

Message #2

Habakkuk 1:1-11

Back in the year 1909, H. A. Ironside said there is no possible way that believers who have consciences that have been exercised by the Holy Spirit can possibly be indifferent to the unholy things that have infiltrated the church. He said the real danger for the spiritually-minded believer is not indifference; it is depression (*Minor Prophets*, p. 278). Dr. Ironside said that in 1909 and here we are over 105 years later in 2014. We look at what is happening in most churches today and it is obvious that this unholy evil infiltration has escalated to new lows.

Now the same thing is true when we look at our country. We are reaching new lows in decency, morality and integrity. Any person who is in tune with the Holy Spirit clearly sees this and there is no possible way you can be happy about it.

Many of God's people are totally disgusted with what is going on in this country and in most churches. Our nation is completely being destroyed. It is being led in a direction that is opposite of one that would receive the blessings of God. We are being led straight to judgment.

When you look at religion, we are falling apart spiritually. What makes us so upset is that there doesn't appear to be anything we can do about it. We go vote, but that doesn't seem to be working and that isn't changing much of anything. The political leaders who are in office for the most part don't seem to care about God or His Word.

There does not appear to be any leaders who are truly interested in moving this nation in the direction of the Word of God so God will once again bless our nation. The vast majority of people don't seem to care, including those who go to church. Truth is we need to figure out a way to keep our head above water to keep our spirits positive, to keep our spirituality alive.

Now we are called to live a joyful life in this world and being right with God is the key to living a joyful life; but there isn't much to be happy about when you look at the world so we must find a way to cope with what we are seeing and sensing.

This problem is not new to us. This same struggle was the very struggle of Habakkuk. He saw the same kinds of things in his day that we see in our day and when the book opens he is depressed but by the time the book ends, he is rejoicing. So what was his secret? How did he do it? How did he cope? Well, we get to see a critical factor to his stability:

WHEN HABAKKUK SAW HIS NATION FALLING APART HE WENT DIRECTLY TO GOD AND TALKED TO GOD AND COMPLAINED TO GOD.

This is important; he took his concerns and complaints to the ear of God and not the ear of man.

A critical key to our survival and development is keep talking to God. Take your burdens to the Lord and leave them there.

Habakkuk did not pull any punches. He shot his prayers straight to God. He let God know that he was frustrated and fed up with what was happening and this was part of the process that would ultimately bring him to the point he could rejoice again.

Now **verse 1** opens with the word “the oracle which Habakkuk the prophet saw.” There are a couple of key points to bring out about this opening phrase.

First, the word “oracle” is not the normal Hebrew word for “oracle” (debir). The word used here is “massa” and it is a word that refers to carrying a “heavy load” or “burden.” **Second**, the word “saw” (chazah) means that Habakkuk literally saw this (William Gesenius, *Hebrew Lexicon*, p. 512, 268). So Habakkuk literally saw what was going on at the time in which he lived.

Jehoiakim was the king and he was an evil king by God’s classification. Jehoiakim was a political leader who made deals with foreign nations and padded his own pockets at the expense of God’s people (II Kings 23:34-37). He was an immoral, idolatrous, power-crazed man who reigned for eleven years. Habakkuk saw this man for what he was and saw his lying and cheating and religious hypocrisy, and it burdened him.

He could not shake the heavy weight of what he saw. It burdened him as a prophet. It frustrated him and that is what prompted him to pray to God and what prompted him to write this book.

When we see the evil of our political world and religious world we should be driven to pray and driven to hear the Word of God. There should be a burden that drives us to God and His Word because God is the only one who can keep us sane in an insane world.

May I speak for a moment to true ministers of the Word of God? When you see what is happening in the church and in the political world you should be burdened by it and you should be driven to pray and proclaim God’s Word. Preaching should stem from a burden to communicate God’s Word.

Now in this opening series of verses there are two main parts:

PART #1 – Habakkuk prays to God and complains to God. **1:2-4**

It is clear from **verse 2** that Habakkuk really is upset by what he sees. He is looking at a political world headquartered in Jerusalem that is corrupt and evil under an evil leader, Jehoiakim. The burden he saw was the moral corruption of the leadership and he went straight to God.

Habakkuk was sick and tired of what he is seeing and he is upset because there is nothing he can do about it. He cries out to God and basically asks Him four questions:

- 1) How long do I have to cry out to you for help? **1:2a**—he had been praying a long time.
- 2) When are you going to hear my prayers? **1:2b**—it appeared as if God wasn't even listening.
- 3) Why aren't you saving us from these God-mocking leaders and people? **1:2c**
- 4) Why do you let me see all of the evil stuff I am seeing? **1:3a**

Now we know that God hears all prayers and Habakkuk knew that too; but he wondered just exactly when God was going to do something about the horrible stuff that was going on in his day.

