

THE PROMISE OF REVIVAL

Hab. 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.

Around us today we see a revival of many ancient belief systems, blatantly in opposition to God. It seems as if we are being 'swamped' by godlessness on an unparalleled scale and we are hurtling at a fast rate of decline into oblivion.

For over two thousand years the Church has been a force to be reckoned with but today, its enemies are jubilant for they prophesy our end is nigh. How ought we to be respond to this opinion that the Church is 'on its last legs'?

Well, we respond by turning to God's Word ... to Hab. 3:1 A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet upon Shigionoth. 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.

Habakkuk's basic dilemma was that he seemed to be the only one left, - virtually, - who realised the absolutely dire spiritual state of his nation, **Hab. 1:2** O LORD, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear! *even* cry out unto thee *of* violence, and thou wilt not save! ³ 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. ⁴ Therefore the law is slacked, and judgment doth never go forth: for the wicked doth compass about the righteous; therefore wrong judgment proceedeth. ... He appeared to be on his own. There is no mention of other like-minded people around him. He could not figure out why God was allowing Israel to proceed along such an openly God-defying path! And then the Lord threw his world into greater confusion when He said He was going to send the Chaldeans/Babylonians (v.5-11).

Instead of the Lord giving him hope, the Lord was *dashing* any hope he was flimsily holding on to, **12** *Art* thou not from everlasting, O LORD my God, mine Holy One? ... "Lord, what are You saying?!" ... What kept Habakkuk steady? ... It was the fact he believed *God* to be sovereign and in control ... no matter how everything looked around him. And so, he covenanted with the Lord, **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. ... Lord, You are going to teach me, and I am going to learn! He went to the watchtower, and he stood on solid ground. He gave up on what he did not know and began to bring to his memory what he *did* know. Instead of worrying about why everything was going the wrong way ... and why God was allowing it ... he 'caught himself on', - as we say, - and he said to himself, My God is an eternal God. He is a righteous God.

He cannot *stand* sin! By His very nature, He must punish it ... and I must wait and watch for Him to do His will.

Once Habakkuk reached that stage, he realised there was yet hope for his people and his nation. Once he had established in his mind what he *did* know about God then it was much easier to cope with what he did not know.

And so the Lord began to teach Habakkuk, and to show him something of what lay behind the Divine plan ... and ultimately, the prophet was reminded, **20** the LORD *is* in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him.

Regardless of the violence that was wreaking havoc in Habakkuk's society ... and despite all the iniquity and the grievance ... and all the rotten dealings going on, and the strife and contention that many were fuelling throughout the nation ... *God had not missed any of it!* He saw what was going on amongst these people to whom He had granted blessing throughout their history.

Having accepted all this, Habakkuk began to pray this very special prayer, **3:1** A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet upon Shigionoth. We are not too sure what exactly 'shigionoth' means. It refers to some kind of musical language, - it seems most likely that either it was a song or some kind of musical instrument. Whatever it was, it can be rightly said that the prophecy of Habakkuk began with *sorrow* but it concluded with a *song*. It has the character of a prayer and yet at the same time it has the quality of poetry. Habakkuk is praising the Lord!

His attitude in this prayer is simply this ... God, I don't understand everything You are doing, and I cannot figure out why You are letting Israel go. In fact, Lord, I can't understand much of what You have been telling me, - how You are going to bring in the Chaldeans and then You are going to judge them. Lord, it is all lost on me but, at the same time, I know Who You are, and I know You are mine, and I know You have a plan for Your people and You will see it through ... And Lord, because I know all that, I keep on trusting You.

What a faith! And yet, that faith possessed by Habakkuk was a gift from God. It is like when the father came to Jesus with his demon-possessed child, **Mk. 9:17** And one of the multitude answered and said, Master, I have brought unto thee my son, which hath a dumb spirit; **18** And wheresoever he taketh him, he teareth him: and he foameth, and gnasheth with his teeth, and pineth away: and I spake to thy disciples that they should cast him out; and they could not. **19** He answereth him, and saith, O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him unto me. **20** And they brought him unto him: and when he saw him, straightway the spirit tare him; and he fell

on the ground, and wallowed foaming. ²¹ And he asked his father, How long is it ago since this came unto him? And he said, Of a child. ²² And oftentimes it hath cast him into the fire, and into the waters, to destroy him: but if thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us. ²³ Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things *are* possible to him that believeth. ²⁴ And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief. ... And Habakkuk was similarly saying to the Lord, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.

