

HABAKKUK

INTRODUCTION: We have come to the book of Habakkuk in our studies in the minor prophets. We do not learn as much introductory information from the first verse as we often do. It simply says, "The burden which the prophet Habakkuk saw." So we get his name which is Habakkuk. I call him Habak'kuk. J.R. Church says the rabbis say it, Ha'ba kook. Ryrie says his name means to *embrace*. Church says it means the wrestler. From the book we can say that Habakkuk did embrace the God of the Bible and committed himself wholly to Him as we will see at the close of the book. But he also wrestled with Him, as we shall see, and he came to a satisfactory end, and wholly committed himself to God Almighty. I think, from the book, the idea of wrestling is more prominent. This morning you may find yourself in the same predicament, wrestling with God over things. May you in the end come to the conclusion Habakkuk came to.

So, we have to learn our introductory information elsewhere. We have mentioned numerous times the split in the kingdom and referred to the Land God gave to Israel as the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom. God had warned both kingdoms of coming judgment. The northern kingdom failed first and Assyria, of which Nineveh was the capital, came and defeated the Northern kingdom. That was 722 BC. And Assyria, by the time Habakkuk writes, had taken the northern kingdom, into captivity. And my Bible makes a note on this book and says that Habakkuk ministered during the death throes of Judah, the southern kingdom. Nineveh was gone and Babylon was taking the world by storm, and they would also take Jerusalem, and that is Habakkuk's concern.

In Nahum 2:1 the Lord had said to Assyria, or Nineveh that a people will come who will destroy Assyria. Nahum wrote, "He who scatters has come up before your face." The Medes and the Babylonians, who had long been tired of Assyria's vicious rule, joined forces and conquered her. So, Samaria, the northern kingdom has fallen and Assyria too has fallen by the time Habakkuk writes. And so, in Habakkuk 1:6, there is a reference to the Chaldeans, and the Chaldeans are the Babylonians.

Well, God has warned the southern kingdom over and over again as He had also done to the northern kingdom. And during the reigns of Hezekiah and Josiah, the nation put

away their false gods and restored the laws of God and enjoyed a time of peace and prosperity. But when Josiah's son Jehoiakim began to reign, the nation once more fell into persistent sin and grew in its wickedness. And Habakkuk, writing in about 607 B.C., writes just a few years after Nineveh was destroyed and just before the southern kingdom is led captive by Nebuchadnezzar. This is the same Nebuchadnezzar who took Daniel captive, and you can read of Nebuchadnezzar's reign in the book of Daniel.

David Levy, from Friends of Israel says, "Often people in our day, like those in Judah, smile smugly at the thought of judgment coming to their country. They write off those who bring such messages as out-of-touch doomsayers living in a bygone era. These people are living only for the moment."

I. HABBAKUK'S PERPLEXITY (1:2-2:20)

A. First Cause for Perplexity (1:2-11)

So, we come to our first point which I call Habakkuk's perplexity. This goes from 1:2-2:20. Let us begin by reading verses 2-4 (read). Maybe we could give Habakkuk's perplexity here like this: "Lord, why do You allow the wicked to go unpunished?" Maybe Habakkuk expresses here what we may feel at prayer meeting at times. He says, "O Lord, how long shall I cry, and You will not hear?" His day seems to speak to our day. There is all kinds of wickedness and the law is powerless, and justice wants to fail.

The answer comes in verses 5-11 (read). Verse 5 is incredible. God answers Habakkuk. He says, "Look among the nations, watch - be utterly astounded! For I will work a work in your days which you would not believe though it were told you." Maybe as long ago as 25 years ago I heard a message when I was in Bible school by a visiting speaker. And the speaker spoke of verse 5, and he said this first clause was present tense. God is saying, "I am already at work. I am already doing a work." Now all these years later I checked through various versions and some of them do put it in the present tense. J.R. Church believes God is here speaking of a work he is beginning among the Gentiles which will ultimately be fulfilled in the salvation of the Gentiles in the church age. That may be correct,

but I think it has reference more directly to the fact that He is raising up the Chaldeans who will bring down Judah and Jerusalem. The Lord goes on to say in verse 6 that already He is raising up the Chaldeans. And after His description of what this nation will become, it puts forth a fearsome picture. Nothing will stand in the way of this nation.

