

## TRIUMPHANT FAITH

*by Bill Pepper*

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The burden which Habakkuk the prophet did see" (Hab 1:1). Habakkuk faced quite a dilemma. He saw sin and problems all around him. He saw nations infiltrating Israel, bringing downfall and disgrace. Yet it was indelibly engraved upon his mind that he was the prophet of holiness. He was to tell Israel that she was to live holy and righteously, despite her surroundings. The word indicates that Habakkuk had become weighted down with the responsibility, and that it deeply disturbed him.

When we have a need or problem, we often come to the Lord with questions, some of which are legitimate. But the enemy tries to incite us to question God beyond what is proper. Habakkuk fell into that trap.

Firstly, he questioned God's apparent failure to respond to earnest and prolonged prayer. "O Lord, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear! Even cry out unto thee of violence, and thou wilt not save!" (Hab 1:2). Have you ever had a problem or a crisis about which you diligently sought the Lord, but didn't get an answer? This was Habakkuk's situation.

"Why dost thou shew me iniquity, and cause me to behold grievance? For spoiling and violence are before me: and there are that raise up strife and contention. Therefore the law is slacked, and judgment doth never go forth: for the wicked doth compass about the righteous; therefore wrong judgment proceedeth" (Hab 1:3,4). Habakkuk questions why God seemingly tolerates evil by failing to punish the wicked. Habakkuk was speaking from the sincerity of his heart. The nation of Israel was under attack, and he wanted to see Israel be all that God designed her to be.

Habakkuk's third concern surfaces as he questions God's apparent indifference toward His people's suffering at the hands of evil men.: Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity: wherefore lookest thou upon them deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he? And makest men as the fishes of the sea, as the creeping things, that have no ruler over them?" (Hab.1:13,14).

It's one thing to inquire of the Lord, but quite another to challenge or question the very nature and character of God. Habakkuk's questions had begun to degenerate on a spiritual level. Do you know what resulted from these questions? Nothing, Why? Habakkuk was waiting for an explanation; God was waiting for faith. And when God wants something from you and me. He won't take no for an answer. Our level of faith must rise above what we see. We want a long, detailed explanation, but God says, Trust me, walk by faith, and do what I have told you to do." In those times, our faith is tried and tested.

Habakkuk had not learned to observe the words of the Psalmist: "Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him: fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass" (Psa 37:7). We must maintain our confidence in God, even though it appears the enemy is winning. "For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the Lord, they shall inherit the earth" (Ps 37:9).

Finally, Habakkuk came to his spiritual senses. He knew in his heart he had missed something, so he decided to go to the tower to pray. "I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved" (Hab 2:1). Some people haven't really learned how to go to the Lord in prayer---not asking questions, but listening to what he would say.

Whether you are a pastor who has been in the ministry for 50 years or a believer who has just been saved, you must spend time seeking God's face to hear Him speak personally to you. It is one thing to study the word or to hold family devotions; but it is quite another to spend some time absorbing the personal attention of the King of kings. When you've asked all your questions, when you've prayed about all your needs, when you've thanked the Lord for what he has done, when you've worshipped and praised Him, you must take the time to sit back and listen to see what he has to say.

The Lord spoke quite clearly and quite distinctly: "behold his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith" (Hab.2:4). This is the morning star verse of the reformation; it stirred something in Martin Luther that changed his thinking, his life and all of history from that time forward. So it is with you and me: God expects His word to change us, to do something within our hearts and lives.

Habakkuk's real problem stemmed from his inability to reconcile what God allows to happen with whom he knew God to be --- holy, righteous and just God who demands holiness. Habakkuk was hearing from God that the Lord is holy, yet he saw sin abounding.

When we find ourselves in situations that are absolutely beyond our ability to handle, we must trust in who God is: full of integrity, righteousness, goodness, and faithfulness. A friend of mine was pastoring on the west coast in an area where logging was the key industry. God spoke to him to proceed with building a larger church. The church took out a loan to proceed with the project. The housing industry collapsed, soon to be followed by the region's logging industry.

The situation went from bad to worse, as people left the area to look for work. The pastor did everything he knew to do, including reducing the staff. Still, he did not have enough funds to pay the monthly mortgage. As my pastor friend sought the Lord, He gave him a brief word. "When you go before the banker tomorrow, ask him whom he most wants to see in eternity." The next day, he and the church board went to the bank.

The bank president went into quite a tirade, explaining to them what a disgrace it would be if the church went into receivership because the debt couldn't be paid. Finally, the pastor decided to ask the bank president whether he was saved, which merely angered the man. The Lord reminded him to ask the seemingly ridiculous question: "Whom do you most want to see when you get to heaven?" It was as if an arrow had pierced that man's heart. He broke down and wept. "My mother was a Christian," he explained. But I'm not. She's in heaven. And I won't get there unless I change my life." That day, the bank president came to Christ.

The pastor and the board were thrilled, but the church was still in debt. And so they sat, somewhat burdened. The bank president, who was busy worshipping God, finally noticed their faces. He asked what the problem was. They reminded him, "Well we still have the debt." He said, "Oh, don't worry about it. I'll take care of it." He paid the debt himself.

It's wonderful when God provides a miracle like this. But sometimes it's preceded by a difficult situation that lasts days, weeks, months, perhaps longer. Just because you have heard from God doesn't mean your situation will change immediately: "Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls"(Hab. 3:17).. This scripture seems to indicate that the situation was becoming worse for Habakkuk. But in verse 18 of the same chapter, Habakkuk states, "Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation." His circumstance had not changed.;

Habakkuk had changed. His faith was now anchored in who God is, not in what God does the moment. Habakkuk's faith was now anchored so deeply that, regardless of circumstance, regardless of persecution, he would serve God.

Some people serve the Lord just for what they can get. I believe God allows His pipeline of blessing over our lives to occasionally be shut off for a time to reveal whom we really serve. If this happens to you, don't assume that you're backslidden. Some great men of God were thrown in the Lions' den, jailed, shipwrecked and stoned. God will give us a divine ability to walk with Him through circumstances that are not pleasant; through circumstances that are very, very difficult. Yet, like Habakkuk, we can come out with a song of victory: "The Lord God is my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds' feet, and he will make to walk upon high places" (Hab. 4:19)