

## A Future and a Hope

In this series of articles we've been looking at the Old Testament prophet Habakkuk as he reveals to us how God punished the people of Judah for their wickedness and disobedience. We've seen that Habakkuk initially cried out to God in prayer because he witnessed the evil of the leaders and the people and it seemed to him as if God was allowing his covenant people to get away with ongoing sin. In a previous article I noted for us that the question that's often posed by non-Christians in the 21st century is: "If there really is a God, why is there so much evil in the world?" But the better analogy from Habakkuk to our day is the disobedience that takes place in the lives of God's people. Many Christians live their lives as if they're not much different from the world. In addition to this, local churches have—in many cases—lost their way and rather than faithful preaching of the gospel for salvation and growth in holiness, many pastors spend their entire waking moments trying to figure out how to get more people to come to their church. Marketing strategies and entertainment rather than faithfulness to scripture can often be the order of the Lord's Day. Even now, faithful Christians pray, "Why does God seem to allow disobedience in the lives of Christians and in the local church to go unpunished? Why does the church seem to make little, if any, difference in the world? Has God forsaken us?" God is faithful to answer our prayers but sometimes his answer may surprise us.

A few years ago I read an extended account of the war that was raging across many parts of the Middle East. There were pictures of cities in ruins and stories of people who had lost everything—even many of their family members. One Christian man who was only identified as 'Brother John' had this to say: "We prayed for revival for years, but revival didn't come as we imagined. Revival came through war." Mission agencies report that people in that area of the world are coming to faith in Jesus Christ in great numbers. It often happens that people look to God when their resources are exhausted and there's seemingly no place left to turn.

Going back to Habakkuk, as we've already seen, God has promised that the punishment for his disobedient people will come from pagans in the land of Babylon. Still, there is great hope and comfort in the knowledge that God loves his people too much to allow them to go indefinitely in patterns of unrepentant sin. God disciplines his people not out of anger—like a frustrated parent with a rebellious child—but always out of his perfect love. As I've already noted, Jeremiah prophesied at the same time as Habakkuk and he gives us more details of God's ultimate plan. In Jeremiah 29:10 we find that, although the people of Judah will be carried off to a foreign land, they'll be brought back after 70 years. "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for your well-being and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope." (vs. 11)

As we look further at God's plan beyond the prophecy that the children of Judah will eventually come back to their land, Jeremiah gives a prophecy of a time of security and peace such as they've never known and this coincides with the One who's coming who will rule in righteousness. "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the

land. In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell securely. And this is the name by which it will be called: The LORD is our righteousness.” (Jer. 33:14-16) We know this to be a prophecy of the coming of Jesus Christ. He, himself, will bring ultimate peace and security for his people.

As God’s people live in this world may we not take God’s goodness for granted; may we look to his Word for instruction on how to be faithful in our personal lives, our families and in our local churches; may we not presume to decide that we don’t like the way that God chooses to answer our prayers; may we continue to seek, by grace, to look to Jesus Christ. In Christ, God’s people receive the promise of “A Future and a Hope.”

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