

Two Distinct Ways Of Life
Habakkuk 2:2-6

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Why do the godless prosper? Why do good men get oppressed by the wicked? Why is God so silent towards evil? Is God unconcerned about the suffering in this world? Will God allow unrighteous men and nations to go on indefinitely without judgment? We all, at times, puzzle over and stumble over the question of why the wicked prosper. In *Psalm 73*, King David wrestled with this problem. He said, ***“For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong. They are free from the burdens common to man; they are not plagued by human ills.”*** David felt sorry for himself and said, ***“Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure.”*** David could not grasp it all until he got alone with God in the temple. He said, ***“When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny. Surely you place them on slippery ground; you cast them down to ruin. How suddenly are they destroyed, completely swept away by terrors.”*** David had to learn that God’s judgment always comes against wickedness. All sin is judged by God in time or in eternity. Not the slightest sin will ever escape the scrutiny of an omniscient God.
- B. Habakkuk had to learn the very same lesson. God judges all sin, all wickedness and all evil in His own timing and His own way. By way of background, Habakkuk had complained to God about the sinful state of the nation of Judah. He saw nothing but violence, oppression, and sin among the elect nation of God and he was discouraged because God had done nothing about this evil in Israel. Habakkuk complained to God and got an answer. God told the prophet He was raising up the wicked nation of Babylon to chasten Judah. Judgment on Israel would come through brutal, cruel, godless Babylon. This raised an even bigger theological problem for the prophet, for now he wanted to know how God could use an unholy instrument like Babylon to chastise a more holy nation like Judah. It did not seem fair. It seemed out of character with God’s holiness. The prophet then got alone with God and waited patiently for God to give him an answer. The answer came in **2:2-20**. God will most certainly judge Babylon. God, who raised up the Babylonians to judge Judah, would hold Babylon totally responsible for their wicked acts, and they will be judged by God and even destroyed as a nation. Just because this foreign army prided itself on its strength and military cruelty, did not mean the Babylonians were justified in God’s sight. They were not. Horrible judgment would fall upon Babylon for the harsh treatment of all nations, but especially Israel, God’s nation. NOTE: There is a mystery here between divine sovereignty and human responsibility, but it does tell us that human history is providentially the accomplishment of God’s purpose. ***“All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: “What have you done?””*** (**Dan. 4:35**) We all, like Habakkuk, have to learn this lesson. **Proverbs 16:9** says, ***“In his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps.”*** In the final analysis, it is the Lord who determines the path we should take. We make our

plans, we scheme and honestly try to look into the future, but in the final analysis, it is the Lord who determines our steps.

II. THE ASSURANCE OF RELIEF FOR ISRAEL (2:2-4)

- A. A Vision (2:2, 3): ***“Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it. For the revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay.”***
1. The prophet Habakkuk asked the question, “How can a holy God use an unholy instrument to accomplish His purpose?” He got alone with God and waited for His answer. NOTE: If we are going to get answers to prayer, we must observe three principles: 1) We must commit the matter to the Lord and leave it there; 2) We must in faith anticipate an answer, and 3) We must learn to wait. God may answer our prayer immediately or much later. The answer may be yes, no or wait awhile. Some answers may come even after we have died and gone home to be with the Lord. ILLUSTRATION: George Mueller prayed for two relatives’ salvation all his life. They were both saved at Mueller’s funeral.
 2. A vision is from God. God gave Habakkuk a vision, a revelation or a prophecy. The prophecy was that God would judge the Babylonians. God spoke to the prophet and gave him supernatural truth. There are no prophets in this same sense in the church today. We have the Bible and it contains all the prophecy we need. The prophet was to ***“write down the revelation.”*** NOTE: Liberal theologians deny God spoke to the prophets. They claim the prophets were profound political thinkers, great philosophers and religious men with intuitive and instinctive insight into human affairs, but they were not men who were in contact with God. This, of course, contradicts the clear teaching of the Bible. ***“Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” (II Pet. 1:20, 21)***
 3. A vision is visible. The prophet was to make it plain on tablets so a herald could run with it. The vision was to be reduced to writing in large letters for the future. It may have been posted in public places such as the market place, temple courts or along the highways. When the prophecy was read, one was to run and tell it to others. This was in one sense a message of joy for the Israelites because it told of the ruin of their enemies and their own deliverance.
 4. A vision is future. It was for ***“an appointed time.”*** The fulfillment was in the future and it would happen according to God’s time table. It would not happen immediately but it would come. The godly in Israel should wait and not get impatient. Delay is only in the heart of man. God is working the details according to His own plan. The purpose of God cannot be hurried along or delayed. It is right on schedule. NOTE: Liberals explain away prophecy by redating books, giving them late dates, after the event has already happened. That way, they remove any supernatural elements.
 5. A vision is exact. The vision will not prove false. It will come to pass just as God said. It will take place at the exact moment appointed by God and it will not be a fraction of a second late. NOTE: In the Old Testament, a flood

