

DECEMBER 18

Hark! A week before Christmas. If you can, keep carving out some time to read your one-year Bible. This is a busy time, but keeping our eyes on the Lord is even more rewarding as we come to Christmas.

Remember the chart, “Kings of Judah and Israel and the Preexilic Prophets.”

Habakkuk 1-3

So, the first order of business is trying to figure out how to say this guy's name. In the U.S. we generally say, Huh-BACK-uck...or something like that. In Germany, it is Hab-ah-cook. He probably pronounced it totally differently in Hebrew, so when you get to heaven, ask him how he pronounces it.

In the world outside of Jerusalem in 612 B.C., the Babylonians and the Medes destroyed Nineveh. That created a power vacuum in the world. Egypt was aspiring to world power status in the south, and the rising power in the north and east was Babylon. Egypt went up the coast of the Mediterranean Sea to challenge the armies of Babylon.

Meanwhile, in Judah the reforms of Josiah created deep changes in some people, but lurking under the surface was rebellion. When Josiah died trying to stop the advance of Egypt up through Israel, the leaders did a quick, spiritual about-face. This is when Habakkuk wrote, or rather, sang. Pharaoh Neco made Jehoiakim (that donkey of a man) king, and immediately the poisons of a sinful people flowed through the city and society. This change from godly King Josiah to King Jehoiakim is what brings Habakkuk to question God.

Apparently Hab was a Levite singer. Much of this short book is a song. There is a song in chapter 2 and all of chapter 3 is a song. In fact, the entire thing may have been put to music, but we'll just have to ask him about that when we see him in heaven. And remember first, to ask him how to say his name.

Habakkuk 1

Vs. 1-4 This is Hab questioning God about all the injustice he is now seeing in Jerusalem. Life was so great under King Josiah, but now it was a lawless free-for-all, and God just kept silent.

Vs. 5-11 Here is what God has planned. He is going to punish Jerusalem for its evil by bringing the Chaldeans (the Babylonians) to execute His wrath.

Vs. 12-17 Hab now has an even bigger problem with God. How fair is it that God uses Jack the Ripper to judge Bonny and Clyde? Hab thinks that God should use a righteous judge, because then there would be a limit and a just end to the penalty. I think there is also the sense that these are God's own people who are being punished, evil though they may be. What Habakkuk doesn't see in this, and why we need to trust the wisdom of God, is that because the punishers are so deeply ungodly and idolatrous, the people of Israel will come back from exile, virtually idol free. There is wisdom to God using a greater evil to chasten His wicked people, making them sick of their own sickness.

Habakkuk 2

V. 1 So, Habakkuk has questioned God regarding His use of the Babylonians to punish Jerusalem and now he waits for an answer.

Vs. 2-5 God answers that He is going to judge Babylon and that Hab needs to be patient and wait.

V. 4 The *his* refers to the Chaldeans. While the Babylonians grow in pride, the righteous need to wait on the Lord, living in faith in Him, in His wisdom, in His justice and in His faithfulness.

V. 5 Babylon is getting ready for judgment by becoming "drunk" on its own wealth and pride.

Vs. 6-20 This is a song. Notice the verses are marked by *woe*. So, figure out what charges God is bringing against Babylon. This song is actually saying that God will repay Babylon "in kind," that is, with the same cruelty that they gave out. How interesting today that we have Psalm 137, with those very awful vs. 8-9. Those verses are saying, too, that as the Babylonians did to others, God will make sure is done to them.

Notice that all of these things could apply to any person or nation. I think there is a warning here for any people or nation that lifts itself against the Lord or against Jerusalem.

V. 14 This is a contrast to the city of Babylon and its wonder, the Hanging Gardens. Their work was evil and wasted, but God's glory fills the earth and never ends.

V. 15 I think the meaning of *neighbor* here could extend to the surrounding nations. Look at Revelation 14:8, *Another angel, a second, followed, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who made all nations drink the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality."*

Vs. 18-19 Note that the *woe* comes later, in v. 19.

V. 20 is ominous in that it is a call to the earth from the temple in Zion. I think that in describing the judgment of Babylon, God is also describing the judgment of nations during the Tribulation.

Habakkuk 3

This chapter is a song. Notice that v. 1 begins like many psalms; for example, the introduction to Psalm 57. Notice too that after certain verses there is a *Selah*, as is also found in The Psalms as a musical notation.

Vs. 1-15 Although there are images here that go back to the Exodus and the book of Joshua, the entire tone seems to be apocalyptic, having to do with the things we are reading about in Revelation. Verse 13 will certainly apply to God's vengeance on the nations when Jesus returns at the end of the Tribulation.