I would like to make application from that. In this time of decline of Christianity in America, no doubt God is already at work too! Habakkuk will later pray for a revival in the midst of the years. That is possible. A revival in America is still possible, though it is looking more grim all the time.

B. Second Cause for Perplexity (1:12-2:20)

Well, the Lord has sought to relieve Habakkuk's perplexity, but it has only served to raise a second cause for perplexity with Habakkuk. Let us read it in 1:12-2:1 (read). David Levy gives Habakkuk's second question like this: "How can a holy God use a sinful nation to accomplish His righteous purpose?" I would put it like this: "Lord, Judah is wicked, but they are not anywhere near as wicked as Babylon. How can You use someone more wicked to punish someone less wicked? This seems out of character for You God. I don't understand. Why would You make some people, including Israel like fish in the sea, and use someone as ungodly as these Babylonians to catch people less wicked than they are like fish in a net. And to top it off Lord, when they are all done with the net, they sit down and worship the net. How can You use a nation like this for such purposes?" Habakkuk has asked again. And look at how he closes his time of questioning in 2:1 (read).

The Lord then answers Habakkuk in 2:2-20 so we will take it piece by piece. Look at what Habakkuk is told in 2:2-4 and notice the word 'it' as we read (read). Keep your fingers there and go to Hebrews 10 (read 37-38). The writer, following the Greek translation of the OT, interprets the 'it' as 'He', capital H. That is Christ. So the vision is of Christ and this vision is not lying. And this vision, which is of Christ, though it tarries, they are to wait for it because it will surely come.

And so, in this context, the proud of verse 4, who is contrasted with those who live by faith speaks of the Chaldeans, or the Babylonians. And who was higher in pride than Nebuchadnezzar, of whom we read in Daniel how God humbled him. Let me just say here of verse 4 that I am sorry I do not have time to deal with this very important verse. So we go on, and verse 5 tells us what the Chaldeans were like (read). Then in verses 6-9, we have an expression of what all the victims of Babylon have to say (read). Then in verses 9-11, we have a woe pronounced on the Babylonians (read).

Now let us consider verses 12-14 (read). The Babylonians and all others who establish themselves in unrighteous ways are only providing more fuel for the fire. Their work is all in vain if the Lord is not in it. The Psalmist says, "Except the Lord builds the house they labor in vain that build it..." So is all the work of unbelievers. So it was for Babylon. They are only providing fuel for the fire.

Let me show you what they built, and it was all only fuel for the fire. I quote from David Levy of Friends of Israel who in turn quotes from Dr. Harold Willmington who writes thus of Babylon, "Superbly constructed, it spread over the area of fifteen square miles, the river Euphrates River flowing diagonally across the city. The famous historian Herodotus said the city was surrounded by a wall 350 feet high and eighty-seven feet thick--extending thirty five feet below the ground to prevent tunneling, and wide enough for six chariots to drive abreast. Around the top of the wall were 250 watchtowers placed in strategic locations. Outside the huge wall was a large ditch, or moat, which surrounded the city and was kept filled with water from the Euphrates River...Within this wall were one hundred gates of brass...The famous hanging gardens of Babylon are on record yet as one of the seven wonders of the world. Arranged in an area of 400 feet square, and raised in perfectly cut terraces one above the other, they soared to a height of 350 feet. Viewers could make their way to the top by means of stairways, which were ten feet wide. Babylon was

literally a city of gold (see Isa. 14:4). The city had fifty three temples and 180 altars to Ishtar."

And why is all this work that went into Babylon vanity? Well, you will remember from the book of Daniel when a hand appeared and wrote on the wall. I'll give it with its interpretation according to Daniel: MENE, God has numbered your kingdom and finished it. TEKEL, You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting. PERES, Your kingdom has been divided, and given to the Medes and the Persians." That happened in this city.

Let me tell you what happened. On October 11 or 12, in 539 BC, the Babylonians had a great big party. You can read of it in Daniel 5. But unbeknown to them, the Medes and Persians diverted the Euphrates River and that night of the big Babylonian party they entered the city on the river bed. Neither the high thick walls, the deep foundations of the walls, nor all the kings horses and all the kings men could deliver them and the city fell in one night! Here was the one city that exceeded Nineveh for magnificence, and it is overtaken in one night! So look at verses 12-13 once more (read).

