

“Sparring With God” from Habakkuk

The Book of Habakkuk opens with the prophet sparring with God. Habakkuk is verbally battling with His Creator. Questioning Him! Complaining to Him! Habakkuk, however, finds out that his arms are too short to box with God.

Part of Habakkuk’s problem was God’s use of the wicked Babylonian to chastise God’s people.

Adrian Rogers, in a sermon, told of an elderly widow who lived in an old apartment. She loved the Lord. Her landlord was not a Christian and even ridiculed the widow for being a narrow minded religious fanatic. On one occasion, she ran out of groceries and prayed for God to supply her need. The landlord could hear her praying through the paper thin apartment walls. He decided to play a trick on her. While she was out the landlord bought a large amount of groceries, used the pass key, and placed them in her room. When she returned, she began to praise the Lord. She then marched over to the landlord’s room and bragged on the Lord for His answering her prayer. The landlord rebuked her. He said, “God didn’t answer your prayer, I bought those groceries and here is the receipt.” The godly widow responded, “No! You are wrong. God did answer my prayer, even if He did have to use the devil!” God is not limited in how He accomplishes His will in our lives. Our Creator is creative.

There is an important progression in Habakkuk’s life from chapter one to chapter three; a growth in the grace and knowledge of Christ Jesus.

In Habakkuk One, Habakkuk is worrying and focusing on his problem: sparring with God.

In Habakkuk Two, Habakkuk is waiting and trusting In his God. He drops his weary too short arms.

In Habakkuk Three, Habakkuk is worshiping and focusing on his God. He takes off the gloves and falls to the mate in surrender. The circumstances in Habakkuk’s life did not change. As a matter of fact, the circumstance got worse. What changed was Habakkuk’s attitude.

Where are you this morning? Worrying, focusing on your problem, blaming God, waiting and trusting on God to answering your prayer, or worshiping God.

In Habakkuk 3:16-19, Habakkuk shows us

1. What To Do When We Are Personally Devastated? (3:16b)

A. The physical and personal devastation is seen in 3:16.

When Habakkuk heard in 1:5-11, that God was raising up the wicked nation of Babylon to chastise His sinning people, Habakkuk was visibly shaken: from the inside/out, from his bones to his belly, and from his head to his toes. He trembled all over.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon was London’s most loved and hated preacher. When Metropolitan Tabernacle was being enlarged, he and his congregation met in the Crystal Palace. The main floor was full as well as the wrap around balcony. During the first sermon, someone, many think an enemy of Spurgeon’s shouted “Fire.” A stampede pursued and several people killed. As Spurgeon watched the panic, he fainted in the pulpit and sank into depression for several weeks.

Perhaps you have experienced this devastation. At the doctor’s office you learn you have a terminal sickness. Your spouse tells you he/she wants out of this marriage. You get an email at work informing you that a layoff will occur shortly and you have huge mortgage payments. One of your children has abandoned the faith. Someone you love dearly is in the ICC on life support and the doctor says that you have to make a decision. This week two church members have asked me to pray for two separate unrelated car accidents where teenagers were killed.

B. The solution is to rest on God’s promises (3:16b).

God was fulfilling His Covenant promises in allowing a wicked nation to punish His people, Israel (Deuteronomy 28:25). God also promised His people in Deuteronomy 30:1-2, that He would regather them if they repented. Habakkuk is resting on God’s promises.

The word “rest” is the word used to describe what God did when He finished His six days of creation. On the seventh day (Exodus 20:11) God rested. This does not mean that God was exhausted and had to physically take a 15 minute break. It means God ceased His creation activity. God did not stop all of His activity; He just stopped His creation activity. He ceased one activity. God still works in sustaining His creation now.

Habakkuk also ceased an activity. He ceased worrying and focusing on his problem. His new activity was faith in God's promises and worship of the God who gave the promises.

R. A. Torrey called Romans 8:28 "a soft pillow for a tried heart." In your deepest, most devastating trial, you can rest on promises like Romans 8:28: "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose."

John R. Rice in his book on prayer recorded someone's prayer: "Dear God, I hate bacon powder. Dear God, I hate floor. Dear God, I hate shortening. But Dear Jesus, you put them all together and stir them up and put them in the oven and cook it and I put some butter between it, and I sure love hot, homemade biscuits." That is the promise of Romans 8:28. This verse does not promise that all things are good. But that all things work together for good for them who love God. All circumstances are not good. The cancer report is not good. The news of the spouse who wants out of the marriage is not good. The layoff is not good. The rebellious child is not good. The loved one in ICC is not good. The killing of teenagers in car accidents is not good. But the God who created and runs the universe can bring good out of the bad.

