

## Lessons from the Prophet Habakkuk

Russell Kemp—September 2, 2023

This is a short book, Habakkuk lived in a period of time very similar to ours today.

- Have you ever been discouraged when you turn on the news and you hear of the violence, the injustice, and a total disregard for God's way of life?
- Do you ever wonder why God isn't doing something about it?

This is what Habakkuk was facing in the nation of Judah. We'll probably spend most of our time in the book of Habakkuk.

The prophet probably lived in Judah—just a little background knowledge there—during the reign of the Godly King Josiah. But he wrote his prophecy during King Josiah's successor Jehoiakim.

Now this fits the description of the life of the collapse <sup>[inaudible]</sup> and the anarchy during the reign of Jehoiakim. The time would be somewhere between the time when Babylon actually conquered Nineveh, the Assyrian Empire, in 612<sub>B.C.</sub> and the time when Babylon conquered Jerusalem in 587<sub>B.C.</sub>

What we read about is the moral decline of the nation from the transition from Josiah to Jehoiakim (2-Kings 23). Let me just briefly read the difference between these two kings:

2-Kings 23:24: "And also Josiah put away *those who work with familiar spirits.*" *Get rid of the:*

- witchcraft
- wizards
- family gods
- idols
- all the abominations

*which were seen in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem so that he might perform the words of the Law!*

Quite a transition! Here's the interesting part. We read what his son, whose name was changed to Jehoiakim, was like, to show you the contrast, the difference:

Verse 37: "And he did *that which* was evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his fathers had done."

Quite a contrast from one generation to the next. But it is important to note that Habakkuk was witnessing during his prophecy.

Hab. 1—where the prophet questions God. Do we ever do that? Notice that he's not the only person to question God, by the way. We can look

back at some of the other examples: We look at Job, and much to his chagrin, he questioned God. Jonah decided not to follow and question God's judgment, as well; and there are others.

However, Habakkuk just wanted to know why God was letting these things happen. Why was He letting them happen?

Habakkuk 1:2: "O LORD, how long shall I cry and You will not hear? I cry out to You *of* violence, and You do not save! Why do You show me wickedness, and trouble? For destruction and violence *are* before me; and there is strife, and contention rises up. Therefore, the Law has become ineffective, and judgment does not always go forth, for the wicked entraps the righteous; therefore, judgment goes forth perverted" (vs 2-4).

All of this sounds like our complaints about the society we live in today! There was sin. Do we witness sin in our nation today? There was wickedness. We see our share of that, obviously, today. There was destruction and violence, just turn on your TV. We experienced violent mobs, if you'll remember, there was the destruction of property. Frequently we see this. There's no justice in the courts. We surely see that those in positions of wealth and power commit crimes that are often ignored.

The wicked outnumber those who follow God. We certainly seem to be heading in that direction today. He asked some very good questions, however.

- Why are the wicked not punished? *And they prosper! They actually prosper!*
- Why doesn't God do something about this?

Habakkuk may have prayed for a little period of time. Notice he asked God: 'How long will I call and not get an answer?'

In vs 5-11 we get God's response to his prayers. He finds out that God is indeed going to do something, and he's going to use Babylon to destroy Judah. God tells Habakkuk:

Verse 5: "...and behold and be amazed and stunned..."

Then in v 6: "For lo, I raise up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, which shall march through the breadth of the land to possess dwelling places that are not their own. They *are* terrible and fearful; their law and their majesty proceed from themselves" (vs 6-7).

Then God goes on to describe just how terrible and destructive they are. God shocks the prophet that He's going to use a people that are much more sinful and destructive than the Jews themselves, that they cannot be stopped and they will certainly destroy Judah.

Now I would imagine that most of us have been praying to God to do something about the conditions in our nation. We need God to correct our country. But what if His decision, let's say for example, to have China sweep through the United States and destroy our wickedness.

- Would you not be a little shocked that they're even worse than we are? *They're full of sins and violence as well!*
- Do we question God's judgment and decision?

or

- Would you say He answered our prayers?
- Is this what we really expected?

I think Habakkuk was a little shocked that God would use these people to destroy Judah. Notice Habakkuk's response

Verse 12: "Are You not from everlasting, O LORD my God, my Holy One? **We shall not die.** O LORD, You have ordained them for judgment; and, my Rock, You have established them for correction."

