, just before taking a dose, noticed the red letters on the side of the bottle: SHAKE WELL BEFORE USING. From time to time the priorities of life find their way to the bottom of our own bottle, and our loving God comes along. Why? To shake us well . . . before using us!





**Q & A:** “O Lord, how long shall I cry, and You will not hear?” It may be that God has already heard our prayers, and we are unaware. Sometimes His answer is *direct*: we pray and immediately see the answer. Sometimes God’s response is *delayed*. There are other times it is *different*: He answers in a way that is not what we expected, so we don’t recognize it. Finally, there are those times when our request is *denied*. But the good news is—God always answers!

