

Through the Bible

HABAKKUK

Zac Poonen



Illustrations by Vinay Kuruville

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CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP CHURCH

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HABAKKUK



HABAKKUK SPOKE ABOUT THE **CONFLICT OF FAITH** AND THE **TRIUMPH OF FAITH**. THIS IS THE STORY OF A MAN WHO HAD QUESTIONS BUT WHO MADE THE **JOURNEY FROM DOUBT TO CERTAINTY**. HABAKKUK HAD TWO QUESTIONS THAT HE ASKED GOD. AND GOD GAVE HIM THE ANSWERS. **EVEN A MAN OF GOD CAN HAVE DOUBTS AND QUESTIONS. THERE IS NOTHING WRONG WITH ASKING GOD QUESTIONS.**



IF LITTLE **CHILDREN**, AS THEY **GROW UP**, DO NOT ASK THEIR **PARENTS** ANY QUESTIONS, THAT IS A **BAD SIGN**. A **GOOD FATHER** WILL ALWAYS **ENCOURAGE** HIS **CHILDREN** TO ASK QUESTIONS. NO FATHER IS EVER UPSET IF HIS LITTLE CHILD ASKS HIM QUESTIONS. **GOD IS NOT UPSET EITHER IF YOU ASK HIM QUESTIONS.**



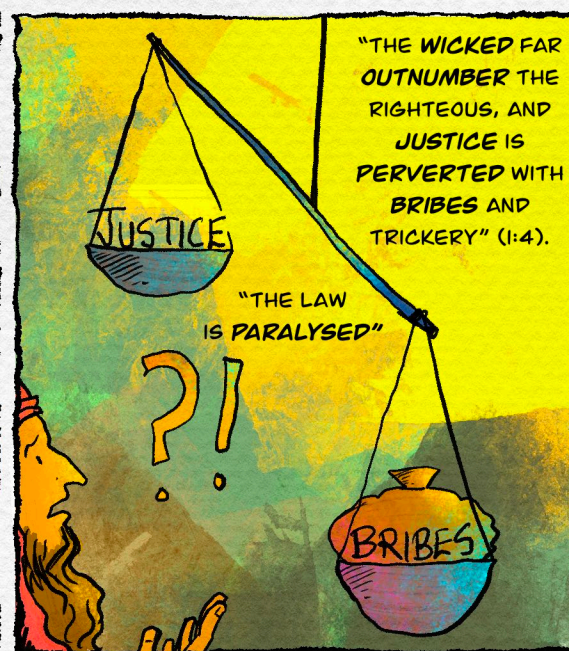
WHEN YOU HAVE A QUESTION DON'T GO TO PEOPLE OF YOUR **OWN LEVEL OF MATURITY**. THEY WILL ONLY **CONFUSE** YOU -- AND YOUR **QUESTIONS** MAY **CONFUSE THEM** TOO. THEY MAY NOT HAVE HAD ANY DOUBTS UNTIL YOU ASKED THEM THOSE QUESTIONS. AND NOW YOU HAVE PUT SOME **DOUBT** INTO **THEIR MINDS**! GO TO **GOD** INSTEAD.

THE FIRST QUESTION HABAKKUK HAD WAS A QUESTION THAT ALL OF US HAVE: **WHY DO WICKED PEOPLE PROSPER?** THIS WAS THE QUESTION THAT **ASAPH** HAD (PSALM 73). **JEREMIAH** ALSO HAD THE SAME QUESTION. HABAKKUK, LIKE **ASAPH** AND **JEREMIAH**, WENT INTO **GOD'S PRESENCE** AND GOT AN ANSWER. WHEN YOU HAVE A QUESTION, YOU CAN CERTAINLY ASK A **GODLY BROTHER**. BUT HABAKKUK WENT TO **GOD**, BECAUSE THERE WEREN'T ANY **GODLY BROTHERS** LIVING NEAR HIM AT THAT TIME.