Habakkuk not only shows us the need to rest on God's promises when we are personally devastated but he also shows us

2. What To Do When Our Circumstances Are Devastating? (3:17-19)

A. The Devastating Circumstances are described in 3:17-19.

After God shows Habakkuk what God has done mightily in the past at Mount Sinai, the Red Sea, the Jordan River, the conquest of Canaan by causing the Sun to stand still and the defeat of over 30 Canaanite nations in 3:3-15, God now shows Habakkuk the future. The future includes the devastation and plunder that Babylon will bring to Israel when it conquers them.

1) What Habakkuk envisioned, Jeremiah, his contemporary, witnessed and recorded in Lamentations. From 588 to 586 B. C. the army of Babylon besieged Jerusalem and completely cut off supplies to Jerusalem. The historical record of this siege is in 2 Kings 25:1-10. Jeremiah's lament over the results of this siege that he witnessed is recorded in Lamentations 2:20-21. The hunger and starvation was so severe that the besieged people reverted to cannibalism. Israel's food supply would be completely destroyed. It would be like you going to your pantry and refrigerator and finding it empty and when you rushed to the grocery store, the shelves there are also barren.

2) What Job experienced individually, God's Old Testament people suffered nationally: they would lose everything. What was Job's response to his devastating circumstances? "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." When it feels like God is slaying us can we trust Him?

B. The solution is to rejoice in what is truly valuable and lasting (3:18-19).

Habakkuk finds his reason for living not in the perishable things that he described in verse 17. When the Titanic was sinking, women and children were being loaded on the too few lifeboats. A lady asked permission to run back to her room one last time for something she did not want to leave. She was given just a few minutes or someone else would take her place. When she got back to her room, much of her possessions were piled against the wall from the steep incline. Above her bed was a jewelry box of expensive diamond rings and necklaces. She brushed them aside and quickly grabbed two oranges and one apple. What was truly valuable all of a sudden quickly changed. Now life trumped things. With Habakkuk, what matters for eternity was more important than temporal possessions.

1. We can rejoice in the Lord (3:18a). We will never lose Him and even more importantly, He will never lose us. He promised, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." We are like the lost sheep, lost coin, and lost son. He finds us and keeps us.

2. We can rejoice in our salvation. Again God promised, "I give unto them eternal life and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them from my hand. My Father, who gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand."

3. We can rejoice in God's strength (3:19). In verse 16, Habakkuk did not have the strength to stand up. Now he has the strength of a deer to leap over fences, roads and mountain peaks. The statement, "He will make me to walk upon mine high places" is used in only two other places.

a) The first is in Psalm 18. David wrote this song when he was fleeing from his enemy, King Saul. For 10-15 years David was a fugitive on the run not for any sin he had committed but for doing the will of God. Yet David was not bitter. He worshiped God in song like Habakkuk is doing in Habakkuk 3. In Psalm 18:33, David wrote, "He makes my feet like the deer's feet, and sets me upon my high places." When we are devastated for someone's fault or sin, we don't have to become bitter and resentful. God can use the problem to prepare us for future ministry as he did with David. The result of Spurgeon's tragedy in the Crystal Palace was a chapter in his *Lectures to My Student* entitled "The Minister's Fainting Fits" where he encourages pastors who experiencing difficulties in the ministries.

b) The next time this phrase is used is in 2 Samuel 22 in another song by David. This time David is much older. In 2 Samuel 21, David is about the age of 65. Almost fifty years after David defeated Goliath, he now attempts to fight Goliath's younger brother and had not David's mighty men intervened, David would have been killed. This time David was at fault and God graciously strengthened him and David praised him in 2 Samuel 22:34: "He makes my feet like deer's feet: and sets me upon my high places." Yes, there are times when we suffer because of the sins, faults and mistakes of others. But we have all made our share of mistakes. We have blown it also. We have caused others to hurt. Yet God graciously strengthens us when we like David depend on Him.

Conclusion: Chuck Swindoll has written that life is 10% what happens to us and 90% how we respond to what happens to us. When we are personally devastated, we can rest on God's promises like Romans 8:28. When our circumstances strip us of materially valuable things, we can find our reason for living in our eternal God.