Now here it certainly appears that he accepts God's judgment and recognized that God has. He recognized the fact that God has made a covenant with Israel that he would never break.

Notice how he says, "...**We shall not die....**" So, he accepts God's answer. It doesn't like much about it, I can tell you that.

Verse 13: "*You are* of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look upon iniquity. Why do You look upon those who deal treacherously? Will You be silent when the wicked swallows the man that is more righteous than he?"

He then goes on and describes that the Babylonians will scoop up Judah as a fisherman with his net. In other words, speaking, obviously, of the army. But again, notice his question is:

Verse 17: "Shall he, therefore, empty his net, and shall he slay nations without pity?"

I think it's okay sometimes to let God know that we recognize His authority. Boy, sometimes His decisions could be painful. In Habakkuk, we see God's answer and he makes it pretty clear that Habakkuk didn't need to worry about the Babylonians. That then he would receive their just punishment soon as well.

Even more interesting here, he tells Habakkuk to write it down because it will happen.

Habakkuk 2:2: "And the LORD answered me and said, 'Write the vision, and make *it* plain on the tablets, so that a man may read it swiftly.'"

God wants to make sure that they know that in time this will happen. It is going to happen! He wanted it written down for that purpose. He continues in:

Verse 3: "For the vision *is* still for an appointed time... [something in the future] ...but it shall speak at the end, and it does not lie. Though it lingers, wait for it..." *It isn't going to happen right away!*

Not right away, God tells him to wait for it. Sometimes we need to be patient with God, because it will surely come. He continues on:

"...because it will surely come. It will not delay" (v 3).

Now even though this applies to ancient Babylon, the statement that "...but it shall speak at the end..." could also apply to Babylon of Rev. 17 & 18. Think about that!

Now this is the reference to *the wine* and to *all the people*. It could be very easily be speaking about the end time Babylon.

Verse 5: "Yea also, because he transgresses by wine, he is a proud man and *he is* not content. He widens his desire like the grave, and he *is* like death and cannot be satisfied, **but gathers all nations to himself, and heaps to himself all the people.**"

Now, Judah is not specifically mentioned here, so this could refer to all of Israel in the latter days.

Babylon was actually noted for their drinking, their partying, and it was actually during one of those drinking parties that Cyrus and the Persians were able to sneak into the city and defeat the Babylonians.

Speaking of the latter days with the reference to the wine and to all nations and to all people. Is He not referring to Babylon the Great of Rev. 17 & 18, who is drunk with the blood of the saints and their peoples and multitudes and nations and languages? You need to go through and read Rev. 17 again.

In the rest of Hab. 2, Habakkuk gives us a series of woes, describing just how bad the Babylonians were and what are those that practice these things.

I'm not going to give you a brief overview, but in:

- vs 4-5 talks about it is a **woe** to the proud
- vs 6-8 talks about it is a **woe** to the greedy
- vs 9-11 says it's a **woe** to the dishonest.
- vs 13-14 it is a **woe** to the violent

All these things, all these violent, terrible things.

- vs 15-17 is a **woe** to the sensual
- vs 18-20 it is a **woe** to the idolater

If you look at these, they all seem to blend together to create the kind of society that he was facing **and we're facing today!**

Verses 16-17 it gives us a description of Babylon's ultimate end.

Verse 16: "You are filled with shame instead of glory; drink also, and *be* seen as one uncircumcised! The cup of the LORD'S right hand shall turn upon you, and disgrace *shall be* your glory, For the violence of Lebanon shall cover you, and the destruction of beasts shall terrify them because of the blood of man, and for the violence of the land, of the city, and of all those dwelling in it" (vs 16-17).

*Interesting!* So, you see that Babylon—even though they're used as an instrument of God to punish Judah—will not escape the wrath of God. God does not support sin of any nation.

This should be a warning for you and I today. Now just for a second let me revert back to v 14. This is an obvious reference to the latter days.

Verse 14: "**For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.**"

It can only happen, that can only happen with the return of Christ and the establishment of God's Kingdom. In any case, it is clear that God is in charge and he will not allow sinful and destructive behavior to go unpunished. ***He will not allow it!*** God must allow humans have their destructive behavior ***until they come to realize that they will self-destruct without God!***

God will intervene when He knows the timing is right. These are important lessons for us today.

