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MINISTRIES

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Minor Prophets, Major Messages | Habakkuk: I Will Rejoice

The so-called “Minor Prophets” are a collection of twelve prophetic books in the Tanakh—that is, the Old Testament. Even though they are called the “Minor Prophets,” these books contain “major messages” that remain relevant to believers today. In this series, we will unpack the major messages of each Minor Prophet. We will discuss their practical applications for believers today and how they connect to the Messiah’s work and teachings in the New Testament.

In this teaching, we are looking at the Book of Habakkuk. Let’s dive in.

Habakkuk: An Overview

Habakkuk prophesied shortly before the Babylonians conquered Jerusalem and took the southern kingdom of Judah into captivity. During this time, Judah was saturated in idolatry, injustice, and violence. Habakkuk was greatly distressed to witness all of this happening.

In contrast to other prophets in the Bible, Habakkuk does not speak God’s words to the people of Judah directly. Instead, the book takes the form of a dialogue between Habakkuk and God. In his dialogue with God, Habakkuk first asks why God seems silent and distant in the face of Judah’s wickedness and violence. He questions why God allows the righteous to suffer and the wicked to succeed. He laments that the law is ignored:

Habakkuk 1:2-4

O LORD [YHWH], how long shall I cry for help, and you will not hear? Or cry to you “Violence!” and you will not save? Why do you make me see iniquity, and why do you idly look at wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise. So the law is paralyzed, and justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous; so justice goes forth perverted.

In response to his lament, God assures Habakkuk that he has a plan. God reveals that he will use the Babylonians as his instrument of judgment upon Judah:

Habakkuk 1:5-11

“Look among the nations, and see; wonder and be astounded. For I am doing a work in your days that you would not believe if told. For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, who march through the breadth of the earth, to seize dwellings not their own. They are dreaded and fearsome; their justice and dignity go forth from themselves. Their horses are swifter than leopards, more fierce than the evening wolves; their horsemen press proudly on. Their horsemen come from afar; they fly like an eagle swift to devour. They all come for violence, all their faces forward. They gather captives like sand. At kings they scoff, and at rulers they laugh. They laugh at every fortress, for they pile up earth and take it. Then they sweep by like the wind and go on, guilty men, whose own might is their god!”

Habakkuk is shocked to hear that God plans to use the Babylonians to judge Judah! So, Habakkuk laments a second time, questioning how a righteous God can use such a ruthless and evil nation as Babylon to judge his people (Habakkuk 1:12-17). At the end of his lament, he states that he has positioned himself as a watchman on the tower, awaiting God’s answer:

Habakkuk 2:1

I will take my stand at my watchpost and station myself on the tower, and look out to see what he will say to me, and what I will answer concerning my complaint.

Then, God answers. He instructs Habakkuk to write down the vision that God gives him. The vision is about how Babylon will also be judged. God assures Habakkuk that even if it appears to be taking longer than expected, the appointed time for the fulfillment of the vision will surely come. Indeed, God says that “the righteous shall live by his faith” in this future promise (Habakkuk 2:2-5).

God follows this with five “woes” upon the Babylonians, targeting their greed, violence, exploitation, drunkenness, and idolatry (Habakkuk 2:6-20). Although God is using the Babylonians as his instrument of judgment, their own wickedness will not go unpunished. God will judge the Babylonians for their sin, just as he has judged the people of Judah.

The final chapter of Habakkuk is a prayer. Habakkuk recalls God’s acts of judgment and salvation in history, such as the Exodus from Egypt and the conquest of Canaan. He acknowledges that God’s power is unmatched and that he can bring about salvation for his people, just as he has done many times before. Habakkuk concludes by expressing confidence in God’s promise of salvation. Even though things seem bleak at the moment, Habakkuk chooses to rejoice. In fact, the book ends with an instruction to use Habakkuk’s prayer as a worship song:

Habakkuk 3:17-19

Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will take joy in the God of my salvation. GOD [YHWH], the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the deer's; he makes me tread on my high places. **To the choirmaster: with stringed instruments.**

Habakkuk’s Major Message

Habakkuk’s dialogue with God demonstrates the importance of trusting in God’s wisdom, even when we don’t understand from our limited perspectives. How many of us have struggled with the fact that evil people often seem to prosper while good people suffer? Why is there so much injustice? Habakkuk

reminds us that this struggle is natural and that God invites us to bring our pain, confusion, and anger to him. We may not fully understand why God allows certain things to happen, but we can be honest with God as we do our best to trust in his wisdom.

