

The Minor Prophets #23

Habakkuk

by: Ronald L. Dart

It's no picnic being a prophet, of all the jobs God hands down to men the job of the prophet maybe the toughest of the lot. It may come as a surprise to learn that some of them maybe even most of them were poets and musicians. I guess there's something about that, which maybe suits prophecy better. I feel sorry for the many self appointed prophets you see around nowadays who claim to have the word from the Lord. The reason I feel sorry for them is because they have taken a hand to speak for God when he didn't tell them to do it. He may have them carry the burden and the pain of the office without any hope of a prophet's reward.

When you come to a real prophet in the pages of the Bible and you read them as they are intended to be read as oftentimes allow, you can sometimes feel the pain that has comes to this man with the message. For some reason I was particularly touch last night by a prophet named Habakkuk, he's different from the others, he's certainly a poet and I suspect he sang his prophecies to the people who assembled to hear him, if not he at least composed them for a singer. There is nothing especially unique about protest songs for example in the likes of Bob Dylan, protest songs are as old as the Biblical prophets, that's what you got in most of them and is what today would sound like a protest song. Habakkuk was a contemporary of Jeremiah and it would not surprise me in the least to learn one day that Habakkuk sang and Jeremiah preached on the same day in the same place. The big different between Habakkuk and Bob Dylan though, is that the Lord really spoke to Habakkuk and really showed him things that were coming. In your imagination place yourself among a crowd of people who have assembled at the temple gate. Jeremiah has been speaking and he has just roundly condemned the justice system in one of the strongest sermon you have ever heard now another man steps forward his name is Habakkuk he has a lyre in his hand, like a little harp and he then introduces the song he's going to sing.

The burden which Habakkuk the prophet did see. O LORD how long shall I cry and you won't hear! How long shall I cry out to you of violence and you won't save! Why do you show me iniquity and why do you cause me to hold grievance? For spoiling and violence are before me: and there are many that raise up strife and contention.

You know it's odd most of the modern translations call this, not the burden of Habakkuk but the oracle of Habakkuk. The poet the root of the Hebrew word used here though, is to lift, in the sense of lifting a burden and the context fits the burden all too well and I don't know why they do that, I'll stay with King James on this one. The Burden of Habakkuk, it was a load he had to carry. Why the prophet wanted to know do I have to look at iniquity, strife, grievance and contention, I'm fed up with it why do I have to bare all this. Frankly I understand that feeling all too well. A few nights ago I got weary of the lineup of crime that the TV channel I was watching was serving up, it just one crime after another so I thought I'll go look at a different news channel. I went over there and I found more crime, missing women, I went somewhere else and I found discovered bodies and murder children, another channel I found child abuse, corrupt judges, false accusation against innocent people, went to another and found the guilty being let off with a slap on the wrist. Now I'm no prophet but I'm beginning to understand how they must feel.

The prophet now goes on with his song. **Therefore the law is slacked and judgment does never go forth: for the wicked surround the righteous; therefore wrong judgment proceeds.**

It's a picture of a courtroom where the righteous are surrounded by the wicked and you can't get an honest judgment out of the courts to save your life.

Behold among the heathen and regard and wonder marvelously: for I'm going to do the work in your days which you will not believe though it be told to you.

I'm no prophet, I'm not going to step up here and tell you what God's going to do but I can read these prophets. Candidly even if you read them to people and say look what God is going to do, they won't believe it even when you tell them. There is nothing new under the sun the law then was not enforced and the courts would not render right judgments so we got a protest song. The difference from our day is this one is straight from God, and he sings.

For, lo, I raise up the Chaldeans that bitter and hasty nation which shall march through the breadth of the land to possess the dwelling places that are not theirs. They are terrible and they are dreadful: their judgment and their dignity shall proceed from themselves. Their horses also are faster than the leopards and are more fierce than the evening wolves: and their horsemen shall spread themselves and their horsemen shall come from afar; and they will fly as the eagle that hasten to eat.

