

Habakkuk 2 vs 1-3

There is much to learn about prayer from the example given by Habakkuk (Hab from now on!) in verse 1. We have already looked at his patience as he waited on the ramparts for God's answer. There are two other things of note. His expectancy and his humility.

Notice Hab doesn't say, 'I'll look to see if God will answer me'. He is expecting a reply from God.

The same attitude of expectancy occurs among the Israelites in Nehemiah chapter 8. Jerusalem had been re-built, they had returned home and were now keen to obey God. Ezra reads God's word to the people, 'And all the people listened attentively' (Neh 8v3). For 6 hours they heard the word and had it explained. They wanted to hear from God. In the end they were filled with joy because God had enabled their understanding (Neh 8v12)

Are we equally expectant when we look into God's word? As we turn to God in study and deep prayer are we looking for what God wants to say to us?

Hab is also humble and submissive! He knows he may have overstepped the mark with his complaints against God. The second half of verse 1 reveals he is expecting to be rebuked. He has presented his arguments and now he is humble enough to wait for God's reproof and his discipline.

Until God speaks Hab doesn't know what God is going to say!!

Do we have that same approach or are we only interested if God answers our prayers suitably? Are we prepared to be rebuked as well as blessed? A rebuke can also be a blessing that demonstrates God's love. (Heb 12 v 5-6)

This attitude will change our lives. It did for Habakkuk as we will see later.

Let's pray and study expecting God to speak to us and be humble enough to accept and act on what we hear.

'These are the ones I look on with favour; those who are humble and contrite in spirit and who tremble at my word'. (Isaiah 66v2)

Daily Devotions      Tuesday 21st July

Habakkuk 2 vs 1-3

After several years of decline in behaviour at the school where I taught, some bright spark on the leadership team came up with the idea of a printed list of rules for each classroom! Revolutionary! No need for teachers to say anything. The kids would just obey!! Sorry for the cynicism but it does show the authority of the written word.

Where do we go when we want to find something out? Google? Wikipedia? Or if you're a bit older Encyclopaedia Britannica? Whichever it is, the authority comes from the fact that its written down!!

God tells Habakkuk to write down the revelation! I doubt this was due to him not trusting Hab to pass it on but more to do with the Jews forgetting what they had been told. God knows human nature. He gave us communion so that we would remember Christ's death.

God's word is written so that we can look at what God says (v1) and remind ourselves about him, his ways and his sovereign rule.

Hab was told to write on tablets (presumably stone) and to make it clear. The Jews were going to be in exile for around 48 years so God wanted it to last and to be clearly viewable for all. The footnote in the NIV for 'herald' is, 'so that whoever reads it'.

On two levels we might take God's word for granted.

First, unlike many Christians living under oppressive regimes, we have Bibles easily to hand. The Jews in exile would have had to travel to where the tablets were to read them. Imagine if there was only one Bible and it was in Derby Cathedral where we would have to go if we wanted to read God's word!!!

Secondly, we can sometimes slip into thinking the Bible is just another book about religion. God, himself, calls this a revelation (v2 ). These are his words. We have God's revelation in full and he doesn't want it added to or taken from (Rev 22 v 18) God's word matters. It is of lasting importance and despite pressure from society we must live by it. We need to read every word of the Bible as if God was with us reading it aloud to us personally. That was the experience of Habakkuk.

Having written about the importance God places on the written word be encouraged and thrilled by what he says to each of us in Isaiah 49v16.

'See I have engraved you on the palms of my hands'

Not just written but engraved!!!

Habakkuk 2 vs 1-3

Have you ever looked at one of those pictures that at first glance look like just a pattern on a page but actually contain a hidden picture? You are supposed to gaze through and beyond the picture and then the hidden picture becomes clear. Whine has worked for me the resulting image has often been amazing.

God here is asking Hab to look beyond the coming troubles to a time when it will end (v3). He wants him to have a full perspective of not just the present but also the future. When God speaks, Hab gets confirmation that trouble is definitely on its way. The Jews were about to be taken into captivity by the Babylonians. Then he is told that while it may linger (and it did for 48 yrs) that there will be an end to it. History proved this to be true when under King Cyrus in 538BC the Jews were released and returned to Jerusalem.

The mark of a Christian mind is that it cultivates an eternal perspective. We, like Hab did, are tempted to think that God has given up on us and on his promises to us but we also must remember that, 'the revelation awaits an appointed time'. This might be cold comfort for us if we are going through difficulties but, though they might linger, they will end!

If we want God to work to our timetable we are going to be disappointed. We need patience and faith to believe that, 'the end will certainly come'.

God, who never lies, adds the phrase, 'it will not prove false'. In these times of political spin, fake news and propaganda lies our thinking can be manipulated and deceived according to what we are exposed to. How reassuring to know that God never spoke a promise he would not fulfil or uttered a single lie. His word will, 'never prove false'.

Gaze hard beyond this life to the next and see the glorious future the God who never lies has promised us. It will put in perspective the pattern of our present earthly lives!

