

Habakkuk – From Worrier to Worshipper

Often we hear of bad things happening to good people, even to ourselves, and frequently there is the tendency to question God, and ask, “Why him or her God?”, or “Why me God?” And then we ask God to fix the matter – our way. Then when God either does not do it our way, or appears silent, we stress and become anxious and worry sets in. Does that sound familiar?

So, our aim in this talk is to have a walk through the book of Habakkuk to learn from him how, in facing difficult situations and circumstances in the world around us, to move from **worry** to **worship**.

Before we go on I must make something very clear here, so there’s no misunderstanding: Trouble comes to us as a result of a number of possible reasons:

- We reap what we sow (bad diet results in illnesses, sin results in judgement, etc.), or
- Outright attack of the enemy (Satan goes about seeking who he may devour), or
- We live in a fallen world where natural disasters, age and decay occurs, or
- As a means of disciplined training (think of an athlete’s painful training program)
- Sovereign act of God (Joseph endured much pain because God wanted a nation to be saved)

No matter which of these reasons for trouble is the case, the overall principles found in the book of Habakkuk apply.

Now let’s take a walk through Habakkuk’s message. Some background information first:

The prophets Habakkuk, Nahum, Zephaniah and Jeremiah were contemporaries during the reign of Josiah (640-609 BC) and Jehoiakim (609-598 BC). Jehoiakim, unlike his godly father, was a vicious and irreligious man who led the nation downhill away from God into idolatry. This brought on God’s judgement of the nation. Babylon (referred to here as “the Chaldeans”) was in power and about to attack Judah. Jeremiah had by this time prophesied that Babylon would invade Judah, destroy Jerusalem and the temple, and take the nation into exile.

Chapter 1 – Worrying

Habakkuk understood what was going on and was very concerned, even worried, about the dangerous and difficult times facing the nation. But he did the right thing, he cried out to God.

Hab 1:2-4 ... “How long, O Lord, will I call for help, and You will not hear? I cry out to You, “Violence!” Yet You do not save. Why do You make me see iniquity, and cause me to look on wickedness? Yes, destruction and violence are before me; Strife exists and contention arises. Therefore the law is ignored and justice is never upheld. For the wicked surround the righteous; therefore justice comes out perverted.”

Sounds a bit like what is going on in our nation – violence, iniquity, wickedness, destruction, strife contention, laws broken, injustice and perversion!

And Habakkuk is screaming out to the Lord asking why He is appearing to be indifferent and apparently doing nothing about the terrible state of affairs.

God responds (1:5-11) not with an explanation but with a revelation. God doesn't owe us explanations, but He does graciously reveal Himself, His work and His ways to those who seek Him. We don't live on explanations, we live on promises, and the promises of God are based on the character of God. He is holy and he is just. (Ps 136 ... "His lovingkindness is everlasting." TON chesed root meaning is: Devote oneself entirely, give oneself to needs. God is eternally disposed to seeing to our needs – attending to us.) His promises are true and good – forever.

Because of their sin, the Lord was planning to chasten Judah by allowing the Chaldeans (Babylon) to invade the land and take the people of Judah into exile. This was an unexpected revelation and the last thing Habakkuk was expecting to hear from the Lord. Using bad people to chasten God's people.

I think we're a bit like that. When facing a difficulty we pray expecting things to work out how we think they should be, and often God answers with something we think is completely "way out."

God had warned the nation time and time again prior to this to forsake their sin and walk in His ways, but they had failed to obey. They were reaping what they had sowed.

But this answer made Habakkuk even more puzzled. He couldn't understand how a Holy God could use a wicked nation to punish His own special people.

Hab 1:12-13 ... *"Are You not from everlasting, O Lord, my God, my Holy One? We will not die. You, O Lord, have appointed them to judge; and You, O Rock, have established them to correct. Your eyes are too pure to approve evil, and You cannot look on wickedness with favour. Why do You look with favour on those who deal treacherously? Why are You silent when the wicked swallow up those more righteous than they?"*

Sin in the life of a believer is far worse than sin in an unbeliever's life. When a believer sins, they sin against the light of God's revealed truth and love. God will not countenance this from His people.

Habakkuk immediately goes back on the defence of the people (1:14-17) and likens them to helpless fish in the sea being hauled out and devoured by the Chaldeans. So having voiced his concern he waits for God's reply, which follows in chapter 2.

But before we go on, let's pause for a minute and ask ourselves a couple of questions and take a moment to ponder our responses.

- What problems are we facing (whether they are of our own making or not) and what are we doing about them? Do we take them to God expecting "our" solution as His answers? Or are open to His will and ways of dealing with our issues?
- Are we looking for explanations or revelations?
- Have you ever questioned how a holy and loving God could allow whatever has happened to happen? What answer would you give to someone who is wrestling with this?

Chapter 2 – Watching and Waiting

Habakkuk moves from worrying to **watching** and **waiting** on God for a response.