So once more I ask, why was all of Babylon's work in vain? Because in such a short time, it was defeated. But note verse 14 (read). You see, if the just live by faith, and the proud build their cities, in the end, the cities and their builders will be fuel for the fire, and the just will live in an earth filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea!

You see, in the end it's the end that counts! One may accomplish incredible works in this world and end up in hell fire. Where is the glory in that? But one may be overcome by the proud whose soul is not upright in him, but if one lives by faith one will inherit this earth which is filled with the knowledge of the glory of God. This refers to the millennium as I'm sure you recognize.

So, we go to 15-17 (read). When you study the Babylonians, alcohol seems to have been a number one problem. Levy says, "In verse 5, it was shown that

the Chaldeans were totally given over to wine, which motivated them to roam the earth in brutal conquest. They also made the nations drink their wine, causing them to become mad (Jer. 51:7)" end quote. And when you consider verses 15-17, you can easily see that alcohol leads to sexual immorality. You see, even a little alcohol lowers natural inhibitions. If you listen to the 'Wine and the Bible' series, you will find all this there.

Let me quote a brief part of a message as regards two passages in the minor prophets, and I quote, "Now let's go to Hosea 7:5 (read). The NKJV says, "In the day of our king princes have make him sick, inflamed with wine." The word 'inflamed' is the word 'bottles' in the KJV. In Hebrew it is khamah, or poisoned. You see, the word 'bottle' is a figure of speech for what it contains. Take one more verse, Habakkuk 2:15 (read). The word 'bottle' is again the word poison, and refers to the poison of fermented grape juice."

You see, very clearly the Bible refers to fermented grape juice as 'poison'. Today we know that alcohol is both a poison and a drug. I copied the following from the Aug. 27/2012 issue of the Calgary Herald on a subject titled: Cancer: Prevention Strategies, and I quote: "A major theme at the congress is prevention. Up to 40% of cancers could be avoided with simple life-style changes - reducing cigarette and alcohol consumption ..." (pg. A2). I cannot take more time on that subject, this is a word to the wise.

Last, in verses 18-20, the worship of false gods, as Babylon did, is dealt with (read). All sheer vanity to worship a piece of stone or wood! It may be overlaid with gold and look ever so nice, but it has no breath whatever, or we might translate it as that it has no spirit. The contrast to this is that the Lord God is a living God and He is in His holy temple. Let the earth learn to keep silence before Him!

So, Habakkuk's second question was this: "How can a holy God use a sinful nation to accomplish His righteous purpose?" Now let me summarize God's answer to Habakkuk's second question like this: "Habakkuk,

yes, I will allow a very wicked nation, the nation of Babylon to destroy your land and your city, but at the appointed time I will deal with them. In the meantime, every person who is truly just, though all this evil is to come upon your nation, is to live by faith. The just shall live by faith. That is my answer to your second question." And may I say, this is His answer to us, wherever we are.

II. HABBAKUK'S PRAYER/PRAISE (3:1-19)

A. Prayer to God (1-2)

We now come to chapter 3. I am no expert on the prophets and would not have you think I am. But let me tell you how I see this book. Habakkuk had a real battle going on in his mind. He could not understand what God was doing and how God would let the Babylonians destroy their beloved country and their beloved city, Jerusalem. It raged in his heart. May I ask, do you have things that rage in your heart? Then you are a candidate to experience what Habakkuk, or shall we call him the Wrestler, experienced with God. He, like Jacob of old, wrestled with God until he prevailed and found peace with God in the midst of his very troubling circumstances.

I see this chapter as having four sections. Verse one is an introduction. What it tells us that this chapter is a prayer. The term, shigianoth may be some musical notation or something like that. From this some think Habakkuk may have been a Levite.

So let us read verse 2 (read). Habakkuk had heard the Lord's speech. Babylon will destroy Judah and Jerusalem. God's people have sinned away their day of grace and Habakkuk is afraid. Big trouble lies before them.

Then He said, "Oh Lord, revive Your work in the midst of the years." And then he said, "In wrath remember mercy." In the midst of what must happen to us, in your wrath against Jerusalem and Judah through the Babylonians, remember Your mercy. And he is probably pleading for those who are still faithful to the Lord.

