

## FAITHFULNESS IN CRISIS

Based on what I have read about Mark Twain, he had trouble believing in God. I'm not sure if he was an atheist or not. He used to make comments that he could not believe in a God that let the innocent suffer and evil people prosper. We read or hear about people that commit fraud and wind up being rich. We learn of people that get conned out of their life savings and are left destitute. There are people that commit murder and never get caught. Innocent kids get AIDS from blood transfusions. When we hear about things such as this, we tend to wonder about fairness and justice. We have trouble understanding what we see going on around us and making sense of it. The world is certainly not being operated the way we would do it if we were in charge. Believe me, this kind of thinking has been about for thousands of years. People in every age or generation have had trouble fitting life into a "fairness formula." The "fairness formula" is something like this: If you do wrong you should fail and/or be punished and if you do right you should succeed and/or be rewarded.

Habakkuk lived in Judah before the fall of that nation to the Babylonian empire. He saw injustice happening in his world of Judah and Jerusalem and had trouble making sense of it. He brought his concerns to God and let Him know that what was going on was NOT what he thought was right and fair. In other words, Habakkuk complained to God. God listened to the complaint and provided answers. We can learn from these answers as we see and react to injustice and unfairness in our world.

### HABAKKUK 1:1-4

- 1 ¶ The oracle that Habakkuk the prophet received.
- 2 How long, O LORD, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, "Violence!" but you do not save?
- 3 Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict abounds.
- 4 Therefore the law is paralyzed, and justice never prevails. The wicked hem in the righteous, so that justice is perverted.

What Habakkuk saw was not encouraging: violence, iniquity, strife, contention, slackness in enforcing the law, and no justice. The king of Judah in Habakkuk's time was Jehoiakim. He was ambitious, cruel and corrupt.

Did you ever notice how society tends to follow its leadership? The general public in Jerusalem was such that the strong took advantage of the weak and the rich took advantage of the poor. (Compare to Jeremiah 9:2-6.)

Habakkuk's complaint to God was that he had told God about this condition before and nothing had been done. Habakkuk knew that God was a just God and that He would surely punish the guilty and deliver the oppressed; therefore, God must not have heard! He was distressed that this sort of thing went on and that he had to continue to observe it. I wonder what Habakkuk would think if he saw what was happening in our world today?

### HABAKKUK 1:5-7

- 5 ¶ "Look at the nations and watch—and be utterly amazed. For I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe, even if you were told.
- 6 I am raising up the Babylonians, that ruthless and impetuous people, who sweep across the whole earth to seize dwelling-places not their own.
- 7 They are a feared and dreaded people; they are a law to themselves and promote their own honour.

God answered Habakkuk's complaint by telling him what was going to happen. God told

Habakkuk that what was going to be done would be unbelievable. I'm not sure what Habakkuk wanted God to do in this matter. Perhaps he thought that somehow, those who lived life in an evil pattern, oppressing others, would just "see the light" and stop doing what they were doing. Wouldn't that be wonderful! But, realistically, does this happen very often?

What do you think are the chances that the American society is going to turn around and suddenly become God-fearing and moral? What are the chances that child abuse is going to decrease, that illegal drugs are going to disappear, that prostitution is going to cease, that traditional family values are going to return? If all it took was that the truth be proclaimed to those that are immoral, then we should have the purest society of any time. Men such as Billy Graham, Charles Stanley, Chuck Swindoll, and many others are on radio and television proclaiming truth as clearly as it has been proclaimed and yet many change only for the worse.

What would we suggest that God do to change our nation? Are we looking for some quick fix, easy solution just as Habakkuk was? However, God could see that only something very radical would cause such people to change in Judah's case and, I fear, that the same will be true for our nation.

The thing that Habakkuk would not be able to believe was that God was going to use a heathen nation to bring judgement on the Jews. Many of the prophets of that day, made it clear that the rise of the Babylonian Empire was God's way of bringing judgement on the people of Judah. The Babylonians were also used by God to bring judgement on the Assyrians that God had used to bring judgement on the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

Verses 8-11 give further descriptions of the Babylonians and how terrible they were. Listen to Habakkuk's reaction.

