

The Vision of Truth Will Not Tarry

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not lie: though it
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—Habakkuk 2:3

HABAKKUK SERVED ISRA-

el’s two-tribe kingdom of Judah as a prophet shortly before it was taken into captivity to Babylon. The nation was in a state of chaos at the time, and the book which bears Habakkuk’s name presents his message to a consid-

erable extent in the form of a dialogue, in which we find the prophet asking questions and receiving answers from the Lord.

Habakkuk’s first inquiry of the Lord pertains to the situation in Judah by which he was surrounded. We quote: “O LORD, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear! even cry out unto thee of violence, and thou wilt not save! 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. Therefore the law is slacked, and judgment doth never go forth: for the wicked doth compass about the righteous; therefore wrong judgment proceedeth.”
—Hab. 1:2-4

Here we sense the bitter anguish of Habakkuk, brought about to a large extent by the fact that it seemed as though the Lord was doing nothing about the evil that was rampant in the nation. As we reflect upon this we can sense in it the feeling of God’s righteous people throughout all the ages, even to the present moment, as they likewise have endeavored to understand why God has permitted so much evil and injustice to continue in the earth. The subject of why God permits evil has had a prominent place in the minds and hearts of all who would like to see conditions in the earth better than they have been.

God replied to Habakkuk on this point. “Behold ye among the heathen, and regard, and wonder marvellously: for I will work a work in your days, which ye will not believe, though it be told you. For, lo, I raise up the Chaldeans [Babylonians], that bitter and hasty nation, which shall march through the breadth of the land, to possess the dwellingplaces that are not theirs. They are terrible and dreadful: their judgment and their dignity shall proceed of themselves. Their horses also are swifter than the leopards, and are more fierce than the evening wolves: and their horsemen shall spread themselves, and their horsemen shall come from far; they shall fly as the eagle that hasteth to eat. They shall come all for violence: their faces shall sup up as the east wind, and they shall gather the captivity as the

sand. And they shall scoff at the kings, and the princes shall be a scorn unto them: they shall deride every strong hold; for they shall heap dust, and take it.”—vss. 5-10; Isa. 13:19; 47:1

Here the Lord explains to Habakkuk that he is not overlooking the intolerably wicked situation in Judah, and that he does propose to do something about it. He explains that he will take action against this iniquity in Habakkuk’s own lifetime. This in itself could have provided some measure of comfort for the prophet, for he had asked the Lord, “How long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear!” Though Habakkuk did receive assurance that action would be taken against the wickedness in Judah, he still did not understand just what the Lord was doing, or why.

HABAKKUK’S QUESTION

Not grasping the full import of what the Lord had said concerning the Chaldeans, a “bitter and hasty nation,” visiting trouble upon Judah, Habakkuk asked, “Art thou not from everlasting, O LORD my God, mine Holy One? we shall not die. O LORD, thou hast ordained them for judgment; and, O mighty God, thou hast established them for correction. Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity: wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he? And makest men as the fishes of the sea, as the creeping things, that have no ruler over them?”—Hab. 1:12-14

Habakkuk’s problem now was to understand why God would use a people more wicked even than the

people of Judah to punish them. In his inquiry concerning this he stresses the Lord's holiness. God, he said, was his "Holy One." Yet, the prophet wondered as to the method the Lord said he would use to put down the wicked situation that existed in Judah. After extending the details of his question throughout the remainder of the chapter, Habakkuk continues, "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."—Hab. 2:1

Once Habakkuk properly concluded that he should "watch" for God's direction of these matters rather than question and complain about them, the answer to the prophet was readily given. He says, "The LORD answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it. 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. Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith."—vss. 2-4

This was God's answer to Habakkuk as to why he would use the wicked Babylonians to punish Judah. Actually, so far as the immediate present was concerned, it was no answer at all. However, what the Lord really does in his reply is to lift the controversy out of its local setting and give it a world-wide application. In the answer it is also indicated that only the just, on the basis of faith, will be able to understand, appreciate, and live by this answer.

The "vision" referred to in the answer is that great vision of truth which began to unfold when

God said that the seed of the woman would bruise the serpent's head, and was amplified by his promise to Abraham: "In thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed." (Gen. 3:15; 22:18; 28:14) This was the great vision of truth that permeated the prophecies of the Old Testament. Included within this great plan of the ages to destroy all evil are all the individual and collective institutions—including Satan himself—through which mankind has suffered because of sin. Only when this vision is understood is the answer seen clearly as to why God permitted evil.

The Lord explained to Habakkuk that this vision was for an appointed time. The prophet could not expect to understand it then, "but at the end it shall speak, and not lie." Though it may seem to tarry, God explains, "wait for it"—the vision will surely come in due time, and will not tarry. If Habakkuk's faith was able to grasp this assurance, which doubtless it was, he received a great comfort from it because it would assure him that while he could not understand the meaning of all that God was doing at that time, there was an explanation which would be forthcoming when "at the end" the vision spoke.

