

Title: When God Says, “No,” to Your Plan A**Text:** Selected Scriptures from Habakkuk**Main Idea:** Even when we don't understand the what, the when, or the why of what God is doing, He is still holy, He is still just, He still deals righteously with all people, and is still actively present in the flow of earth's history. Because of this, you can still worship.**Date & Location:** August 1st & 2nd, 2020 | Edgewood Baptist Church | Rock Island, IL**Introduction**

“God, where are you at?” “What are you doing in this moment?” “Help me to see.” Have you ever been there? Have you ever asked those questions? Let me tell you about two people who have asked those questions. The first person is D.L. Moody.

Most of us are familiar with D.L. Moody for the school that he founded, Moody Bible Institute, and for his work as an evangelist. But did you know, prior to a full-time commitment to ministry, he was a successful businessman? Moody grew up in a poor family in Northfield, Massachusetts. Tired of life in a small city, he packed up after his 17th birthday, took his belongings and maybe, maybe, 4-years-worth of formal education, and moved to Boston.

In Boston, Moody discovered two things: 1) Faith in Christ. 2) He was really good at business. After 2-short-years in Boston, on a whim, this impulsive teenager moved to Chicago. His ambition was money and in 1856, at 19 years old, in a time when workers seldom earned \$1-per-day, Moody made it his goal to have assets of \$100,000.

Fast forward 4-years to 1860. Moody, now 23, was making \$5,000 annually and had \$7,000 in savings. In today's dollars, this uneducated man was making over \$155-thousand-dollars a year with a little over \$217-thousand-dollars in the bank...as a 23-year-old.

You say, “Jason, with all of that money, what was Moody's struggle with God?” Well, let me tell you. About a year after Moody arrived, revival broke out in Chicago. Some of the fruit of this revival was the creation of mission schools, schools for children, that met on Sundays—the first Sunday Schools—with the goal of seeing children come to faith in Jesus Christ. Moody

noticed these schools were taking place in areas of Chicago where children were already educated so he decided to start one where no one ministered to children...the Sands. The children in Little Hell, as it was also called, were usually illiterate, often beaten, sexually abused, malnourished, lived in wooden shanties with 1-parent, and that parent was typically an alcoholic or addicted to drugs.

As a 21-year-old in 1858, Moody opened his mission school in a vacant saloon and used candy, pennies, and clothes to entice children to sit still and listen. For 2-hours, the kids would listen to 5-minute talks followed by a minute of free time and then songs. Moody did Ted Talks before Ted Talks were even a thing. His approach proved popular with the kids and in autumn of 1859, drawing 300-children on a weekly basis, Moody moved his school to a bigger hall. A little over a year later, near the end of 1860, Moody was reaching around 1,500 children weekly.

Here's his struggle: Moody had a thriving, financially-prosperous, career as well as a thriving, spiritually-prosperous ministry. In 1860, Moody said God was calling him to give up business and go into ministry full time. If Moody was to follow this calling, it would mean giving up a very lucrative career and returning to poverty, the very thing he fled when he left home, the very thing he wanted nothing to do with. Returning to poverty was not Moody's plan "A". He didn't know it, but over the course of several years, despite all of his success, God had been winding down Moody's Plan "A" and in 1860, it was time to close it out for good.

That's what I want to talk to you about this morning, *When God says, "No," to Your Plan "A."* I invite you to open your Bible to the book of Habakkuk and here's what we'll see, "Even when we don't understand the what, the when, or the why of what God is doing, He is still holy, He is still just, He still deals righteously with all people, and is still actively present in the flow of earth's history. Because of this, you can still worship." Let's pray and we'll dive into our text.

I. Habakkuk's Lament (1:2-4)

Just like Moody had a Plan "A," so too did Habakkuk but Habakkuk's Plan "A" looked very different from Moody's. Moody put together a plan and chased it. Habakkuk put together a plan and brought it to God, and said, "Why don't You do it this way?" Have you ever been there? Have you ever prayed a prayer full of suggestions for how God can solve a problem? Of course you have. We all have. Take a look at verse 2, "O LORD, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not hear? Or cry to you 'Violence!' and you will not save?"

