

## Judah After Israel's Fall (725-585 BCE) *Habakkuk's Questioning Prophecy*

Readings: *Habakkuk 1:1-3:10*

### *Reflections:*

- In the midst of prophecy after prophecy about the judgment of God coming against Israel through the wicked nations around them, Habakkuk pauses to ask a very legitimate question: how can a righteous and holy God use such evil nations, particularly Babylonia to complete his judgment? How can he use an evil nation as an instrument of judgment? Shouldn't they be the ones being judged? This question points toward a similar question, how can a righteous God allow evil to exist? Although Habakkuk doesn't answer every aspect of these related questions, his dialogue with God does provide key insights into God's perspective and purposes when dealing with evil in the world.
- Habakkuk begins with his first complaint: How long must I cry out because of the violence and injustice? The law of God is paralyzed, justice never prevails, and the wicked have completely surrounded the righteous. The previous prophecies of Jeremiah affirm that these are terrible times when God is using the wicked to punish Israel for its continual lust for evil.
- God's first words contain an insight that will carry on throughout the centuries to come: "I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe, even if you were told." To have faith means you know God's power and love to the point where you can actually believe what he says. When the disciples heard Jesus' words about the future, they didn't believe. We often struggle with the same thing. God tells us but we have a hard time believing what He says.
- God's use of Babylon creates a huge problem for Habakkuk: God you are too pure to tolerate evil. How can you use such an evil nation? Habakkuk is very bold and declares that he is going to wait until God answers him!
- God's response teaches about how the process of growing our faith response to God. "Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so that the herald may run with it. For the revelation waits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and it will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it, it will certainly come and not delay." First, when God speaks you need to capture it and make it concrete. The best way is to write it down in a safe place like a journal. Make sure you explain it well enough that you can remember the words

themselves, the circumstances and the emotions. Second, you need to run with the message. That means you need to start to live your life in line with what God has said. You may not be able to act on the word until God works but you can living in line with the word. This means maintaining your confidence and making the necessary adjustments to your thinking and lifestyle so that when God works, you will be able to immediately partner with him. Third, you need to take the long view of life and demonstrate patience. God almost always takes longer than we think but then when he acts it happens swiftly. So it requires us to be ready and watchful, ready to go as soon as God says "GO!"

- God gives this conclusion to Habakkuk: "See, he is puffed up; his desires are not upright – but the righteous will live by his faith" – Here is my translation: "Although prideful, self-centered people become consumed with desires that are not right, those who are right in their relationship with God will live by their humble, active trust in God." This statement is the centerpiece description of our relationship with God. In the meta-narrative, it stretches right back to Genesis and into the future to the apostles of Christ. To live in friendship with God is to value everything he says and to trust him to be true to all his declares. Living by faith is not easy though because God is invisible and we must ultimately trust someone we can't touch or feel. All we have is his Spirit and his word to us. God's advice through Habakkuk is helpful: write down what God says and start to align your life to it so that these practical steps can help you make it more concrete and something you can hang on to as you wait.
- Habakkuk 2:5-17 zeroes in on the destructive nature of human kingdoms. People are taken captive; the rich gain wealth by oppressing the poor; innocent blood is shed; land and animals are destroyed; your evil will call out for the judgment of God. We see this pattern repeated throughout history. Humans left to their own are terrible creatures. They kill each other and destroy their own home.
- Within this passage there is a message of hope: "For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea." This promise declares that in this terrible darkness, God will shine a light of his glory. As we will see, the coming of the Messiah, the Christ, will reveal a type of glory about God no one could have ever imagined.
- Habakkuk 2:18-20 turns to the idols and points out how completely useless and worthless are the idols of false gods. What is the key difference between idols and the true God? Habakkuk makes it clear: God actually speaks and gives his people guidance. God is relational and he wants to speak to his people. What are we called to do then? "But the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him." We are called to be still and silent before God so that we can know him and hear his gentle whisper. This silence is not like a classroom of kids that has just been yelled at by their teacher and needs to have a collective time out. This is a silence of listening, of waiting with anticipation of what God will say.

- Habakkuk 3 ends with a prayer or a psalm. It captures his heart response to all God has said to him and shown him. He declares the power and judgment of God on all wickedness. He declares God as his deliverer. But then he concludes with two powerful insights about his relationship with God: Insight #1: “Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive tree fails and fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior.” – This is faith! Although there are no visuals to confirm that God is going to fulfill his promises, yet I know God’s heart and so I can still wait with true joy and anticipation. God will be my Savior so I am just going to relax and celebrate until the day it happens. Insight #2: “The Sovereign Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights.” This is an awesome picture. As we walk by faith, we will go to impossible heights in our relationship with God! God help me learn and live this lesson!