

How Do We Make Sense Of It All?

Habakkuk Series

From 1618 to 1648 there was a war that engulfed most of the countries of Europe. At the centre of the 30 years war was the little town of Eilenburg, near Leipzig in Germany. For 30 years, Martin Rinkart lived there as a Pastor. He had to endure soldiers living in his house, and people stealing his food and household goods. In 1637 Eilenburg experienced a severe plague through the overcrowding of refugees. Of the 8,000 people who died in the village that year, Martin Rinkart personally conducted 4,000 funerals. As if the war and the plague were not enough, there followed a famine that was so extreme that thirty or forty people might be seen fighting in the streets for a dead cat or crow. Even though he had such trouble finding bread and clothes for his own children that he was forced to mortgage his future income for several years, Martin Rinkart's spirit was never broken. He had an amazing confidence in God. He was a modern day Habakkuk, who didn't understand all the terrible things that were happening around him, yet believed that in some way he couldn't fully grasp, God was in control.

Martin Rinkart was not only a Pastor, but was also a very good poet and musician. When things were at their worst, he wanted to express his thanksgiving to God by writing a hymn. This is what he wrote:

***"Now thank we all our God, with hearts and hands and voices,
Who wondrous things has done, In whom his world rejoices,
Who from our mother's arms has led us on our way,
With countless gifts of love and still is ours today.***

***O may this bounteous God through all our life be near us
With ever joyful hearts and blessed peace to cheer us
And keep us in His grace and guide us when perplexed
And free us from all ills in this world and the next.***

***All praise and thanks to God the Father now be given
The Son, and Him who reigns with Them in highest heaven
The one eternal God whom earth and heaven adore
For thus it was is now and shall be evermore".***

How does a person have such confidence in God when all of life is falling down around their ears? How was it that Habakkuk could finish his prophecy by rejoicing in God? What was it that these two men understood that could cause them to be so positive when life around them was such a disaster? For Habakkuk, and I suspect for thousands of Christians who have lived since then, there were two things that helped them understand what God was doing in their world.

1. A Vision Of God's Intervention In The Past.

Habakkuk knew his history. From the time he was a little boy, he had been told stories of the way God had intervened when everything was at its worst. He had heard how God had worked in Joseph's life. Joseph, who had been wrongfully imprisoned, left to rot in an Egyptian dungeon, forgotten by everyone except God. Habakkuk knew the story of how God had miraculously intervened to raise Joseph up to become prime Minister in all Egypt. Habakkuk knew the story of the children of Israel. Bound in slavery, with no hope of rescue, making mud bricks in the burning sun. Born into a life of slavery, they could only expect to die as slaves. But God raised up Moses to take on the might of Pharaoh. Habakkuk knew the stories of how God had brought the plagues upon the Egyptians, and drowned the Egyptian army in the Red Sea. Habakkuk knew his history. He knew that God had demonstrated his power in the past. He had confidence God would do it again.

Do you know your history? Do you have a whole fund of stories of the way God has acted in the past that you can pass on to your children and your grandchildren that will keep their faith in God strong when times get tough? Because it will happen. What will your children hold on to when life gets tough?

Habakkuk was able to say to God **"LORD, I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds, O LORD. Renew them in our day, in our time make them known; in wrath remember mercy."** (Habakkuk 3:2)

Here's a story you can tell your kids that will strengthen their faith. In 1904 and 1905 God did a remarkable thing in Wales. What we call revival changed the lives of over 100,000 people. That transformation in the hearts of men and women and young people had a huge spill over effect in society. There was a dramatic decline in drunkenness. Each night the churches were packed with worshippers. Young men and women walked in procession through the streets, singing hymns and visiting pubs, inviting those inside to come to revival meetings. The bars were empty. Dance halls, theatres, and football matches all saw a dramatic decline in attendance. The crime rate dropped to such an extent that Judges and Policemen had nothing to do. The policemen at one station closed the station and formed a choir to sing at the Revival meetings. Long-standing debts were repaid, church and family feuds were healed. Sales of Bibles increased to such a degree that the shops sold their entire stocks. God transformed the coal miners so much that they stopped swearing at the pit-ponies. They had to re-train the horses so they could understand English. The illegitimate birth rate dropped as God changed the lives of tens of thousands of young men and women.

Habakkuk knew what God could do, even in the most disastrous of situations. His prayer was "I'm in awe of you Lord. You have done amazing things in the past. Do it again Lord. Do it in our day. Show your power once more." That's a great way to pray when you see your nation crumbling around you. Do it again Lord. Lord, you are the mighty God. I know what you did in the past. I know what you will do in the future. But in our day, in the midst of the years, renew it. I want to see you in action here and now."

