

Valley Bible Church - Bible Survey

Bible Survey Lesson 56: The Books of Habakkuk and Zephaniah

INTRODUCTIONS AND OUTLINES TO

THE BOOKS OF HABAKKUK AND ZEPHANIAH

We are presently considering the Minor Prophets who were contemporary with the Prophet Jeremiah. Last week we covered Obadiah and Nahum, and this week we will look at Habakkuk and Zephaniah. **Refer to Prophet Chart, Lesson 41, Intro, to the Prophets**

INTRODUCTION/OUTLINE, THE BOOK OF HABAKKUK

Introduction:

If there is any one event we can point to in the history of the church which has had a profound effect on it's direction it would be when Martin Luther was reading his Latin Bible and came to Romans 1:17,

"For in it (the Gospel) the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'But the righteous man shall live by faith.'"

The sudden, shocking realization that salvation came by faith, apart from anything man could do put the lie to the selling of indulgences, flagellation and penance, pilgrimages and purgatory, giving and serving as a means to attain salvation.

It was revolutionary and with its ensuing Reformation began the protestant movement which we join in our own church today, believing that it is only in the Scriptures that we find truth and authority for faith and practice.

Interestingly, when Paul wrote Romans 1:17, he was quoting the Prophet Habakkuk when he said in chapter 2 verse 4, *"Behold, as for the proud one, His soul is not right within him; but the righteous will live by his faith."*

The theme of the book of Habakkuk is the same as the theme of Romans, salvation by grace through faith. ***How can that be?***

According to Hebrews 11:1 and 2, *"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it man of old gained approval." "Abraham believed God and it was counted for him as righteousness."* Faith is believing that God is in control even when we don't see or understand, or even agree with what He is doing.

This righteous is living by faith, then, when he believes that God is in control and is faithful, and will keep His covenant promises even when His people reject Him and He seems to have abandoned them.

Verse 2:20, *" . . . the Lord is in His holy temple. Let all the earth be silent before Him."*

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Habakkuk prophesied during the final days of the Assyrian Empire and into the time of Babylonian rule under kings Nabopolassar and his son Nebuchadnezzar (Nab. and Neb.). The Babylonian armies moved north and west to overthrow Nineveh in 612 BC. and chased its leaders, first to Haran and then on the Carchemish, capturing those cities by 606 .C.

In the midst of this (in 609) Josiah, who had brought great spiritual reform to Judah, was killed in a battle against the fleeing Assyrian King and his ally, King Necho from Egypt, at Megiddo. His three sons and a grandson quickly led the people of Judah back into idolatry which was recorded like this, *"your eyes and your heart are intent only upon your own dishonest gain, and on shedding innocent blood and on practicing oppression and extortion."* --Jer.22

Habakkuk fits well coming directly after Nahum. Nahum examines the judgments of the Lord on Assyria and Habakkuk studies those brought against the Chaldeans or Babylonians. Both these judgments are results of their violence and cruelty against His chosen people.

I. THE PROPHET'S PROBLEM (Chapters 1 and 2)

Habakkuk is God's prophet and God speaks to him and through him, yet now when he has serious doubt questions, God seems deaf and mute. And so he again goes to God directly with his problems.

A. Question #1: Why does God permit evil? (1:2-4)

Habakkuk looks around and sees violence (v 2), injustice and strife and conflict (v 3), the law paralyzed and justice perverted (v 4), . . . NOT IN THE PAGAN WORLD, BUT IN JUDAH!

Why? *"How long, O Lord, will I call for help, and Thou wilt not hear? I cry out to Thee, "Violence!" Yet Thou dost not save."* (v 2)

"Hello, God, are you there?" ". . . the wicked surround the righteous, . . . justice comes out perverted." (v. 4)

Answer #1: God does not permit, He punishes! (1:5-11)

God does not allow wickedness and disobedience, even among His own chosen people, but how He plans to deal with it is surprising:

God's answer is a shock, and He knows it . . . see verse 5,

"Look! Observe! Be astonished! Wonder! Because I am doing things in your days--that you would not believe if you were told."