Habakkuk chose to call the Babylonian the Chaldeans why I don't know maybe he like the vowels in the Hebrew word better or perhaps because of common usage at the time. When you're singing a song for the common man maybe you use the language of the common man.

They shall all come for violence: their faces shall sup up the east wind, and they shall gather the captivity like the sand. And they shall scoff at the kings and the princes shall be a scorn to them: they're not worried princes and kings; they shall deride every strong hold; for they'll just heap up dirt and take it.

The image is not very familiar to modern warfare but in the old days when they came up against a stronghold a walled city all the way around an army like the Babylonians would besiege the city and close it down. Nobody came or went and they began to build a ramp up to the top of the wall of the city and when they got that ramp built, in they came and of this enemy he said.

Then shall his mind change and he shall pass over and offend, imputing that his power this, his power unto his god. Are you not from everlasting O LORD my God my Holy One? We shall not die. O LORD you have ordained these people out there for judgment; and, O mighty God you have established them for correction.

What's interesting about this is that God gave power to the Chaldean kingdom to serve as a corrective. There was a time when they knew this and the Chaldean understood that God had sent them but having achieved power they began to attribute it to their own God. They actually saw themselves in many ways as God's avengers against wicked kingdoms a big mistake for both the Assyrian before them and the Chaldean and Babylonian when they came. Never facing the fact that they were becoming that wicked kingdom themselves and somebody else was coming for them. It's been said of the Assyrian in prophecy that the rod in their hand was the rod of God indignation but the Assyrian went too far. Violence has a way of doing that to a man it corrupts him and so the Assyrians were taken and overcome. The Babylonians rose up in their place and they were overtaken and overcome by the Persians when they came, that is the way it goes in the world so he said.

You are of pure eyes than to behold evil and cannot look on iniquity: wherefore do you look on them who deal treacherously and hold your tongue when the wicked devours the man that is more righteous than he? And makes men as the fishes of the sea as the creeping things that have no ruler? They just take them all up with the angle they catch them in their net and gather them in their dragline: and they rejoice and are

glad. Oh they sacrifice unto their fishnet and burn incense to their dragline; because by them their portion is fat, and their meat plenteous. Shall they empty their net, and not spare continually to slay the nations?

The imaginary that he present here for us is people that just go out after human beings like you go out after fish, gather them up, kill them slay them and in the process they come around full circle and their God becomes their net, their dragline they're angling and they then burn incense and worship their own means of harvesting the world. Weapons of their warfare, it's an interesting thought.

Chapter 2 of the prophet Habakkuk I will stand upon my watch and set me upon the tower and will watch to see what he will say to me and what I shall answer when I am reprov'd. And the LORD answered me and said write the vision and make it plain upon tables that he may run that reads it.

Now that's striking because it almost sounds like when you read this prophecy it's time to get out of town, time to get away from here and It harken back to Jesus who said when you see Jerusalem encompassed about by armies let him that's in Judea flee to the mountains. When the city was surrounded in 70AD to be totally destroyed, every stone in the temple area was brought down so that not one was left on top of another. Some people did take the warning and got out. It's a little chilling when you hear the words of this prophecy or read them so you can run when the time comes and the image of the watchman also fits the prophet's role perfectly. There's this fascinating prophecy in Ezekiel.

Chapter 33: The word of the LORD came to Ezekiel saying, Son of man, speak to the children of your people, and tell them. When I bring a sword upon a land if the people of the land takes a man of their coasts and set him for their watchman: If when he sees the sword coming he blow the trumpet and warn the people; Then whosoever hears the sound of the trumpet and doesn't take warning; well his blood be upon his own head. He heard the sound of the trumpet, and he didn't take the warning. But the man that takes the warning he shall deliver his soul. But if the watchman see the sword coming and doesn't blow the trumpet and the people be not warned; if the sword come, and take any man from among them well he dies in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at the watchman's hand. So you, O son of man, I have set you a watchman unto the house of Israel; if you hear the word of my mouth and warn them from me.

