

I Will Rejoice Part One

Introduction: This small, three chapter prophetic book called Habakkuk is one of the least preached and understood texts in all of Scripture—yet it is powerful and profound in the truth it provides to believers.

Primarily—it deals with the questions, perplexities, confusion, and struggle experienced by God's people in days that seem so very uncertain. This is why it is so applicable to our world today.

(ILL) The Unisys Security index surveys more than 13,000 people in 13 countries, and is considered one of the only recurring global snapshots of citizen perceptions. It measures anxiety about issues like national security, disasters or epidemics, and personal safety. The most recent survey (2017) shows that levels of U.S. anxiety jumped sharply since the last survey in 2014, and came in at the highest levels since the surveys began a decade ago.

"It's an understatement to say that anxiety level is high, and we live in very uncertain times," said a Unisys senior vice president. "We definitely have seen a huge spike over the last three years." Another expert added, "It appears that our cloak of security, the impression that we had that we are more secure than the rest of the world, is starting to fade."

About the Context:

1. He prophesied during the fall of Nineveh (of Assyria) in 612 BC—fell to the Babylonians
 - a. He is prophesying to the southern Kingdom of Judah
 - b. Split in two after death of Solomon (North and South) north fell to Assyria in 712
 - c. Now Assyria is falling to the new world power-Babylonians-King Nebuchadnezzar
2. 609 BC—the last godly king of Judah (Josiah) dies and people are increasingly godless
3. The power of Babylon is becoming great and the wickedness of Judah greater still
4. Habakkuk's prophecy is really a dialogue between he and God
5. Two complaints to God—two responses of God and a prayer in chapter 3
6. Ultimately he will prophecy the utter destruction of his own people and the takeover of his land—only through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit could this be possible

Today going to look at the first two chapters of Habakkuk's prophecy and the two complaints and two responses from God—we will learn a lot about rejoicing in midst of a troubled world.

I. **The Perplexity of the Faithful**—*Sometimes the world does not make sense*

“The burden which the prophet Habakkuk saw. O LORD, how long shall I cry, And You will not hear? Even cry out to You, “Violence!” And You will not save. Why do You show me iniquity, And cause me to see trouble? For plundering and violence are before me; There is strife, and contention arises. Therefore the law is powerless, And justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous; Therefore perverse judgment proceeds.” Habakkuk 1:1-4 NKJV

- A. Habakkuk wants to know how long it will be before God does something about the sin and wickedness of his own people—he is utterly amazed that God has not acted yet.
- B. Habakkuk was asking for relief from the injustice and sin that was destroying the people of God but none was coming (usually God hears our cries and respond but He seems silent to Habakkuk)
 - 1. Violence (hamas) is everywhere (same word as before the flood in Genesis 6)
 - 2. The law is paralyzed—is it numb and being brutally perverted
 - 3. How long will this sin go unpunished?
- C. We are like Habakkuk often aren't we?
 - 1. God how can this be?
 - 2. How can the world be so evil?
 - 3. Many just chuck it here altogether and quit following Christ.
 - 4. But there is so much more we don't see

“To walk away from one's faith because of unanswered questions about evil is to walk into a storm of unanswered questions about good”.—Ravi Zacharias

II. The Sovereign Plan of God—*His ways are not our ways*

Note God's response:

“Look among the nations and watch— Be utterly astounded! For I will work a work in your days Which you would not believe, though it were told you. For indeed I am raising up the Chaldeans, A bitter and hasty nation Which marches through the breadth of the earth, To possess dwelling places that are not theirs. They are terrible and dreadful; Their judgment and their dignity proceed from themselves. Their horses also are swifter than leopards, And more fierce than evening wolves. Their chargers charge ahead; Their cavalry comes from afar; They fly as the eagle that hastens to eat. “They all come for violence; Their faces are set like the east wind. They gather captives like sand. They scoff at kings, And princes are scorned by them. They deride every stronghold, For they heap up earthen mounds and seize it. Then his mind changes, and he transgresses; He commits offense, Ascribing this power to his god.”
Habakkuk 1:5-11 NKJV

A. Just watch—Habakkuk—I am doing something great—I am raising up the Chaldeans and they will come and bring judgment to the people of Judah.