Hab 2:1 ... *"I will stand on my guard post and station myself on the rampart; and I will keep watch to see what He will speak to me, and how I may reply when I am reproved."*

God answered and gave the prophet **three responsibilities** to fulfil:

1. Record the Vision

Hab 2:2-3 ... *"Then the Lord answered me and said, Record the vision and inscribe it on tablets, that the one who reads it may run. For the vision is yet for the appointed time; it hastens toward the goal and it will not fail. Though it tarries, wait for it; for it will certainly come, it will not delay."*

Now there is a prophetic element to this relating to the first and second coming of the Lord, and Romans, Galatians and Hebrews have more on that matter, but we won't go into that today.

In those ancient times the watchman was responsible to warn the inhabitants of the city of any approaching danger. If they failed to hand on the warning the blood of the innocent victims would be on their hands. Hence he needed to record and relay whatever God had revealed to him. You can get more detail on this from Ezek 3:17-21.

As believers, when we see danger coming it's our responsibility to share the gospel and warn people to *"flee from the wrath to come"* (Matt 3:7). How are we doing in this respect?

2. Trust God's Word

Hab 2:4-5 ... *"Behold, as for the proud one, his soul is not right within him; but the righteous will live by his faith. Furthermore, wine betrays the haughty man, so that he does not stay at home. He enlarges his appetite like Sheol, and he is like death, never satisfied. He also gathers to himself all nations and collects to himself all peoples."*

The prophet presents a contrast here between God's people of faith who trust in Him and His Word, and the proud who arrogantly trust in themselves and reject God from their lives.

For the people of faith, those who take God at His word, God offers **three assurances**:

I. **The assurance of God's Grace** – (2:4) ...*"the righteous will live by his faith"*.

Grace and faith go hand in hand.

Eph 2:8 ... *"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God."*

Rom 5:1 ... *"Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."*

1 John 5:4 ... *"and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith."*

To live by faith means to believe God's word and obey it no matter how we feel, or what we see, and to accept the consequences of doing this, whatever they may be. Living by faith is really just resting in God's faithfulness!

- II. **The assurance of the Revelation of God's Glory** – (2:14) ... *"For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea."*

When you behold the glory of God and believe the word of God, it gives you faith to accept the will of God.

The good news is that no matter how bad things may get in our lives, there will come a day when it's all over and the whole earth is filled with the glory of the Lord. What a day that will be!

- III. **The assurance of God's Government** – (2:20) ... *"But the Lord is in His holy temple. Let all the earth be silent before Him."*

What an assurance! God is on the throne. He has everything under His control. It's not our place to question what He has planned or is doing, and not ours to complain against Him.

The best thing for us to do is heed the words of Psalm 46:10 ... *"Be still, and know that I am God"* and Prov 3:5-6 ... *"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight."*

These are the three assurances offered to the righteous and faithful.

Now for the proud and arrogant, **five woes** are pronounced against them. These are found under the third responsibility given to us:

3. Declare God's Judgement

The proud sinner not only rejects God but delights in the very things God abhors: amongst which are the **five woes** declared by the prophet:

- I. Woe of Selfish Ambition – (2:6) ... *"Woe to him who increases what is not his."*

Our only ambition as believers should be as stated in 2 Cor 5:9 ... *"Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him."*

- II. Woe of Covetousness – (2:9) ... *"Woe to him who gets evil gain for his house."*

Mark 8:36 ... *"For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul?"*

- III. Woe of Exploitation of People – (2:12) ... *"Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed."*

God's people, made in His image, cannot be exploited without incurring His judgement.

The eventual fall of Babylon was great, which serves as a reminder that whatever we build without God's input and involvement will not last. Psalm 127:1 ... *"Unless the Lord builds the house, they labour in vain who build it; unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman keeps awake in vain."*

- IV. Woe of Drunkenness and Violence – (2:15) ... *"Woe to you who make your neighbours drink, who mix in your venom even to make them drunk."*

Today this would include anything we do in any hidden manner to bring a neighbour down. To prevent them from coming to the knowledge of God. Including keeping silent.

- V. Woe of Idolatry – (2:19) ... *“Woe to him who says to a piece of wood, ‘Awake!’ To a mute stone, ‘Arise!’ and that is your teacher?”*

Rom 1:25 tells us that idolatry is worshipping the creature instead of the Creator. Whatever a person delights in over God, whatever they are devoted to and sacrifice for over God, whatever they cannot stand to be without, is an idol. Whatever takes first place in our lives, our time and energy and devotion, other than God, is an idol. It's one thing to own something and another to be owned by something. All idols are under the condemnation of God.

Compare this list of woes with the things the Lord hates as recorded in Proverbs 6:16-19.

Now before we look briefly at the last chapter let's pause again and reflect on some questions.

- When we look at non-Christians around us do we share the gospel with them, or if not, what holds us back from doing so? Think of Ezek 3:17-21 the watchman's responsibilities.
- How do you, as a believer, “live by faith”? And are you truly living by faith in God?
- What can you honestly say is your prime ambition?

