

Scripture Lesson Text

HAB. 2:1 I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reprov'd.

2 And the LORD answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make *it* plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it.

3 For the vision *is* yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry.

4 Behold, his soul *which* is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith.

5 Yea also, because he transgresseth by wine, *he is* a proud man, neither keepeth at home, who en-

largeth his desire as hell, and *is* as death, and cannot be satisfied, but gathereth unto him all nations, and heapeth unto him all people.

3:17 Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither *shall* fruit *be* in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and *there shall be* no herd in the stalls:

18 Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation.

19 The LORD God *is* my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds' feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places. To the chief singer on my stringed instruments.

NOTES

Habakkuk Praises God's Faithfulness

Lesson Text: Habakkuk 2:1-5; 3:17-19

Related Scriptures: II Kings 22:14-20; Psalm 36:1-12; Galatians 3:10-14;
Hebrews 12:4-11

TIME: 608-605 B.C.

PLACE: Jerusalem

GOLDEN TEXT—"Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation"
(Habakkuk 3:18).

Lesson Exposition

THE LORD'S REVELATION—

Hab. 2:1-5

The prophet's anticipation (Hab. 2:1). Habakkuk was a prophet who, like Jeremiah, lived during the declining years of Judah. Habakkuk was distressed by the wickedness of his people. He could not understand why God had so far been silent and had done nothing to stop it (1:2-3). The Lord answered that He would, indeed, deal with wicked Judah. He would resort to the drastic measure of bringing an invasion by the Chaldeans. Judah would be swept away by them.

But for the prophet this raised another question: How could a righteous God use an even more wicked nation to judge and discipline Judah (Hab. 1:12-13)? The wicked nation's success would inflate their pride and encourage them to credit their exploits to their own false deities (vss. 14-17).

After Habakkuk had boldly made his complaint, he waited to receive the Lord's response. "I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower," he said, "and will watch to see what

he will say unto me" (Hab. 2:1). He likened himself to a sentinel on a watchtower awaiting important news. His heart was prepared and his attention undivided. It was assumed that, like watchmen on a wall, prophets would discern God's message and pass it on.

The revelation's certainty (Hab. 2:2-3). The Lord answered Habakkuk with certainty. Not content with a merely oral transmission of the message, He said, "Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables (tablets)." "Vision" is often used of the message God gave His prophets (cf. Isa. 1:1; Ezek. 7:26; Obad. 1:1). They "saw" His revelation in whatever form He chose to reveal it. Habakkuk's vision included the words that follow (Hab. 2:4-8).

The command to write down the message indicates its importance not only for the present generation but also for posterity (cf. Ex. 17:14; Isa. 30:8; Jer. 30:2).

The Lord explained why it was important to keep a permanent record: The revelation still awaited its appointed time. What God was about to re-

veal would not happen immediately; the Captivity would have to come first.

“At the end it shall speak” (Hab. 2:3) more literally reads, “It pants toward the goal.” The expression pictures the prophecy hastening as a runner to its fulfillment. The immediate “end” toward which it was moving was the destruction of the Babylonian Empire. But it may also point to the “end” of the messianic “last days,” when all kingdoms will fall under the rule of Christ (cf. Dan. 8:17, 19; 11:35, 40).

The Lord assured Habakkuk that the vision would “not lie” (Hab. 2:3)—that is, it would not fail to be fulfilled. Therefore, “though it tarry, wait for it.” This suggests that the fulfillment might be delayed longer than some thought proper, leading them to abandon all hope. However, God does not operate on a human schedule, and what He does always happens at the right time.

The Lord’s condemnation (Hab. 2:4-5). God now expounded His promised revelation and in so doing answered the issue raised by the prophet in 1:12-17. Had He ignored the pride of the Chaldeans who would sweep through their neighbors’ lands? No, He was well aware that the Chaldeans were inflated with pride, and their soul was not honorable. The Lord would bring disaster upon them from the very people they had conquered and dominated (cf. Hab. 2:6-8).

Conversely, “the just shall live by his faith” (vs. 4). “Just” can also read “righteous.” It signifies a person who lives steadfastly by the ethical and moral standard defined by the nature of God. He follows this standard not only in his walk with God but also with his fellow man in the community. In our context, he was the righteous Judean who, like Habakkuk, was distressed by the evil about him (cf. 1:4).

Habakkuk had feared that the righteous would be swept away in the

Chaldean invasion. He had questioned how a righteous God could let this happen. But now the Lord revealed that the righteous man would “live by his faith.”

The believing Judean, whose faith was already seen through good deeds in the midst of evil, needed the certainty of faith in a time of national calamity (cf. II Chr. 20:20). Unlike the Chaldean, whose pride would lead to an untimely end, he would live by his faith, enjoying the fullness of God’s presence and security.

The statement that the just shall live by faith is a cornerstone of New Testament theology. Both Paul (Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11) and the writer of Hebrews (10:38) cited this declaration that faith in Christ is the key to true righteousness and eternal life.

God’s condemnation of the Chaldean invader continues with a series of further indictments (Hab. 2:5). The treacherous nature of wine is widely known (cf. Prov. 20:1; 23:29-35), and the Chaldeans’ love of wine is well attested. In fact, Babylon fell while Belshazzar feasted and drank at a riotous party (Dan. 5).