That is how the Lord accepted him. The Lord could see into His heart ... and here was a man who did not understand it all but, at the same time, he truly sought after the glory of God. He wanted to see the violence and the iniquity and the strife and the contention all being dealt with by God, for God's sake ... and he wanted for God to come in among his people and to bring them back to Himself. Habakkuk wanted his people to get back to the old paths Jeremiah spoke about (Jer. 6:16). He wanted them to recognise their sin, to humble themselves, to seek the face of God, and to turn from their wicked ways (II Chron. 7:14). ... **O LORD**, - he prayed, believing God could answer, - *revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known*; and then he adds, *in wrath remember mercy*.

Look at it again ... He is standing in the midst of a dilemma. He is afraid for himself and he is afraid for Israel. But notice, even though he is in a dilemma he does not ask for deliverance. He does not ask for personal escape, or any easy way out for him or his people. He doesn't even try to convince God to change His mind. He does not pray against the will of God so that the Chaldeans would not come, and they might be defeated by some other nation. He doesn't pray that God would change His mind about them ransacking Jerusalem, and carrying off its people. No, He knew God was right to bring judgment for it was what the people of the land deserved. They had been warned time and again, but they would not listen. ... Indeed, there is no point for a believer to ever pray *against* the will of God. Instead, the Christian must pray *within* the will of God.

How do I know what the will of God is? You read and you study His Word and He will show you. And when He shows you, then you will know, **Rom. 8:28** *all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose*. And you will be able to pray from your heart, **Mt. 6:10** *Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven*. You will be like Habakkuk for you will realise He has a plan and a purpose in everything He does.

He is not like a government that makes great promises but cannot deliver. He is God and everything He does is *according to the good pleasure of his will* (Eph. 1:5). And there is even more to it than that because Paul adds, just a few verses later, ⁹

Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: **10** That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; *even* in him: **11** In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: **12** That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ. ... He has the conclusion of the book already written!

Remember what Habakkuk had come to acknowledge, **2:20** the LORD *is* in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him. ... *God is in control!* Remember how the writer to the Hebrews quoted from the Psalms, **Heb. 13:6** So that we may boldly say, The Lord *is* my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me ... ⁸ Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever. And Habakkuk was praying to God in that victorious manner, Lord, since that is the way You are going to work, *do it* ... for it is the means by which You have declared You will bring Your people back, **Hab. 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.

Bring us back into line, Lord, for we need it. Even if it means You are going to use the Chaldeans, bring us back, *revive thy work in the midst of the years*. You will not cast us off because that is why You have planned all this. You see, Habakkuk had made a great transformation. If you like, he had started out *shaking*, and then we see him *standing* in the tower, and now he is *singing* in anticipation.

What is it that you believe this world needs most? ... Does it need peace most? Does it need all the poor to be fed, most? ... What is it that you believe this world needs most? Surely it is a one-word answer, - *Christ!* This world will see revival when Christ returns! How can I be so sure of that? I can be so sure because it is what God says in His Word.

Will we not find the answers before He comes? No, we will not. No British Prime Minister or American President will bring the peace this world longs for, as Paul put it, **Rom. 8:22** For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain. Man's efforts are making it worse! *That* is what the psalmist declared, **Ps. 146:3** Put not your trust in princes, *nor* in the son of man, in whom *there is* no help. ⁴ His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish ... ⁵ Happy *is* he that *hath* the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope *is* in the LORD his God: ⁶ Which made heaven, and earth, the sea, and all that therein *is*: which keepeth truth for ever. That tells us God has a keen interest in this world He made, for it belongs to Him. And the psalmist tells us also that God has a date in His calendar when He will come and bring revival, the likes of which this earth has never seen before, **10** The LORD

shall reign for ever, *even* thy God, O Zion, unto all generations. Praise ye the LORD. You see, that is how we know God will bring revival, *for He says it in His Word!*

Habakkuk had the right perspective, and notice the tender little addendum he adds to his prayer, *in wrath remember mercy*. God, I know You have to do it God, but please ... remember mercy! He always does, of course, otherwise humanity would have been finished a long time ago. He has been merciful to His creation more than we deserve. Habakkuk knew it was going to be difficult. It was a fearsome enemy God was about to use, and the prophet even explains to us, **16** 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.