In verses 3-7, Habakkuk turns from speaking to God in verse 2 to speaking for the benefit of His readers. And I see this section as prophetic. I won't take more time here but to say that Keil and Delitzsch say this: *"...Habakkuk depicts a coming redemption under figures borrowed from the past..."* And again, *"...he is predicting a future appearance of the Lord to judge the nations..."*

[Note: leave this out. It is proof for myself, I was most amazed to find this statement in Keil and Delitzsch, amillennialists, but commentators whose expertise few would match, *"...Habakkuk depicts a coming redemption under figures borrowed from the past..."* And again, *"...he is predicting a future appearance of the Lord to judge the nations, from the simple fact that he places the future (he is saying the word 'came' of verse 3 should be 'comes' fut. tense) at the head of the whole description, so as to determine all that follows..."*]

In verses 3-7, Habakkuk had seen what God would do in the future, but he has told his readers. In verses 8-15, it seems to me, he speaks to the Lord in the past tense of what would happen when the prophecy was actually fulfilled. This prophecy may have reference to Babylon's destruction, but I cannot help but think it speaks mostly of the tribulation time.

And then in verses 16-19, we have the conclusion to the whole book. Habakkuk had been perplexed regarding some seeming inconsistencies in the character of God. And when God was done with him, he is a little like Job was when God was done with Job. Although Habakkuk did not lay his hand over his mouth as Job did, look at what he did do in verse 16 (read).

I think what he is saying is, "When God was done with me and I had foreseen what was coming, I found absolutely no inconsistencies in God at all. And when I saw how righteously he will requite the nations when all is said and done, and saw what they would experience my body trembled, my lips quivered, and rottenness entered my bones and I trembled in myself. I wish for one thing, that I might not be around when He comes up to the people and invades them with His troops."

And then follows one of the most beautiful conclusions and one of the most beautiful passages of Scripture to me in the whole OT (read 17-19). In 2004 when I did a message on these verses I gave them like this: "Though the canola fields won't turn a beautiful yellow, and the wheat grows no heads; though the cutworms get my garden, and the wind gets my tomato plants, though BSE hits the cattle industry, and the spruce beetle hits the trees; yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The Lord God is my strength; He will give me the traction of a quad, and He will bring me to victory."

You see, what the prophet foresaw was that which well might mean the end to life as they had known it. No more fig trees, no more vines, so no more olive oil and no more grape juice. Maybe there would be no more flock in the fold, and no herd in the stalls. Maybe there would be no more of the joys of life they had so abundantly experienced. But Habakkuk was committed to one thing: No matter how bad it got, he had gotten a clear vision of God, and God was good even when He used a very wicked nation to deal with one more righteous than they. And he would rejoice in the Lord though Judah and Jerusalem were destroyed.

In recent days I have experienced the onslaught of the evil one in ways I have never met before. And in recent days I have been learning to rejoice more in the Lord than I have in a long time. No, that does not mean I enjoy these times. What it does mean is that I have enjoyed the Lord in these times. In many quiet moments I rejoiced in the Lord. At times, at night, when sleep failed, I rejoiced in the Lord. As I see it, rejoicing in the Lord does not mean rejoicing over the tough things of life, it means rejoicing in the Lord while experiencing the tough things of life! No matter how difficult life may be, I have found many things to rejoice in Him about.

And Habakkuk said, "I will rejoice in the God of my salvation." He knew he was saved and just how incredible that is. For many of us, we need a much clearer vision of how great our salvation is. This God, the One who provided our salvation provides much to be rejoiced in.

But he further said, "The Lord God is my strength." I am thankful to be able to say that I know by experience what that means. The Lord has provided a strength for me I thought was no longer there. And the prophet says I will rejoice in Him, the God of my salvation. He is my strength and He will make my feet like deer's feet. I will step with surety. I will be confident in the steps I take though the whole world around me crumbles. And He will make me walk on my high hills. He will yet take me from the valley to the high places. I trust Him.

And from the final words you see that this is a song. Someone ought to write a song from these verses.

CONCL: So, let me briefly conclude this book. Habakkuk's first concern was: "Lord, why do You allow the wicked to go unpunished?" And God says, "I am already at work to deal with that and I will deal with it. Nothing goes unnoticed by Me." Then came Habakkuk's second concern, "How can a holy God use a sinful nation to accomplish His righteous purpose?" And I might summarize like this: "Judah and Jerusalem will get exactly what is their due, and so will the nation I will use against them."

And Habakkuk's final answer is a song to the Lord in which he will tell the Lord, "I trust you now, no matter what befalls my beloved country and city." I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.