

November 22

Scriptures: Read Habakkuk 1 & 2

Key Verse: "... The just shall live by his faith." (Habakkuk 2:4)

Overview

Like many believers, Habakkuk had some sincere questions that he asked the Lord. His first question concerned the unjudged sin in his own nation of Judah. He knew that God was a holy and righteous God who must punish sin, yet he was puzzled about the "when" factor. Habakkuk's complaint was a result of the injustices such as violence, stealing, bribing of judges, persecuting of the righteous, and all the while the wicked were prospering (1:2-4; cf. Ps. 37:1-10; 49:16-20; Ps. 73; Jer. 12:1-4; Job 21). Habakkuk wanted to see an immediate punishment of the wicked, so that righteousness could be vindicated.

In the Lord's most gracious answer, Habakkuk is asked to broaden his limited and narrow-minded perspective. The Jews had a tendency to think that God, the God of Israel, dealt only with them and concerned Himself with matters involving only Israel or Judah. God asked Habakkuk to look beyond the borders of Israel and see His working among the Gentiles. When Habakkuk would understand more fully God's plan for the whole world, the Lord said that he would be astounded (1:5). The Lord revealed to Habakkuk that He would use the Chaldeans (Babylonians) to bring the punishment which Habakkuk knew Judah deserved. By this time the Babylonians were already a strong nation, but God affirms that "indeed" He was the One raising them up to fulfill His purposes of judgment, not only upon Judah in answer to Habakkuk's prayer, but upon other nations as well (1:6).

In anticipation of Habakkuk's response, the Lord explained to him that He knows all about the Babylonians. He knows that they are powerful, terrible, violent, swift, arrogant, and most wicked. He knows that they would mock all the people they overran, including the Jews, and that no one would be able to stand before them (1:7-10). He also knows that they will commit an offence against God by accrediting all that He has given them to their own strength and to their worthless idols (1:11; cf. Dan. 5:4).

Although Habakkuk did not understand the Lord's ways, he acknowledged that the eternal God is holy and just. In faith he knew that even though God would use the ruthless Chaldeans to punish Judah, He would not let His righteous remnant see death (1:12). The difficulty Habakkuk had was in understanding why the Holy God would use those who were even more wicked than Judah to punish her? Habakkuk illustrates the Chaldeans' cruelty to people by comparing them to fishermen catching fish. They rejoice over a large catch and unmercifully allow their captives to die. When they partake of the goodness of their catch (i.e. take plunder from the captive nations), it leads them to worship their nets, which represent their weapons of warfare and their own strength (1:13-17).

Having expressed his puzzlement and complaint, Habakkuk prepared himself to wait on the Lord's answer (2:1). He did not accuse God of injustice, for he knew God was just. It is not wrong to pose questions to the Lord; what is wrong is accusing God and refusing to wait on Him.

for the answer. Sometimes our questions can be answered by looking through the Word of God; other questions will not be answered until we get to heaven, yet we must still trust and wait on the Lord.

It appears that the prophet Habakkuk did not have to wait long before the Lord answered. God told him to write down the vision so that it could be preserved. God reassured him that it would surely come to fulfillment, just as every prophecy of the Lord has been and will be fulfilled at the appointed time (2:3). Although God would use the Chaldeans to execute His judgment and they would appear to be the victors, God had also purposed to judge the proud Chaldeans who, like an alcoholic with wine, could never get enough of the taste of victory (2:5). Before detailing the doom of the wicked, God reassures Habakkuk that “the just shall live by his faith” (2:4). This became a favourite scripture verse of the early church, and it was quoted three times in the New Testament (Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38). In the coming Babylonian invasion of Judah, there would be many righteous people who would suffer and die along with the wicked, yet the Lord promises the righteous that they shall yet live. The temporal loss of life would lead them to eternal life with Him in glory (2 Cor. 4:17-18).

The remainder of chapter two shows, in contrast to the ultimate victory of the righteous, that the wicked will be vanquished. God pronounces five “woes” which are timeless and universal; they are given here specifically in condemnation of the Babylonians, but they also apply to the wicked of Judah who were guilty of similar offences (2:6-20). Habakkuk wrote them down in a poetic form so they could be easily remembered. These woes condemn greed, the amassing of wealth, the oppression of others, covetousness, bloodshed, violence, deceitfulness, and idolatry. Habakkuk warns that the wicked shall reap what they have sown; they will be accused and put to shame. The reason that one can be sure of this is because the Lord God is the only living God before whom the whole earth must stand in awe (2:20), for there will come a day when “the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord”. At that time it will be clear to all that the Lord and His righteous people are indeed the victors.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, through the shed blood of Your Son Jesus, You have set at liberty those that have been held captive, and You have made us victors through Him. We praise You today!