

In my early college years I was challenged by 2100 Production's multimedia show on the book of Habakkuk. I had never seen the Gospel so clearly presented in an Old Testament book. This production, presented by Intervarsity Fellowship, challenged the American culture of the day in its materialism, injustice and war-time dangers, such as nuclear war. Yes, there was a personal appeal in this Old Testament prophetic book. But the bigger question tackled by the book of Habakkuk was, and remains current: How is the godly man to survive in a day of evil? What is the bedrock assurance to which he can hold when the foundations of this world appear to be destroyed?

Monday: Read Habakkuk 1:1-4**How Long, O Lord?**

Throughout the Old Testament, the godly man cries out to God, "How long will you tolerate wickedness in your world as the Holy Creator and Judge of all men?" Habakkuk asks this same question in verses 2-4 (ESV):

O Lord, how long shall I cry for help,
and you will not hear?
Or cry to you "Violence!"
and you will not save?
Why do you make me see iniquity,
and why do you idly look at wrong?
Destruction and violence are before me;
strife and contention arise.
So the law is paralyzed,
and justice never goes forth.
For the wicked surround the righteous;
so justice goes forth perverted.

To properly understand the grief of this prophet in the face of wickedness as he served God from an address in the middle of wicked Judah, we will spend the rest of this week in a psalm of Asaph that describes the life and times of Habakkuk.

Tuesday: Read Habakkuk 1:2-4; Ps. 73:1-3 & 77:7-9**One Voice Among Many**

Throughout the Old Testament, the godly man cries out to God, "How long will you tolerate wickedness in your world as the Holy Creator and Judge of all men?" It is not surprising to hear even godly writers of Scripture throw up their hands in bitter despair as they behold the wicked. Consider the words of Psalm 73 as we pause in order to deepen our understanding of Habakkuk's lament and prophecy by comparing it to another godly prophet – Asaph. Out of the twelve Psalms attributed to Asaph (50, 73-83), at least five are classified by scholars as Laments.

It should comfort us to see how the Holy Spirit moves Asaph to write in a way which identifies with our trials. Is there anyone else who will listen to Asaph in his Psalms of lament and to us in our spiritual failings like God does? How honest Scripture is, and how humble our Father proves to be toward us!

Meditate and Pray: What a God we have, to help Asaph compose such songs for us... Surely God must indeed be One who "collects our tears in a bottle" (Psalm 56:8, KJV). How patient He is with us in our complaints.

In this Psalm of lament, Asaph asks (like Habakkuk in 1:2) “How long will the wicked prosper?” Even this famous choir leader Asaph has much to complain about when it comes to the prosperity of the wicked. He is unashamed to express his own broken-hearted longing for God to answer his complaints. Just as the sons of Korah lament the mockery of those who say to them in Psalm 42:1-3, “Where is your God?” so Asaph laments the impunity with which the wicked boast that God does not know or have knowledge of their wickedness (Psalm 73:11). Listen to fellow OPC pastor Edd Cathey, as he describes what the kind of grief these Psalmists were suffering:

Laments reckon with a world that is not harmonious... In the laments the psalmist is out of sorts and confused. Something is not right in his world. He feels abandoned and threatened. God's promises appear to be in jeopardy ... God often seems unaware of the crisis or unconcerned about it.

Meditate and Pray: Have you ever felt that God's will seems hidden in your life? Does the moral order in your world seem threatened? Does life seem to hold - instead of abundance - scarcity, sickness and death? What a comfort not to be alone at such a time, and to be able to sing with the greatest choir of Israel about our troubles, by means of these God-inspired laments! Surely there is great help for us at our lowest times. Would God ever provide us such songs of lament to sing *without at the same time* planning to rescue us from those times? No, as soon as we begin to sing these laments, we know that deliverance will indeed come... sooner than we had thought it would! God will revive our faith so that we will be able to say with Asaph in Psalm 73:1: “Surely God is good to Israel!”

Thursday: Read Psalm 73:1-3 & 73:16-17

Almost, but not Alone

The instability of Asaph's footsteps show us how urgent Asaph's danger had become. The Psalmist tells us that “his feet had almost slipped and he had nearly lost his foothold”. Verse 2 applies to our most *desperate* of times.

“But as for me, I lost my balance,
my feet nearly slipped.” (Jewish Bible).

“But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled, my
steps had nearly slipped.” (ESV)

What is clear is that the Psalmist was on his way to destruction, if the Lord had not stepped in and rescued him. For remember, the metaphor of stumbling and falling is used very seriously in Scripture, not as a mere misstep or stubbing of the toe. To stumble in Romans 9:32-33 means to reject the way of faith and to reject Jesus Christ as God's cornerstone!

Meditate and Pray: This is how close Asaph came to losing his faith: His feet had “well-nigh turned aside” with the result that he had “nearly fallen right off the path.” He was on his way down and his feet were “being poured out like water.” He felt completely scattered and “unable to keep a foothold.” No wonder many of the Puritans take Psalm 73:2 as a verse proving that, if the believer were left to himself even for a moment, his end would be destruction. John Owen describes what would be the terrible end result for Asaph, and for us, if the Lord were to leave us stumbling in Psalm 73:2:

We ... should have been made a prey unto every subtle and powerful adversary. Christ could, therefore, no otherwise comfort his disciples, when he was leaving this world, but by promising that, ‘he would not leave them orphans,’ John 14:18.

