

SPIRITUAL CAT SCAN

HABAKKUK

In September 1939, American preacher, Donald Grey Barnhouse was invited to speak at a church in Ireland. Earlier that same week, German troops had invaded Poland. British prime minister, Neville Chamberlain responded by giving Hitler an ultimatum – either withdraw by Sunday morning at 11:00, or England would declare war on Germany.

Just as Barnhouse rose from his seat to preach he was handed a note. It read, “No reply from Hitler. The Prime Minister has declared war.”

The pastor whispered to Barnhouse, “I hope you have a good sermon today. It may be the last sermon some of these men will ever hear.”

Talk about preaching under pressure!

Barnhouse used as his text that morning, Matthew 24:6. He quoted Jesus, “You shall hear of wars and rumors of wars: see that you be not troubled...” He went on to describe the horrors of war, and after each account he repeated, “*Don’t be troubled.*” Here’s how it sounded...

Millions of homes will be broken up. Don’t be troubled!
Children will be torn from their mothers. Don’t be troubled!

Husbands and brothers will perish in battle. Don’t be troubled!

Innocent blood will flow like a river. Don’t be troubled!

Children will be left orphans. Don't be troubled!"

On and on he went... the tension in the room mounted.

Finally, Barnhouse looks up to heaven and cries, "*Don't be troubled?*"

These words are either the words of a madman or God. How can these words be spoken to men who have hearts that can weep...? Unless Jesus is God He has no right to tell us, *don't be troubled!*" Of course, Donald Grey Barnhouse went on to explain that Jesus is indeed God.

Jesus is the God of history. He's in charge of every circumstance. Jesus is always at the wheel. He never dozes off. Though man's sin causes the horrors of war, God still controls human affairs. He uses even *our evil* for *His glory*. Jesus is God... even in horrible times, like times of war.

This is Habakkuk. In times of calamity and tragedy God is still in control. And according to Habakkuk *the just*, people right with God, live by faith.

The book of Habakkuk is a progression. From chapter 1, to chapter 2, to chapter 3... he goes from *wrestling to waiting to worshipping*. He starts in a *valley* - climbs on *top of a wall* - ends up on a *mountain*. He *sighs* - *seeks* - then *sings*. He starts in *turmoil* - learns to *trust* - then rejoices in *triumph*.

The book of Habakkuk begins with *a sob* and it ends with *a song*. It's a book for everyone who's seen evil in the world and asked God "why?"

Habakkuk begins with the prophet grieving over the injustice he sees.

Verse 1 "The burden which the prophet Habakkuk saw. O LORD, how long shall I cry, and You will not hear? Even cry out to You, "Violence!" And You will not save." The Hebrew word translated "*cry*" means "to roar or scream." Habakkuk is so frustrated he wants to scream.

All he sees is injustice and evil. Verse 3 "Why do You show me iniquity, and cause me to see trouble? For plundering and violence are before me; there is strife, and contention rises. Therefore the law is powerless, and justice never goes forth." The wicked prosper and no one stops them.

"For the wicked surround the righteous; therefore perverse judgment proceeds." Here's what perplexes the prophet... Habakkuk was a Jew in Jerusalem, around 600 BC. He was watching a mighty army from the east, the Chaldeans or Babylonians roll unhindered into God's land.

They'd plundered the homes of hard-working families. Crops and fields and stores had been confiscated. Judah was under military occupation.

What if America was the weaker nation, and Mexico the world's sole superpower – and without any provocation from the United States the Mexican army crossed the border, invaded our cities, and helped themselves to our land, houses, streets, and businesses.

Suddenly, we couldn't move about without Mexican permission.

Freedom has vanished. Our laws are irrelevant. **Might now makes right.** *Would you scream for justice? Would you complain to God?*

Habakkuk has made the startling discovery all of us make at some point... **life isn't fair.** One day life just reaches up and slaps you in the face with inequity and injustice. There's nothing you can do.

And what adds to the prophet's frustration is God's silence.

Habakkuk screams, but God refuses to answer. He's bothered by the fact God isn't doing anything to restore order. When will God punish the wicked and protect the righteous? He wants **right to make might.**

God breaks His silence in verse 5. **"Look among the nations and watch - be utterly astounded! For I will work a work in your days which you would not believe, though it were told you. For indeed I am raising up the Chaldeans, a bitter and hasty nation which marches through the breadth of the earth, to possess dwelling places that are not theirs."**

Habakkuk assumed Babylon's rise to power was due to God's inactivity. The "*bitter and hasty nation*" was advancing *against* God's will. Not so!