"...I am raising up the Chaldeans, that fierce and impetuous people." Then He describes just how horrible they were. The Chaldeans were a Semitic people who were the dominant force in the Babylonian empire, and so synonymous with Babylon.

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B. Question #2: Why does God use evil people? (1:12-2:1)

OK, God had to punish sin, even among His own people. Judah had to be disciplined, but when Habakkuk looked at the Babylonians, he saw a people far worse than they ever were.

How could God punish a nation for unrighteousness by using a nation that was even less righteous? Verse 13, *"Thine eyes are too pure to approve evil, and thou canst not look on wickedness with favor . . . Why art Thou silent when wicked swallow up those more righteous than they?"*

Answer #2: God uses, but also punished evil people! (2:2-20)

Yes, God will use the wicked to punish his adulterous nation. He's done it before and He'll do it again. But, *"write this down so everybody gets this straight"* (Kemble paraphrase of 2:2)

The principle never changes and is stated in verse 4, *"Behold, as for the proud one, his soul is not right within him; But the righteous will live by faith."*

Who will come out of this time of testing and discipline. The proud Chaldean soul, or Judean soul for that matter, will not survive this testing. But, the person who is in right relationship to God will live *"by his faith."* The formula for survival in hard times is always having faith in God and being faithful to God.

God follows this principle with a description of five specific "woes" which will come upon the Babylonians. He states that they will come to ruin and sums up why in verses 19 and 20

READ CHAPTER 2, VERSES 19 and 20

II. THE PROPHET'S PRAYER (Chapter 3)

Chapter 3 is Habakkuk's prayer Psalm which came to be used in worship as indicated in the musical superscription *"For the choir director, on my stringed instruments."*

A. Petition (3:1-2)

Habakkuk yields to God's judgment. He is satisfied that God knows best whether he understands what is going on or not.

Hear him in verse 2, *"O Lord, revive Thy work . . ."* He is saying literally, "Lord, make alive your covenant work. Fulfill your plan in judgment and in mercy." He has moved into the area of complete faith. He trusts God to be God and do what is right and just.

B. Praise (3:3-15)

The praise portion of this prayer song is a portrayal of God's salvation of his people from the land of Egypt (Exodus 1-15) He sees that God's overarching plan and purpose in everything He has done is to save His people and bring them to Himself.

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C. Promise (3:16-19)

Habakkuk in faith believes God is in control and will "*wait or rest quietly*" even as the invasion comes. Knowing that this time of disaster is just a small part of God's plan, he can "*exult in the Lord, . . . rejoice in the God of his salvation.*" Because that same "*Lord God is his strength.*" (vv 18 and 19)

Lesson:

The book of Habakkuk represents the kind of faith that became the expected norm for Judaism and later for Christianity. We have no more chance of shaping our own destiny than Judah did, but by faith we believe that God is on the throne, in control, and able to bring about His complete plan for us, even as we often have to quietly, patiently wait.

INTRODUCTION/OUTLINE, THE BOOK OF ZEPHANIAH

Introduction:

Zephaniah was different from most other prophets. He was a noble prince, from the royal house of Judah, a great-great grandson of King Hezekiah. He stood up during the reign of Josiah (641-609 BC.) and spoke of the wickedness of his own aristocracy probably before Josiah's reforms were in place.

Nahum had prophesied fifty years earlier, but two wicked kings, Manasseh and Amon, lead an idol worshipping people and brought unspeakable evil back to Judah. On top of the immorality, the rich nobility had amassed great fortunes by taking advantage of and enslaving their own people.

Josiah became king when he was still a young boy and promoted religious and moral revival. He personally led the priests in repairing the temple and hacking down images and idols. Zephaniah was his voice of God before and in the midst of this revival.

Zephaniah's prophecies were pronouncements of wrath. "The great Day of the Lord" was coming. He looked squarely at the coming invasion of Babylon but also predicts:

1. A faithful remnant will be delivered from that captivity.
2. Even some heathen people will be converted.
3. Worship of God will eventually happen not only in Jerusalem but everywhere else as well. (The Millennial Kingdom.)