HABAKKUK'S CRY WAS, "HOW LONG, O LORD, MUST I CALL FOR HELP? YOU **DON'T SEEM** TO LISTEN! I AM YOUR **SERVANT**. LOOK AT WHAT THESE **UNGODLY** PEOPLE ARE DOING TO ME. AND YOU ARE NOT DOING ANYTHING TO **SAVE** ME." (1:2). FOR 2000 YEARS MANY GODLY CHRISTIANS HAVE FELT LIKE THAT. "LORD, WHY DO THESE **GODLESS** PEOPLE **PROSPER**? WHY DO YOU ALLOW THEM TO **HARASS** YOUR PEOPLE? WHEREVER I LOOK THERE IS **MISERY** AND **DESTRUCTION** AND **VIOLENCE**, AND I AM **SURROUNDED** WITH PEOPLE WHO LOVE TO **ARGUE** AND **FIGHT**" (1:3).

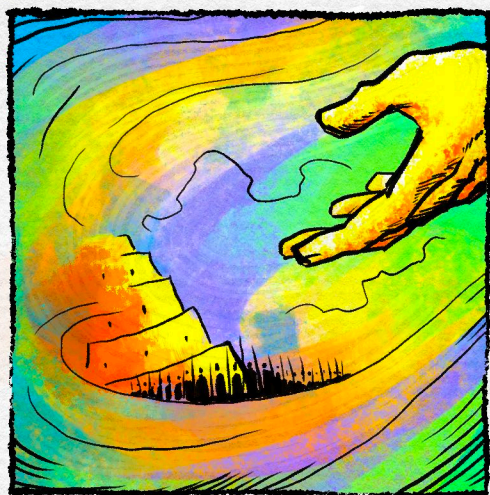


HABAKKUK LOOKED AT **JUDAH** AND SAID THIS 2600 YEARS AGO, BUT IT IS SO RELEVANT **TODAY**! IF YOU ARE A **CHRISTIAN WITNESSING** FOR THE LORD, YOU MAY FIND IN MANY PARTS OF THE WORLD, THAT THE **LAW** HAS BECOME **PARALYSED** AND THAT YOU GET **NO JUSTICE** IN THE **COURTS** OF YOUR LAND.



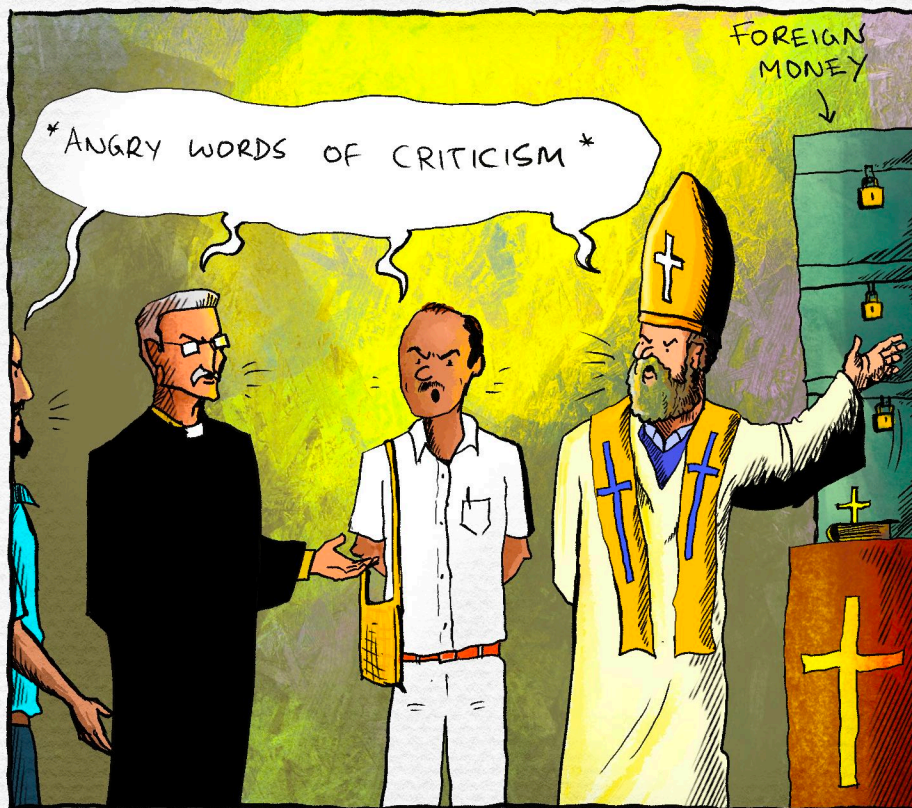
THE LORD **DIDN'T** ANSWER HABAKKUK'S QUESTION DIRECTLY. THIS IS BECAUSE **GOD'S WISDOM** IS FAR **SUPERIOR** TO OURS. GOD'S REPLY TO HABAKKUK WAS, "LOOK AT THE NATIONS AND BE **AMAZED**, FOR I AM GOING TO DO SOMETHING IN YOUR DAY WHICH YOU **WON'T** EVEN **BELIEVE** IF SOMEONE TOLD YOU ABOUT IT, BECAUSE IT HAS **NEVER** HAPPENED LIKE THAT BEFORE FOR **JUDAH**" (1:5). **ISRAEL** HAD GONE INTO **CAPTIVITY**, BUT **JUDAH** HAD **NEVER** EXPERIENCED THAT.