Just the opposite was true... God was "*raising up the Chaldeans...*" He was using a sinful nation as His agents. It was easier to accept that God had fallen asleep at the wheel. Why would a *Holy God* use *wicked men*?

God's actions were neither understood nor appreciated by Habakkuk. As God said, He was working in a way Habakkuk would never imagine.

And this is our problem. We too make assumptions in our dealings with God. We want Him to work... *but in our way, at our time, according to our plan, to carry out our agenda.* And when God doesn't, our faith is tested...

Do you trust God's wisdom, even when it contradicts your own?

Oswald Chambers writes, "*Faith is the deliberate confidence in the character of God whose ways you may not understand at the time.*"

Seldom does faith see all that God is doing - He works behind the scenes. The facts we do have, aren't always understood. At times we see what God is up to - but we don't like it... *Yet faith still trusts God!*

Never in a million years would Habakkuk have thought God would use an evil and idolatrous people like the Chaldeans... *aka the Babylonians.*

This threw a wrench in how Habakkuk thought God operated. Will he still trust in *God's goodness* despite the strangeness of *His methods*?

Verses 7-11 describe why the Babylonians were the least likely nation to be used as God's instrument... They were vile, and vicious, and violent. They lacked morality and dignity. They were boastful. And to top it all off, they gave their false gods and idols credit for their military triumphs.

Habakkuk thought, "Surely, the one, true God of all the Earth - will never allow a victory over **His** people to be attributed around the world to the power of an idol? God will at least look out for His own reputation!"

God's reply to Habakkuk provided more questions than answers.

That's why Habakkuk prays to the Lord again in 1:13, "You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on wickedness. Why do You look on those who deal treacherously, and hold Your tongue when the wicked devours a person more righteous than he?" This puzzles the prophet...

Habakkuk knew Judah had sinned and needed to be judged, *but by the Babylonians*? They were worse than the people they were used to judge.

Yes Judah sinned, but compared to the Babylonians they were saints.

It doesn't seem fair or right to Habakkuk. He's thinking, "God may be at work in the world, but to me His ways don't make sense." Sound familiar?

Have you ever been in Habakkuk's place? *Ever wrestled with God?*

Habakkuk is *wrestling*... He's struggling... God is at work, but He's not running the world the way Habakkuk expects a holy God should run His world. He's upset God isn't acting the way He thinks God needs to act.

Chapter 2 tells us how Habakkuk resolves His wondering and wrestling.

Verse 1 "I will stand my watch and set myself on the rampart, and watch to see what He will say to me, and what I will answer when I am corrected."

Let me ask, "What do you do when your life doesn't make sense? When conclusions become confusion? When life goes haywire and you can't square horrible circumstances with the loving God who allows them?"

You have a choice... You can jump to conclusions – "God let me down." "He doesn't care." "He took the day off." "His hands were tied." You can jump to wrong conclusions OR you can climb to the right perspective.

Habakkuk ascended to the ramparts – to the top of Jerusalem's walls.

The walls of an ancient city were strong and thick. Their top became a road around the city. There were towers,

lookouts, and combat positions soldiers could take to counter an invasion. Walls were *a vantage point*.

In climbing to the top of the walls Habakkuk was rising above the circumstances that perplexed him to seek the Lord. He was slowing life down – getting above it all - he was taking time to listen to God.

And you can do the same... You can humble yourself. You can admit that even though there's much about God you don't understand, *that doesn't make Him any less God*. You can wait on God to work in your heart, and teach you lessons you wouldn't learn otherwise.

When life throws you a curve... *you can jump or you can climb* - jump to faulty conclusions, or climb to see the glory of God... Habakkuk climbs to his knees - *and that's the highest climb any man will ever make*.

Habakkuk seeks God's perspective. *What about you?* When life gets tough do you *fold your faith and quit on God* – or do you *fortify your faith, and grow in God*? Habakkuk chose the latter - *literally, the ladder!* He climbs above his confusion to wait on a word from God.

In 2:1 Habakkuk demonstrates four attitudes in his waiting on God...

These are attitudes we should emulate. First, **determination** - second, **isolation** - third, check out his **expectation** – fourth, his **humiliation**.