Now Habakkuk gives a description of some of the things he saw. In fact, he believed that God in His sovereignty let him see these things. The more you know God and His Word, the more you see how corrupt this world actually is and how corrupt you are. He couldn't figure out why God would let him see these things and then appear to do nothing about them. Keep in mind that the people doing these things were the political leaders who were very religious. Habakkuk saw eleven sights:

Sight #1 - God let Habakkuk see the violence. **1:2b**

The word “violence” (hamas) shows up six times in this book (1:2, 3, 9; 2:8, 17, 17). When we consider that this book is only three chapters long, that is a very unusual amount of uses of that noun. This particular Hebrew word does refer to physical violence but it also refers to more than just physical brutality. As Dr. Thomas Constable said, it refers to any “flagrant violation of moral law by which someone injures his fellow man” (*Habakkuk*, p. 10).

Habakkuk saw a world that flagrantly disobeyed God's Word and brutalized people. He wanted to know when God was going to do something about it. It would be like us saying, “How long God, are you going to allow political leaders to support and fund killing and ripping little innocent babies to shreds through abortion.” This is life God creates and it is being brutalized.

Sight #2 - God let Habakkuk see the iniquity. **1:3a**

This word refers to an empty, vain, false religious life (William Gesenius, *Hebrew Lexicon*, p. 21). Habakkuk said I see all the light, fluffy, false stuff that is dominating our nation and wonder God, why aren't you putting a stop to this.

Sight #3 - God let Habakkuk see the wickedness. **1:3b**

The word “wicked” refers to a wickedness that is wretched. The word carries with it the idea that the people were actually working and laboring in wretched things (*Ibid.*, p. 639). In other words, Habakkuk saw that sin was publicly flaunted.

We turn on the news and there are festivals that publicly flaunt homosexual behavior. People are proud of it; they call it “Gay Pride.” According to Scripture, this is an evil abomination. Why do we even have to see it and why isn't God putting a stop to it. That is what Habakkuk saw.

Sight #4 - God let Habakkuk see the destruction. **1:3c**

The word “destruction” (shode) refers to violent, oppressive things that the people did to obtain wealth (*Ibid.*, p. 805). Habakkuk saw how Jehoiakim was destroying people’s income through various taxes (II Kings 23:35). He was making the decisions to keep the money flowing in the political world and it was destroying people’s lives. The rich got richer and the average person was being destroyed through taxation and inflation.

Sight #5 - God let Habakkuk see the violence. **1:3d**

He uses the same word he used in **verse 2**. Everywhere Habakkuk looked, he saw evil, corrupt and violent things happening in a nation that was supposed to be right with God. People who were going to worship services were anything but godly.

Sight #6 - God let Habakkuk see the strife. **1:3e**

The word “strife” means there were a lot of forensic contentions (*Ibid.*, p. 767). People were suing and taking each other to court. People who were right with God were targeted for a lot of negative things. It would be like some governmental agency like the IRS targeting a group like the Tea Party to see if they could haul them in to court. Habakkuk saw that stuff.

Sight #7 - God let Habakkuk see the contention. **1:3f**

This word often refers to a lot of contentious hatred like that between the Arabs and Jews (*Ibid.*, p. 451). In tracking the root Hebrew word there seems to be an emphasis on lower versus higher. In other words, the contention exists because someone thinks he is higher and better than another and he lords it over others.

Sight #8 - God let Habakkuk see the rejection of God’s Word. **1:4a**

Amos tells God the law is ignored, literally in Hebrew it is “pugged,” which means people were cold to the Word of God (*Ibid.*, p. 668). In other words, God’s own people did not find warmth and comfort from God’s Word; they ignored it and rejected it.

Habakkuk did not see many people going to worship to hear God’s Word or because they esteemed God’s Word. In fact, most didn’t care if they heard it accurately taught.

Sight #9 - God let Habakkuk see the lack of upholding justice. **1:4b**

Habakkuk saw that no one was standing for what was right and true and just according to the Word of God. No one was upholding the truth of God’s Word. There was no concern for what is right before God. No one in this nation cared.

Sight #10 - God let Habakkuk see the dominance of the wicked over the righteous. **1:4c**

The wicked people were dominating and surrounding the righteous people. In other words, God's people were surrounded by people who are not interested in God or His Word or righteous things; they were surrounded by wicked things and wicked people.

Sight #11 - God let Habakkuk see the perversion of justice. **1:4d**

That which is just according to God's Word was twisted and perverted. Criminals were getting away with horrible crimes. The judicial system was a mess. It was not interested in justice.

Now Habakkuk saw all of this and it made him mad and that is why he is crying out to God. God seemed to be totally indifferent to what he was seeing. He seemed to be totally oblivious to everything and he wanted to know, "God why aren't you doing something about this? How long do we have to pray about this? Why don't you intervene right now and start wiping out the evil politicians?"

There are three realities to always remember about God:

- 1) God is ALWAYS on the side of the righteous even when evil appears to be winning.
- 2) God ALWAYS hears the prayers of the righteous even when the answers are delayed.
- 3) God will ALWAYS negatively judge evil leaders and evil people in His time.