How do you respond when you see injustice, and it is clear as day that it's injustice? In the text we just read, Habakkuk sees injustice. You have a people who God has set apart, called to holiness, and most of them want nothing to do with holiness. They want sin. What he's really upset about is: God's letting them have it. He's letting them have their sin AND He's not punishing them for their sin. That is what has Habakkuk upset. God's people are sinning and God appears to be idle, He appears to be doing absolutely nothing about it. Have you ever felt that way? Have you ever looked at a situation and said, "God why don't you intervene? Why aren't you doing something here?" That's Habakkuk's question and there are two things that I want you to know right off the bat: The first thing is that you can take your big questions to God. I don't know what's weighing you down. I don't know what anxieties you are faced with today but here's what I do know, God can handle your big questions. He invites you to bring them to Him. Here's what we tend to do: We tend to take our big questions and bypass God and go right to people. There's nothing wrong with trying to find wise counsel among mankind but let me encourage you to also bring your big questions to the Creator of mankind. He can handle them. Don't hesitate bringing your big questions to God.

Here's the second thing: just because we can't see it doesn't mean that God's not at work.

Now, if you can, here's what I want you to do. Right now, take 5-seconds and sit perfectly still. Ready, here we go. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. Did you see it? Did you see it? We sat there for 5-seconds, maybe you didn't see it, maybe you felt it. Did you feel it? No. You didn't see it or feel it. Do you know what it was? It was the earth rotating. The entire time you sat still, the earth was moving and you neither saw it nor felt it. Do you know why? Because you can't see it from your vantage point. In order for you to see your community rotate away from the sun and in order to see the Earth rotate around the sun, you need a different vantage point. You have to see the bigger picture. You may not see Him at work but God is always at work. God is at work even when it appears from your vantage point that He is idle.

II. God's Answer (1:5-6)

Now, as it relates to Habakkuk, God does tell him about the work He's about to do so let's jump to Habakkuk 1:5-6. "Look among the nations, and see; wonder and be astounded. For I am doing a work in your days that you would not believe if told. ⁶For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, who march through the breadth of the earth, to seize dwellings not their own."

God has a plan. He has heard Habakkuk's complaint and, while Habakkuk's complaint is not the reason for the plan, God has decided to show Habakkuk what the plan is. God is going to bring judgement on Judah by raising up a wicked nation, the Chaldeans, who are going to come and conquer Judah because of their sin.

III. Habakkuk's Response (1:12-13)

Habakkuk doesn't like this plan and you're going to see why after we read this next section of verses, so now, let's look at 1:12-13. "Are you not from everlasting, O LORD my God, my Holy One? We shall not die. O LORD, you have ordained them as a judgment, and you, O

Rock, have established them for reproof. ¹³ You who are of purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong, why do you idly look at traitors and remain silent when the wicked swallows up the man more righteous than he?”

We like to play games in my family and one of our favorites is Uno. Now when we play the game, my kids use card holders that are made out of wooden blocks. Before the card holders came along, they would lay their cards on the table and try and hide them with books and other items but it rarely worked and you could usually see their hand. Well here, Habakkuk has just shown his hand. He is irritated that God is going to use a nation, the Chaldeans—a nation much more wicked than Judah, to bring judgement on Judah. Habakkuk thinks it should be the other way around. “Why God? Why would you use a wicked nation like Babylon to bring judgement on your people? Why wouldn’t you use your people to bring judgment on Babylon?”

In your mind answer this question, “Who do you think is an enemy of the United States? Who is a nation that commits more sin than the US?” Now that you have them in mind, if God were talking to you about a coming judgement on the US and said, “That nation, that nation you just thought of is the nation who is going to bring judgement on the US.” You would probably respond the way Habakkuk did. He wants to know why God would use a nation to judge Judah that is clearly more wicked than Judah. If 15% of Judah’s population was righteous and 0% of the Chaldeans were righteous, why would God use the Chaldeans who aren’t even remotely righteous to bring judgement on a group of people who at least have some righteous people living among them? That’s Habakkuk’s second question.