In Hab. 1 we see a very, very depressed Habakkuk calling on God to correct his nation for their destructive behavior. Habakkuk doesn't like the response that he gets to his prayers and he questions God.

In Hab. 2, he sets himself up in a tower to await God's answer to these questions.

Habakkuk 2:1: "I will stand on my watch and set myself on the tower..."—*on my watch*, and

I'm going to sit up there and I will watch to see what God will say to me and what I shall answer when I'm reproved. **God lets him know that iniquity will not go unpunished!**

As we go into chapter three, we now see Habakkuk, praises God and he accepts the outcome, realizing that God will keep his promise. He's going to keep this promise of the covenant that he made with Israel.

Hab. 3:1-2—Habakkuk pleads for mercy as God brings on His judgment to Judah. He pleads, preaches for mercy

Habakkuk 3:2: "O LORD, give new life to Your work in the midst of years; in the midst of the years make it known..." *Notice the request for compassion here!*

"...in wrath remember compassion: (v 2).

Habakkuk recognizes the need for God's judgment, but he also pleads for God to be merciful.

In verses 3-15, he actually praises God's power and His majesty.

- v 6: "...His ways *are* everlasting."
- v 10: "The mountains have seen You and they tremble..."
- v 11 "The sun *and* moon stood still in their lofty dwellings...."
- v 12: "You march through the land in indignation; You thresh nations in anger."

***Habakkuk recognizes and praises God's power!*** In spite of all the fear and what is coming, he promises to wait on the Lord

Verse 16: "I heard and my inward parts trembled; my lips quivered at the sound. Rottenness entered into my bones, and I trembled in myself that I should wait for the day of trouble; when He comes up against the people that He invades."

- What do we learn from this book of Habakkuk?
  - What do we take away from this prophet's encounter with God?
1. Sometimes it appears that God is remote and not paying attention, but He is involved. We noticed in chapter one that God was even in control of the Babylonians, and He would use them to achieve His purpose. *In other words, in the end, God's will and His purpose stands!*
  2. God is Holy and He will not approve of evil. Now, we need to be looking into our own life, our own sins, our own habits, because God will not approve of our sins or our bad behavior.

Without repentance, He will eventually deal with our nation.

3. One thing for sure is that we learned that God does answer prayers, plain and simple. We may not like the answer.
4. The answer we get to our prayers may not be what we expect. Most of the time we pray and we're expecting a certain kind of answer. And I imagine Habakkuk was hoping for some kind of repentance for the people, but God had a different answer in mind.
5. God is just and He's merciful, but He will not tolerate sinful behavior and He will judge the wicked. That He will do it in His time, but He will not. He will judge the wicked, but He will do it in a time, and a schedule that He puts before Himself, but He will always keep the covenant He made with the people.

Finally, we must have faith in God. It all boils down to faith. We may not always agree with God's decisions, but He has a plan and He knows what is best.

Patience is not always easy, but we need to learn to wait on God. One of Habakkuk's final statements in chapter three:

Verse 18: "Yet, I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The LORD God is my strength, and He will make my feet like deer's feet, and He will make me to walk upon my high places" (vs 18-19).

He prayed to God. He got an answer, and the answer wasn't the answer you originally wanted, but he eventually learned to put his trust in God.

Brethren, today we walk in the same shoes as Habakkuk did in the nation of Judah. Take a look around. Look at the news once in a while. See what's taking place. See how 'Godly' our nation is. ***We see that same destruction! We see that same violence!*** The injustice that's taking place is awful and a total disregard for God and His Laws. Total disregard.

Now we don't know when or how God will deal with this nation; ***we don't know!*** But rest assured that He does not approve of the evil. And ***at some point He is going to take action if the people do not repent.***

Brethren, we must be patient and wait on God and remain faithful that He will deliver on the promises that He has made to those who love God and keep His commandments.

There's a lot to learn in these minor prophets, and a lot of them pertain to the events of our time and our day. I wish everybody to have a wonderful and happy Sabbath.

Scriptural References:

- 1) 2 Kings 23:24, 37
- 2) Habakkuk 1:2-7, 12-13, 17
- 3) Habakkuk 2:2-3, 5, 16-17, 14, 1
- 4) Habakkuk 3:1-2, 6, 10-12, 16, 18-19

Scriptures referenced, not quoted: Revelation 17; 18

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