Vs. 16-19 Here is what Habakkuk learned in questioning God and humbling his heart to receive God's answer. He is sick that judgment must come, but he knows God's love and wisdom. He will wait patiently on the Lord. Even in chaos and disaster, he will rejoice in the Lord. God is his strength.

Vs. 17-19 are not only beautiful, but they are worth memorizing. And I would say that as we follow Christ as His disciples in His harvest, these verses are the strength of our hearts too. Especially since we have already found His love and are already secure and have a seat at His table when this darkness comes to an end.

I'm sure there are a lot of songs written to certain verses in Habakkuk, but the verse that attracts me as a disciple is 2:14. As disciples following Christ with His message, we need to go and draw people's attention to God's Son and His glory. The glory of God already fills the earth, like water the seas. We need to point to it and see who is ready to move toward Christ.

Revelation 9

Vs. 1-12 The fifth trumpet sounds. This will appear to be a *star* or meteor, but it is a *he* with a *key*. Usually this "he" is associated with Satan. Since it doesn't say it, I'd hesitate. The next angel who blows a trumpet will also release satanic forces. It appears that this thing or angel will go to the core of the earth where it releases a demonic plague of some sort. It will last for five months and it appears to be insects, literally from hell, worse than fire ants. Maybe they're flying fire ants.

V. 4 Notice that this will not affect the 144,000 or those who know Christ. I don't get it either, but just like the children of Israel were spared some of the plagues of Egypt because they

belonged to God, the same will be true here. The nations and peoples will be so busy trying to kill these things and find a cure, that the believers in Christ will be free to continue working in the harvest under the radar. I wonder if someone comes to faith, if the bugs lose their bite on that person. This will surely be an interesting way to see the difference between those who belong to God and those who don't.

Vs. 13-19 The focus here is the release of four demons.

V. 15 It is the four demons who, through all that they incite, are responsible for the death of a third of the world's population. With the fourth seal a fourth of mankind had died, and now with this trumpet a third of those remaining will die. Together, that means that half of the earth's population has been destroyed.

The Bible does talk about imprisoned angels and some think that these four angels were chief angels under Satan who sinned as mentioned in Genesis 6 and have been imprisoned for this very hour.

V. 18 This mentions three plagues caused by these angels. It is hard to understand all of what they do. It's clear that they dry up the rivers allowing an army of 200 million men to go from the east to the west. Yet, even if China invaded all the countries west of it, marching right up to Israel, I don't think they could kill a third of the world's population, so there must be more going on here.

The earth is looking more and more like Egypt when God's plagues hit it. Imagine how debilitated and restricted life on earth will be at this point.

Vs. 20-21 All of mankind is aware of these plagues and they are aware there is a spiritual hand at work. Instead of seeking God, they seek the gods of their own imaginations. Of course, Satan will also be performing deceiving signs and wonders, just as Pharaoh's magicians did in response to Moses.

I don't know, but I think this is near the end of the first 3.5 years. A long interlude in the judgments is about to follow, and in it the two witnesses will be killed, ending their 3.5 year ministry. Then Satan is cast down from heaven, goes after Israel and is given power to kill the followers of Christ. At the point where the antichrist enters the temple and breaks his peace treaty with Israel, there begins a part of the Tribulation referred to as The Great Tribulation. That is the Tribulation on steroids and aimed at the Jews. It is referred to as "great," because at this point, and for the next 3.5 years, the antichrist will try to exterminate the Jews and the followers of Christ. It will be good for them that the earth is so wrecked.

Still, at this point in the Tribulation, the disciples of Jesus, the 144,000, and those who are now believers, are boldly telling others to turn to God as the darkness continues to fall. As Jesus' disciples now, following in this harvest time, we need to be doing the same. When He comes, He comes very quickly.

Psalm 137

I think this fits amazingly well with our reading in Habakkuk. There will come a day when a future generation of Israel will rejoice and trust God. This will be the result of lessons learned from all of the previous generations of the Jews, whom God used to teach us our failings and His love. That is why we have all of this written in the Word.

Vs. 1-3 Not only were the people taunted by their captors, they were reminded of their own sin that brought God to have to punish them by exile.

Vs. 4-6 But now, after God's chastening, all they wanted was to remember Zion and return to Jerusalem. It was only God's grace, as seen in Daniel, that made this possible.

V. 7 As we've already seen, God promised a special punishment of Edom.

Vs. 8-9 Babylon may have been God's instrument of punishment, but God never allows or condones utter, grotesque violence and carnage such as Assyria and Babylon used. Babylon would be repaid in kind.

Proverbs 30:10

The key word is *slander*. Apparently pride is at work here, thinking that since the despised person is a servant and of little priority or value, you can get away with running him/her down. God says not to criticize and despise people. It comes from pride and there is a curse attached.