

HABAKKUK, THE PROPHET OF HOPE

Things are well and truly ‘hotting up’ concerning the European Election, - whether we leave or whether we remain. All types of information are being paraded so as to help us make up our minds ... in case we are in any doubt! ... And, for good measure, others from outside these shores are ‘throwing in their tuppence worth’. It is very much comparable to the days of Hosea, **8:3** *Israel hath cast off the thing that is good: the enemy shall pursue him. 4 They have set up kings, but not by me: they have made princes, and I knew it not: of their silver and their gold have they made them idols, that they may be cut off*

We are going back to about the year 626 BC. It is a long time ago but, nonetheless, there are many similarities to today. ... Here is a bit of the background ... Habakkuk was basically an ordinary person, from an ordinary background. He is one of a group known as the *Minor Prophets*, - not because his message was any less, - or ‘minor’, - than Isaiah’s, Ezekiel’s or Jeremiah’s, but mainly because of its briefness. He was the eighth of the twelve minor prophets.

He prophesied during the time when Jeremiah, - sometimes described as “the weeping prophet”, - was also prophesying. This included a period when the land of Judah was experiencing great times of revival under King Josiah (640-609 BC). During those years there was freedom and prosperity throughout the land (II Chr. 34,35).

However, Habakkuk began to detect a ‘moral decline’. Life was still fairly good but a change was subtly underway. It is often the case that during success and stability the spiritual state of a country *does* suffer. ... And this moral decline then started to hurtle at an ever-increasing pace, and it seemed as if Habakkuk, - and those like him, - were completely unable to stop it.

You see, while Josiah was an excellent king, - in his faithfulness to the Lord, - his son Jehoikim was completely the opposite, - he became nothing more than a tyrant. The situation worsened when his son Jehoichin was arrested and taken to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar (597 BC). It seemed as if it was all getting out of control! ... Israel’s future as a nation was under threat.

As far as religion was concerned Israel had turned away from God, - they had forgotten Him and replaced Him with idolatry. Formerly, they had been a Jehovah-worshipping people ... but they had moved away from that ... they had ‘progressed’ and now identified themselves with the other surrounding

nations. They all became united and this was to their detriment because Jehovah became nothing more than a relic confined to the history of this very privileged people.

And what a situation had developed! ... And the very small number, - because God always keeps a remnant, - of the good, upright, faithful people of the land was crying out for God ... And chief among them was the prophet Habakkuk, **O LORD, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear! (1:1)** ... Gone were those great days of King Josiah's reign when the nation knew such memorable times of true blessing from God ... when the Word of God was rediscovered and read with such authority. ... But now the preaching of the Word of God had fallen silent, and the society of Jerusalem and the fervour of the people of God had come under the yoke of violence and lawlessness and destruction. The law was paralysed, - they had begun by redefining it until it meant absolutely nothing! True justice was scorned and laughed at. Old-fashioned values were detested and considered to be antiquated ... having no place in a modern society. Nobody was sure of what was right or wrong anymore ... and the righteous, - who held on to the old standards of rule according to God's Word, - were mocked by the wicked. ... The nation was shoving God and His ways into 'the dump'! ... And their fraternising with the pagan nations roundabout was facilitating their apostasy.

God and His ways had been over-ruled. He had been overtaken by the masses. The outside religions, - upon which the nation had never been established, - were considered on a par with the worship of Jehovah ... All the gods co-existed alongside each other ... and the rottenness had set in, and it looked as if it was totally impossible to remove it. Sadly, Israel and the people of God had unwittingly, - carelessly, - become *slaves* to the spirit of the age ... so much so you couldn't tell the difference. ... God's Word had been silenced ... And it truly troubled Habakkuk ... and He actually went so far as to accuse God of *indifference* (v.2), *inactivity* (vv.3,4), and *inconsistency* (vv.5-17) ... He cried out to God, **Where are You?**

... For when Habakkuk considered the holiness, righteousness, and perfect justice of God ... and when he read again the teachings given to Moses, and the way God had dealt in chastisement with the people of Israel down through their history, he could not understand why God *would not*, - it seemed, - step in and 'sort the land out' and draw His people 'back from the edge'. ... Surely, I don't have to spell out any more the similarities of the days of Habakkuk and our own. They are so starkly obvious! They are staring us in the face! ... **God, where are You?! ... God, are You listening?!**

And then God began to speak ... not to everyone, but *to* one who was seriously concerned about the state of the nation, - Habakkuk was in constant and earnest prayer before the Lord. And then his heart started to race and get excited for he realised God was answering his prayer. God is about to do something! Tremendous, God is going to visit His people again! ... And so God answers. Look at how He begins, **v.5 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.** ... Fantastic! God hasn't given up on His people. He hasn't left us, even though it seems as if we have left Him. He continues to have plans for us. Israel is His precious nation and He will *never* give up on them!