First, notice his **determination**, “**I will stand my watch and set myself on the rampart**”. He implies he’s not coming down until he hears from God.

Moses fasted for forty days before God spoke to him. Daniel prayed for three weeks before the angel broke through, and victory was won. Why is it we pray for five minutes and if we don’t get an answer we turn on Sports Center, or call a friend? When you seek God show some *determination*.

Also seeking God involves **isolation**. Habakkuk climbs on top of the walls - away from the hustle and bustle in the streets – and the clamor of the markets. He ditches the distractions and gets alone with God.

When we go to Jerusalem I always like to walk the walls.

Jerusalem is a packed, congested city. Its cobblestone streets are narrow and busy. One of the ladies in our trip told me she was hoping we’d slow down in the streets and spend time in prayer and reflection.

In Jerusalem streets the goal is to protect your wallet and camera.

The place for prayer and meditation in Jerusalem isn’t its streets, but the tops of its walls. On top of the ramparts you find serenity and quiet.

Below you hear the noise, but on top of the walls you’re above it all.

There's no ceiling - nothing between you and God. Here's the place to quiet your soul and listen to what the Spirit of God might say to you.

Once, a Native American left the reservation to visit New York City.

He and a friend were walking down a busy street when he stopped, and said, "I hear a cricket." His buddy responded, "That's impossible! Not with all the shouts, and buses, and cars, and ambulances, and pedestrians."

But the Indian insisted, "I hear a cricket." He walked over to a planter next to an entranceway, dug into the dirt, and pulled out a tiny cricket.

His friend was impressed, "How did you hear a cricket in the midst of all this noise?" The Indian answered, "It's how you train your ear. *Watch...*"

He pulled from his pocket a fist full of nickels, and dimes, and quarters and dropped them on the pavement. Instantly, everyone within a block stopped and turned in their direction. *They all recognized that sound!*

The Indian was right - we hear what we train ourselves to hear. This is why Habakkuk climbed on the top of the wall, and sought out a quiet place. He wanted to train his ear to hear the Lord. We should follow his example.

Notice too, Habakkuk's **expectation**. "Watch to see what He will say to me" – the prophet expects God to

meet him, and speak to his heart. Let me ask you, *when you pray do you pray with a pen and paper in hand?*

Don't you expect God to speak? When I take time out of my busyness, and get alone with God, I'm ready to write down the direction and ideas He gives me. I think you'll find God speaks to expectant hearts.

And fourth, pay attention to Habakkuk's **humiliation**. Notice, he says he's concerned about, **"what I will answer when I am corrected."**

Habakkuk expected to be corrected. Maybe this is why so few people really take time to listen to God – they don't want to be told what they're doing or thinking incorrectly. They don't like being corrected.

When I approach God, He is the teacher – I am the student. Not once have I enlightened God on a subject or situation. Never have I told God something He didn't already know... God corrects. I listen and learn.

Habakkuk climbs the walls to wait on God - and he doesn't have to wait long. In verse 2 he tells us, **"Then the LORD answered me and said: "Write the vision and make it plain on tablets, that he may run who reads it.**

For the vision is yet for an appointed time; but at the end it will speak, and it will not lie. Though it tarries, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry." God's word will come to pass, but it may take a while.

You don't reap in the same season you sow - this is why we need **"faith and patience to inherit God's promises."**

And this is true of the vision God gives us... **especially, when you plant a new church. We need to realize...**

God shows us His plan - *but it's not poof, presto!* It doesn't just happen instantly. The vision God speaks to our hearts may take time – sometimes months or years to unfold, and develop, and come together. It takes *faith and endurance* to hang on long enough for the vision to be fulfilled.

This is why God states in verse 4, "**Behold the proud, his soul is not upright in him; but the just shall live by his faith.**" In the end, God sees to it the proud are punished, and the just will live – but in the meantime it takes faith – "***the just shall live by his faith.***" What a vital vision!

Habakkuk had been living by **sight**... *he couldn't see God's hand!*

He'd lived by **logic**... *what God was doing didn't seem to make sense.*

Emotion had governed Habakkuk... *he'd screamed out in frustration.*

The prophet's circumstances didn't ***look right, or seem right, or feel right.*** Yet to God's people none of that matters... the just won't live by sight, or by logic, or by emotion. True believers choose to live by faith.

Do we trust God's Word in our situation? Regardless of what we see, or think, or feel are our attitudes and actions based on what God has said?

