

Retribution And Revival
Habakkuk 2:6 – 3:2

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Why does the church of Jesus Christ seem so weak, so powerless, so impotent? Why is there such compromise and nominalism among Christians? Why is the church so lifeless, lackluster and lazy? Why does God allow the professing church to live on such a low moral standard when His moral law is so clear in Scripture? Where is the dynamic of the first century church in the twentieth century church? Why doesn't God discipline the church more? Why doesn't God revive the church when He has the power to do so? Why is the church so dead? ILLUSTRATION: A father was with his young son, waiting in the foyer of the church for someone to pick them up. The father was showing his son the plaques on the wall pointing out all the members of the church who died in military service. The boy said, "Who are these men?" The dad replied, "These are the men who died in the service." The boy replied, "Which service, the evening or morning?"
- B. Every observing and thinking Christian has asked these questions about the coldness, deadness and indifference of the organized church many times, and so did the prophet Habakkuk concerning the nation Israel, God's people in the Old Testament. Habakkuk saw nothing but violence in Judah. He wanted to know how long this would go on without God's discipline and why God made him look on such iniquity. Habakkuk thought God didn't care. Then God gave him an answer. It was not what Habakkuk wanted to hear. He wanted revival in the nation but God told him He was raising up the wicked, cruel and godless Babylon to chasten the nation of Israel. This raised an even greater problem for the prophet. Now he wanted to know how a holy God could use an unholy instrument like Babylon to discipline the more holy nation Judah. Judah was bad but not anything like the Babylonians. The prophet became frustrated, confused and probably a little angry with God. He wanted an answer, so he got alone with God and waited for a response from Him. He prayed and expected an answer. God gave him an answer. The nation of Babylon would invade Judah, defeating the nation and carry the choicest of Israel to Babylon as slaves, but God would not let the Babylonians off scott free. No, God would bring retribution against Babylon for every one of their sinful acts against the nations and especially against God's people. God would judge Babylon and destroy it forever as a great nation. God always judges evil. No sin is free from His omniscient eye. While it may seem as though God is doing nothing, He is providentially carrying out His purposes in this world. The millstone grinds slowly but it grinds surely. But what about Israel? What about God's elect remnant in Judah? With an invasion by Babylon imminent and great suffering for the nation of Judah certain, how should the elect remnant live? The prophet is told that, "***the righteous shall live by his faith.***" In this crisis, the principle for living for the elect remnant was faith – strong, sure, dependence on Jehovah-God! God assures Habakkuk that Babylon will be judged and He does this by stating five woes against Babylon.

II. RETRIBUTION FOR BABYLONON (2:6-20)

- A. Woe Against Ambition (6-8): ***“Will not all of them taunt him with ridicule and scorn, saying, ‘Woe to him who piles up stolen goods and makes himself wealthy by extortion! How long must this go on? Will not your debtors suddenly arise? Will they not wake up and make you tremble? Then you will become their victim. Because you have plundered many nations, the peoples who are left will plunder you. For you have shed man’s blood; you have destroyed lands and cities and everyone in them.’”*** Out of selfish ambition, the Babylonians raped and plundered nations. They enriched themselves at the expense of others. They took land and belongings which were not theirs. Therefore, the nations around Babylon hated them. They waited for the opportunity to strike back. Suddenly Babylon would be called to relinquish its ill-begotten gain. We know that the Medes and Persians in B.C. 539 struck unexpectedly at the Babylonians. What is the point? God always punishes evil!
- B. Woe Against Greed (9-11): ***“Woe to him who builds his realm by unjust gain to set his nest on high, to escape the clutches of ruin! You have plotted the ruin of many peoples, shaming your own house and forfeiting your life. The stones of the wall will cry out and the beams of the woodwork will echo it.”*** King Nebuchadnezzar took the plunder to build his own kingdom, palace and temple in Nineveh. He boasted that Nineveh was so fortified it could never be taken. He captured slaves and took them to Babylon to build his palace and city. He developed the melting pot system by bringing slaves to Babylon from every nation conquered. But all this came crashing down. The beams and stones echoed to one another at the destruction of this mighty capitol. What is the point? Men reap what they sow! The Babylonians sowed violence and they reaped violence at the hand of God!
- C. Woe Against Cruelty (12-14): ***“Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed and establishes a town by crime! Has not the LORD Almighty determined that the people’s labor is only fuel for the fire, that the nations exhaust themselves for nothing? For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.”*** Bloodthirsty Babylon would be defeated. Their conquests could not continue because God’s kingdom would conquer. There will be only one monarch who will rule the whole world and that will be Jesus Christ at the Second Advent. This is a prophecy of either the millennial kingdom or the eternal state. Either way, the earth will be filled with the knowledge and glory of the Lord. If God’s kingdom will one day reign completely on earth, then Nebuchadnezzar, Marduk and Babylon are doomed to defeat. They can never reign permanently. What is the point? God’s kingdom will always triumph ultimately over evil!
- D. Woe Against Debauchery (15-17): ***“Woe to him who gives drink to his neighbors, pouring it from the wineskin till they are drunk, so that he can gaze on their naked bodies. You will be filled with shame instead of glory. Now it is your turn! Drink and be exposed! The cup from the Lord’s right hand is coming around you, and disgrace will cover your glory. The violence you have done to Lebanon will overwhelm you, and your destruction of animals will terrify you. For you have shed man’s blood; you have destroyed lands and cities and everyone in them.”*** The Babylonians slaughtered people and animals unmercifully. God is concerned for animals as well as people. The Babylonians wine and dined nations, seeking their friendship, and then when they were thoroughly drunk with their

