



A Biblical Response to Troubling Times – Part 9
Habakkuk 3
GCSP – 11/08/2008

There seems to be a sense of general fear among many people in our country today. With unemployment at its highest level in more than a decade, with the stock market dropping 30-40% in the span of a few months, and with the typical uncertainty that comes during election cycles, differing levels of fear are gripping many in our nation.

People deal with fear in various ways. Some ignore it altogether. They simply get busier in order to so fill their minds with other things that they do not have time for fear. Others become mentally and emotionally paralyzed. They are so consumed by the fear that they are useless to themselves or to anyone around them. Still others are defiant and face the fear in a macho showdown of sorts. They are self-reliant, self-dependent, and self-confident that no fear can stop them.

Jesus said repeatedly, "**Fear not**" or "**Let not your heart be troubled**" or "**Do not fear**" or any number of other phrases along these same lines. So we can rightly say that it is a sin for a Christian to fear anything of this world. But like many sins we struggle with, the sin of fear is difficult to avoid and difficult to overcome at times.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones said, "*Our troubles can nearly all be traced to our persistence in looking at the immediate problems themselves, instead of looking at them in the light of God.*"

The prophet Habakkuk learned this lesson well.

Turn with me in your Bibles to the Book of **Habakkuk**.

Habakkuk 3:3-19

Let's pray.

I believe the Lord is going to allow me to complete this study tonight. Hopefully, all of us have learned a thing or two in the last two months from the principles of this short but great Book of Scripture. Hopefully, we all know how to respond in a biblical manner to our troubling times. Hopefully, each of you are making changes in your lives that will allow you to build up your wall of faithfulness and stand in the gap by way of intercessory prayer on behalf of the churches of our nation and our nation in general.

The last principle we need to deal with is that of handling fear. Fearing God is commanded of us, as we have studied through this series, but fearing anything or anyone else is not only unprofitable, it is wrong. Fear of any kind shows your lack of trust in God.

Habakkuk was there temporarily; **verse 16** shows us that.

That being said, many times the circumstances in our lives that have caused or heightened a fear have been self-inflicted. These self-inflicted causes come about whenever we ignore God's Word or are ignorant of God's Word. The Bible tells us plainly that everything pertaining to life and godliness are found within its pages, so all of our troubles and problems can be solved with God's Word, if we take the time to study and apply and wait on the Lord. And please do not miss the aspect of waiting on the Lord. I am afraid our impatience leads us into sinful choices more than most other characteristics of our lives. But typically, fear comes in when we have disobeyed or misapplied the principles of Scripture.

For example, most of the fear that currently grips the people of our nation is directly or indirectly attached to money. Very few who are still in the workplace or even in retirement are prepared to handle the loss of income for a few weeks. Fewer still are prepared to handle the loss of income for several months. Some are not prepared to handle the loss of income for a single day.

The Bible tells us how to handle our money. The Bible tells us in great detail how to handle our money. The Bible tells us how to invest, how to give, how to store up for the future, how to lend, how to avoid borrowing, how to take advantage of seasons of plenty, and how to be prepared for seasons of want. The topic of handling money is the single most talked about topic in Scripture; more than heaven, more than hell, more than the end times, and even more than salvation. Yet very few Christians have taken the time to know and understand these principles let alone apply them to their lives.

And because of this self-inflicted ignorance or willful disobedience, multitudes of God's children are living in constant fear of not having enough money to pay their bills, and struggle with having peace about their future.

So whether it is self-inflicted or not, how do we overcome the sin of fear when it creeps into our lives?

Remember who is in control

In **verses 3-7**, although not in chronological order, Habakkuk recalls five instances of the Lord's intervention in the history of Israel to remind all about the awesomeness of their God.

v. 3a

Mount Paran is another name for Mount Sinai (**Deuteronomy 33:2**). The reference Habakkuk is making is to the giving of God's Law through Moses. When God inscribed His Law into the stone tablets on Mount Sinai, He was revealing Himself to Moses and to His people. The character of God was never before revealed in such detail than it was in His Law; and the primary characteristic that was revealed is His holiness.

We are called to be holy because the Lord our God is holy. We are to be separate and distinct from all who cannot call God, Abba Father. We are to pursue holiness with all of our being; and we do that by pure devotion and humble obedience to His Word.

God gave His Law many thousands of years ago but because He never changes His desire for us to be holy has not changed. God still demands holiness from His people. **Hebrews 12:14** tells us that no one will see the Lord apart from the sanctification of holiness. And while ultimately the holiness of Jesus Christ attributed to us in repentance and salvation is the only way for us to ever see the Lord, our pursuit of holiness is still to be the primary principle of our lives.