Habakkuk does throw one more question God’s way and it’s this, “How long will this judgement last?” Look at verse 17, “Is he then to keep on emptying his net and mercilessly killing nations forever?” Here’s the problem that Habakkuk is up against with his questions: his

perspective was too limited.

You see, Habakkuk wanted the punishment of the wicked so his own people could prosper. Do we not do that with our own plans? Do we not come to God with a solution that, primarily, has ourselves at the center of it? That's a perspective problem. I see this frequently with my children. We have 3-kids. Our oldest is 7, and they get younger from there. If the kids had their way, and could plan out all of their meals, do you know what they would pick? Marshmallows, M&M's, and ice cream. How do I know? Because those are the things they ask for. Why do they ask for those things? Because they don't have the big picture. They only live on a moment by moment basis and those foods are sweet and delightful but they don't produce a whole lot of growth. Suzy and I, as their parents, have a different picture for the menu and for our kids. It's a bigger picture and it includes some foods they may not like and their refusal to eat might make the meal longer, which in turn pushes back the start of the growth, but we will help them get through it and we're still gonna eat the meal because it's part of the bigger picture.

Is it safe to say that our perspective, like Habakkuk's, is limited? Habakkuk didn't have God's perspective. God knows the end from the beginning and He had a very specific goal in mind for the punishment of Habakkuk's people. The goal behind the punishment was for Habakkuk's people, the nation of Judah, to be restored to fellowship with God.

As I have reflected on that statement and this book, I can't help but think about America. God still judges nations for their wickedness. There is nothing in Scripture that says following the death and resurrection of Jesus, God has now changed the way He judges the nations. In Scripture, His judgement could be compared to scales and when the wickedness of a nation tips those scales too heavily to one side, judgement comes upon that nation. I wonder if our sin has tipped the scales too heavily to one side and brought God's judgement on America. 2020 ushered

in a pandemic, societal unrest, questions about justice, we were already confused over what is and is not true but this year we've added to it confusion over what is and is not true about the pandemic and confusion over what is and is not true regarding justice in our society. In addition to all of that, as a culture we continue to denounce good as evil while celebrating evil as good.

I can't prove any of that is God's judgement any more than you can disprove it's not. But let's focus in on one of those areas. I wonder, if the goal behind God's judgement is restoration, and the pandemic disappeared tomorrow, based on what you're doing today in your walk with Christ, would your relationship with Christ be restored? Would it be in a better place because of what you're doing today as opposed to where it was when the pandemic started? Listen to me very clearly. I am not interested in minimizing the pandemic or any of the issues we're facing right now as a nation. These are important issues. But all I'm asking is what if in this season, the bigger picture is for you to take a moment and shift your focus from the external to the internal and ask Him, "God, how are we doing?" Pray as the Psalmist did at the end of Psalm 139, "Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! ²⁴ And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!" That's a prayer of restoration. That's a prayer of, "God, how are we doing?" Shine the sanctification spotlight on my life and show me what you want to work on.

Listen, that prayer doesn't make the coronavirus go away. That prayer doesn't bring peace to a chaotic, confused, and angry society. But it will have a massive impact on your life. How different would your response to the pandemic be, how different would your conversations about justice and race and culture and politics be if your responses and conversations came from the overflow of a restored relationship with Christ?

Let me speak to those of you who are already doing this. I commend you. If, during the

pandemic and all throughout 2020, your relationship with Christ has been full of growth, I am so proud of you. Keep at it. Please don't stop. Continue to grow and be an encouragement to the rest of us. The body of Christ needs you to grow because by your growth, the rest of us are encouraged to keep growing. You keep growing. You keep pointing us to Christ. God is using you to be an encouragement us. Don't stop growing.