#### HABAKKUK 1:12-13

12 ¶ O LORD, are you not from everlasting? My God, my Holy One, we will not die. O LORD, you have appointed them to execute judgment; O Rock, you have ordained them to punish.

13 Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong. Why then do you tolerate the treacherous? Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?

This was not the solution that Habakkuk wanted. This solution that God came up with seemed to be unfair from Habakkuk's point of view. In fact, he had another complaint to lodge with God. In the second half of the first chapter, he claims that he had trouble seeing how an eternal and just God could use the unrighteous to swallow up those that were more righteous than themselves. In other words, even though there was sin and evil in Judah, it was nothing like that of the Babylonians. At least the people of Judah claimed to believe in and worship God and the Babylonians were a pagan nation that worshiped idols. We can understand the perplexity of Habakkuk in trying to comprehend God's methods. Habakkuk did not see the depth and seriousness of the basic problem in the society of Judah, but God did. It was as if Habakkuk wanted to treat a heart attack with antacid, whereas, God saw that they needed a transplant.

#### HABAKKUK 1:14-15

14 He has made men like the fishes of the sea, like the worms which have no ruler over them.

15 He takes them all up with his hook, he takes them in his net, getting them together in his fishing-net: for which cause he is glad and full of joy.

Habakkuk has claimed that God does not value humanity any more than people value fish and fish bait.

#### HABAKKUK 1:16-17

16 For this reason he makes an offering to his net, burning perfume to his fishing-net; because by them he gets much food and his meat is fat.

17 For this cause his net is ever open, and there is no end to his destruction of the nations.

The argument that is put forth by Habakkuk is that the pagan who are successful in conquering other nation (and especially if they conquer Judah) would give credit to their instruments of war. They would think that they could defeat their enemies because they had better horses or better chariots or better strategy. (That would be the equivalent of the fisherman praising his hooks and nets for his success as a fisherman.)

In verses 5 and 6, God told Habakkuk that He was raising up the Babylonians or Chaldeans to bring about judgment on His people. Habakkuk was concerned (and rightly so) that the Babylonians would not realize the reason for their success and would go to extremes in conquering other nations, just because they could.

Habakkuk laid out his complaint before the Lord and then waited for a reply.

#### HABAKKUK 2:1-4

1 ¶ I will take my position and be on watch, placing myself on my tower, looking out to see what he will say to me, and what answer he will give to my protest. (BBE)

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 reproved. (KJV)

2 Then the LORD replied: "Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it.

3 For the revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay.

4 "See, he is puffed up; his desires are not upright—but the righteous will live by his faith—

Habakkuk expected to be rebuked by God for this second complaint. He was saying, in effect, I'll just wait until God's answer comes.

God's answer came in the form of a message that was to be shared with all the people of the nation. Habakkuk was told to write it down so that runners could take to various parts of the country and let everyone know. It was also intended that the message would be preserved so that when it finally came to pass that people would know that what was happening was according to God's word.

We need to be diligent in taking the revelation that God has already given us and sharing it with other people. We should also be alert to be able to interpret what is happening in our day and time and put these happenings in the context of what God has said would be happening.

For example, in 2 Timothy 3:3, the word of God that came to us from Paul says that in the last days people would be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self control, brutal, not lovers of good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof.

The revelation that God was giving to Habakkuk was set to happen at a specific time. Judgement would not be instantaneous but it would surely come. Habakkuk was told to wait until God acted because it would happen in God's timetable -- He would not miss His appointments.

God addressed the wickedness of the Chaldeans. God realized that the nation of Babylon and in particular their king was proud, boastful and unjust. In some of the following verses God pointed out that eventually the king would meet his downfall in the form of alcoholism. God also answered Habakkuk's concern about the righteous. "The righteous (the justified) would live by and because of his faithfulness." This great truth was quoted in three places in the New Testament (Rom 1:17, Gal 3:11, and Heb 10:38). It is a foundational truth regarding man's relationship to God. Without faith (faithfulness) it is impossible to please Him, but all things are possible to him who has faith in God.