Teman is identified a place in Edom and the territory of Seir. So the opening of **verse 3** traces God's leading of the children of Israel from Egypt to the Promised Land. Even though the Lord always allows us to make the choice of when we obey, God was in control of His people through their wilderness journeys.

v. 3b-4

The next reminder Habakkuk points to is that of God's power. God displayed His power to the Children of Israel in His creation and in His continuing control over creation. God reveals His radiance to us through creation and through His servant Moses. The Hebrew word used for "rays" in **verse 4**, is only used one other time in Scripture, and that was to describe the glow on Moses' face when he came down from Mount Sinai.

The power of the sun that God created can make your face radiate heat but it doesn't make it glow; the power of God is the only thing that accomplishes that. Habakkuk reminds that God's power has been displayed for us in creation and in history.

Why fear when we know God through His Law, His holiness, and His power?

v. 5

The picture in Israel's history that Habakkuk paints here is of the Exodus. God brought plague and pestilence on the land of Egypt while they continued to defy Him. But there is also another meaning to this picture.

Hold your place in **Habakkuk** and turn with me in your Bibles to the Books of **Leviticus** and **Deuteronomy**.

Leviticus 26:18-25; Deuteronomy 28:15-24

Plague and pestilence also await God's children when they willingly disobey His Word. **"The Lord will send upon you curses, confusion, and rebuke, in all you undertake to do." "The Lord will make the pestilence cling to you."**

How vivid is that? How serious is God when it comes to our treatment of His Word?

Do you go through periods of time in your life when nothing seems to work? Do you experience trouble and trial for months on end? Then you first need to ask yourself, what in God's Law am I disobeying? Am I being covetous? Am I forsaking the assembling together of God's people? Do I not love others as I should? Am I not praying for others as I should? Am I allowing pride into my life? Am I unthankful? Am I misusing the money and material possessions God has given to me?

Work your way through Scripture. Pray and ask the Spirit of God to reveal where you are allowing the world into your life. Ask the Lord where you are missing the truth of Scripture. Ask Him where you have misinterpreted or misunderstood what the Bible says. Ask Him when you have misapplied His Word or have fallen to false teaching.

If you keep His commandments and pursue the proper understanding of His Word you will have no reason to fear.

Turn with me in your Bibles back to the Book of **Habakkuk**.

v. 6

The nations have reason to fear, and so do we when we act like the nations.

Notice that God's inanimate creation is more immediately responsive to God's presence than those who are created in His image. The mountains and the hills bow down while mankind refuses to even acknowledge Him.

We understand how unbelievers refuse to acknowledge God but we are just as guilty of this atrocity at times. We are guilty of not acknowledging God when we do things our own way or when we apply the wisdom of man to our situation before applying the wisdom of God to our situation. We are guilty of not acknowledging God when we don't spend time in prayer every day and when we make decisions before covering it with prayer. We are guilty of not acknowledging God when we grow weary of waiting on Him and get ahead of His perfect timing.

If the mountains and the hills have enough sense to bow down when God's presence approaches, why are we so rebellious and thick-headed? I guess the phrase, "Dumb as a rock"

needs to be adjusted to "Dumber than a rock" when we refuse to acknowledge God in every aspect of our lives.

We have no reason to fear if we are acknowledging God.

v. 7

Habakkuk now goes to the time of the Judges in Israel's history. The people of Cushan were the first to attack Israel once they had settled into the Promised Land. God then raised up a nobody named Othniel to deliver and judge the people. The Midianites attacked Israel and God raised up another nobody named Gideon to deliver the Israelites and to judge them.

God was showing Habakkuk and us that He will always intervene on behalf of His children when they genuinely turn back to Him in repentance.

So the first reason way to defeat fear in our lives is to remember who is in control. Remember God's Law, holiness and power. Remember to understand and keep His commandments. Remember to acknowledge God in every aspect of your life. And remember that God always intervenes on behalf of those who genuinely turn to Him in repentance.

Remember who is returning

Habakkuk now turns more to God's activity against those who have defied Him and will defy Him in the future. This portion of Habakkuk's hymn of praise to God mixes events that have already happened with events that are still to come. God reveals His faithfulness in the past to assure us of His faithfulness in the present and the future.

v. 8-15

We cannot pinpoint every instance mentioned in these verses. **Verse 8** appears to be speaking of the parting of the Red Sea and/or the parting of the Jordan River. **Verse 11** seems to refer to the time when Joshua prayed and asked the Lord to stop time so he could finish defeating the Amorites in the light of day. **Verse 13** appears to refer to how God preserved David during the times Saul attempted to murder him and during his reign as king of Israel. And **verse 14** could refer to the battle of Gideon against the Midianites who in their confusion attacked and killed each other.

Much of the content of the other verses in this section seem to point to the end times and the final Day of the Lord. The imagery points to the time when God will make His final triumphant sweep through this earth to gather up and destroy all who oppose Him.