1. Look among the nations and watch (it's bigger than just Israel—my work and purpose are larger than that...important for us to remember)
2. I will use Babylon and Nebuchadnezzar to judge my people
 - a. 20 years before they did not exist except as a small little band of people
 - b. Now they have conquered Syria, Egypt, and Assyria and about ready to conquer Palestine
 - c. They will dissipate in power in 70 years and Persia will rise and Jews will go home

B. This will be perplexing to Habakkuk for God will judge his wicked people at the hands of people more wicked than them.

1. They are cruel and impetuous people who will spread out in the land and conquer territories not their own (6)
2. They are skilled in warfare and their horses and chariots are the marvel of the kingdoms (swift and mighty—v.8)
3. They gather captives like the sand (9)—irony the seed of Abraham like the “sand of the seashore”
4. They mock and scorn all fortresses (deride every stronghold-10)
 - a. When Israel went into Canaan they would check out how fortified nations were
 - b. Did they have walls and fortifications
 - c. Babylon was so powerful it wouldn't matter

- C. While God declares the downfall of Judah at the hands of the wicked Babylonians he also tells of their ultimate destruction

“Then his mind changes, and he transgresses; He commits offense, Ascribing this power to his god.” Habakkuk 1:11 NKJV

III. The Struggle of the Godly—Why do the righteous suffer?

Now Habakkuk is really perplexed:

“Are You not from everlasting, O LORD my God, my Holy One? We shall not die. O LORD, You have appointed them for judgment; O Rock, You have marked them for correction. You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, And cannot look on wickedness. Why do You look on those who deal treacherously, And hold Your tongue when the wicked devours A person more righteous than he? Why do You make men like fish of the sea, Like creeping things that have no ruler over them? They take up all of them with a hook, They catch them in their net, And gather them in their dragnet. Therefore they rejoice and are glad. Therefore they sacrifice to their net, And burn incense to their dragnet; Because by them their share is sumptuous And their food plentiful. Shall they therefore empty their net, And continue to slay nations without pity?” Habakkuk 1:12-17 NKJV

- A. His problem becomes even greater—God using wicked Babylon to judge His own people seems worse than God not judging His own—He actually gets a little bold with God

1. You are from everlasting (made a covenant with us) surely you won't wipe us out? Correction maybe—but surely not destruction!
2. You are a God that cannot tolerate evil, you are too pure to look at sin and yet you say you will use these people?
3. You said you can't curse your people (see Balaam who had been paid to curse Israel in his prophecy)

“How shall I curse whom God has not cursed? And how shall I denounce whom the LORD has not denounced?” Numbers 23:8 NKJV

- B. The question Habakkuk poses, the complaint he gives to God is one we still ask—How can the favored of God suffer such devastation?

1. He struggles on behalf of all of God's people through the centuries
2. He struggles with and wrestles with the depth and riches of the wisdom of God
3. It culminates in the cross when He who knew no sin became sin for us (the favored suffering for the wicked)
4. Notice his complaint—how God can you hold your tongue and not say something (you told us not to be silent witnesses of evil)—Habakkuk is protesting

C. He accuses God of wrongdoing

1. Like fish being drug by the hook (Babylonians used the torture of a hook in the lip of their captives)
2. He even tells God in verse 16 they will end up worshipping their nets (they will think it is them)
3. How can God allow this—you are a God of compassion (v.17)

D. Habakkuk is now questioning God about His answer to the problem he first raised

IV. The Quiet Trust of the Just—*We submit to a God who is in His Holy Temple*

The initial resolution comes for Habakkuk:

