

Devotion on Habakkuk (Intro) - 14 November 2012, Anno Domini

(Note: By request, I am conducting the next series of devotions on Habakkuk, then following with devotional study of the Book of Job)



The Twenty-Third Sunday after Trinity
The Collect.

O GOD, our refuge and strength, who art the author of all godliness; Be ready, we beseech thee, to hear the devout prayers of thy Church; and grant that those things which we ask faithfully we may obtain effectually; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

1 The burden which Habakkuk the prophet did see. 2 O Lord, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear! even cry out unto thee of violence, and thou wilt not save! 3 Why dost thou shew me iniquity, and cause me to behold grievance? for spoiling and violence are before me: and there are that raise up strife and contention. 4 Therefore the law is slacked, and judgment doth never go forth: for the wicked doth compass about the righteous; therefore wrong judgment proceedeth. (Habakkuk 1:1-4)

We will take up a devotional study of the Book of Habakkuk over the next several days. This book is particularly relevant to our present times in that the prophet uttered his words during a time of great apostasy and wickedness in the people of God. The times of Habakkuk were very similar to those days we witness in our own dearly beloved nation today.

Credible sources differ on the precise time frame of Habakkuk. Bishop Ussher dates the time of its writing at 626 B.C., but other chronological analyses date the writing to 610 B.C. Some others even date the writing to 515 B.C. This last date seems far too recent in view of historical documentation in secular sources. Though Habakkuk seems to have begun his service to the Lord as a priest around 630 B.C., the date of 610 B.C. seems the most accurate account of his prophecy and in greatest accord with the actual record of the Chaldean

invasion under Nebuchadnezzar. According to Eusebius, Habakkuk did live to see the bondage of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar. It seems consistent with the narrative that Habakkuk prophesied in the last years of the reign of the good King Josiah and, perhaps, during the reign of the wicked King Jehoiakim. The biblical 'scrolls of the Law' were found in the Temple when King Josiah was twenty, and he immediately sought to lead God's people back to a love and obedience to God. This resulted in a period in which God withheld His wrath and judgment from Israel (particularly, Judah). The 'revival' was half-hearted being mostly an awakening of Josiah to the terrible sins of his people, and a devout dependence of Josiah upon the mercies of God.

Later, Josiah was succeeded by an evil King – Jehoiakim, who had no such reverence for the Word of God (sound familiar?). When it was revealed to Jehoiakim how his behavior was very wicked and incurred God's wrath, King Jehoiakim cut the scroll up with his pen knife and cast it into the fire. We see essentially the same thing happening at the highest echelon of our own government today! The Prophet, Habakkuk, viewed the wickedness of Israel-Judah and, rather than plead that the Lord would withhold judgment, question why God would not immediately bring these people into judgment.

Habakkuk is a prophet who, like Jacob, wrestled with God. He loved the righteousness of God above every other consideration and would have preferred to see his people suffer tribulation and judgment than to be permitted to sin without limit. His will was the same as that of God. The big difference was timing. God will often suffer a people to sin so grossly that their cup of iniquity is so full and overflowing that they cannot question the hand of judgment when it falls upon their heads. Habakkuk was only less patient than God! God's great patience with a disobedient people was something that Habakkuk did not understand at the beginning of his ministry.

We shall examine the five parts of this book in the coming days: **1)** The personal anguish of Habakkuk at God's delay of judgment against the wickedness of the people of Israel owing, it seems, to the repentance of a good King, Josiah. This consideration is covered in today's devotion. - Habakkuk 1:1-4. **2)** God's response to the entreaties of Habakkuk in 1:5-11. **3)** The response of Habakkuk to God's counsel (1:12-17) and his awaiting further guidance from God in 2:1. **4)** The vision of God to Habakkuk which comes to his eager and watchful eyes – 2:2-20. And **5)** The finale of the Book of Habakkuk with his Psalm of wondrous sublimity and praise.

We note, in this first part (1:1-4) that Habakkuk had a burden to **understand** and **proclaim** the Will of the Lord. Every minister and prophet must bear that same burden. He cannot escape the sure bonds of his calling in God to go forth and proclaim the Word! *The burden which Habakkuk the prophet did see.*

Every minister of the Lord is anxious to see, not only His mercy, but His judgment enacted against those whom he loves. His cry goes up night and day with anguish and inquiry – HOW LONG, O LORD? The minister or prophet may

even suppose that the Lord does not hear for His delay of action, but He does indeed! Another point of great importance here is this: the minister or prophet of God suffers great pain in his heart at the wickedness that displeases his Lord. Do we suffer when we see how our nation has been overrun with sin and licentiousness? 2. O Lord, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear! even cry out unto thee of violence, and thou wilt not save! 3. Why dost thou shew me iniquity, and cause me to behold grievance? for spoiling and violence are before me: and there are that raise up strife and contention.

Now is shown the grievous distress the prophet, or minister, feels when he observes the Law of God trampled under foot without a visible and prompt retribution. He longs to see the judgment of the Lord come down on his sinful neighbors – not because he despises them, but because he loves them enough to desire even tribulation if it will awaken their slumbering consciences. He sees the judgment of wicked men trumping the judgment of God. The righteous suffer, and the wicked prosper according to the prophets point of view. But WAIT upon the Lord. All things will be righted in His own time! 4 Therefore the law is slacked, and judgment doth never go forth: for the wicked doth compass about the righteous; therefore wrong judgment proceedeth

Can you feel Habakkuk's frustration? When you look about you in our own country, do you desire that the Lord would bring down the wicked who bear rule and elevate the righteous in the land? We have reached a sorry state today in which so-called ministers of God are too politically correct, or fearful, to sound the alarm. Like Jeremiah, we MUST – even if our courage takes us into the pits of torment. ***"I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out."*** (Luke 19:40) Are we not better than stones, my friends?