



Big Picture, Small Picture, and a Conversation with Habakkuk and God

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Write down the revelation
And make it plain on tablets
So that whoever reads it may run with it.
(Habakkuk 2:2, NIV)

Habakkuk, I am so thankful that you wrote down this conversation with God. You wrote it on a tablet of some sort, but today I have your words on paper in a book. Others might be reading it on an electronic tablet! Over the years, I've returned to this conversation many times, and it speaks to me again and again. You begin with a lament and you end with a song. You and God had discussions about the big picture of the nations, but you also offer me some clues on how to live in my limited time and place when I feel overwhelmed with all the injustice and brokenness I see around me.

How many times have I wept with you over injustice? For the women who suffer at childbirth for want of a skilled birth attendant, for lack of companions, for lack of transport, for lack of knowledge. For the girls who are not valued as a gift from God but are, instead, considered a burden, a continuing debt. For young men who get electrocuted or lose a limb in workplace accidents all because their employer does not care about safety, only profit. I, too, have asked God, "How long are you going to put up with this?" I want to see things improve in my own health-related work, but I feel powerless to bring about change, real change.

Then along come new programs, new systems, and new governance. These are intended to improve the situation, to care for the people. Sometimes they help; sometimes they seem to make things worse than the original situation; sometimes the amount of work to implement the

changes does not seem commensurate with the improvement in outcomes. Then, at other times, what I thought was a profitable project has its funding withdrawn, and I cry out, "God, what are you doing?" Then, Habakkuk, I remember your cry, "What? You are going to send the Babylonians?" So, I wonder, "God, if you can use the Babylonians to bring about your purposes, maybe you can use these changing circumstances and limited programs well? The powerful people instituting these programs don't seem to know you, sometimes they even don't seem to like your people, but perhaps you can use them too in the big picture of your purposes." I will join you, Habakkuk, as you sit on the city wall and watch to understand the big picture of how God is at work.

Woe to you him who piles up stolen goods and makes himself wealthy by extortion! (2:6)

Woe to him who builds his house by unjust gain, setting his nest on high to escape the clutches of ruin! (2:9)

Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed and establishes a town by injustice! (2:12)

Woe to him who gives drink to his neighbours, pouring it from the wineskin till they are drunk, so that he can gaze on their naked bodies! (2:15)

Habakkuk, thank you so much for writing God's message down. You give me the reminder of the big picture – God will always deal with injustice. I don't know if you ever got to see it; I know I may not in my lifetime. The message God gave you seems to emphasize the punishment of the ruthless Babylonians, but it also speaks of your



grace toward your people. Let me return to this part of God's message a little later.

After hearing God's message, you pray a big prayer:

Lord, I have heard of your fame;
I stand in awe of your deeds, Lord.
Repeat them in our day,
in our time make them known;
in wrath remember mercy. (3:2)

God, I too, have heard of your fame and stand in awe of your deeds. Your work in creation, your work in history, amaze me, but I must admit I am reluctant to pray with Habakkuk: "Repeat them in our day, in our time make them known." As I read on about God's actions, they can be rather disturbing and even frightening in their nature; your power is beyond my imagination, and your holiness leaves me standing trembling in awe. All the earth needs to be silent before you, listening, as you speak from your holy temple. (2:20)

Habakkuk, I understand exactly why you wrote, "in wrath, remember mercy." (3:2) Without mercy, we would have no hope. Despite my apprehension, I know the only way that justice and healing and *shalom* will come on the earth is when the earth is filled with the knowledge of God (2:14), and so I make this my big prayer, "God, make your glory known in all the earth. May people know your power and holiness, may people also know your mercy and a sense of hope. May your Kingdom come on earth as it is in Heaven."

Habakkuk, thanks for your faithfulness. Amid great injustice, you remained faithful to the task of being God's messenger. You exemplify the message of encouragement that God gave you "but the righteous person will live by his faithfulness" (2:4b). Your message was not an easy one. Understanding injustice in God's world is always difficult. I still struggle with it today, but I am greatly obliged to you for reminding me of my task—as a health care professional and a messenger sent by God—my duty is faithfulness.

Faithfulness and patience are required to continue to serve and trust, even when there is no visible fruit, no signs of blessing. (3:17–18) How much we like to see the fruit of our work! A worker deserves to see good outcomes as a result of his or her labour. However, one of the tasks given to me is to be joyful in God my Saviour even in drought and seemingly unfruitful situations. God, give me strength to be joyful as I await the big picture of your purposes being worked out. God, you **are** my strength; you were Habakkuk's strength, too. With you as my strength, I might be surprised—you may enable me to go to places I never expected to go, to see the big picture, and to do things I never expected to do!

The Sovereign Lord is my strength;
he makes my feet like the feet of deer,
he enables me to tread on the heights.
(3:19)

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