Lord, we and our loved ones are completely vulnerable to total loss unless you keep us in your firm grasp! Remind and recover us, every moment, every trial.

Friday: Read Psalm 73:1-3, 18-28 & 1 Peter 1:10-12**Mighty to Save in Every Age**

We know that hundreds of years after David's reign, even down to the rule of godly king Hezekiah, the songs of David were sung (2 Chronicles 29:30). Moreover, David is identified as a prophet who "saw" the final answers to his prayers and laments in God's sending His Son to deliver His people one day. This prophetic "sight" David shared with all other Old Testament prophets like Asaph, who inquired as to when this suffering Savior called the Christ would arrive. In terms of 1 Peter 1:12, it was "revealed to the prophets, (like Asaph), that they were not serving themselves but us, when they spoke of the things that have now been told us by those who preached the Gospel to us."

Asaph served us by pointing to the coming of Christ! The presence of God which Asaph longed for in Ps 73:23ff was fulfilled in God's coming to abide with us permanently through His Son, born of a virgin! And his Psalms endured longer than King David's throne and kingdom – even into our day! How enduring are the praises of God's people when we pray to such a king, mighty to save in every age of the church!

Meditate and Pray: God is so adept at rescuing us from *every imaginable trial and even from afflictions we have sinfully brought on ourselves*. We will never lack grounds for giving praise to the One who does the impossible. We only have to look at His most recent act of redemption in our lives for our hearts to be stirred to thanksgiving. He rescues us every day – so that every day there can be a song in our mouths! Sing about God's rescuing power, always remembering how He persists in rescuing us "even unto seventy times"! Use *Trinity Hymnal* # 455:

*And can it be that I should gain
An interest in the Savior's blood?
Died He for me, who caused His pain—
For me, who Him to death pursued?*

*Amazing love! How can it be,
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?
Amazing love! How can it be,
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me*

*No condemnation now I dread;
Jesus, and all in Him, is mine;
Alive in Him, my living head,
And clothed in righteousness divine,*

*Bold I approach th'eternal throne,
And claim the crown, through Christ my own.
Bold I approach th'eternal throne,
And claim the crown, through Christ my own.*

Sat/Sun: Read Habakkuk 1:1-17**We Shall Not Die**

We began this week with Habakkuk opening his mouth to plead with God to address the sinful rot of corruption and injustice in godless Judah (Hab. 1:1-4). Then the Lord reveals to the prophet (Hab 1:5-11) that He will soon chastise His people severely through the “wild, heathen Babylonians who will attack and dismantle Judah” (Walter Chantry, *Habakkuk, A Wrestler with God*). Then the prophet cries out to God in verse 12:

Are you not from everlasting,
O Lord my God, my Holy One?
We shall not die.

O Lord, you have ordained them as a judgment,
and you, O Rock, have established them for reproof.

What a response to calamity. In prayer, the prophet appeals to God’s *covenant faithfulness*. He uses the name God revealed (Exodus 3) to Moses to reassure the Hebrews that He remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Habakkuk reminds the Lord, “You are my God!” He appeals to God’s steadfast, unchangeable character as *his Rock* and reassures himself in prayer that God will not allow the Babylonians to overturn the moral order forever by wiping God’s people off the map: “We shall not die.”

Meditate and Pray: My, what a powerful prayer God inspired Habakkuk to pray. Just think of some of the answers to this prayer in subsequent history. Babylon arose quickly; it was in power little more than the seventy years Judah was in exile. Babylon’s demise was as rapid as the “writing on the wall,” by which God dramatically brought in the Medo-Persian empire (Daniel 5:24-31).

Just as God raised up the Babylonians as His rod of chastisement (Daniel 5:18) so He destroyed them even as Habakkuk prayed. The Lord *did not allow* Babylon to “keep on mercilessly killing nations” (Daniel 1:17).

Let’s close this week with a challenging quote on the importance of Habakkuk’s and our prayers. May we never fall into the trap of thinking that our prayers are non-essential, emotional outbursts that have no effect on God’s plans for the nations.

His is all the power and glory, but God invites us by prayer to participate in the decisions of His heavenly throne. Failure to hold such a view of prayer makes men dull and silent as they come to pray. Such ignorance empties church prayer meetings. It robs men of hope that things will change in the future. Without prayer men move about as uninvolved robots in their rounds of life. Earthbound men are out of touch with the Father of spirits. Their atrophied souls lie unused.

We were made in the image of God to commune with Him, speaking with Him whose arm directs all events. How many believers chatter to other men about national moral crises and international threats poised to crush God’s people! Nonetheless, too many have fled from God’s throne room where their voices would do much good.

Walter Chantry, *Habakkuk, A Wrestler with God*, page 26