Daily Devotions      Thursday 23rd July

Habakkuk 2 vs 4-5

Lynda and I have driven miles on holiday looking for a good campsite. We find a good one then drive on thinking there will be a better option further on!

When it comes to matters of God we can have the same attitude but ultimately there really are only two options. Faith or unbelief. Sitting on the fence is still unbelief! Verse 4 is a key verse in this book. It draws a contrast between the wicked, unbelieving Babylonians and the faithful remnant of Jews who follow God. Between the godly and the ungodly, the Christian and the pagan.

The revelation presents the ungodly as completely self-obsessed and self-reliant. For this reason they are unable to find a righteousness outside themselves. They are 'never at rest' always consumed by an ambition to get more. Death relentlessly consumes everything living and their greed is compared to it. The greed of the Babylonians was to conquer other nations.

How much we see this attitude in present western society! The 'look after number one' approach that denies God the ability to be in control of people's lives. Arrogant, greedy people are mentioned here. Pride is something God hates. How appropriate these days that the word has come to represent something equally despicable to God as the absence of humility in a person.

Many during the pandemic have experienced the joy of self-less acts but still won't accept the joy that was set before Christ as he committed the ultimate selfless act on the cross. (Heb 12v2)

Pride, arrogance and self-reliance are part of our sinful nature. The ungodly may be comfortable living with such motives although they may be restrained at times. However Christians are not immune from these tendencies either.

An African Pastor once taught Helen Roseveare a valuable lesson during her missionary days.

'He drew a straight line in the dirt floor with his heel. 'I', he said, 'the capital 'I' in our lives, self is the great enemy. Helen I see that you drink much coffee. You stand there holding it, until it is cool enough to drink. May I suggest that as you stand and wait, you should just lift your heart to God and pray....' And as he spoke he moved his heel in the dirt across the 'I' he had previously drawn. 'Please God cross out the I' There in the dirt was his lesson of simplified theology - the cross - the crossed out life. 'I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me'. (Gal 2 v 20)

Daily Devotions      Friday 24th July

Habakkuk 2 vs 1-5 (esp v 4)

This verse is referred to in the New Testament several times. (see Romans 1 v 17 and Heb 10 v 36-39). God draws a contrast here between the wicked pagan Babylonians and the righteous who live by faith.

It is worth spending some time thinking about what it means to live by faith since it is, according to this verse, the only reason we can lay claim to any kind of righteousness!

This verse also appears in Galatians 3 v 11, when Paul is considering the example of Abraham. He was credited with righteousness, not because he kept the law but because he had faith in God (v6)

So it is with us. We cannot hope to live sinless lives due to our inherent sinful nature but this was why Christ came! Our belief is, that despite our best efforts not to, whenever we sin, God has dealt with it through Christ. The self reliant self obsessed pagans in Habakkuk's and our times have not the ability to rely on something outside themselves.

There may have been a time in our pasts when we, 'put our trust in Jesus'. A conversion experience. But this verse is about the present. It's about living by faith! This is a continual trust in God. Forsaking All I Trust Him. Living by faith means we depend entirely on him and live our lives under the controlling principle that God is absolutely true to what he has said. We trust God with our lives, our families, our futures and our world.

Most of us are happy to put our trust in a mere mortal who happens to have learned to fly a plane. How much more secure is putting our trust in the God who has made everything around us, been in complete control of history and has provided us with access to him through Christ!!

Habakkuk 2 vs 6-8

Habakkuk now records 5 woes as taunts to the Babylonians.

This first one concerns their complete lack of consideration towards peoples outside their own nation in their quest for power and wealth. They had conquered many and taken from them goods for themselves. Blood was shed as they used military might to gain land, cattle, gold, fine food and drink, palaces, resources etc. etc. They trampled on others in their quest and their desire was insatiable. (v5)

Materialism isn't a word we hear much of these days but shopping centres seem to have become the new places of worship. Evidence for this surely came on the first day of shops opening after lockdown, when people queued overnight to get into Primark!! Online shopping nearly doubled in May and shares in Amazon more than doubled between March and May. We are driven to want more and more but are we giving due regard to those we might injure in the process.

These verses, however, remind us that God will turn the tables. The plunderer will become the plundered.

Consider Belshazzar, the king of Babylon. On an evening when he was enjoying the fruits of his ill-gotten gains, he witnessed a scary judgement from God written on a wall by a human hand. 'That very night Belshazzar, king of the Babylonians, was slain and Darius the Mede took over the kingdom.' (Daniel 5 vs 30-31)

When we look around at the apparent success of evil in our world it is good to be reminded that God will one day right all wrongs. One day, the fat cats who have prospered at the expense of others, will understand what God meant when he spoke of the plunderer becoming the plundered. (v8)

If you'd like to meditate on this in more depth then have a look at Psalm 73. The psalmist considers the success of evil people but concludes in v25, 'And earth has nothing I desire besides you.'