He is 'only human', but look at the next verse. He gathers himself, he sees the sovereignty of God and the majesty of His plan, and so he declares, **17** 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: ... Lord, You are going to do what You say You are going to do, and You are right to do it for we deserve Your judgment ... **18** Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation. **19** The LORD God *is* my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds' *feet*, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places. To the chief singer on my stringed instruments. ... *He is singing, and what a song!*

He is looking ahead to a time when Israel would be re-gathered ... not to be chased again from their land ... but to be re-gathered into their land forever. It is the time of which Isaiah wrote, **10** Rejoice ye with Jerusalem, and be glad with her, all ye that love her ... **12** For thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the Gentiles like a flowing stream ... **14** And when ye see *this*, your heart shall rejoice, and your bones shall flourish like an herb: and the hand of the LORD shall be known toward his servants, and *his* indignation toward his enemies. It was the same victory cry Jeremiah prophesied, **Jer. 51:10** The LORD hath brought forth our righteousness: come, and let us declare in Zion the work of the LORD our God. Ezekiel saw it too, **20:34** And I will bring you out from the people, and will gather you out of the countries wherein ye are scattered, with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with fury poured out. **35** And I will bring you into the wilderness of the people, and there will I plead with you face to face. **36** Like as I pleaded with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so will I plead with you, saith the Lord GOD. **37** And I will cause you to pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant: **38** And I will purge out from among you the rebels, and them that transgress against me: I will bring them forth out of the country where they sojourn, and they shall not enter into the land of Israel: and ye shall know that I *am* the Lord ... **40** For in mine holy mountain, in

the mountain of the height of Israel, saith the Lord GOD, there shall all the house of Israel, all of them in the land, serve me: there will I accept them, and there will I require your offerings, and the firstfruits of your oblations, with all your holy things. ⁴¹ I will accept you with your sweet savour, when I bring you out from the people, and gather you out of the countries wherein ye have been scattered; and I will be sanctified in you before the heathen. ⁴² And ye shall know that I *am* the LORD, when I shall bring you into the land of Israel, into the country *for* the which I lifted up mine hand to give it to your fathers. Isn't that what Micah said also, ^{4:1} But in the last days it shall come to pass, *that* the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it. ² And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. ... There is the revival God promises! It is coming ... we must wait, but it is coming. Jesus said, **Lk. 21:28** when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh. That is the day He promised would arrive, **Hosea 14:4** I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him. ⁵ I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon.

Yesterday I was reading Horatius Bonar's *Prophetical Landmarks*, and here is what he wrote, "It is at His second coming that He is to take possession of the better Eden, and have dominion over a renovated earth, with all things therein. *Now* "we see not all things put under Him" [Heb. 2:8], as under Adam, but *then* we shall. God's purpose from the beginning was to rule this earth by a man. The first man sinned at the very outset of his reign, and proved himself incompetent to fulfil God's design. But still that purpose must stand. Man's rebellion shall not frustrate it [*i.e. God's design*]. It has been for a time, indeed, deferred, but only that preparations may be completed for carrying it out in the Man Christ Jesus, "the WORD made flesh," the second Adam, who is the Lord from heaven. The government of earth shall be put into His hands, and He shall execute righteous judgment. By Him shall earth be made to flourish anew. Under Him, that fruitfulness in evil to which the soil was doomed for the first man's transgression (Gen. 3:18), shall be removed ... Under Him and the true Eve, - His Bride, the Church, taken from His wounded side, - shall the whole earth rejoice."

We are winning, for that is what God teaches us in His Word! Take heart from Habakkuk. The promise of revival! Stand in the tower and watch, and wait for the glory of the Lord to come on that great day when each of His saints declare in great anticipation, *he will make me to walk upon mine high places (v.19)*. Amen.