

HABAKKUK ? > !

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When you compare these minor prophets with the books written by Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel, the minor prophets are “minor” only in size. However, there is nothing minor about their messages. The minor prophets shout at us to awaken and invite us to open our eyes and be amazed at what God is doing in this world.

A. THE AUTHOR AND THE THEME

Habakkuk was a contemporary of Nahum, Zephaniah, and Jeremiah, which places him in the reigns of Josiah (640-609 B.C.) and Jehoiakim (609-598 B.C.). We don't know much about the prophet Habakkuk from the Bible. But we can tell that he was a professional prophet unlike Amos who was a fig fruit picker.

His name means “to embrace” or “to wrestle”. In his Book, he does both. He wrestles with God concerning the problem of how God could use a wicked nation like Babylon to chasten the people of Judah. Then by faith, he embraces God and clings to His promises. In other words, the Book starts with a question mark to God and ends with an exclamation mark to His holiness, righteousness and mercy for His people.

In your experience of attending churches, with all due respect, how often did your previous pastors teach the minor prophets' Books to their congregation? Not often. Many people even think less of this Book because it is one of the minor prophet's Books and they can barely spell his name. Due to these kinds of circumstances, they don't realize that Habakkuk summarized the base of the entire NT theology in a mere seven words in chapter 2 verse 4.

Habakkuk 2:4b the just shall live by his faith.

This statement was quoted three times in the NT – Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11, Hebrew 10:38. The emphasis in Romans is on “the just”, in Galatians on how they should “live”, and in Hebrews on “by faith.” It takes three books to explain and apply this one verse.

By the way, this Book was not one of those “Thus says the Lord” proclamations that a prophet declares the prophecies of God to the people in his country. It is a journal of the conversation between God and his prophet Habakkuk.

B. WHY, GOD?

Habakkuk 1:1-4 The burden which the prophet Habakkuk saw. 2 O Lord, how long shall I cry, And You will not hear? Even cry out to You, “Violence!” And You will not save. 3 Why do You show me iniquity, And cause me to see trouble? For plundering and violence are before me; There is strife, and contention arises. 4 Therefore the law is powerless, And justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous; Therefore perverse judgment proceeds.

If you are like me, and just about every single Christian, you've asked the Lord this question, “Why, God?” We have a strong notion that since we are born-again Christians that we should not suffer, nor should we go through any difficulties. We think that the Lord should shower His blessings on us all the way to heaven.

At least that is what the Prosperity Gospel teachers, a.k.a. the Faith Movement Bible teachers teach to their followers. It is nothing more than a shallow positive thinking garbage without any solid sound theology. You never hear them ask what Jesus ask to the Father on the cross,

Matthew 27:46b "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

Habakkuk was not that kind of shallow believer. As he surveyed the land of Judah and watched what was happening around his kingdom, he was facing some serious problems and he took them to the Lord.

Ever since the godly king Josiah died in 609 B.C., his spiritual reformation was also forgotten and his son Jehoiakim was leading the nation closer to disaster much like what is happening in our country. Habakkuk asked the Lord what He was going to do in his prayer.

C. THE LORD'S REPLY

Habakkuk 1:5-6 "Look among the nations and watch-- Be utterly astounded! For I will work a work in your days Which you would not believe, though it were told you. 6 For indeed I am raising up the Chaldeans, A bitter and hasty nation Which marches through the breadth of the earth, To possess dwelling places that are not theirs.

I am sure that you've heard a phrase "too good to be true". But that is not what the Lord was doing here. It was "too bad to be true".

God's plan to chasten the kingdom of Judah was so unbelievable and unheard of that even His prophet was shocked and couldn't believe it. God was planning to punish the idolatrous Jews by using the godless Babylonians. It would be like God is planning to punish the United States by allowing godless and murderous Iran to set off several nuclear bombs in this land.

That wasn't the answer Habakkuk was looking for. He was hoping that God would send a revival to His people and judge the evil leaders and establish a godly and righteous king in the land.

God had warned His people the Jews for generation after generation through His prophets, natural calamities and various military defeats, only to be rejected. They'd rather turn to idols than their true God. It was time for God to say, "ENOUGH!"

I believe that the time is fast approaching to this once great nation, the United States of America. Each and everyday we see and hear the news about somebody rejecting God from their workplaces, homes and schools. Once Christianity was the majority, now it is a minority and everybody's open season to take pot shots.

D. YOU ARE GOING TO DO WHAT?

Habakkuk 1:13-14 You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, And cannot look on wickedness. Why do You look on those who deal treacherously, And hold Your tongue when the wicked devours A person more righteous than he? 14 Why do You make men like fish of the sea, Like creeping things that have no ruler over them?

There is a tremendous difference between doubt and unbelief. Like Habakkuk, the doubter questions God and may even argue with Him. But unbelief is rebellion against God, a refusal to accept what He says and does. Unbelief is an act of defiant will against God, doubt is born out of a troubled mind and a broken heart.

Some people face crisis times like this all the wrong way. They withdraw from the church and from fellowship and they retreat to their little spiritual corner and isolate themselves. Others give up on God altogether.

Here is a right response we should consider and take:

- 1) Stop and think and pray to the Lord to show you the problem from His view point.
- 2) Restate basic principles – Don't begin with the problem, rather start with what caused the problem in the first place.
- 3) Apply God's principles from the Bible to the problems
- 4) Commit the matter to the Lord in faith.

E. WATCHING AND WAITING

Habakkuk 2:1 I will stand my watch And set myself on the rampart, And watch to see what He will say to me, And what I will answer when I am corrected.