Let me ask on more question of us as it relates to judgement. Do you remember what God's goal was with the judgement of Judah? The goal behind the punishment was for the nation of Judah to be restored to fellowship with God. What about your own idea of punishment? Let's answer this question and move from big picture to close-up. As you look at injustice in our society, does your idea of punishment have restoration in mind? Let's zoom the lens in a little closer. What about those under your authority in your work place? When you punish or correct behavior, do you have restoration in mind? Let's zoom the lens in some more. What about those under your authority in the community? Maybe a team you coach or an organization you lead. When you correct inappropriate behavior, do you have restoration in mind? In any area under your authority or in any space that can be swayed by your opinion, does your idea of punishment have restoration in mind or just payment for the offense committed? If your goal is to become more like Christ, your view of judgement needs to match His and that means restoration has to be part of your goal when it comes to discipline, correction, and punishment.

Well, Habakkuk's perspective was limited and that becomes clear based on the questions he's asking. Now, here's the deal. God never tells him why He is using the Chaldeans to bring judgement on Judah. But He does answer the question and not only does He answer the question, He tells Habakkuk to write it down.

IV. God Answers Again (2:3-4)

God says in Habakkuk 2:3-4, “For still the vision awaits its appointed time; it hastens to the end—it will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come; it will not delay.”

Impatience is part of the human condition. I am convinced that to be human is to be impatient. The Internet, perhaps, illustrates this best. Did you know the average amount of time it takes for a web page to fully load on your phone is 22-seconds? Did you also know that if a website takes longer than 3-seconds to load, 53% of visits are abandoned? In other words, if your business website isn’t mobile-friendly and doesn’t load fast, you’re losing money because less than half of your customers are going to stay longer than 3-seconds to wait for your page to load.

We are not patient people and, yet, how often is God’s answer to us, “Wait”? “Habakkuk, wait.” “Friend, wait.” God has a solution and will reveal it according to His timeline, but God is not indebted to any human to reveal the answer prior to the time of His choosing. “God, what do I do if it seems slow?” “Wait. It will surely come.”

So, what do we do until then? Habakkuk 2:4 tells us. “Behold his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him, but the righteous shall live by his faith.” This is an incredible promise from God to Habakkuk. What you place your confidence in is very important.

I don’t play the lottery but I do have days where I drive down John Deere Road and see the sign with the Powerball jackpot and think, “Here’s how I would spend that jackpot...” We think money will bring happiness but Jane Park would tell us otherwise. She is the youngest EuroMillions winner ever when she won 1-million pounds in 2013 at the age of 17. Just 4-short-years later, Park said the win has left her incredibly stressed. In a 2017 article she said that she thought the win would make her life, “...ten times better but it’s made it ten times worse. I wish I had no money most days. I say to myself, ‘My life would be so much easier if I hadn’t won.’”¹

¹ <https://www.thehits.co.nz/the-latest/youngest-lottery-winner-wishes-she-never-won/>

What is your confidence in? If you are relying on something found here—something like your education, your money, our country’s military might, your physical appearance, getting enough compliments, where you were born, status in the community, or the ability to solve problems—if your confidence is placed in human ability and not in God, you will not find true satisfaction. True life cannot be had in those things.

God says to Habakkuk, “The righteous shall live by his faith.” Who are the righteous? They are those courageous enough to accept God’s word of promise in a world dominated by the horrors of a powerful nation like Babylon. To be righteous means to meet the demands of a relationship. Righteousness toward God is to meet the demands of God toward him and toward others.

Okay, what does this righteous person do? They live by faithfulness. “Faithfulness” is a way of acting that flows from inner stability. It’s a type of behavior characterized by genuineness, reliability, and conscientiousness. Habakkuk was not to wait with folded hands and bated breath for all this to happen. He was to live a life of faithfulness.

In the verses that follow, God explains to Habakkuk that the Chaldeans too will be judged. They will be judged for the sins that they commit and those sins will lead to their eventual downfall. Briefly, those things are extortion, unjust gain that advances the nation and the nation’s royal dynasties, bloodshed, drunkenness and orgies, and idolatry.