was prophesied. One hundred and twenty years passed and nothing seemed to be more unlikely than a universal flood. Unbelievers laughed at Noah but at the appointed time and the exact way it came. The same can be said of Sodom and Gomorrah and the release of the children of Israel from seventy years of captivity in Babylon. Prophecy always happens as God says it will.

6. A vision is certain. The prophecy will certainly come. When God predicts an event through a prophet, it is as certain as the sun rising and setting every day. It will happen and God's people are to wait patiently. NOTE: Think how long God's people waited for the coming of Messiah, but at the appointed time, He came into this world as the God-Man, the Saviour of the world, the Lord of the universe and the Head of the Church. God has told us all through the Bible that Christ is coming a second time. He will return to this earth. He will judge unbelievers and reward believers. It has been two thousand years now, but He will come and we must wait patiently. In our day, there are many who scoff at Christians for their belief in the Second Advent of Christ. The Apostle Peter even prophesied of this unbelieving attitude. ***“First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, “Where is this coming he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.” But they deliberately forget that long ago by God’s word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and with water. By water also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.” (II Pet. 3:3-10)*** Liberals, modernists, unbelievers and infidels will not have the last laugh. Christ will!

B. A Division of Lifestyle (2:4, 5)

1. A life of independence from God (4a, 5): ***“See, he is puffed up; his desires are not upright – indeed, wine betrays him; he is arrogant and never at rest. Because he is as greedy as the grave and like death is never satisfied, he gathers to himself all the nations and takes captive all the peoples.”*** The Babylonians were a proud, arrogant and vain people who boasted in their power, might and strength. They were never satisfied with their conquests; they always wanted more. They had an insatiable thirst for power. They were a nation excessively fond of wine. They had a reputation for being big drinkers. Love of wine was one of the besetting sins of the Babylonians, and it helped destroy this proud and perverted empire. In fact, according to Daniel five and history, it was while being involved in a drunken orgy that King Belshazzar and the Babylonians were overthrown. The Babylonians lived a debauched life and were totally rebellious to Jehovah-God as seen in the independent attitude of King Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel four. NOTE: God was going to humble the proud Babylonians and

inflict terrible punishment on them. Their whole cruel, arrogant, debauched lifestyle was repugnant to God. God's judgment was certain.

ILLUSTRATION: I read somewhere about three years ago that 168 cocktail parties take place among government officials in Washington daily. In Moscow, Russia, government officials are so drunk by one o'clock in the afternoon it is impossible to do business with them. This sort of thing is the destruction of nations.