We should not fear because the Lord is returning. Instead we should be emboldened to stand firm as we studied a few weeks ago. We should be empowered to build up the walls of faithfulness in our lives, and we should be willing and able to stand in the gap no matter the odds against us. The Lord is returning!

v. 16

Confess your fears. Habakkuk finally understood everything the Lord was about to do, he has rehearsed God's holiness and power and faithfulness, he has reaffirmed that the Lord will return, and yet he is still transparent enough to admit and confess his fears to God. I believe that the act of confession and repentance is as much an act of worship as is praying and praising and exalting the Lord is. Confession and repentance should always be a part of our worship.

So why does the church primarily, if not exclusively, focus on triumph and good news in the public aspects of worship? Why are we embarrassed or afraid to bear our souls before the Lord in public worship? Why is confession and repentance kept hidden in a corner somewhere? Why are

we afraid to even acknowledge that we have some issues in our lives that need prayer, during the testimony time and the invitation time?

Beloved, being transparent enough and humble enough to acknowledge your struggles in public is an act of worship; and if you withhold any act of worship because of what someone else may think of you, then you are worshipping yourself and not God.

Habakkuk now has and understands all the information and all the theology and all the philosophy; his struggle is now physical and mental. He is afraid of what will happen when the Chaldeans come in and invade Judah. He fully knows that God is in control and that God is faithful and sovereign and holy and just, but he is mightily impacted by what he knows of the immediate future. So what is he to do? What are we to do?

Start by voicing your fears. Confess them before the Lord as Habakkuk did; and don't wait. If the Lord brings these fears to mind when home alone, confess to Him at home. If your fears manifest themselves in the public assembly, then confess them in the public assembly. The quote that no man is an island is a biblical concept. We need each other for encouragement. We are interdependent on each other. We simply cannot wear the mask of a strong warrior on the outside when we are trembling on the inside.

After confessing his fears, Habakkuk was given the strength and the encouragement to reaffirm his commitment and submission to the Lord. And the verses that wrap up this tremendous Book of the Bible is one of the most amazing texts in all of Scripture in the face of what looms on the horizon of Habakkuk's life.

v. 17-19

That is an amazing response we all need to take note of and copy the next time we face severe trial.

Let's break it down a little as we close out this study.

v. 17

First, what would cause the conditions depicted in **verse 17**? This could be the results of the impending invasion. Crops could be trampled and burned, livestock could be butchered or stolen, or it could be the results of what remained of the people would not be able to care for the land and the livestock. But, if you remember the passage we read in **Leviticus 26:18-25** earlier, God said, "**I will make your sky like iron and your earth like bronze...your land will not yield its produce and the trees of the land will not yield their fruit...I will let loose among you the beasts of the field, which will...destroy your cattle...I will send pestilence among you...**"

Scripture makes many connections to the spiritual health of a nation and the physical health of its land and its people. You can go all the way back to the Garden of Eden for this reality. After Adam and Eve sinned God made it difficult to raise crops. After Adam and Eve sinned disease and sickness made its debut in their lives.

It is not out of the context of Scripture to say that many of the environmental issues facing our world today and many of the diseases that afflict us could be lessened or eliminated if God's people would wholly and completely turn back to obedience and submission to the Lord. Passages in Amos, Micah, and Haggai all allude to this probability.

Habakkuk realizes that in his nation, Judah had already gone too far to see repentance and revival in his time. Habakkuk is resigned to the fact that the conditions of **verse 17** will soon be the reality. We have not been given the vision that America has already reached that same point

in God's longsuffering and patience; and until we do know we have reached that point we still have time to build the walls of faithfulness and to stand in the gap on behalf of our nation so the Lord will not destroy it.

v. 18-19

Notice Habakkuk does not say, "I will grudgingly accept what the Lord will is" or "I will somehow manage to grit my teeth and struggle through what the Lord has planned"; no, Habakkuk says, **"I will exult in the Lord, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation."** Compare that to how you responded the last time your car broke down, or you received some bad news about your 401(k), or you woke up with the flu. Did you exult in the lord and rejoice in the God of your salvation?

Beloved, we must live every moment of every day exalting the Lord and rejoicing in Him. To do otherwise is not truly living as we are created to live. Exalt the Lord in the midst of your trials. Rejoice in the God of your salvation when the enemy is closing in. Praise God for His mercy and goodness and righteousness and justice and loving kindness when you lay on your sick bed.

"Rejoice, and again I say rejoice!"

"Who will separate from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:35; 38-39).

Habakkuk's response is in the face of real struggles and impending invasion and captivity. Habakkuk wasn't going to be rescued with the promise of health, wealth, and prosperity. There was no name it and claim it theology for Habakkuk. The Bible gives us a path for blessing and prosperity as we saw last week, but sometimes a nation goes beyond the bounds of God's patience. Habakkuk shows us how to respond with praise, worship and rejoicing in the midst of tragedy.

"The righteous will live by his faith!"

Let's pray.