flattery, they marched their armies against them. God did not stand passively by but brought judgment through the Medes and Persians. What is the point? Those who live by the sword die by the sword!

- E. Woe Against Idolatry (18-20): ***“Of what value is an idol, since a man has carved it? Or an image that teaches lies? For he who makes it trusts in his own creation; he makes idols that cannot speak. Woe to him who says to wood, “Come to life!” or to lifeless stone, “Wake up!” Can it give guidance? It is covered with gold and silver; there is no breath in it. But the LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him.”*** The Babylonians were great idol worshippers. Idolatry is senseless, for idols are a creation of man and men worship their own creations. Idols are dead; they cannot give life or guidance. Idolatry brings the judgment of God. What is the point? Those who choose to serve any idol, whether of material or the mind, must sometime face the judgment of Almighty God. NOTE: Because of these woes, God is in His holy temple and all the earth is to be silent before Him. Jehovah-God is not an idol made with hands nor is He contained in man-made temples. God rules in His holy temple which is the universe. He reigns in holiness! He reigns in sovereignty! He reigns in glory! He is judge. He will judge. He must judge. Let all the earth get silent. Let there be a universal hush. All nations are to humbly and reverently bow before God because His judgment on all evil is certain. Whatever sin, evil or suffering God allows, He will bring retribution against it in His way and His timing. NOTE: Quite often Habakkuk 2:20 is used for a call to worship in a church service. This in context is a frightening, horrible and sad verse on judgment. This is a pronouncement of judgment not a call to worship. This is a thunderous pronouncement of an outraged God against a nation which mocked Him. It is a judgment against Babylon and any other nation or individual who does not believe the divine revelation concerning His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

III. REVIVAL PRAYER FOR ISRAEL (3:1, 2): ***“A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet. On shigionoth. LORD, I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds, O LORD. Renew them in our day, in our time make them known; in wrath remember mercy.”***

- A. Recording The Prayer (1): ***“A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet. On shigionoth.”*** All of chapter three is a prayer. It is a response to the revelation Habakkuk received from God concerning his problems. All of chapter three was put to music. A shigionoth was a highly emotional, passionate, exciting song, skipping from one subject to another as seen in the term “Selah” in verses 3, 9, and 13. The language is some of the loftiest and most sublime in the Old Testament.
- B. Reverence Of God (2a): ***“LORD, I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds, O LORD.”***
1. Habakkuk had caught a vision of God. He began his prayer with the word “Jehovah.” He was awed with the fame of God. In spite of the impending crisis, he would cling to the unchanging eternal I AM THAT I AM. Habakkuk’s emotions were deeply stirred even to the point of tears as he contemplated the Babylonian attack on Judah and the impending captivity in Babylon. He was equally moved to joy when he realized God’s judgment on Babylon, the enemy of Israel. A vision of God drove Habakkuk to prayer. He stood in awe of God’s sovereign deeds.
 2. Habakkuk’s attitude has drastically changed from chapter one. There is no longer any arguing with God or questioning His ways. He does not ask God

to remove the discipline on Judah. He has stopped fighting intellectually and is now resting in the sovereign purposes of God for his life and the life of the elect remnant in Judah. He has come to the place where he sees God is perfectly just and that His punishment is just and deserved on Israel. The prophet has been broken by his own sin and the sin of the nation. He came to the place of complete submission. Not a visage of self-righteousness remained, just complete admission of sin and utter submission to the judgment of God upon the nation. Whatever the crisis, he, as a righteous one, would live by faith in the sovereign God of the universe.