Habakkuk 2:4 is one of the most strategic verses in the Bible...

In the 3rd century AD a Jewish rabbi named Simlai observed that Moses gave Israel 613 commandments - 365 negative and 248 positive. Simlai noted in Psalm 15, David reduced the commandments from 613 to 11.

In Isaiah 33:14-15 these 11 commands are reduced further to 6. Micah 6:8 compresses them to 3 – **do justly, love mercy, walk humbly with God.**

But Habakkuk takes it the final step. He packs all of God's requirements into one, single, solitary statement, 2:4, **"The just shall live by his faith."**

This is the passage that revolutionized the life of the Apostle Paul.

In the NT Paul quotes Habakkuk 2:4, three times – Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11, and Hebrews 10:38 - **"the just shall live by faith."**

The emphasis in Romans is **"the just shall live by his faith."** A person doesn't become just or righteous by doing good deeds or performing religious rituals. God declares a person **"just"** because of their faith.

The stress in Galatians is **"the just shall live by his faith."** It's not the *works of the Law* that make us just, but faith in the *work of Jesus*.

The accent in Hebrews is on **"live"** - **"the just shall live by his faith."** We both *obtain* and *maintain* a just standing

with God – not by grinding it out, or sweating it out, but living by faith. To a believer faith is a way of life.

Habakkuk 2:4 was the seed from which all the NT sprouted.

And this one verse set in motion history's greatest revival of Christianity!

In 1509 a monk named Martin Luther journeyed to Rome. Luther was a troubled man. He was tormented by guilt, and feelings of unworthiness.

He sought to answer the question, *how can I win the favor of a holy God?* He tried to achieve his goal through self-sacrifice and self-denial.

The man would fast for weeks. When the temperature dropped below freezing he would sleep outside without a blanket. Luther even beat himself black and blue trying to suffer enough to work off his sins.

Finally, he embarked on a pilgrimage to Rome where He planned to crawl on his knees up the long, sacred staircase in St. John's Cathedral. He even whipped himself as he climbed, trying to pay the penalty for sin.

But half-way up the steps this verse, Habakkuk 2:4 popped into Luther's mind, **"The just shall live by his faith"**. Suddenly it hit Martin Luther... There was nothing he could do to earn God's favor. Jesus had done all the work.

All God had asked of him was to believe. Luther got up from his knees that day, went home to Wittenburg, and

the Protestant Reformation was born. Seven words changed the modern world as well as the 1st century.

“The just shall live by his faith.”

When Habakkuk saw God raise up the evil Babylonians as a tool for His judgment, *his faith almost slipped*. He couldn't believe God would use an idolatrous nation, worse than Judah, to judge His own people.

That's why Habakkuk had to live by faith.

God's ways are not *our ways* - but God can be trusted. He always does what's right. God has proven countless times, He never makes a mistake. He'll use Babylon to judge Judah - then call up a nation to punish Babel.

That's what the remainder of the chapter predicts... The vision God tells Habakkuk to write down is the future judgment of the wicked Babylonians.

Beginning in verse 5, God denounces the king of Babylon for his wicked ways. His name was **“Nebuchadnezzar.”** You can read of his arrogance in Daniel. He was bloodthirsty - intoxicated with pride - hungry for conquest.

Nebuchadnezzar reminds me of a former Hollywood starlet.

She was 70 years old when she died in her apartment. She was getting down a box of old press clippings to remind herself of her former beauty and stardom. The box fell on top of her. She was crushed and died.

You might say she was *pressed to death*. Well, God assures Habakkuk that Nebuchadnezzar will also die because of his pride and arrogance.

In chapter 2 five woes are pronounced against the king of Babylon.

He's condemned for his **greed** - his evil **gain** - his **gore** and violence - his **guile** or deceit – even his **gullibility**... How dare him, give credit for the victories he won to mute idols - nothing but chunks of wood.

God closes his curses on the king in verse 20, **“But the LORD is in His holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before Him.”** Nebuchadnezzar chased after false gods, while the true God was abiding in His Temple.

Chapter 3:1 states **“A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, on Shigionoth.”** The meaning of **“Shigionoth”** is unclear. It also appears with Psalm 7.