“I will stand my watch And set myself on the rampart, And watch to see what He will say to me, And what I will answer when I am corrected. Then the LORD answered me and said: “Write the vision And make it plain on tablets, That he may run who reads it. For the vision is yet for an appointed time; But at the end it will speak, and it will not lie. Though it tarries, wait for it; Because it will surely come, It will not tarry. “Behold the proud, His soul is not upright in him; But the just shall live by his faith.” Habakkuk 2:1-4 NKJV

A. It seems that Habakkuk expects to be rebuked by God for his questions

1. I will wait and see what He says to me (I won't try to figure it out—His ways are beyond me)
2. He braces himself and prepares for the likely rebuke

B. The divine response

1. Write it down so it may be proclaimed (run with it)
2. It is for a future people (an appointed time)
3. Though immediately and temporary devastation would come, His purpose would be brought forth in a future people
4. Though it tarries (wait for it for it will come)
5. At the end (it will speak, or is hastens toward the goal)
 - a. It yearns or pants (pua)
 - b. True prophecy yearns and longs to be fulfilled
6. There will be a final resolution that would come to the Babylonians who would proudly judge the people of God

C. The substance of the vision

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“Behold the proud, His soul is not upright in him; But the just shall live by his faith.”
Habakkuk 2:4 NKJV

1. It may seem that the Babylonians are living-but the proud cannot be upright and therefore they cannot ultimately live-they think their righteousness and power is within themselves
 - a. Even if it looks now like they will prosper
 - b. They cannot survive and they will not escape judgment and condemnation
2. The just (saddiq—righteous) shall live by his faith
 - a. Justice (righteousness-Hebrew word saddiq) is always judicial it must be pronounced
 - b. In Israel the earthly judges tied to make their decisions based in God’s settled covenant-what He declared was just and right
 - c. God declares people righteous or morally sound
(ILL) Abraham believed God and God declared him righteous
—we are made righteous the same way but God’s declaration when we believe
 - d. The just (the declared righteous) the saddiq-live by their faith (or trust in His faithfulness)
 - e. Faith does not justify us-God does

Calvin-“It is that faith which strips us of all arrogance, and leads us naked and needy to God, that we may seek salvation from Him alone, which would otherwise be far removed from us.”

- f. But the justified live (go on living) by their faith in God’s faithfulness

“By steadfast trust, even in the darkest of hours, the righteous (saddiq) will live.”

3. Compared to the proud-the puffed up will fall

“Indeed, because he transgresses by wine, He is a proud man, And he does not stay at home. Because he enlarges his desire as hell, And he is like death, and cannot be satisfied, He gathers to himself all nations And heaps up for himself all peoples.” Habakkuk 2:5 NKJV

—Daniel 5 and Belshazzar

Five Woes on the Proud

- a. The Babylonians will be taunted by their captives (6-8)—reciprocation
- b. The Babylonian dynasty will fall (9-11)

c. Like every people that tries to make itself great, it will fall as the glory of the Lord takes precedent (all attempt to build cities and nations fail—Babel, Golden image, America be careful) (12-14)

d. Will be forced to drink the cup of the God's wrath (15-17)

- Jerusalem would have to drink this cup
- If they did wouldn't the wicked nations as well
- In Matthew 20:20ff— (James and John's mother—are you able to drink the cup that I drink?)
- Gethsemane (Matthew 26:42ff—Oh Father, if it be possible...)"
- We don't have to because Jesus did (the proud do but the just, the declared righteous, leave by their steadfast trust in His faithfulness)

e. They speak to a god that cannot hear (18, 19)

"What profit is the image, that its maker should carve it, The molded image, a teacher of lies, That the maker of its mold should trust in it, To make mute idols? Woe to him who says to wood, 'Awake!' To silent stone, 'Arise! It shall teach!' Behold, it is overlaid with gold and silver, Yet in it there is no breath at all." Habakkuk 2:18-19 NKJV

- They have created God's themselves that's cannot speak or hear
- They look to a god for aid that they themselves had to make
- People today look to anything they themselves can create for help because they do not want to answer to God

Conclusion: But we have a speaking, seeing, and hearing God (Habakkuk 2:20)

"But the LORD is in His holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before Him."