C. Revival Of God's People (2b): ***“Renew (revive) them in our day, in our time make them known;”***

1. Habakkuk prays that God's deeds may be renewed or revived in Judah, a nation to be destroyed and taken into captivity. He is praying that God's works would be “brought back to life” in Israel. The word “renew” means “creating life” or “bringing back life.” It is revival that Habakkuk is speaking of, but he is looking beyond the destruction of Judah, the conquering of the promised land and the captivity in Babylon. He is asking for God in His timing and His way to restore His work once again in Israel.
2. Notice carefully that Habakkuk did not pray for deliverance and ease, nor that there would be no war with Babylon or that Judah would be spared. He clearly saw these events were inevitable and deserved. He does not pray God will change His plan. The prophet's one burden was a concern for God's work, God's cause, and God's purpose in the nation of Israel and the world. His one plea was that God would revive His own work. The prophet is saying that whatever becomes of us, though we be dead as dry bones, let your work be revived, O God; let it not sink and come to nothing. Whatever happens to Israel, let not the God of Israel be forgotten! Habakkuk became God-centered in his thinking and prayer. Even though the revival of the nation would be seventy years away after the captivity of Jerusalem, Habakkuk was praying for it! What Habakkuk is asking is for swift, fair judgment on Judah so the revival can begin. Meanwhile he also wants a preservation of God's work among the Israelites. God did that by preserving an elect remnant even in the captivity in Babylon for seventy years.

D. Remembering Mercy By God (2c): ***“In wrath remember mercy.”*** The prophet prays that in all of God's wrath against Judah and its sin He would show mercy. He would be compassionate. That He would temper judgment with mercy. Habakkuk is praying, “Your will be done, Lord, but get this judgment over as quickly as possible and please be merciful.” The judgment was deserved and no excuses could be made. Habakkuk is asking God to remember the other side of Himself. He is both wrath and mercy. There is another side of God – His mercy, His love, His goodness, His compassion! Habakkuk is saying, “God, act Yourself.”

IV. RETRACING STEPS TO REVIVAL

Revival means to bring to life that which was dead. Revival comes to God's people who have grown cold to God and His moral law. When God's people get revived, then there are many unsaved who become Christians. Revival must come in the Church universal; it must come to the church in America; it must come to the local church and it must come to the individual Christian. Revival is ultimately a matter of the heart. Revival is a renewal of a life of faith, a renewal of interest in Christ, a renewal of concern for God's law. How does

revival come? What are the steps in revival? They are set forth for us by the prophet Habakkuk.

- A. Realization Of Sin. The Christian realizes he is going through the motions; he is transgressing God's law; he is cold in his heart to Christ; he is indifferent to prayer, the lost, the poor, the family and personal righteousness. Realizing his sin and realizing that this brings the discipline of God, there must be a desire to turn away from these things which are grieving the Holy Spirit.
- B. Recognition Of God. The Christian must get a vision of God, who He is, what He does, how He acts, and he stands in awe of His sovereignty and holiness. He also recognizes his accountability to God.
- C. Submission To God. The Christian must confess his sins to God. He must stop fighting God's will for his life and submit to Him, knowing that the Christ-centered life is the best life. It is the life of joy, freedom and liberty.
- D. Petition For Revival. The Christian must plead with God to renew him, revive him, dealing with his cold, indifferent, apathetic heart. He prays for revival in himself, in his family, in his local church and in his country and world. He prays for God to give the ability to live by faith.
- E. Appropriation Of God's Mercy. The Christian pleads with God to be merciful and bring a changed life which reflects God's goodness, mercy and love. We ask Him not to discipline but to revive! NOTE: What happens when we become dry as dead bones spiritually and refuse to repent, confess our sins, love Christ and do God's law? What happens if we refuse to desire revival? There can only be discipline for us! We may think that God is indifferent to our sin and is asleep. We may foolishly conclude that God will not discipline us, but it will come. The millstone of God grinds slowly but it grinds surely! Let's remember the words of *II Chronicles 7:14*: ***"If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land."*** God could just as well have said, "I will heal their souls, or their local church or the universal church in the world!" Revival begins in the individual heart of the born again Christian.
ILLUSTRATION: Gypsy Smith was once asked how to start a revival. He answered, "Go home, lock yourself in your room, kneel down in the middle of your floor. Draw a chalk mark all around yourself and ask God to start the revival inside that chalk mark. When he has answered your prayer, the revival will be on."

V. CONCLUSION

- A. God brought great discipline on Judah, the people of God, but He utterly destroyed the Babylonians for their wickedness, cruelty, violence, sin, drunkenness and rejection of the one true God, Jehovah. God showed no mercy to the Babylonians.
- B. God will show no mercy in eternity to those men and women who reject Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. He will utterly destroy them. They shall perish in hell.
- C. If you are not a Christian, ask God to be merciful to you. Ask Him to spare you the awful pangs of eternal punishment. Ask Him to give you the ability to turn to Christ. The Bible says in *I Peter 4:17*: ***"For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God?"***