The Chaldean was also “a proud man, neither keepeth at home” (Hab. 2:5). With arrogance inflamed by drunkenness, he was not content to stay in his own political domain. He “enlargeth his desire as hell, and is as death, and cannot be satisfied.” Here is a picture of insatiable greed. “Hell” is the Hebrew word “sheol,” which is the place of the dead. Just as death is always consuming more victims but is never satisfied, so the Chaldean was never content with his conquests.

Instead, he gathered and hoarded all the peoples and nations in the entire region.

THE PROPHET’S TRUST— Hab. 3:17-19

The prospect of hardship (Hab. 3:17). Habakkuk 3 is a prayer, set to music to be sung in public worship

(vs. 1, cf. vs. 19). In verses 16-19, Habakkuk summarized his reaction to all God was about to do.

He reacted at first with fear and trembling at the prospect of the invasion of his country (vs. 16). He anticipated (vs. 17) that Judah's whole economy would be devastated. He foresaw that "the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines." The staples of Judean life would not be forthcoming.

Finally, the flocks would be missing from the sheepfolds, and there would be no herds in the cattle stalls.

The perseverance of faith (Hab. 3:18-19). In spite of this dismal prospect, Habakkuk could say, "Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation." The Chaldeans could rejoice only while conquering others (1:15) and devouring the poor (3:14); the prophet could rejoice because his God was in control. And he knew that this Sovereign One was the God of salvation, or deliverance, for His people.

The Lord also was the strength of Habakkuk's life. The combined depiction of God as both salvation and strength recalls David's praise (Ps. 27:1) and, perhaps more significantly, that of Israel after they had been delivered at the Red Sea (Ex. 15:2). The same God who had brought Israel victoriously out of Egyptian oppression and delivered David from his enemies would sustain Judah in its darkest hour.

The One who is strength gives strength to His own. Habakkuk declared, "He will make my feet like hinds' [deer's] feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places" (Hab. 3:19). His imagery here pictures a swift and graceful animal leaping easily from height to height, unhindered by circumstances below. So Habakkuk could rise

above Judah's imminent calamities in the strength given by the Lord.

Habakkuk's final words are a comment indicating that this prayer was to be used musically in public worship. Similar notations accompany several of the Psalms (cf. 4—6, 8—9). This notation tells us that Habakkuk wanted these words to instruct others besides himself.

Habakkuk's experience teaches us that God is sovereign in all human affairs. He brings judgment upon the disobedient and arrogant, but He gives confidence and strength to those who submit to His will, trust His Word, and walk by faith.

—Robert E. Wenger.

QUESTIONS

1. What problem did Habakkuk have with God's use of the Chaldeans to discipline Judah?
2. In what sense were Old Testament prophets watchmen?
3. What did God instruct Habakkuk to do with the vision?
4. Why is it difficult for people to wait for what God has foretold?
5. How would the Lord punish the Chaldeans for their insatiable conquests and general immorality?
6. Why was it important for those in Habakkuk's day to live by faith?
7. What role did wine have in the fall of Babylon?
8. How were the Chaldeans' ambitions for conquest like death?
9. How would the agricultural economy of Judah be affected by the Chaldean invasion?
10. To what animal did Habakkuk liken himself?

—Robert E. Wenger.

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. The answer to our problems and lack of understanding rests in the Lord (Hab. 2:1).
2. The Lord's promises often require patience, but they do not require revision (vss. 2-3).
3. God's people must follow Him by faith, for they do not know all the answers (vs. 4).
4. The proud will never be content in this life and are doomed to suffer judgment in the next (vs. 5).
5. The worst conditions in this life cannot rob us of the joy of our salvation (3:17-18).
6. Strength to endure anything in this world rests in the Lord alone (vs. 19).

—Jarl K. Waggoner.

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. What guidance does Habakkuk's response to his dilemma give us when we do not understand the Lord's ways (Hab. 2:1; cf. 1:12-17)?
2. Why is the principle set forth in Habakkuk 2:4 so critical to our lives as followers of Christ (cf. Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38)?
3. How does the book of Habakkuk describe the Chaldeans, or Babylonians? In what sense are they mirrored by present-day people?
4. What is the key to finding joy even in the midst of suffering (3:17-18)?
5. In what sense is the Lord our "strength" (vs. 19), and why is this theme repeated so often (cf. Pss. 27:1; 28:7; 118:14; Isa. 12:2)?

—Jarl K. Waggoner.

Golden Text Illuminated

"Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation" (Habakkuk 3:18).

Habakkuk realized that his nation was in dire straits. The crops were not producing. There were no animals to till the ground or to kill for food. The situation looked hopeless, but the prophet encouraged himself. He made a willful choice to rejoice in the Lord. Habakkuk knew that deliverance from this situation would come only from the hand of the Lord; therefore, he praised God despite how things looked.

If only we could have the resolve of Job and Habakkuk. If only we could have complete confidence in God and believe with our whole hearts what Paul said in Romans 8:28: "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." If only we could learn to trust God.

If we trust God, then no matter how dark the night gets, we will believe that the light will shine again. If we trust God, then it does not matter what news the doctor has; we know that there is a reason and a purpose for everything. If we trust God, we will not find it difficult to give thanks even on those days that seem to be falling apart. If we trust God, we will rejoice even when everything around us tempts us to despair.

It is a choice to rejoice. It is a choice to trust. It is a choice to believe. It is a choice to hope. "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31).

—Kristin Reeg.