

## 16 - ENTER THE HIGH PLACE

Habakkuk prophesied around 606 BC, only twenty years before the final destruction of Jerusalem and the temple - just two decades before the nation of Judah was overthrown and the people taken into captivity in Babylon.

Habakkuk describes the culture of Jerusalem in 606 BC as being filled with social injustice. The elite oppressed the middle class into poverty, resulting in strife and contention as the middle class attempted to fight back within a corrupt legal system that favored the ruling class. Obviously, in that kind of setting any judicial decision would have been twisted and unjust. As Habakkuk told them, the "law is paralyzed, and justice never goes forth." This enabling atmosphere naturally resulted in the elite (mockers) further oppressing the wise, fools, and simple of the land for their own benefit.

These ubiquitous and shameless iniquities caused Habakkuk to cry out and seek understanding from the Lord:

*O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not hear?*

*Or cry to you "Violence!" and you will not save?*

*Why do you make me see iniquity, and why do you idly look at wrong?*

*Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise.*

*So the law is paralyzed, and justice never goes forth.*

*For the wicked surround the righteous; so justice goes forth perverted.*

- Habakkuk 1:2-4

In response, the Lord explains to Habakkuk that he is going to bring justice upon the evil in Judah using the “bitter and impulsive” Babylonians (1:6). In fact, the Lord reveals that he has been preparing them for his use. He has actively not prevented them from developing their arsenal of the best military armaments, technology, and technique available in that age (1:7-8).

Habakkuk is shown that the Babylonian invaders will bring an even deeper level of social injustice and destruction than was currently happening in Jerusalem (1:9). The Babylonian culture that will overpower the wickedness of Judah consists of “guilty men” who worship their own strength (1:11). They are mockers (1:10) who consider their victims as worthless as sand (1:9) and treat them like nets full of unnamed fish from the sea (1:14-16). Surprisingly, they will be doing the work of the Lord as history continues to move forward toward its ultimate end - the kingdom of God on earth, the home of eternal righteousness (1:5).

Habakkuk is stunned by this revelation of the Lord’s plan and tries hard to deny it (1:12-13), just as Peter, after having identified Jesus as “the Messiah, the son of the living God”, immediately rejected the Lord’s intention to “go to Jerusalem and suffer many things... be killed and on the third day be raised to life.”

Peter’s reaction to Jesus’ revealed plan was strong:

*Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying,  
“Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.”*  
- Matthew 16:22

Just as Habakkuk was stunned in 606 BC by the Lord, so Peter was stunned by Jesus’ rebuke of his attempt to correct and reject the Lord’s plan in 30 AD: “[The Lord] turned and said to Peter, ‘Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For **you are not setting**

*your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”*

Indeed, Habakkuk had faith in the Lord and was able to articulate in his words, life, and prayers the truth that God had revealed to him. But God’s determination to crush Judah with the pagan Babylonians was beyond Habakkuk’s limited understanding of God - and his plans and his purposes.

God’s promised plan for Israel - and God’s plan of salvation - are still active and developing today, but the fulfillment of those promises are yet in the future.

Habakkuk was promised that the Lord’s plans would still come to pass at the appointed time. But until then, Habakkuk (and all the believers he represented as a prophet) must “wait for it”. Until that time, Habakkuk must stand firm in faith regarding those things he did understand, while trusting God for the things that were too overwhelming to be grasped by mere humans - even by the prophet to whom so much was revealed.

In his mercy, God reminds Habakkuk that “the righteous shall live by his faith.”

*For still the vision awaits its appointed time;  
it hastens to the end—it will not lie.  
If it seems slow, wait for it;  
it will surely come; it will not delay.  
Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him,  
but the righteous shall live by his faith.*

- Habakkuk 2:3-4

The mature, wise, and righteous man will stand firm in the knowledge and understanding already stored in his soul - but will also extend his faith to trust in the deep recesses of God’s unrevealed

mysteries of truth.

Understand that this is not a blind faith. Our faith should never be blind! We are never told in the Bible to merely trust in some fantasy or vain hope. That is a doctrinal error we could call presumption.

What we are talking about is faith in the person and character of God. Our Father has already proven himself to be trustworthy concerning his revealed intentions and his past interventions. We should have already experienced the Lord's good and perfect character in our lives before we seek to live by faith in him. And so, with this knowledge and experience, we can move forward to face the unknown and incomprehensible things of life, knowing that the same Lord is in them and will continue to be.

This is why Habakkuk was able to write at the end of his book that he would continue to trust the Lord even though all the surrounding evidence tried to convince him to despair. While the "fool" and the "simple" would renounce their presumed confidence in God, Habakkuk was able to remain steadfast.

*Though the fig tree should not blossom,  
nor fruit be on the vines,  
the produce of the olive fail  
and the fields yield no food,  
the flock be cut off from the fold  
and there be no herd in the stalls,  
yet I will rejoice in the Lord;  
I will take joy in the God of my salvation.  
God, the Lord, is my strength;  
he makes my feet like the deer's;  
he makes me tread on my high places.*

- Habakkuk 3:17-19

We see that Habakkuk's knowledge of and faith in God enable him to stand strong in hopeful faith, as he joyfully proclaims that "He will make me walk on my high hills."

The Hebrew word translated "tread" or "walk" is *darak*, which also means "march". So what we see here is Habakkuk saying that his soul is in a high, strong tower where he can remain at rest even when everything outside is chaotic - no harvests, no food, no economy, and no physical signs of hope or deliverance.

Habakkuk knew his salvation was not in the harvest, or in his strength, or in the economy. His place of protection was not in his provisions. It is a good thing he did not place any of his hope in any of these things, because they would all begin to fade away when Babylon defeated Egypt at Carchemish in 605 BC. And they would continue to decline for the next twenty years. When Babylon burned Jerusalem and the Lord's temple to the ground in 586 BC, all these things were gone and would not be restored in Habakkuk's lifetime.

Habakkuk's joy was in God, because God was the source of his salvation.

Habakkuk's Lord was the God of his strength, and because he was able to understand these concepts and his mind remained focused on them, Habakkuk was able to enter God's rest and tread forward courageously in the security of a soul fortified by reality and truth.

And so, in the coming days let us be very careful to imitate Habakkuk in these things - never fleeing before the enemy, but standing firm with our eyes set immovably on the person, character, and promises of our God.

This is what the Sovereign Lord, the Holy One of Israel, says:

*"In repentance and rest is your salvation,  
in quietness and trust is your strength!*

*- but you would have none of it.*

*You said, 'No, we will flee on horses.'*

*Therefore you will flee!*

*You said, 'We will ride off on swift horses.'*

*Therefore your pursuers will be swift!"*

- Isaiah 30:15-16 (around 730 BC)