Before we listen to God's encouraging reply, we must pause to examine our own hearts. Are we fully yielded to God and willing to obey what He says to us? I really like what Habakkuk was doing here – watching and waiting. Instead of running ahead of the Lord or being dragged by Him, he wisely waited upon the Lord with openness, sincerity and willingness.

Isaiah 40:31 But those who wait on the Lord Shall renew their strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, They shall run and not be weary, They shall walk and not faint.

F. THE JUST SHALL LIVE BY HIS FAITH

Habakkuk 2:2-4 Then the Lord answered me and said: "Write the vision And make it plain on tablets, That he may run who reads it. 3 For the vision is yet for an appointed time; But at the end it will speak, and it will not lie. Though it tarries, wait for it; Because it will surely come, It will not tarry. 4 "Behold the proud, His soul is not upright in him; But the just shall live by his faith.

Before you became a born-again Christian, you might have asked, "How can you believe that Bible? Have you ever seen this God? How could Jesus rise from the dead? How could He forgive me for my sins when I am not a bad person?" You might even challenge Him and His followers with some defiance.

If God had dealt with us each time we foolishly challenged Him, no one would have survived. Our Lord's meekness and patience should not be considered as His weakness, but His love and mercy.

Justification is the gracious act of God when He declares the believing sinner righteous and gives that believing sinner a perfect standing in Jesus Christ. The 'just' person isn't someone who has met all of God's requirements by means of good works because none of us can.

We cannot justify ourselves before God because we stand with the whole world, guilty and condemned before His throne.

Acts 4:12 Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.

We are not only saved by faith, but we are instructed to live by faith.

G. GOD'S JUDGMENT AGAINST BABYLON

From v5 to v20, God declares His complete and righteous judgment against the godless Babylon even though He was using Babylon to chasten Judah at that point.

Babylon was filled with its selfish ambition, covetousness, pride and exploitation of people.

I believe that it has a set of parallel lines between this ancient Babylon and the Babylon of the last days that is mentioned in Revelation 17-18. God will destroy that final great world empire that opposes Him and Jesus Christ will return and establish His kingdom on earth.

The fall of 'Babylon the great' is a reminder to us that what man builds without God can never last. They will lose everything and man's utopias will turn out to be disasters.

Habakkuk 2:18-20 "What profit is the image, that its maker should carve it, The molded image, a teacher of lies, That the maker of its mold should trust in it, To make mute idols? 19 Woe to him who says to wood, 'Awake!' To silent stone, 'Arise! It shall teach!' Behold, it is overlaid with gold and silver, Yet in it there is no breath at all. 20 But the Lord is in His holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before Him."

These three verses give us such a great truth about the stupidity of idol worship – worshiping created things instead of the Creator of the universe. Idol worship started with Lucifer who said, "I will be like the Most High" in Isaiah 14. He used the same line to Eve in the Garden of Eden, "You will be like God" in Genesis 3. She fell for it.

Not only is idolatry disobedience to God's Word, but it is also foolish and useless since the idols people choose are dead substitutes for the ever-living God.

H. PRAYER AND PRAISE

Habakkuk 3:2-4 O Lord, I have heard your speech and was afraid; O Lord, revive Your work in the midst of the years! In the midst of the years make it known; In wrath remember mercy. 3 God came from Teman, The Holy One from Mount Paran. Selah His glory covered the heavens, And the earth was full of His praise. 4 His brightness was like the light; He had rays flashing from His hand, And there His power was hidden.

Habakkuk started as a worrier in chapter 1, then he was transformed to a watchman in chapter 2, now we see him as a worshiper of God in chapter 3.

Hearing God's Word generates faith in the heart of the children of God, and without faith, we can't pray effectively. The Word of God and prayer must always go together, otherwise our praying becomes zeal without knowledge.

Let's not make a mistake that hearing from God or meeting Him is always an enjoyable experience. No doubt it would be, but getting to know Him allows us to see what we truly are. Moses trembled at Mt. Sinai when God gave the law. Joshua fell on his face before the Lord on the way to Jericho; Daniel became exhausted and fell after seeing the visions God gave him; the vision of Christ's glory made John, James and Peter to fall on their faces on the Mount of Transfiguration.

God does not reveal Himself to so-called super saints so that they can write books about that experience and brag about, or to curious Christians who want to 'sample' deeper fellowship with God but not at too greater dedication.

There is no substitute for good theology which we can apply into our Christian lives. As we've learned from the Book of Hosea, many Christians are deceived because they don't know the Word of God.

Hosea 4:6 My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being priest for Me; Because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children.

Many Christians would rather get hyped with entertaining Christian music and listen to charismatic preachings than sound godly theologies. Am I saying that entertaining Christian music and charismatic preachings are wrong? Absolutely not. It would be like having desserts only and not having nutritious meals. After that hype, people are still spiritually hungry.

Without learning His Word, the Bible, we cannot have solid faith in God. Our joy in Christ is in proportion to our trust in Him. Our trust in Him is in proportion to our knowledge in God.

Romans 10:17 So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

One of the marks of faith is willingness to wait patiently for the Lord to work. Whenever we run ahead of God, we get ourselves into trouble. In quietness and confidence of God, faith becomes our strength.

I. APPLICATION

Over the years, I've learned that if I practice these three verses, they help me wait patiently on the Lord.

- 1) **Stand still.** – *Exodus 14:13*
- 2) **Sit still.** – *Ruth 3:18*
- 3) **Be still.** – *Psalms 46:10*