

Habakkuk's Dilemma #1

Scripture: Hab.1:1-11

Introduction

- Dilemma in life: sometimes the evils of life and the world hurt us. We cry out to God yet see no change.
- Background:
 - Who was Habakkuk? See v.1 – a little known, godly Israelite.
 - When did he live? Contemporary with Jeremiah.
 - What conditions prevailed during his life-time (on the international scene)?
 - Defeat of the Egyptians with the Assyrians at Carchemish (605 BC)
 - Rise of Babylon (“Chaldeans”).
 - Religious and political life soon after Josiah’s reforms – under Jehoiakim (meaning: “The LORD raises up”).
 - What is the nature of the book? Dialog rather than a direct message to the nation of Israel.
 - What is the theme? Struggle to understand and appreciate God’s ways.
- Three messages:
 - Habakkuk’s first complaint & God’s answer/response (1:2-11)
 - Habakkuk’s second complaint & God’s answer/response (1:12-2:20)
 - Habakkuk’s confession of faith (3:1-19)
- Theme/focus of his message: Habakkuk’s heart’s cry before God as he hears about and then struggles to comprehend the mysterious ways of God.

1) THE HEART CRY OF THE RIGHTEOUS

- a) Habakkuk’s prayer / plea for God to help and save – without any apparent effect or result:
 - i) Habakkuk – often called to God for help – yet no response.
 - ii) He often cried out to God: “Violence!” Yet no salvation or help came – v.2.- cf., Psalm 6:3; 13:1-2 (also Psalm 94)

- iii) Habakkuk's danger / temptation – to conclude that God isn't interested, or that He's impotent or not real – cf. Satan's activity to cause God's people to doubt God's character – His goodness, faithfulness, power et al.
- iv) Application:
 - (1) A prayer of questioning God in honesty is not condemned by God
 - (2) God might seem far away or even silent; however, He cannot change or stop being Who He is
- b) Habakkuk's prayer: a cry to God to intervene in a seemingly hopeless situation – he was concerned about a matter that God Himself undoubtedly was concerned, i.e. related to the spiritual state of His chosen people – related to the honour of His name – see verses 3-4.
 - i) Under the evil hand of Jehoiachin (God's anointed king), terrible conditions prevailed:
 - (1) All advance through Josiah's temple reforms had been reversed – idolatry brought demoralization of the people – see 2 Chron.36:8.
 - (2) Prophetic voices (eg Jeremiah) were scorned
 - (3) Injustices were rife – heavy taxes – by forced labour a new palace had been constructed – see Jer.22:13-18.
 - (4) Violence and bloodshed were commonplace – many attempts on people's lives both internally (nationally) and also at the hands of the super-powers (internationally)
 - (5) Conflict and strife between families and individuals.
 - (6) No real turning away from sin (= repentance) – either from God's anointed or among the people – most were seemingly callous to God and His Law – see Jer.36 (burning of Jeremiah's scroll) – resulting in the rapid decline of God's people on every front and a sense of helplessness among God's true people.
 - ii) It seemed totally inconceivable that the just and righteous God who had delivered His people in the past would just sit by doing nothing – from all outward appearances it seemed as if He was devoid of concern or unable to stem the tide of evil.
 - iii) Application:
 - (1) Hab.1:4b – common experience of God's people living in a non-Christian environment, among a people who appear to have no fear of God – we can fall prey to envy of the wicked who appear to advance without facing any major obstacle and also appear to get away with any injustice and evil they conjure up, even delighting in evil – see Ps.73:2-3.

- (2) How often we pray but then watch as the situation deteriorates – as if our prayers are without any effect – giving rise to the question/dilemma: Why is God ignoring our pleas?
- (3) Contemporary spiritual conditions around us – few bright spots:
 - (a) We have prayed for our state & national government – yet we find that injustice, crime, corruption, immorality, severe and uncertain economic environment etc.
 - (b) We have prayed for the Church – yet continuing to remain a relatively weak and powerless instrument in society, introverted in their worldview, feeling inferior and reacting defensively, falling prey to insidious worldly standards and values
 - (c) We have prayed for our families – yet we may not yet have seen any real changes in attitudes or behaviour.
- (4) Questions:
 - (a) How can God just remain silent or sitting calmly on His throne in heaven while these and other conditions continue to afflict our society, church and families?
 - (b) Why doesn't God step in and remove our suffering?
- (5) The temptation and danger: To give up on prayer – yet God answers us today just as surely as He answered Habakkuk then.

2) THE MYSTERIOUS WAYS OF GOD

- a) God *will* act – see 1:5 – He is not dead nor silent.
- b) Application:
 - i) God's timing in reversing or judging evil is often out of sync with our timing – yet He will act, and will act righteously, justly, powerfully, and at the right time, never one second too early or too late.
 - ii) This calls for a patient, watchful heart – observing the times – cf. v.5a “Look at the nations and watch.”
- c) When God acts, even His faithful ones are amazed, sometimes even baffled at what He does:
 - i) God's plan was to raise up the evil pagan Babylonians to judge Judah for her unfaithfulness to her covenant LORD – see v.6 (“I am raising up”) – totally incomprehensible, unbelievable, unthinkable (= contradictory) to the mind, heart and feelings of the believer that God's holy city, all the holy places and His holy people could

become the victims of the horrific evil designs of this powerful and pagan nation. See Jeremiah 8:11.

ii) Why??? How could the God of truth, mercy, justice, righteousness and peace be on the side of raising up such a ruthless, arrogant, blood-thirsty people to inflict such devastation upon His own chosen people? See 1:6-11 (JB)

iii) Yet ... see 1:11 – the message is that their time will certainly come!

iv) Application:

(1) Belonging to God's people offers us no immunity, is no "insurance policy" against tasting the severity of God's judgment if we flagrantly disregard His Word – cf. the belief: "God will keep loving us (= doing nice things to and for us) even if we disregard His Word" – where the truth is that God is just and will judge His people who do not submit to His ways and obey His commands whether nations, churches (cf. Rev.2 & 3), families or individuals – and sometimes the hand of God's judgment is the hand of a person or a group of people whose beliefs and ways are in direct opposition to God's truth and laws – but *their* judgment from God's hand will also certainly come to them, even if delayed until a later time.

(2) God is the Sovereign Ruler of history, Who governs the movements of people – as ethnic groups or nations, as families and as individuals – His hand is directing the present-day movements of people and nations, regardless of the variant interpretations of the media gurus – implying that even when the circumstances of our lives or of our nation appear to be totally chaotic and riddled with injustices, yet King Jesus continues to rule over all in order to accomplish His higher purposes – hence the true believer can rest even when life around him/her seems to be totally out of control.

Conclusion

- Don't stop crying out to God – see Psalm 27:14 – God's ear is open to the cry of the righteous – Psalm 34:17 – He will answer even if "delayed."
- Don't lose hope in God when outwardly it appears as if God is ignoring our pleas for help or for justice – hope in God alone no matter what! See Isaiah 40:31; Psalm 42:5; Job 13:15; Luke 18:6-8
- Don't trust in man's estimation and interpretation of life's circumstances (whether your own or any other man) – trust in God alone and watch for Him to act for the honour of His name.

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