The *King James Version* reads, speaking of the vision, "It will surely come, it will not tarry." The *Greek Septuagint* version renders it, "Though he may tarry, wait for him; for he will assuredly come and will not fail." The use of the pronoun "he" in the *Greek Septuagint* emphasizes that fundamental to this great vision of truth is the fact that there is a personality associated with it—the great Christ, the Messiah of promise.

NEW TESTAMENT CONFIRMATION

The Apostle Paul, who so faithfully preached the gospel of Christ, understood the significance of the vision promised to Habakkuk from this standpoint. He wrote to the Hebrew Christians, “Ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith.” (Heb. 10:36-38) This vision of truth was the sole focus of Paul’s mission as a minister of Christ.

How comforting it is to us today to realize, through the fulfillment of many Bible prophecies, we are living in the time when God’s great vision of truth is speaking even more clearly than in Paul’s day. Because of this those who are faithfully watching now understand why God permits evil. They know also that the end of the reign of sin and death is drawing very near, and in that also they rejoice. With the end of the reign of sin and death there will come a time of joy and happiness when there shall be no more death, sorrow, crying, nor even any pain. (Rev. 21:1-4) How glorious to be living in the time when the vision is speaking. While the time has not arrived as yet, we know that it is drawing near when, as the Prophet Habakkuk later recorded, “The earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.”—Hab. 2:14

HABAKKUK’S PRAYER

Much in the second and third chapters of Habakkuk is denunciation against wickedness and wicked people. In verse 20 of chapter 2, however, God gives us assurance that he has not lost control over the

permission of evil. We read: "The LORD is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him." How reassuring it is to realize that no matter how much evil flourishes throughout the earth, God has not lost control of the situation!

Habakkuk sensed that, despite all that the Lord had threatened and the review of wickedness which he presented, in due time God's vision would speak. Then the great Messiah of promise, together with his associates, would establish peace and righteousness throughout the earth, which would then be filled with an accurate knowledge and understanding of the Lord and his plan.

However, Habakkuk, like many of God's righteous people through the ages, was impatient. He knew that the Lord was capable of taking full control of the situation any time he wished, and could not see the need for waiting for some future day for this to happen. Thus we have his prayer, "O LORD, I have heard thy speech, and was afraid: O LORD, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy." —Hab. 3:2

First in Habakkuk's prayer was his acknowledgment of fear when God revealed to him the calamities that would soon come upon the nation. Perhaps he felt that he could not endure even the sight of what this would involve, so he prayed to the Lord, "Revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy." In other words, he seemed to be asking God not to wait for some distant future time in which to reveal himself through the vision that would then speak. The prophet's expression may

have been a request for the Lord to take hold of the evil situation in the world right then, bring it to an end, and establish righteousness. Why delay such a glorious outcome? Habakkuk may have thought.

This, however, was not the Lord's will. He knew that there were yet millions of people to be brought into the world who would benefit from the experience of evil. He knew that he had the ability when the time came, through the kingdom of the Messiah, to restore those who had suffered and died in the interim, and that together all would receive of his blessing when his glory would fill the earth.

HABAKKUK SPEAKS AGAIN

After learning of all the calamities which the Lord would visit upon the wicked, Habakkuk, said, "When I heard, my belly trembled; my lips quivered at the voice: rottenness entered into my bones, and I trembled in myself, that I might rest in the day of trouble: when he cometh up unto the people, he will invade them with his troops."—Hab. 3:16

Despite Habakkuk's distress and foreboding, he maintained his trust in God and expressed his assurance that no matter what happened, he would rejoice in the Lord. "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: Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation."—vss. 17,18

How sublime is this expression of trust in the Lord! It is the more wonderful when we realize that previous to this Habakkuk had declared himself to

be afraid because of what he had heard God say. His “belly trembled,” his “lips quivered” at the voice of the Lord. “Rottenness” entered into his bones, and he “trembled.” He had expressed a desire to “rest in the day of trouble,” evidently referring to rest in the sleep of death.

While not much is known about Habakkuk’s personal life, he is thought to have been a farmer. In his expression of trust in the Lord he refers to essentially all the things with which a farmer would be concerned. His fig trees might fail; there might be no fruit on the vine; the labor of the olive might fail, and the fields would yield no meat; the flocks would be cut off from the fold; there would be no herd in the stalls. With all these things occurring in a farmer’s life there would seem to be not much left for which to live, but despite this Habakkuk said, “Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation.”

It is a joy to worship and serve God under favorable conditions, but the real test of our faith in him and devotion to him results from adversity. In Habakkuk we have a wonderful example of what should be our attitude when the Lord permits trials and tests to come upon us. If we rejoice in the abundance of good things which he supplies today, will we also rejoice in the God of our salvation tomorrow, when perhaps some of these good things are removed? We should be able to, especially since we are living in the time when the vision of truth is speaking, and the presence of the Son of man is enabling us to see the glory of God’s glorious plan—“the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.”—Eph. 3:11 ■