PART #2 – God answers Habakkuk's prayer and complaint. **1:5-11**

It is interesting that God does not get mad that Habakkuk is talking to Him about this. God decides to somewhat answer Habakkuk's prayer but He does not answer him in the specific way we might think.

In **verse 5** God reveals to Habakkuk that He wants him and also the faithful people to do four things. The pronoun "you" is plural, so this refers to Habakkuk and all godly people who think the same way Habakkuk thinks:

- (Action #1)** - Look among the nations—don't just look at what is happening in your nation.
- (Action #2)** - Observe what you see.
- (Action #3)** - Be astonished by what you see.
- (Action #4)** - Wonder at what you see.

Now what God actually does here is He says I want you to stop looking at what is happening in your own country right now and take a look at what I am doing in the big world and by looking at this you will in part get your answer. What Habakkuk did not realize was God was stirring up the whole world to judge Judah.

It would be like God saying to us, stop looking at just the evil stuff going on in the U.S. and look what I am doing in the Muslim world because I am stirring it up and I am going to use it to judge the U.S.

In fact, God says in **verse 5** I am going to do something “in your days.” In fact, He says you would not believe what I am going to do if you were told, so I will tell you. One reason why he would not believe it is because of the description of the kind of people God would use. Now the Jews living in Habakkuk’s day never dreamed that God would allow a Gentile power to overrun their nation and land, even though God’s Word had warned them of that (Deut. 28:49-50; Jer. 5:14-17)

People today do not believe God could raise up evil people to destroy in judgment. They want a God of love; not one who would do something like what is described here. If you tell them what God will do, it is just as the text says, “You won’t believe it if you are told.”

Now in **verses 6-11**, God reveals exactly what He is in the process of doing: God was in the process of raising up the Chaldeans, who were the Babylonians, and He was going to direct them and use them to judge his people. **God is letting Habakkuk see that He is in complete sovereign charge of all world events. God, by His sovereignty and providence, was beginning to stir up a people who were not even known to be the dominate people at that time (the Assyrians were).** The Babylonians started warring with the Assyrians from 612-605 B.C. If Habakkuk is writing at 606 B.C., he never dreamed that God would bring them against Israel.

The name “Chaldean” refers to a ruling class of people who lived near the Persian Gulf. Out of this group came the Babylonian Empire. So what is predicted here is that God was going to stir up the Babylonian Empire, which today is comprised of Islamic Arabs to demolish His own people.

In verses **6-11**, He gives us a description of the kind of people He is using for His judgment purposes. He gives **15 descriptions** of people you would never think God would ever use:

Description #1 - They are fierce people. **1:6a**—word means sad, raging, violent (*Ibid.*, p. 505).

Description #2 - They are impetuous people. **1:6b**—quick to rush into things (*Ibid.*, p. 454).

Description #3 - They will march throughout the whole earth. **1:6c**

Description #4 - They will seize places that do not belong to them. **1:6d**

Description #5 - They are dreaded. **1:7a**—people are terrified of them (*Ibid.*, p. 38).

Description #6 - They are feared. **1:7b**—scary people to the point of trembling (*Ibid.*, p. 364).

Description #7 - They are their own justice. **1:7c**

The Babylonians were a law to themselves. They made up their own laws and own rules. We saw that in Hitler. It is a known historical fact that Hitler made up his own justice system. He called what was false truth and he called what was right wrong.

Description #8 - They are their own authority. **1:7d**—they do not submit to any authority.

Description #9 - Their military horses and armaments are the fastest and the best. **1:8**

The description here is that these Babylonians have horses and horsemen who could run as fast as a horse in the Kentucky Derby. In other words, their horses and equipment were the best.

Description #10 - They are violent people. **1:9a**

One historian said the Babylonians “loved violence.” They love to kill. They loved to destroy people and take what they have.

Description #11 - They have a horde of people who move forward. **1:9b**

They set their faces on moving forward to destroy and no one could stop them.

Description #12 - They collect captives like the sand. **1:9c**

They were taking captives like the sirocco winds take sand.

Description #13 - They mock all political leaders. **1:10a**

No political leader of the world will be a threat.

Description #14 - They mock all military forces. **1:10b**

No military force intimidated them.

Description #15 - They will sweep in like the wind. **1:11a**

But notice the end of **verse 11**, they will be held guilty by God because their god was not the God of the Bible; it was power.

There is a lesson to learn. When a nation like the United States moves away from God and His Word and starts flaunting their sin, God will bring up some very unexpected means of judgment. He can and will and does sovereignly and providentially send a judgment no one can stop.

When God's people neglect the Word of God and persist in sin, they may expect that God will judge and He will bring someone or some thing into our life to judge that we never expected.

Those whom God uses to judge will themselves be judged far worse than the judgment that came upon them.

We should never be indifferent to evil; but we also should never be disheartened. We can always know and believe that our God is in control and the just live by faith believing that.

In Acts 13:38-41, Paul quoted this text. He preached faith alone in Christ saves, not law and not works. Then he quotes Hab. 1:5: "You won't believe it even if someone explains it to you."