



CONVEYING *the* **LIGHT**
CLAIM IT. FOCUS IT. SPREAD IT. BE IT.

Too Soon to Quit by Warren W. Wiersbe Chapter 9 – Habakkuk the Wrestler
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I. Habakkuk the Wrestler - Face the facts, but keep living by faith.

A. The name Habakkuk means “to wrestle, to embrace.”

B. Habakkuk and Jeremiah were contemporaries in Jerusalem when the kingdom of Judah was falling apart.

1. The nation was in political decline and spiritual decay, thanks to the stupidity and disobedience of a series of kings who refused to obey God’s Word.

C. Habakkuk seems to have had one major personal conflict with God from which he emerged a smarter and better man.

1. Habakkuk faced problems in his heart and mind as he tried to understand what God was doing to His people.

2. It’s difficult to live by faith and serve the Lord when your theology says one thing and your Master seems to be doing something else.

D. Habakkuk had a dramatic change in attitude as well as a change of altitude as he moved from the depths of perplexity to the heights of praise.

1. He went from worrying to worshipping, because he took time to be quiet and listen to God.

II. At Least He Was Honest

A. The prophet’s attitude was somewhat imperious as he demanded that the Lord explain what He was doing.

1. Habakkuk had been faithfully praying and even crying out to God and had received no answer (1:1-2), so he began to ask questions as though God owed him an explanation for His actions.

B. Habakkuk asked the Lord two questions: “How long must I pray before You answer?” and “ Why do You permit such injustice?”

C. Habakkuk’s first problem was the seeming indifference of God to the plight of His people: “Why aren’t You doing something about the mess the nation is in?”

1. The prophet had received no answer to his prayers, and it seemed to him that the Lord was indifferent to Judah's dangers.

2. King Josiah's reforms hadn't really changed things. The priests and prophets were liars and extortionists, and the nation desperately needed to repent and turn to God.

3. Habakkuk uses words like strife, violence, iniquity, injustice and wrongdoing to describe the society of his day. The law was paralyzed, and the judges were selling themselves to the highest bidders.

D. The Lord's answer shocked the prophet: "I AM at work!

1. I'm permitting the idolatrous Babylonians to invade Judah, destroy the city and the temple, and take the people captive."

2. This raised a second question: "How can you punish your own people by bringing against them a people more wicked than they are?"

E. Habakkuk knew his theology (1: 12-13).

1. God is eternal and therefore sovereign, and God is holy and therefore sinless; in fact, He is so holy that He cannot tolerate sin.

2. The Babylonians were a ruthless, vicious people. Their sins were many and great.

3. But the sins of God's people were far worse than the sins of a pagan nation.

4. God's judgment begins with the household of the Lord (1 Peter 4: 17; Ezek. (9: 6).

5. The Jewish people were God's chosen people, and their election involved responsibility. "You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your sins" (Amos 3; 2).

6. To whom much is given, much is required, and privilege involves responsibility (Luke 12: 48).

III. A Time for Silence

A. There is "a time to be silent and a time to speak" (Eccl. 3: 7), and the time had come for Habakkuk to be silent so God could speak to Him again.

B. Habakkuk saw himself as a watchman on the city walls, scanning the landscape for the approaching enemy armies.

1. Isaiah had used the same image (Isa. 21: 6-16)

2. So had Habakkuk's fellow prophet Jeremiah (Jer. 6:16-19)

3. Ezekiel would be commissioned a watchman in Babylon (Ezek. 3: 17-21; 33:1-9)

4. Habakkuk the wrestler had been struggling with the Lord, and now it was time for him to wait before the Lord and learn some of His secrets.

C. The message God shared wasn't only for the prophet; it was for everybody, including God's church today.

1. The prophet was told to write the message large and clear on a tablet so that anybody who saw it could read it easily and then run and deliver God's Word to others.

2. Judgment was coming, and there was no time for delay. The leaders and the people of Judah were also sinners who needed to repent and begin once again to obey the Word of the Lord.

D. It has been well said that the heart of every problem is the problem in the heart.

1. In chapter one Habakkuk had described the evil deeds of the Babylonians, but now the Lord will announce the sins of the Babylonians as well as the citizens of Judah.

2. The first sin on the list is pride: they are "puffed up ...arrogant and never at rest" (vv4-5).

3. Nebuchadnezzar's boast "Is not this great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?" (Dan. 4: 30) No sooner had he spoken those words when the king became like a beast, and for seven years he ate grass like a beast and even looked like a beast. God humiliated him (Dan. 4: 31-37).

4. But King Zedekiah (of Judah) would also be humiliated and his sons and officers slain.

5. In contrast to the "puffed up" boasters are the humble believers: "but the righteous will live by their faithfulness" (v. 4). This statement is quoted in the New Testament as "the righteous shall live by faith" (Rom. 1: 17; Gal. 3: 11; Heb. 10: 38).

IV. Judgment on Gentiles---and Jews

A. The Lord pronounced five woes upon the Babylonians (2: 6-19).

1. Jeremiah predicted the destruction of Babylon (Jer. 50-51)

2. So did Daniel when he interpreted the handwriting on the wall (Dan. 5).

B. Zedekiah and his officers had permitted wealthy and influential people in Judah to abuse, exploit and even kill innocent people, so why should Judah escape punishment?

1. The Lord mentioned the sins of drunkenness, indecency and violence (vv. 15-17), and He closed with an indictment against those who worshiped idols (vv. 18-19).

2. If Habakkuk wanted the Lord to judge the evil Babylonians, could he explain why the leaders and people of Judah should escape WHEN THEY WERE COMMITTING THE SAME SINS AND KNEW BETTER?