But as God opens up and explains to Habakkuk the prophet realises things were about to become indescribably worse. As he listened to the Lord, he could not believe what he was hearing! "This isn't the way I would do it, Lord! You are going about it the wrong way! Surely Lord, we're supposed to come back to you and repent of our sins. Make it happen that way! ... Lord, here is how You should do it, ... invoke II Chronicles 7:14 **If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.** ... Lord, that's the way to do it!" ...

But we dare not tell the righteous God how to behave for His ways are not our ways, and His thoughts not our thoughts ... He chose to use the most cruel and terrifying people on the face of the earth for His own reasons. You could not have found a good word to say about the Chaldeans/Babylonians! They were evil according to every definition of the word! The name of Babylon struck fear in every land. ... Nevertheless, God said, "I'm going to use Babylon!" ... That is the power He has! He uses the ungodly to fulfil His purposes ... They don't know they are doing it but *He* is working out His plans through them, and they wouldn't believe you if you told them ... but that is also what He is doing today. God is in charge, and they are all unwittingly and unknowingly working towards an end that will ultimately bring God all the glory ... according to the way He has already worked it out!

... But Habakkuk could not see that ... When he heard the Lord tell him, **Hab. 1:5 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,** ... he was filled with an excited anticipation ... The Lord has heard me and He's going to do something ... and it is going to be great!

Well, any joy that had momentarily come to Habakkuk quickly evaporated. Things were bad before ... but they had just suddenly become worse for it seemed as if God was offering him no hope at all! God, Who had the power to smooth over the problem, to take the wicked people out and to bring the people back to Himself ‘nicely’ and with gentleness, chose instead a plan of action whereby He would ‘uproot’ the children of Israel from their land and send them away them as captives to a wicked, evil, and tyrannical people. ... And if Habakkuk thought his problems were great when he first came before God, they had now suddenly ‘mushroomed’ to a level he could never have anticipated! He was confused, bewildered, mystified at how the holiness of God could permit and include such rampant sin against His special people.

What could he have done, though? He could have turned against God. He could have tried to sort the people and the problem out himself ... and set God to the one side, like everyone else had done. He could have sought to reverse the will of God and said, “God’s thoughts are not my thoughts, neither are God’s ways my ways” (cf. Is. 55:8) ... I’m not going along with You anymore, God ... What did he do though? He took a very wise course of action, [2:1 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.](#)

In other words, Habakkuk became *content* and satisfied to trust in God, and in the fact God is in control and He knows what He is doing. God has the wider picture, and He works *absolutely* everything [according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will \(Eph 1:11\)](#)

... And when Habakkuk ‘slowed down’, and realised the best course of action was to hand the situation over to the Lord, then he took his eyes off the sin of Israel and concentrated upon the sovereignty of God (1:12ff.). His trust in Jehovah went along a very different road altogether, - it took a different track.

... And God gave Him a wonderful truth, - **the assurance of God’s Grace, [2:4 the just shall live by his faith.](#)** ... Those words were pivotal to Paul for he took and used them when he wrote to the church in Rome (1:17) and also to the church in Galatia (3:11). The same words had such a powerful impact they were also included by the writer to the Hebrews (10:38). ... And Martin Luther and John Wesley testified to how it brought them to saving faith. ... It is God’s *only assurance of God’s grace*, - [2:4 the just shall live by his faith.](#) It is not sight, or intellectualism, or the ability to work it out in tandem with other

philosophies or religions ... salvation is by grace alone, through Christ alone, through faith alone ... as God chooses to reveal!

And when Habakkuk recognised the all-pre-eminence of God, he not only had **the assurance of God's grace** but also **the assurance of God's glory** (v.14), *For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.* ... He looked up! ... *He* was brought to the place where *he* repented, "God, I'm surrounded by idolatry, apostasy, confusion, and the world chasing its own sad agenda and I confess I have taken my eyes off You. Well, Lord, no longer for I have stopped looking around me and I have started looking up, and my eyes behold **the glory of Almighty God.**"

What an experience he encountered ... but how he would have *missed* it if he had not been 'standing upon his watch', 'standing in the tower watching expectantly for the Lord, listening to hear Him speak, and watching to see Him work out His purposes (cf. 2:1)! ... And he saw the majesty and sovereignty of **the assurance of God's grace** (v.4), **the assurance of God's glory** (v.14), and also **the assurance of God's government** (v.20), *the LORD is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him.* ... *He is on the throne!*

"Habakkuk, I'm in control", says God. ... Don't you notice that before God began to deal with the spiritual need of the nation, He began to deal with the heart of His servant! ... **Hab. 3:2** *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.* "Revive Thy work, O Lord, Thy mighty arm make bare; Speak with the voice that wakes the dead, And make *Thy people* hear." ... God was to begin among those who had a heart after himself. ... And when God had caught Habakkuk's attention, all the prophet's fears were dispelled and he began to have a peace and a certainty he would have gained nowhere else.

