

“O LORD, HOW LONG...?”

Habakkuk 1

We just completed a series of sermons on Jonah. Jonah prophesied to the nation of Israel – the ten tribes whose capital was Samaria. Jonah prophesied 782-753 B.C. God sent him to Nineveh which was the capital of Assyria. Assyria conquered and destroyed Israel in the next generation after Jonah. By the time of Habakkuk, Assyria had been conquered by the Chaldeans and Nineveh had been destroyed.

Habakkuk prophesied to the nation of Judah – the two tribes of Judah and Levi whose capital was Jerusalem. Habakkuk prophesied to the people of Judah about 610 B.C., just five or ten years before Judah was conquered and Jerusalem captured by the Chaldeans who took many of the people as captives to Babylon. The Chaldeans would return about ten years later and take most of the inhabitants captive to Babylon. They destroyed the walls of Jerusalem and its buildings, including the Temple. They took all the treasures of the king and the Temple, even cutting up the bronze pillars and the huge brass basin of the Temple so that they could transport them to Babylon.

Habakkuk's prophecy is God's last warning to Judah before He sent judgment upon them. Ironically, Habakkuk's prophecy is considered some of the finest poetry in Hebrew. The song in the third chapter is a masterpiece of hymnody.

1.) 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)

This prophecy was burdensome to Habakkuk in two ways. It was a revelation from God which Habakkuk faithfully declared despite the fact that it was heavy, it weighed on his heart. Think of the officer and chaplain whose task it is to go to the wife or parents of a soldier killed in Iraq or Afghanistan. Their duty is burdensome. They go with a heavy heart. They have to remain composed and strong while the person to whom they deliver the news is falling apart. Habakkuk's message was similar to that of Jonah. God was sending terrible judgment on Judah because of their sins.

This prophecy was burdensome to Habakkuk because the sinful state of the people all around him. He saw iniquity, trouble, plundering, violence, and perverse judgment. Even the law that was supposed to restrain sin was corrupted by bribes, favoritism, prejudice. We know from other prophets of that time such as Jeremiah that the rich had enslaved their Jewish brethren who were poor. There were sexual immorality, witchcraft, and idolatry. If a person's heart is righteous and loves God's laws, this environment of sin is crushing to the soul.

and *the LORD* delivered righteous Lot, who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked (for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds) -- (2 Peter 2:7-8 NKJV)

If your soul is righteous, then it ought to be tormented, vexed, oppressed by the sin all around us. The sex and violence that are the staple of entertainment should not entertain but trouble Christians. It ought to burden your heart to see the lives wasted by drugs and alcohol, the young people throwing their lives away having fun instead of getting an education, the parents who care only about their own desires, pleasures and resent the needs and demands of their children.

2.) "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)

This is the judgment God has prepared for Judah. God is raising up the Chaldeans to punish Judah. Habakkuk and Jeremiah and many other righteous souls had cried out to God on behalf of their nation. They had begged God to send revival. God had sent prophets to persuade, to plead, and then to warn the people to turn from their wicked ways. That is why Habakkuk is crying "O LORD, how long...?"

We might wonder ourselves How long? Why do the wicked flourish? There are many churches in our land, but not as many as there were a decade ago. There are less people in the churches. If you ask the people in the churches Why? they blame the sagging economy, all the industry that has moved away or shut down. But they have the box upside down. If the churches were full, prosperity, jobs, plants would return. Too many people who prospered decided they didn't need God or the church. They decided that playing golf, laying in bed reading the newspaper, going fishing or going shopping were better activities.

Righteousness exalts a nation, But sin is a reproach to any people. (Proverbs 14:34 NKJV)

God has sent the jobs overseas. He has taken away the financial cushion of many. People are hurting but they still haven't turned to God. What more will He have to do? AND The righteous are going to

suffer along with the wicked and unbelievers who brought God's judgment to us.

3.) 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)

Now Habakkuk is confused. Like Jonah he argues with God. He says, "You are the true God. We don't worship false gods like the Chaldeans do. We aren't going to die. It's the heathen You have appointed for judgment. How can You choose them as instruments of Your will. You are holy. You are of purer eyes than to behold evil. Would You send the wicked to devour someone more righteous than he? You can see how they conquer huge groups of people as though they were fish in a net. Then they offer sacrifices to their weapons of warfare. Will You really give victory to such heathen over Your people?"

We might be confused in the same way. If we allow that it is God who is bringing economic distress on our country, then we see that it is heathen nations whom He is using – Muslim nations control the oil we consume, Communist China produces much of the consumer goods we buy, Shinto and Buddhist Japanese have taken over the auto industry, Hindu India supplies more and more of the intellectual needs of our country. God is using these unbelieving people to bring our nation to crisis. Either we repent or God will destroy us. How can we argue that we are a Christian nation? We are no longer winning others to Christ.