3. Judgment begins with God's people, and the righteous Lord would deal with the thieves, murderers, crooked politicians, drunks and idol worshipers (according to His timing).

C. One of Habakkuk's prayers was "in wrath, remember mercy" (3: 2). The Lord would answer that prayer, and He graciously inserted three marvelous statements:

1. "but the righteous will live by their faithfulness"(v. 4)
2. "For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea" (v.14).
3. "The Lord is in His holy temple; let all the earth be silent before Him" (v. 20).

V. Righteousness by Faith

A. Habakkuk 2: 4 –"the righteous will live by their faithfulness" is quoted three times in the New Testament.

B. These seven simple words in the small book of Habakkuk required three books in the NT for their explanation and application.

1. Paul's letter to the Romans explains who "the just" are.
2. The Galatians epistle describes how they should live.
3. The book of Hebrews defines "by faith".

C. The just are not only saved by faith but they "live by faith, not by sight" (II Cor. 5:7).

D. It is by faith that we have access to God and can pray (Rom. 5: 2; Eph. 3: 12).

E. It is by faith that we encourage one another (Rom. 1: 12).

F. The Bible is "the word of faith" (Rom. 10: 8).

G. Our faith grows as we receive the Word of God (Rom. 10: 17).

H. Our victory over the world is through faith (I John 5: 4).

I. The British preacher Geoffrey Studdert Kennedy used to say that faith is not believing in spite of the evidence—that's superstition—but obeying in spite of consequence.

1. To obey God's will in spite of the feelings within us, the circumstances around us or the consequences before us is to live by faith.
2. Questioners like Habakkuk can become stronger believers if they live by faith and humbly allow God to know some things they don't know (Deut. 29: 29).

3. Even when we don't fully understand God's thoughts or ways (Isa. 55: 8-9), we can know we can trust His loving heart.

J. In verse 14 you find a second statement from the Lord that encouraged Habakkuk: "For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea".

1. The day will come when God's glory will return to a new temple in a New Jerusalem, and the glory of the Lord will radiate throughout the world (Ezek. 43: 1-5).

K. When God looks down on our world, He sees wickedness, rebellion and corruption (Gen. 6: 5; Psalm 2: 1-3; 14: 1-7), but that isn't the end of the story.

1. The seraphs at the throne look down and see things from God's viewpoint, and they say, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of His glory" (Isa. 6: 3).

2. God's angels see what the Lord is doing on this planet and rejoice at the glory that comes to His name!

VI. God Is in Control

A. Habakkuk 2: 20 exalts God's sovereign rule in this world: "The Lord is in His holy temple; let all the earth be silent before Him".

1. When through Jesus Christ we enter into God's presence, it's not so we can give Him advice but to ask Him for the wisdom and strength we need to serve Him each day.

B. God is on the throne, and He knows what He is doing!!!

C. Human governments are limited by authority and geography, but our God is in control of everything.

1. Where He is not permitted to rule, the Lord will overrule and accomplish his righteous purposes on all the earth.

2. The sovereignty of God doesn't violate either human responsibility or personal accountability.

3. God's sovereignty frees us to serve Him, to enjoy doing His will and to receive His blessings.

D. God's sovereign will comes from God's loving heart and is an expression of His personal love for us.

E. Jeremiah said, "Who can speak and have it happen if the Lord has not decreed it? Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that both calamities and good things come?" (Lam. 3: 37-38)

F. When our hearts are upset and our plans have been shattered, it isn't easy to be silent; but Hab. 2: 20 instructs us to do just that: "be silent before Him".

1. This means no debating, no resisting, no bargaining, just silently submitting.

2. Solitude and silence are missing disciplines in Christian living today.

3. “ The purpose of silence and solitude is to be able to see and hear, “ wrote Richard Foster, but many Christians would rather be disturbed and distracted.

VII. A Prayer for Revival

A. The prophet reaches his highest spiritual elevation in chapter 3, for he ends up treading on the heights of mountains in the strength of the Lord (v. 19).

1. In the Hebrew text you will find a “selah” after the word “arrows” in v. 9 and also at the end of v. 13, which suggests use in public worship.

2. The chapter records the prophet’s responses to what God had said to him and revealed to him (v. 16).

3. He prayed that God would show mercy to Judah even as He permitted the nation to be chastened.

4. Before we pray about present needs or impending challenges, it helps to increase our faith if we remember the mighty works of God in the past. The prophet does this in verses 3-15.

5. In Hab. 3: 12-15 he sees the Jews being delivered from their exile in Babylon and returning to their land. The prophet received these words with great fear and trembling, but their message put strength into his soul and deepened his faith, for he said, “I will wait patiently for the day of calamity to come” (v. 16).

6. He said, “I will rejoice in the LORD; I will be joyful in God my Savior” (v. 18).

VIII. A Change of Heart

A. God didn’t change, the circumstances didn’t change, the Babylonians didn’t change, but THE PROPHET CHANGED!

1. He was looking at God through the circumstances instead of looking through the eyes of faith. When he did that, everything fell into place. He looked back and saw the greatness of God, and he looked ahead and realized that nothing was too hard for the Lord.

2. He learned to accept the fact of evil in the world.

3. He also learned again that God is great enough even to use man’s wickedness to magnify His own righteousness.

4. His chastening of His people was an act of love, and He would accomplish His purpose, no matter how terrible the situation might be.

5. Habakkuk moved from worrying in the valley of defeat to singing on the mountains of victory because he waited on the Lord, listened to the Word and exercised faith in the Lord.