Then there was a complete turnaround for, in the final chapter of this short prophecy, Habakkuk went from sorrow to a song! He was no longer doubting, but he was full of confidence. It is hard to believe this is the same man ... but it is! ... When he realised the sovereignty of God and that nothing can hinder or change His ways, he saw the future of Israel as bright. It was wrapped up in God's sovereign purpose.

Indeed, God loves with a special love the people of His choice. In an even more special way, He has the eternal welfare of all His Redeemed upon His heart. He won't allow them to suffer that which is not in their interests, or His.

... There is nothing going on today that He has not already made plans to confront and to remedy. Even when, - at the final consummation of the age, - His enemies will make war with the Lamb, the Lamb Who is the Faithful and True, will overcome them, for He is Lord of Lords and King of kings ... and those who are with Him are no less than His called, His chosen, and His faithful (Cf. Rev. 17:14). ... And the great multitude of voices in Heaven will eternally declare, Rev. 19:1 *Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God*

Yes, from sorrow to a song ... from victims to the victors ... God will never allow His own precious people to be destroyed. He will never allow their message to be silenced. The Gospel will be preached until the end of the age ... and no government or antichrist will stop it (Mt. 24:14)! ... And notice Jesus made it specifically and poignantly clear, Mt. 24:14 *this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.* ... It doesn't matter who is in charge for they are all subject to God ... whether they like it or not ... and whether they believe it or not!

... And Habakkuk wanted the Old Testament people of Israel to catch this great confidence God had so graciously granted to him. ... Yes, Lord, we remember those great times of blessing during the days of Josiah, ... Lord, bring those days back once again, 3:2 *O LORD, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy.*

You see, Habakkuk's mind and heart belonged to the Lord, - the Lord Who had shown him wonderful things concerning His plan for the nation. ... Incidentally, that is why it is so important for God's people to be interested in prophecy because in the Scriptures He consistently answers the request of the disciples, Mt. 24:3 *Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?*

... This is the road map to follow! Here are all the 'directions' you need. Some in the professing church often 'climb up the pole' and tamper with their own version of the directions and send people the wrong way ... but God's road map has never changed, and Habakkuk came to be assured that God had a purpose in all He was doing, and that purpose was for the continued honour of His Name and for the blessing of His true people.

Yes, the prophet was so full of praise. God was real to him (3:3 *God came from Teman, and the Holy One from mount Paran. Selah His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise.* ⁴*And his brightness was as the light ... et al).* He

knew the power of God was greater than any evil Babylonian army (3:10-12). He realised God was unstoppable and answerable to none as He carries out His will and His purposes (vv.12-15).

No wonder Habakkuk finishes with such a beautiful song of triumph! All his confidence and trust was in God. His position wasn't popular, - it wasn't the view held by the vast majority ... but, nonetheless, Habakkuk confidently declared ... **I will rest in God**, v.17 ... **I will rejoice in God**, v.18 ... and **I will rely on God**, v.19.

Making sense of the ways and plans of God! ... Habakkuk teaches us many things, but perhaps above and beyond them all is this: Do you know what God wants on every occasion from those who are His? It's simple ... He wants our attention, our adoration and our confidence! ... He calls us to rely on His truth that which assures us He is in control.

Regardless of what He allows to come our way, or even to be entered into the statute books of the world's parliaments, we trust in how He said to us, [Is. 41: 10](#) Fear thou not; for I am with thee; be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.

Believer, do you have the confidence Habakkuk came to have? It's the confidence in the same God the prophet worshipped. That same, one and only God has never changed or lost any of His ancient power. He continues to carry out His purposes unabated, and He works to an agenda that is far beyond our thoughts ... And we can be confident of this, that He knows the end of all things for He alone has planned them.

Regardless of what the world might imply and openly and arrogantly affirm, He is not a failure and He has never gone away. Neither is He old-fashioned and out-dated. The world and society haven't got the better of Him! He is the same God, He changes not! If you don't know this God as your Saviour, ... I would understand it if you thought the world was out of control ... but when you look through the pages of His Word you will see there the great and powerful God He is. He has no equal! ... There is a storm brewing, - it is only starting, - but He is in the boat with His disciples and He is saying, [Mk. 6:50](#) Be of good cheer: it is I; be not afraid.

... And so Habakkuk began in *despair*, and yet he finished with *delight*. ... Even through the dark valleys God leads you where you cannot see, and He will bring you safely out the other end. ... Those are His promises, and I trust we have the unshakeable and unmoveable confidence in His Divine and inspired Word. Amen.