V. Habakkuk Remembers (3:3-15)

But it’s important that we get to chapter 3. Let’s note what’s happening in verses 3-15. It’s here that Habakkuk is remembering God’s work and praising Him for it.

As you look back on your life, I would guess that there are clear instances that you can look at with incredible clarity and have no explanation, except to say, “But God.”

“There’s no way the medical diagnosis should have been this favorable, but it was so all I can say is, ‘But God.’”

“My marriage should be a complete train wreck but by God’s grace we’ve been able to reconcile and all I can say is, ‘But God.’”

“The bill was astronomical, it was too great for us to pay, and somehow the bill was paid and I have no idea how. All I can say is, ‘But God.’”

We all have these clear instances that we can see with incredible clarity and only conclude, “But God.” Reflecting on those instances should cause us to praise. That’s what Habakkuk is doing here in verses 3-15. He is reflecting on instances in Israel’s history and saying, “But God.” As he remembers God’s work, he praises God for what He has done.

But not only is He reminded of the faithfulness of God, He is reminded of the greatness of God. I want us to hone in on verse 5 when he says, “Before him went pestilence and plague followed at his heels.” It was not uncommon for important people living at the time of Habakkuk to be accompanied by attendants. Here, the Lord has two attendants subject to his control: pestilences and plague. While it’s true that those two terms should cause us to recall the events surrounding the exodus, there’s an important point being made here. Pestilence and Plague are important to us because of their use prior to the exodus and Habakkuk would surely remember that too. But both are also Canaanite deities, and it’s here Habakkuk sees that pestilence and plague are not, in fact, deities but are rather subjects to the One True and Living God.² Think about the immediate implications of that today. In Habakkuk’s day, some people worshipped the gods of plague and pestilence, what do people worship today? Those things too are subjects to God. They do His work and fulfill His purposes. We would be wise to not fall into the trap of

² David W. Baker, *Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 27, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 70.

worshipping those things that were never meant to be worshipped, but rather to worship the One who created those things.

VI. Habakkuk Worships (3:17-19)

Remember, earlier I mentioned, faith provides the key to understanding the Lord's sovereign purpose, and it leads us to worship. Well, here in chapter 3, we'll see Habakkuk worship. Let's look at Habakkuk 3:17-19, "Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, ¹⁸ yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will take joy in the God of my salvation. ¹⁹ GOD, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the deer's; he makes me tread on my high places."

If we summarized Habakkuk's words in verses 17-19 we might say, "God, I don't care if all of nature goes crazy. I don't care if nothing's right in the whole world, I'm going to love You and rejoice in You. I've learned to stand back from my circumstances and just get blessed by worshipping the God that I know." Listen, Plan A doesn't get Habakkuk to this place of worship. God has to shut down Plan A first and then Habakkuk ends up at a place of worship.

Conclusion

"God, where are you at?" "What are you doing in this moment?" "Help me to see." What's your Plan A? Ending plan A for Moody took 3-agonizing-months before he decided to enter full time ministry. Praise God that he did. Moody started the Chicago Evangelization Society, later renamed Moody Bible Institute in 1886. Since then, the school has trained up numerous men and women who have entered full time ministry. Moody also has publishing and radio ministries. Since its inception in 1894, Moody Publishing has distributed over 300-million books. Moody Radio began in 1926 in Chicago and has since spread to 36 owned and operated

stations and thanks to digital initiatives is now around the world. We minister to over 1-million people on a weekly basis. Moody's plan A doesn't result in any of this. It gets him a lot of money and still provides him some different ministry opportunities but in order for Moody Bible Institute to be what it is today, God had to say, "no" to Moody's Plan A.

Friend, if you're asking, "God where are you at?" "God, what are you doing in this moment?", let Habakkuk's story be a reminder to you that God is still holy, God is still just, God still deals righteously with all people, and God is still actively present in the flow of earth's history. Because of this, you can still worship. Let's pray.