It's more than likely a musical notation - *which means chapter 3 is a psalm of Habakkuk*. **He begins with a sob – now ends with a song.**

Verse 2 the prophet articulates his faith, **“O LORD, I have heard your speech and was afraid; O LORD, revive Your work in the midst of the years! In the midst of the years make it known; in wrath remember mercy.”** When Habakkuk first heard of God's plan he was alarmed.

Now he trusts God's ways are right. Even in the midst of God's wrath, he's sure God won't forget to show mercy to

His people. Habakkuk had come along way in his faith. He had learned a lot on the ramparts.

In verse 3 he says, “God came from Teman, the Holy One from Mount Paran.” And the next verses depict the coming of God to judge nations.

“His glory covered the heavens... Before Him went pestilence... He startled the nations... mountains were scattered...” Verse 9 tells us, “Your bow was made quite ready... the sun and moon stood still...”

Verse 12, “You marched through the land in indignation; You trampled the nations in anger...” The Lord was coming to judge not only Babylon, but all the nations of the world. Most scholars see Habakkuk 3 as a reference to both, *past judgments* and *judgments yet future*.

There’s a parallel chapter - Isaiah 63 - which describes the Second Coming of Jesus – when our Lord returns to judge a wicked world.

Like John in Revelation 19, Isaiah sees the robe of Jesus splattered and stained with the blood of His enemies. He brandishes a sharp sword. He’s locked and loaded. Jesus will spill the blood of those who resist Him.

Imagine *John Wayne, Chuck Norris, Jack Bauer* rolled into one - this is the returning Christ! *Terrorists beware!* Hijack God’s glory – rob Him of His place in your heart – act like your own God – and *it won’t go well for you!*

Isaiah 63 sees the Lord coming out of “Bozrah.” Habakkuk witnesses the same vision. “*Teman*” is another name for Bozrah, [land of Edom](#).

Here’s the point God is making to Habakkuk – **He will win in the end!**

Life is like a suspense novel. The tension builds and builds - until you have to flip to the final chapter to discover how the plot ends. After you read it you can go back, and enjoy the story without all the anxiety.

Certainly, Habakkuk was upset an army was about to invade Judah.

But in this vision God took him to the end of time to see that ultimately His Son will prevail. In the end God’s people prosper - evil is punished.

Habakkuk slept better after his divine vision.

And you will too, when you read your Bible. Today, life is a struggle. But read the final chapter – the Revelation – you’ll see Jesus wins in the end. And with that assurance, we can live confidently. We can enjoy God’s peace even in the midst of frightful, confusing circumstances.

Once, a discouraged man was taken by his friend to the RCA building in downtown New York. The friend showed him the statue of Atlas holding the globe on his shoulders. The ancient muscle man had a grimaced face. His bulging muscles were about to break. *The weight of the world is heavy.*

Afterward he escorted his friend across the street to Saint Patrick's Cathedral - to a small shrine dedicated to the boyhood of Jesus.

There stood a statue of Jesus as an 8 or 9 year old boy. He's composed and calm. His arm is outstretched, and the whole world rests in his palm.

In the beginning, Habakkuk was like Atlas – trying to carry the weight of the world on his shoulders. At the end of the story, Habakkuk accepts his place on the globe, and puts his trust in the God who is in total control.

I love how the book closes. In verses 17-18 Habakkuk's faith reaches a crescendo. **“Though the fig tree may not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines; though the labor of the olive may fail, and the fields yield no food; though the flock may be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stalls - yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation.”**

Here're the effects of a foreign invasion, yet Habakkuk is going to trust God come hell or high water. He can rejoice in good times or bad times.

When the economy dips... or you get laid off... or you're diagnosed with a cancer... or a friend dies unexpectedly... or your marriage struggles...

Even then you can say with Habakkuk, **“Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation.”** Read your Bible. God wins in the end!

Verse 19 closes, “The LORD God is my strength; He will make my feet like deer's feet, and He will make me walk on my high hills.”

A deer has the uncanny ability to move along mountainous cliffs and rocky terrain – yet he keeps his balance - he never slips. Likewise, all Habakkuk has to stand on is a vision, yet God enables him to stand!

Like a mountain deer do you want to dance in the midst of danger – live peacefully and gracefully on top of your problems – enjoy stable footing even on shaky ground? Do you want to go from *sighing to singing*?

Then stop **jumping to the wrong conclusions** – and start **climbing to the right perspective**. Seek God - see what He might say to you.

And by all means learn this truth... “*The just shall live by faith.*”