Here's the other thing that sustained Habakkuk in the midst of calamity.

2. A Vision Of God's Intervention In The Future.

I'm not going to go through this prophecy in detail but there is something about prophecy that we need to know. In most of the English translations of the Bible the verbs of this chapter are in the past tense. Yet in the original Hebrew they are in the present tense. It should read – "His glory covers the heavens. His praise fills the earth" – all in the present tense. This is because Habakkuk is a seer. He has a vision. He sees God answering his prayer. He is seeing the past and the future as if it is happening now. He is describing events which may not happen for many years to come in the present tense, for God is showing him what will happen as if he is watching a widescreen movie. In the spirit he is transported through time and he sees what is happening, and describes it. "I can see his glory covering the heavens. I can see his praise filling the earth. It's happening. I can see His glory. His splendour is like the sunrise. I can see him standing up and when he stands the whole earth shakes and the mountains tremble. When he strides through the earth the nations tremble."

Have you ever wondered why Moses could describe the creation of the earth as described in Genesis 1? Because God transported him back to let him see the creation of the world even before mankind was made. When the Apostle John was on Patmos he was transported in the spirit to see the end of the world and he watched it happening before his eyes. God knows no boundaries in time. He is eternal. He is the one who was and is and is to come. He can place any of his prophets any where in the time line and give them an eyewitness account of things in the past or of things that haven't happened yet.

The book of Habakkuk is about three visions. All three visions were the result of God given insight.

- **The First Vision – His Nation.**

The first vision is a vision of his nation – Israel. As he looked around him he saw his nation in disarray. There was violence. The poor were getting ripped off. Law enforcement was a joke. Conflict and strife were everywhere. The good people were being walked all over. When he saw the state of his nation he was concerned, frustrated and angry. He was angry of God for allowing it to happen. Angry that God didn't step in and stop it. It was a vision that upset him deeply.

- **The Second Vision – The Babylonians Coming.**

The second vision Habakkuk had was a vision of the Babylonians coming. God was going to raise up a barbaric and cruel people to straighten out the nation of Israel. These people would kill, maim, rape, slaughter, and carry off the captives back to Babylon with hooks through the jaws of their victims. When God gave him the second vision of his nation being overrun by the Babylonians, his reaction was one of shock and disbelief, then horror that God could let that happen. That vision left Habakkuk aghast. It was more than his mind could comprehend.

- **The Third Vision – God Coming.**

The third vision was a period further ahead in history when God showed Habakkuk His long term answer. It was a vision of God coming in great power and judgement to rescue his people. This was the most shocking vision of all. The first vision upset him. The second vision left him aghast at the idea that the Babylonians were coming. But it was the third vision that caused Habakkuk to tremble in fear. It was a vision of God coming in awesome power that caused to his heart to pound and his lips to quiver and his knees to turn to jelly. ***"I heard and my heart pounded, my lips quivered at the sound; decay crept into my bones, and my legs trembled."* (Habakkuk 3:16)**

Habakkuk had a vision of God's intervention in the future that left him gasping. He knew from his childhood stories about the power and might and majesty of God, but this was different. He saw it. God allowed him to see the future unfold, and he was watching it as if it was in real time. He saw God trampling the nations. Swatting the Babylonians as if they were some annoying fly. God's power shaking the earth. Causing the mountains to tremble. It was such a powerful experience, his heart pounded, his lips quivered, his bones felt like soft butter and his legs like jelly. What happened? He had seen God's awesome power. He was more in awe of the God who was coming to save him than he was of the enemies coming to crush his country. He could never be the same again.

The Christians known as the Society of Friends are also nicknamed the Quakers. Do you know how they got that name? It was their firsthand experience of the power of God that caused them to shake and tremble. It's a vision of the power of God that really makes us shake. If we would only look at the events of history and realize how much God has had his hand on things, we might be more confident about his working in our day. If we could only believe that the God of the past is also the God of the future, we would trust him a whole lot more.

That's where Habakkuk finished up. Having seen the power of God, he worshipped. He finishes with a statement of faith.

"Yet I will wait patiently for the day of calamity to come on the nation invading us. Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Saviour. The Sovereign LORD is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights". (Habakkuk 3:16 – 19)

Let's put that in our terms. No food in the supermarket. No petrol at the pumps. The gardens all withered and dead. The superannuation payments dried up. The insurance companies failing. The job market shrinking to nothing. Everything we depend on being knocked out from under us. But in spite of all that is happening, or may happen, I'm still going to trust in my God. How can we have that attitude of faith? We need to have a vision of God that is bigger than all we see around us. We need an encounter with Him that is so big and powerful it leaves us trembling in awe. We need to see his working in our world in such a way that the only appropriate response is worship.

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