

August 5
Habakkuk

Today we take a brief break from Jeremiah to hear from one of his contemporaries, Habakkuk. The ministries of Habakkuk (who read about today) and Zephaniah, though much shorter were happening at the same time of Jeremiah.

We know almost nothing about the prophet Habakkuk -- not even the name of his father or the town from which he originally hailed. The plain fact is that we don't know anything about Habakkuk except that he was a man with enough courage to tell God exactly what he was thinking. He had a fair bit of boldness about him! We can also deduce from the Book of Habakkuk that his ministry must have been exercised at some time after the reforms of King Josiah. (This is because Habakkuk is appalled at the wickedness of Judah) and before the full power of Babylon was reached. Probably he prophesied during the reign of Jehoiakim.

With that much background in hand, let us proceed to think for a while about what we have read today. The Book divides itself quite readily into five parts -- it is a record of Habakkuk's dialogue with God. In part 1, which takes up just the first four verses of the Book, Habakkuk makes his complaint to God -- he is upset because God's judgment about which he and Jeremiah and all the other prophets had been speaking for so long has not yet come. "God," he is saying, "Come on -- your reputation is on the line here. People are sinning with impunity -- the good guys are all beaten up and yet you have not yet punished the wicked."

In part 2 which takes the next six verses or so, Habakkuk gets an answer from God, but it is definitely not the answer he is looking for. God says, "Stand back and watch Habakkuk because I am about to bring that long delayed judgment. In fact, I am going to use the cruelest, most rapacious people on the face of the earth -- the Babylonians to do this.

Part 3 takes up the remainder of chapter 1. Habakkuk's big problem with God has now become even bigger. "Lord," he fairly screams, "you are supposed to be holy -- of purer eyes than to behold evil. How in the world can you justify punishing disobedient Judah with an instrument that is even more wicked and godless than the ones being punished. God, where is the justice in that? And by the way, Lord, I am going to sit right here until you answer that one!"

In part 4, the Lord responds to Habakkuk, assuring him that justice has not been forgotten and all the evils of the Babylonians have been noted and will be judged when the Lord has finished using Nebuchadnezzar and his armies to achieve his own sovereign purposes.

Part 5 of the Book is found in chapter 3. It is Habakkuk's own response to what the Lord has shown him. It is a response of faith based upon a thorough acquaintance with the mighty acts of God in history.

Friends, the setting of this Book may seem strange and archaic to us, but the subject matter absolutely could not be any more relevant. Every single first year student of philosophy ought to be required to read this little Book -- and so, quite obviously, should every professing Christian because it answers the terrible questions that plague us as created finite beings living in a world that we can neither completely understand nor adequately control.

Do you see what God was saying to Habakkuk? He was saying, Habakkuk, I am omnipotent (you aren't), I am omniscient (you aren't) and I am good (you aren't) and it is precisely because I am these things that you can relax and trust me to work things out in ways you could never imagine. God is saying: Look, Habakkuk, you know who I am and you know my record -- so trust Me. The last verse of chapter two sums it up. "The LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him.

Why doesn't God eliminate all evil? Well, if he did, he would have to eliminate you and me. Because we are a mix of good and evil. Why doesn't God eliminate some evil? We don't really know. Why doesn't God allow MORE evil? We don't know. Can you imagine how much knowledge we would need to have to answer all that? I for one am glad that God knows it all, is just and good. "The LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him."

Now that you have become well acquainted with the little known prophet named Habakkuk, it is my guess you will come to visit him again and again. I do every time the world looks unjust.