Now here's the question, when you have the Bible at hand and you look around at what is going on you are apt to see things coming that others may not see. What should a

person do, keep quiet about it or don't we if we see it have an obligation to say something about it. You will figure it out very quickly that I feel I have an obligation to say something about it. Habakkuk goes on.

For the vision is yet for an appointed time but at the end it shall speak and not lie: though it tarry wait for it; because it will surely come it will not tarry. Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith.

The point is getting your heart lifted up and being exalted in your own eyes, you're not upright and you're headed for trouble.

Yea also because he transgresses by wine he is a proud man he doesn't stay at home who enlarges his desire like hell and is as death and cannot be satisfied he gathered unto him all nations and heaps unto him all people.

This sound like he's talking about the king of Babylon who was in the ascendancy when this prophet was singing.

Shall not all these take up a parable against him and a taunting proverb against him and say Woe to him that increases that which is not his!

Why is this person doing this, building all this stuff and putting it all together and it doesn't belong to him,

How long? And to him that lades himself with thick clay! Shall they not rise up suddenly that shall bite you and awake that shall vex you and you shall be for booties unto them? Because you have spoiled many nations all the remnant of the people will spoil you; because of men's blood and for the violence of the land of the city and of everyone that dwell there.

The Assyrian spoiled Israel and they in turn were spoiled, the Babylonian took Jerusalem and they themselves were taken by the Persians it is a cycle what goes around comes around.

Woe unto him that covets an evil covetousness to his house that he may set his nest on high that he may be delivered from the power of evil! You have consulted shame to your house by cutting off many people and have sinned against your soul. For the stone shall cry out of the wall and the beam out of the timber shall answer it. Woe to him that builds a town with blood, and establishes a city by iniquity! You can't build

that way, you can't put an empire together that way. **Behold is it not of the LORD of hosts that the people shall labor in the very fire and the people shall weary themselves for very vanity? For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.**

That comes out of nowhere almost and if you're a broad reader of prophecy you'll realize that this is looking way ahead into the future to a time of establishing God's kingdom when the whole earth knows about God, I don't think we're there yet.

Woe to him that gives drink to his neighbor pouring it from the wine skin until they are drunk so he can gaze on their naked bodies! You'll be filled with shame instead of glory. Now it's your turn! Drink and be exposed! The cup from the LORD'S right hand is coming around to you and disgrace will cover your glory.

That a strange thing to read this here in this ancient prophecy about people who get drunk in order so they can gaze on naked bodies.

Verse 17: For the violence of Lebanon shall cover you and the spoil of beasts which made them afraid because of men's blood and for the violence of the land of the city and everyone that lives there. What profits is the graven image that the maker thereof has graven it; the molten image and the teacher of lies that the maker of his work trusts in it to make dumb idols?

It's strange he says here people get around to make an idol and they trust it to be their God and never understanding I made this with my own hands.

Woe to him that says to the wood, Awake; to the dumb stone, Arise it shall teach!

Oh good grief and yet people historically have done this and are we really a whole lot better than that ourselves, because of the Gods we have made with our own hands, we don't call them Gods but they seem to be.

Behold, it is laid over with gold and silver and there is no breath at all in the midst of it.

This thing can't even breathe much less talk.

But the LORD is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him.

It's interesting how this has been lifted out of context that it's in and finds its way into the blessing you sometime here in church. A call to worship the Lord is in his holy temple let all the earth keep silence before him, sometimes that's the very best advice.

A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet. O LORD I have heard your speech and I was afraid: O LORD revive your work in the midst of the years in the midst of the years make known; even though you're angry remember mercy.

This is a prayer, it's an honest prayer coming out of the heart of a man that has seen too much and he was frightened frankly of things that were coming. And he is saying in the middle of all this thing you are doing, in the midst of the years don't forget to have mercy on us.