2. A life of dependence on God (4b): ***"But the righteous will live by his faith."*** Habakkuk now understood the end of the Babylonians, and he was convinced that Judah would be severely disciplined. But what would happen to the true believers in Judah? How should they act? The prophet was told, ***"the righteous will live by his faith."*** No matter what the crisis; no matter what the discipline; no matter what the suffering at the hands of the wicked Babylonians, the just shall live by faith. God's people are to live by ***"his faith"*** not God's faithfulness but the principle of faith. It is not faithfulness in the keeping of the moral law of God but in firm reliance on God. God's people under any and all circumstances are to live by faith. NOTE: Habakkuk knew his Old Testament and understood faith in God was the key to salvation and living. In ***Genesis 15:6*** it says, ***"Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness."*** NOTE: ***"The righteous shall live by faith"*** is a key verse in the Bible. It is quoted three times in the New Testament. In ***Romans 1:17***, the concept of ***"righteous"*** (just) is stressed. ***"I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith." (Rom. 1:16, 17)*** Romans stresses a sinner can have righteousness imputed to him positionally before God. Salvation is a pure act of grace appropriated through faith alone. Christians are righteous in God's eyes because they have Christ's righteousness through faith in Christ. The Book of Galatians stresses the concept of ***"shall live."*** ***"Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, "The righteous will live by faith." (Gal. 3:11)*** Galatians stresses that men are neither saved nor sanctified by keeping the Mosaic Law or any manmade legalistic rules. Sanctification is also a life of faith in Christ based on the moral law of God. The Book of Hebrews stresses the concept of ***"by faith."*** ***"But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him. But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved." (Heb. 10:38, 39)*** This is a lead into the great "By Faith" chapter of Hebrews 11. That which gives the Christian joy, liberty, excitement, desire for obedience and strength for perseverance is a life of faith. All these giants of faith like Moses ***"saw him who is invisible."*** From Romans, Galatians and Hebrews, we see Habakkuk 2:4 does not teach the righteous shall begin by faith and then proceed on some other principle. It does not say the righteous shall draw on faith from time to time as faith is needed. It says the righteous shall continually live by the faith principle. The key to Christianity is faith. ***"And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him." (Heb. 11:6)*** NOTE: From

these words, ***“the righteous will live by faith”*** sprang the Protestant Reformation. Martin Luther was a medieval monk, raised up in the Roman Catholic system of good works to justify and save. Luther read the Bible and saw himself a sinner. He tried and tried to do works to please God but the harder he tried the more depressed he became. He would deny himself, do all kinds of works and even beat himself to please God, but his soul was left barren, frightened and trembling. He became afraid of God and withdrew from Him. While in the monastery at Erfurt, he read in his Bible the words, ***“the righteous will live by faith.”*** It began to take root in his mind. He did not understand it all but he knew this “by faith way” was different than all the prayers, fasting, good works and flagellations he had been doing to please God. Later, Luther became quite ill on a pilgrimage to Rome and almost died. Facing the horrors of death and not being ready to die, the words ***“the righteous shall live by faith”*** went through his head again. When Luther recovered, he completed his journey to Rome. When he arrived in Rome, he saw the corruptions of the Roman Catholic system. He, as a good Catholic, went to St. John’s Lateran. At St. John’s there is a staircase which is said to be from Pilate’s judgment hall. Here pilgrims get on their knees, go up the stairs one at a time, repeating prayers as they go. At different points on the stairs, there are blood stains that have been covered with pieces of glass. They are said to have been caused by the blood of Christ, spilled when He was taken out of Pilate’s hall. As pilgrims go up the stairs, they stop at these places and kiss the glass, praying constantly. As Luther was somewhere on this staircase, the words from the Book of Romans and ultimately from Habakkuk came to his mind: ***“the righteous shall live by faith.”*** He got up on his feet, turned around and walked down the staircase. Luther’s turnabout on those stairs marked the beginning of the Protestant Reformation. ILLUSTRATION: Luther said these words about ***“the just shall live by faith.”*** “Before those words broke upon my mind I hated God and was angry with him because, not content with frightening us sinners by the law and by the miseries of life, he still further increased our torture by the gospel. But when, by the Spirit of God, I understood those words, ***“The just shall live by faith! The just shall live by faith!”*** – then I felt born again like a new man; I entered through the open doors into the very Paradise of God.”

III. CONCLUSION

- A. This passage of Scripture tells us there are just two possible attitudes about life in this world – that of faith and that of unbelief. As a man believes so is he. Faith in Christ will bring a certain lifestyle and view of the world. Rejection of Christ will also bring a lifestyle and view of the world. A man’s beliefs determine not only his conduct but his eternal destiny.
- B. ***Habakkuk 2:4*** says, ***“The righteous will live by his faith.”*** The man who lives by faith in Christ is righteous. The man who does not live by faith in Christ is not righteous in the sight of God no matter how good he may be. Right here is the great divider of men in God’s books. Those who believe in Christ and those who do not. A man’s life is either based on faith or it is not. A person is either saved or lost, just or unjust, righteous or unrighteous, bound for heaven or hell, depending on what he or she does with Christ. The righteous will live by faith. When you understand the

true meaning of these words, then you can say as Martin Luther, “I felt born again like a new man.” The key to Christianity is in the words, “***The righteous shall live by faith!***”