

Thinking Biblically, Part 3: Lessons from Lamentations and Habakkuk

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God may shake our physical and financial foundations to remind His children that He's the solid Rock who never moves irrespective of seemingly seismic upheavals. Often the prophets not only taught this truth, they themselves lived by it. Two cases in point are Jeremiah and Habakkuk. Both prophesied and experienced the catastrophic devastation of the Southern Kingdom including the destruction of Jerusalem and the dazzling temple built by Solomon.

So, for example, when Jeremiah wrote, "Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD and whose trust is the LORD" (Jer 17:7), or when Habakkuk wrote "the righteous [i.e. the person whom God has pronounced 'not guilty'] shall live by faith/faithfulness" (Hab 2:4), they would shortly be presented with the challenge to personally document those truths in space, time and history.

Concerning Jeremiah, listen first to Lamentations 3:1, 18 (NAS):

1 I am the man who has seen affliction
Because of the rod of His wrath.

¹⁸ So I say, "My strength has perished,
And *so has* my hope from the LORD."

Now continue with him into the depths of his lament in Lamentations 3:19-20 (CSB):

¹⁹ Remember^[a] my affliction and my homelessness,
the wormwood and the poison.
²⁰ I continually remember them
and have become depressed.

Finally, according to the prophet's counter-intuitive faith, similarly be lifted up with him in Lamentations 3:21-33 (NAS):

²¹ This I recall to my mind,
Therefore I have hope.
²² The LORD's lovingkindnesses ^[a]indeed never cease,
For His compassions never fail.
²³ *They* are new every morning;
Great is Your faithfulness.
²⁴ "The LORD is my portion," says my soul,
"Therefore I have hope in Him."
²⁵ The LORD is good to those who wait for Him,

To the ^[b]person who seeks Him.
²⁶ *It is good that he waits silently*
For the salvation of the LORD.
²⁷ *It is good for a man that he should bear*
The yoke in his youth.
²⁸ Let him sit alone and be silent
Since He has laid *it* on him.
²⁹ Let him ^[c]put his mouth in the dust,
Perhaps there is hope.
³⁰ Let him give his cheek to ^[d]the smiter,
Let him be filled with reproach.
³¹ For the Lord will not reject forever,
³² For if He causes grief,
Then He will have compassion
According to His abundant lovingkindness.
³³ For He does not afflict ^[e]willingly
Or grieve the sons of men.

In reference to Habakkuk, the LORD-God had informed him that the divine judgments that were being revealed to him would actually come to pass in his days (Hab 1:5). After the prophet's continued bold protestations (1:12-2:1) followed by more details pertaining to the imminent arrival of those divine judgments including especially those "woe" oracles of 2:6-20 and capstoned by the awesome, knee-shaking Theophany of chapter 3, the prophet's own "faith/faithfulness" was kindled. Pay careful attention to Habakkuk's personal testimony at the end of the book (Hab 3:16-19, NAS):

¹⁶ I heard and my ^[a]inward parts trembled,
At the sound my lips quivered.
Decay enters my bones,
And in my place I tremble.
Because I must wait quietly for the day of distress,
^[b]For the people to arise *who* will invade us.
¹⁷ Though the fig tree should not blossom
And there be no ^[c]fruit on the vines,
Though the yield of the olive should fail
And the fields produce no food,
Though the flock should be cut off from the fold
And there be no cattle in the stalls,
¹⁸ Yet I will exult in the LORD,
I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.
¹⁹ The Lord ^[d]GOD is my strength,
And He has made my feet like hinds' *feet*,
And makes me walk on my high places.

For the choir director, on my stringed instruments.

Before we make jot-and-tittle comparisons between their experiences and our current situation, we need to understand that although there are some basic continuities, there are some significant discontinuities. Consider the interruption of corporate temple worship in Jeremiah's case. The majority of his countrymen had already been taken into captivity in Babylon, and it would be 70 years before only a trickle of them would return to the land and construct a temple that for many old timers was hardly a shadow of the pre-exilic one.

What about Habakkuk? Was it challenging for him to get out, go to the store and find many empty shelves? Hardly. For him and the remnant with him the basic items for their physical survival were wiped out! Chapter 3, verse 17, lists the essential needs for life at that time, not the extras. I say this not to minimize the crisis we find ourselves in today, but to demonstrate that even in and throughout tests of greater magnitude God takes care of His remnant.

On our end it demands an unwavering trust (Jer 17:7) that breeds hope in Him (Lam 3:24), that faith that proves to be faithful under the pressure of testings (Hab 2:4).