I. PROPHETIC JUDGMENT Chapters 1:2-3:8)

The book opens with a word of prophesy of total destruction for the entire earth. In the original Hebrew this could be read as destruction to the entire land of Canaan or destruction effecting of the entire world.

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Verse three leads us to believe it refers to the second, the final judgment during the Tribulation years.

A. Judging Judah and Jerusalem

God narrows His message down to His people in Judea and Jerusalem, indicting them for their idolatry.

1. Judah (1:2-18)

2. Zephaniah calls for silence during the Lord's sacrifice, as God punishes the arrogant princes and aristocracy for leading the people into idolatry. There will be no defense heard, only an awed silence as they witness the devastation of their land.

This will include: Panic in the cities and plunder of their wealth (vv 10-13). The end of the population and life as they have known it (vv. 14-18)

2. Jerusalem (3:1-7)

Chapter 3 starts, "Woe, or curse, to her who is rebellious and defiled, The tyrannical city!" Jerusalem, the "Holy City of God," the "City of David," has become utterly defiled, insensitive to God's calls for repentance through His prophets. A description of its decadence and its disobedience can be found in Jeremiah 5:1; 19:5; 23:13-14; 32:35.

They lack faith, righteousness, relationship, compassion and humility as they follow arrogant and wicked rulers, prophets, and priests (vv 1-5).

In verses 6 and 7 Zechariah sites the destruction of other wicked nations, hoping his people will see the connection, hear, and accept correction.

B. Judging Other Nations

Jumping back to chapter 2 we visit the Lord's judgment on other nations that have dared to come against "the Lord and His anointed."

1. Gentiles (2:4-15)

God used the pagan nations to punish His people, but they themselves would not go unpunished either. God is just. He chose one nation from each direction to illustrate.

1) West--Philistia (vv. 4-7)--Its major cities of Gaza, Ashkelon, Ekron and Ashdod are to be destroyed so completely that "Judah will pasture on it." (v 7)

2) East--Moab and Ammon (vv. 8-11)--The decedents of Lot through his incest would come to ruin and complete desolation just like Sodom and Gomorrah, especially harsh punishment because of their taunting of Judah.

3) South--Ethiopia (v 12)--They will be, "slain by My sword." God's sword in this case was Nebuchadnezzar's conquest of Egypt reported in Ezekiel 30.

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4) North--Assyria (vv 13-15)--Of course Nineveh fell and the nation was conquered by Babylon shortly after this prophesy.

2. All others (3:8)

Jumping forward again to Chapter 3 we see the prophecy moving from the immediate invasion of Judah to the future "Day of the Lord," including great tribulation and the gathering of all nations to judgment.

II. PROPHETIC JOY (Chapters 3:9-20)

Behind the judging of nations, both His own and their enemies, God has greater plans, which include great blessing and restoration for His chosen people, but also great blessings for all nations over the entire earth. Covenant promise is, "*Through them the nations of the earth will be blessed.*"

A. Blessings for Gentiles (3:9-10)

In the Millennial age, the remnant of the people from every nation will worship the Lord in righteousness with pure lips as opposed to lying idolatrous speech. Pure speech comes from a pure heart.

B. Blessings for Jews (3:11-20)

God will have purged the arrogant and unrighteous from His people leaving a humble and righteous people to worship Him in spirit and in truth. Physical peace and prosperity will follow allowing them to enjoy their Lord unhindered as Christ, their Messiah, personally reigns in their midst.

Lesson: This is one of those times when I asked myself, "Was there really a lesson here for me?" Perhaps the only reasonable lesson for today, beside the fact that God controls all the nations, is that **God has glorious plans for His people (Jews and Christians)** and when all the need for discipline is done, He will be able to do with man what He first intended. That is to have a glorious relationship with us forever.

Homework:

Read: The Book of Haggai, The Book of Zechariah, and The Book of Malachi

Think: Recall the love of God shown in the prophetic books and in your own life.

Apply: Try this week to worship God, in spirit and in truth.