1. Habakkuk began by questioning God
2. Now he stands in hushed reverence before the God of the Universe
3. It was a time of difficulty and trial, confusion and questioning
4. Evil abounded and the future looked devastating
5. But God had not moved—He was still speaking and He was still in control in His temple
6. So instead of questioning—Habakkuk would reverently stand and rejoice in the presence of God

This is what the American Church needs to do today! Standing reverently and listening to God in days when the world doesn't seem to make sense.

- You have questions?
- You have concerns?
- You have doubts?

True Fear of God

A few summers ago, we took a family vacation to Toronto. We'd never been there, and we didn't know what to see, but all the guidebooks said, "You have to go up the CN Tower, the world's tallest building and free-standing structure."

I didn't think that was a good idea, because I have a great fear of heights. Just the thought of being 1,815 feet above the ground made me queasy. But the kids said, "Aww, Dad, we gotta go. C'mon, Dad," so against my better judgment, we went.

I was the last one into the elevator, and I turned around, as some unwritten "Law of Elevators" says you're supposed to do. Then we started up. It was only then that I realized that the door of this elevator was actually made of glass, and that this elevator was affixed to the outside of the tower. So as we rushed up the side of the CN Tower, I could see the city of Toronto falling away at my feet. I was only inches from the door—and from the air outside and a freefall. My palms started sweating, my throat got tight, and I started breathing really fast. I told myself, Just hang on. Soon you'll be on the observation floor.

I stumbled out of the elevator onto the observation floor, where I thought it would be safe. But I found that some sadist had installed a glass floor there, so that people could walk on it, and look straight down to the ground.

The kids were laughing as they walked onto the glass floor, jumped up and down, and even laid down.

"C'mon, Dad!" they yelled.

I didn't care how thick those blocks of glass were; they were installed by the contractor with the lowest bid, so I wasn't going to chance it.

That same year, we went to the Grand Canyon, where you can stand at the South Rim and peer 6,000 feet straight down. At the Grand Canyon, you are not separated from your doom by blocks of glass 2½ inches thick. So every year, an average of four or five

people die while visiting. Some deaths happen because of (in one website's words) "overly zealous photographic endeavors."

Still, the Grand Canyon is so beautiful that I was drawn to it. I had to see it, to get near it. I knew I couldn't do anything too foolish near the edge, but the same awesome beauty that caused me fear drew me toward it.

When the Bible talks about "fearing God," what is it talking about? Is it talking about the kind of fear I felt at the CN Tower? Or is it more like the fear I felt at the Grand Canyon?

For most of my Christian life, preachers and writers have told me it's like the fear I felt at the CN Tower. "When the Bible says to fear God," they explained, "it doesn't really mean fear. It means awe or reverence. You should respect God, of course, but you don't need to actually fear him. It's like you're standing on the glass floor 1,100 feet up in the CN Tower. Being there may give you a thrill or a quick feeling of awe, but you're completely safe. So if you do feel any terror with God, it's unnecessary or even irrational."

That all sounded good. I believed that. And I told other people that.

But the Bible disagrees. Isaiah prophesies, "The LORD Almighty is the one ... you are to fear, he is the one you are to dread." And Jesus says, "Fear God, who has the power to kill you and then throw you into hell. Yes, he's the one to fear."

So when the Bible talks about fearing God, it means not just awe, and not just reverence. It also means fear. It's the kind of fear I felt at the Grand Canyon, where I was drawn to the amazing beauty, but I also felt a realistic fear at the danger, because people who acted foolishly near it have died.

Submitted by Kevin Miller, Vice President, Christianity Today International