One of the reasons that Habakkuk brought himself to rejoice despite his difficult circumstances was that he remembered God's awesome works in the past (Habakkuk 3:2-16). Similarly, when we struggle to see God's purposes in the present moment, we can reflect on God's works in the past. This is why the biblical festivals are so powerful and important—they are memorials of what God did for his people. Passover, for example, is a memorial of God saving Israel out of slavery in Egypt and punishing Israel's enemies. These memorials remind us that God saved his people before, and he will do it again at the appointed time. So, we can rejoice even in the midst of difficult circumstances because we know they will not last forever.

Interesting Connections

Habakkuk's theme of choosing joy despite the present trials is a major theme elsewhere in the Bible. For instance, the apostle James writes the following:

James 1:2-4

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

Also, Habakkuk was told that God would save his people and judge the wicked who oppress them, and James gives that same assurance.

James 5:1-8

Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you. Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure in the last days. Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, are crying out against you, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. You have condemned and murdered the righteous person. He does not resist you. Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.

The Lord *will* return. Evil *will* be punished and justice *will* prevail. In the meantime, Habakkuk and James admonish us to be patient. And not only to be patient but also to rejoice in the midst of trials. Because “YHWH, the Lord, is [our] strength” (Habakkuk 3:19).

Another interesting connection is the phrase “the righteous shall live by his faith” found in Habakkuk 2:4. Paul quotes this in Romans, and he connects it to the gospel:

Romans 1:16-17

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.”

How does this verse from Habakkuk relate to the gospel? Keep in mind the context of Habakkuk. The prophet was shocked to learn that God intended to use the Babylonians to judge Judah, so he sought an explanation from God regarding this plan. God responded by giving Habakkuk a vision and instructed him to write it down. Again, the vision was about how Babylon will be judged. God assured Habakkuk, and the rest of the “righteous,” that justice will prevail, even if it doesn’t currently seem like it will.

Paul emphasizes this same principle in Romans, hence why he quotes Habakkuk. That is, the righteous people are willing to trust what God has revealed in the gospel, even when it appears to be inconsistent with their present circumstances. Like it was in the time of Habakkuk, in Paul’s time, there was also rampant wickedness, sexual immorality, and idolatry. The righteous were suffering while the unrighteous seemed to prosper. But after quoting Habakkuk, Paul goes on to assure his readers that God’s wrath is directed against all unrighteousness. There will be judgment. But those who put their faith in the Messiah will live.

How Habakkuk Points to the Messiah

Habakkuk’s message of justice and salvation finds its fulfillment in Yeshua’s work of redemption, which includes the coming Messianic kingdom. One day, the Messiah’s kingdom will be fully established on earth, evil will be destroyed, and suffering and death will be no more (Revelation 21-22). In the meantime, like Habakkuk, we rejoice—even though we cannot see the final victory just yet. As Peter writes:

1 Peter 1:3-9

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ [Messiah Yeshua]! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ [Messiah Yeshua] from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ [Messiah Yeshua]. Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Peter calls on us to rejoice in the assurance of eternal life that we have inherited through the Messiah’s resurrection. We rejoice despite the various trials that we’ve had to endure. Even though we don’t yet see the Messiah in all his glory, our joy is not based on what we currently see. Our joy is not based on the present circumstances of life but rather based on the glorious future promised to us. Just like God strengthened Habakkuk, he strengthens us in the midst of trials as we await his coming.

And that is Habakkuk’s major message. We can trust God’s wisdom, even when we struggle to understand the reasons behind the presence of evil and injustice. Just as Habakkuk looked forward to the appointed time when God will save his people and judge the wicked, we also have hope that the Messiah will return, and suffering and injustice will be abolished. In the meantime, we rejoice in YHWH, for he is our strength.

We pray you have been blessed by this teaching.

Remember, continue to test everything. Shalom!

For more on this and other teachings, please visit us at www.testeverything.net

Shalom, and may Yahweh bless you in walking in the whole Word of God.

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