God came from Teman, and the Holy One from mount Paran. His glory covered the heavens and the earth was full of his praise. And his splendor was like the sunrise and rays flashed from his hands where his power was hidden. Before him went the pestilence and burning coals went forth at his feet. He stood and measured the earth: he beheld and drove asunder the nations; and the everlasting mountains were scattered the perpetual hills did bow: his ways are everlasting.

Wow I don't know what the man saw, apparently there was a vision in all of this that he could see. The idea of God coming from the east, generally in the direction of Edom, but his power his splendor the rays coming forth and burning coals at his feet. Basically we're told when he gave the Ten Commandments to Moses on Mount Sinai the whole mountain was full of smoke, because the power of God was there and mere rocks cannot survive contact with that kind of power.

I saw the tents of Cushan in affliction: and the curtains of the land of Midian did tremble. Was the LORD displeased with the rivers? Was your anger against the rivers? Was your wrath against the sea that you roared upon your horses and your chariots of salvation?

You know horses and chariots in prophecy and in reality in the ancient world were icons of war as were the bow and arrow, these were the things people used to fight with.

You uncovered your bow and called for a lot of arrows you split the earth with rivers. The mountains saw you and they trembled: the overflowing of the water passed by: the deep uttered his voice and lifted up his hands on high.

The imaginary in all this, even the created earth, everything stands before God.

The sun and moon stand still in their habitation: at the light of your arrows they went, and at the shining of your glittering spear. You did march through the land in indignation; you did thresh the heathen in anger.

This was all in vision for Habakkuk, the reality of it as it came to pass was probably more mundane, but the result was the same war and the destruction of those heathen nations that had in their turn destroyed Israel.

You went forth for the salvation of your people even for salvation with your anointed; you wounded the head out of the house of the wicked by discovering the foundation all the way to the neck. You did strike through with his staves the head of his villages: they came out as a whirlwind to scatter me: their rejoicing was as to devour the poor secretly. You did walk through the sea with your horses through the heap of great waters. 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 comes up to the people, he will invade them with his troops.

Because this is poetry that we are reading here it is sometime difficult to follow, but the idea of God as a warrior is very consistence with other prophecies and the way that people fight as the heathen when they come forward they do their damage and God in turn does his.

Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labor of the olive shall fail and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there will be no herd in the stalls.

All these terrible, terrible things come to pass

Yet I will rejoice in the LORD I will joy in the God of my salvation. 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.

In all this no matter how bad it gets he looks to rejoice in God and then he signs off his prayer this way.

To the chief singer on my stringed instruments.

I wondered a little as I read through Habakkuk why it's here, it doesn't really seem to have a great deal of historical significance there's no looking ahead to the future with any details. I've said this before many times, God doesn't give us these prophecies merely to tell us what's going to happen or when. One of the primary things, he is telling us why it's going to happen, so we will understand why we need to change our lives and change the things we do. I look at Habakkuk and I think what I'm getting in him is a glimpse through one man's eyes of what a country was like when it was reaching the end of its downhill slide. The time was coming for God to do something with it and do something about it.

I'm often asked and I was again recently, what translations I read from when I do this program. I use the old authorized King James Version mostly and I paraphrase it as I go, the King James can fall strangely on the modern ear and the words are often archaic. It still has affected our language and it is still the most literate of all the translations. When I first began to read the Bible it was about the only game in town, I'm not sure if there was an old American Standard Version in the county where I was living. So when I recall that the Bible says this or that then I have to look it up in the King James concordance so I might as well keep on using it. However I do consult and I sometimes cite it as I did a couple of times in this program The New International Version. I also consult lexical studies and sometimes I adopt a meaning from them that I think is truer to what the author is trying to say. Now there are a few people that think the King James Version was inspired by GOD and they adhere to it religiously. I believe the underlying documents were inspired by God and they have been rendered in such a way that they can speak to the modern mind.

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