Chapter 3 – Worshipping

Habakkuk started down in the valley **worrying**, wrestling with the will of God. Then he climbed up and stood on the watchtower **watching and waiting** on God for a reply. After hearing the word of God and seeing His glory, he became like a deer bounding up the mountain heights. None of his circumstances had changed, but he had changed, and he was now walking by faith and not by sight. He was living by promises rather than by explanations.

What was it that took Habakkuk from the valley to the mountain top? The same things that can move us from despair to delight, from worry to worship: **Prayer, vision and faith**. He interceded for the work of God, he fixed his gaze upon God and His ways, and he affirmed God's will.

1. Prayer – Intercede for the Work of God

Start by taking the matter to God in prayer. Talk to God. Listen to Him. He is the answer. He will give revelation – pray Eph 1:17 ask for a *“Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ.”*

Hab 3:1-2 ... *“A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, according to Shigionoth. Lord, I have heard the report about You and I fear. O Lord, revive Your work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make it known; in wrath remember mercy.”*

Rom 10:17 ... *“So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.”*

Without faith we cannot pray effectively. Without the word we have no faith. The word and faith go hand in hand. When we know God's word we can pray, *“Thy will be done”* with confidence that God watches over His word to perform it.

2. Vision – Gaze upon God and Ponder His Majesty

The next step in moving from the valley to the heights is to fix your gaze upon the Lord. Not on the problems or things around you, but on Him. He is the answer. Know Him. Know he is faithful. Know he has it all under control. Rest in Him.

The splendour of the Holy One (3:3-5):

Hab 3:3-4 ... *"God comes from Teman, and the Holy One from Mount Paran. His splendour covers the heavens, and the earth is full of His praise. His radiance is like the sunlight. He has rays flashing from His hand, and there is the hiding of His power."*

John 1:14 ... *"And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth."*

The Power of the Almighty One (3:6-7)

Hab 3:6 ... *"He stood and surveyed the earth; He looked and startled the nations. Yes, the perpetual mountains were shattered, the ancient hills collapsed. His ways are everlasting."*

The Victorious One (3:8-15)

Habakkuk describes Israel's victorious march from Egypt, through the Red Sea, through the wilderness to the Promised Land using dynamic poetic imagery. This is a picture of God's people being led by God the Victorious One, routing the enemy and leading the people to possess the Promised Land.

Habakkuk was looking to both the past (the exodus victory) and to the future (deliverance from Babylon) and using the past victory to encourage the people to expect victory in the future.

Our heavenly Father is the Holy, Glorious, Almighty and Victorious One in whom we can place every confidence. It was this vision and understanding of the greatness and splendour of God that lifted Habakkuk to the mountain top.

3. Faith – Affirm the Will of God

Hab 3:16-19 ... *"I heard and my inward parts trembled, at the sound my lips quivered. Decay enters my bones, and in my place I tremble. Because I must wait quietly for the day of distress, for the people to arise who will invade us. ¹⁷ Though the fig tree should not blossom and there be no fruit on the vines, though the yield of the olive should fail and the fields produce no food, though the flock should be cut off from the fold and there be no cattle in the stalls, ¹⁸ Yet I will exult in the Lord, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation. ¹⁹ The Lord God is my strength, and He has made my feet like hinds' feet, and makes me walk on my high places."*

This is one of the greatest confessions of faith we will find in the entire Bible.

There is a merciless enemy coming, the nation's fate is at hand. Many will be killed and the nation will be taken into exile. Jerusalem and the temple will be ruined. Yet Habakkuk says no matter what

happens my trust is in you Lord, you have it all under control, You are my strength, and I will praise your name regardless. He couldn't rejoice in his circumstances, but he could rejoice in his God.

1 Thess 5:16-18 ... *"Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."*

No matter what we are facing, we need a return to this kind of worship – one that focuses on the glory of God, and His will, and seeks to honour Him and Him alone.

What are the marks of this kind of faith?

- I. Waiting patiently on the Lord (v16) ... *"I must wait quietly."*
- II. Rejoicing in the Lord (v 18) ... *"Yet I will exult in the Lord, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation."*
- III. Relying on the Lord (v 19) ... *"The Lord God is my strength."*

God made us for the heights. He made us to be able to skip like a deer on the high places, but he allows us 'valley' experiences so that we may learn to wait on Him, trust Him and rest in Him and His sufficiency to give us the strength to mount up with wings as eagles, so that he can strengthen our feet like the hinds feet.

The great Bible expositor Campbell G Morgan said, "Our joy is in proportion to our trust. Our trust is in proportion to our knowledge of God".

Conclusion

The story of Habakkuk in a nutshell – from worrying, to watching and waiting, to worship. Living by promises not by explanations. Ascend from the valley to the heights – through prayer, vision and faith. Talk to Him, get a revelation of who He is, trust Him – He is faithful and His lovingkindness (His disposition to give of Himself to attend to your needs and to make you strong in Him) is everlasting. His prime interest is to conform you to the image of His Son. Trust Him.

I trust you will be strengthened and encouraged by this message from the word of God.

Ref. – W. W. Wiersbe, "Be Amazed", OT commentary on Minor Prophets