SOME PEOPLE **MISQUOTE** THIS VERSE AS THOUGH IT WERE A **PROMISE** OF SOME **GREAT MIRACLE** THAT GOD WOULD DO. BUT WHAT THE LORD WAS ACTUALLY SAYING WAS THAT HE WAS GOING TO RAISE UP AN **EVIL NATION** TO **ENSLAVE** HIS PEOPLE.

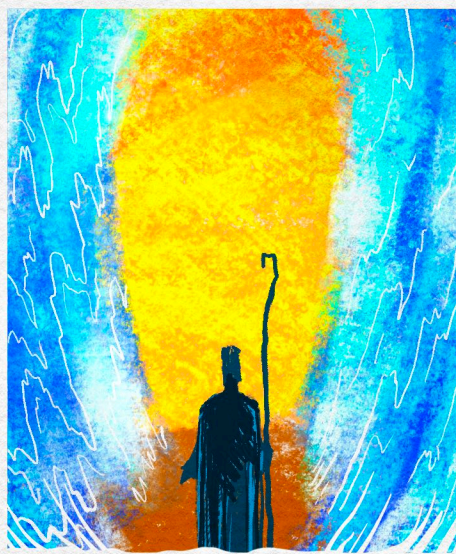


IT WOULD BE **DIFFICULT** FOR THEM TO BELIEVE THAT THEIR GOD WOULD EVER DO SUCH A THING. BUT GOD WAS SAYING, "I AM **RAISING UP** **BABYLON** TO BE THE NEW **SUPER-POWER** IN THE WORLD. THEY WILL NOT RISE UP BY ACCIDENT. I AM IN **CONTROL** OF THE WORLD AND I AM RAISING THEM UP." THE IDEA THAT MANY CHRISTIANS HAVE OF GOD IS THAT OF A "**GRANDFATHER**" WHO SITS IN HEAVEN ALWAYS GIVING US **GIFTS** THAT WILL MAKE US **HAPPY**. THAT IS A TOTALLY **WRONG** CONCEPT OF GOD. MOST CHRISTIANS DON'T HAVE A PROPER UNDERSTANDING OF GOD'S **HOLINESS**. THAT IS WHY THEY CANNOT BELIEVE THAT GOD WOULD USE **NON-CHRISTIANS** TO **DISCIPLINE** HIS CHILDREN.





FOR EXAMPLE, IF IN A COUNTRY WHERE ELECTIONS ARE TO BE HELD, THE **CHRISTIANS ARE FIGHTING** WITH EACH OTHER, AND **CRITICISING** EACH OTHER, WITH EACH DENOMINATION IMAGINING THAT THEY **ALONE ARE GOD'S CHOSEN** PEOPLE, WHAT **SORT OF POLITICAL** PARTY WOULD GOD **ALLOW TO WIN** THE ELECTIONS? THE CHRISTIANS MAY ALL PRAY, "LORD, GIVE US A GOVERNMENT THAT GIVES US FREEDOM TO PREACH THE **GOSPEL** AND ALLOWS US TO **RECEIVE MONEY** FROM **AMERICA** FREELY." BUT GOD MAY SEE THAT AMERICAN MONEY IS **HINDERING** THE TESTIMONY OF HIS CHILDREN IN THAT LAND AND MAY ALLOW A PARTY TO WIN THE ELECTIONS THAT **STOPS ALL FOREIGN MONEY** AND **PERSECUTES CHRISTIANS**. THEN THE CHRISTIANS WHO WERE **CRITICISING** EACH OTHER WILL **STOP** DOING THAT. THEY WILL BECOME A LITTLE MORE **UNITED** WITH EACH OTHER.

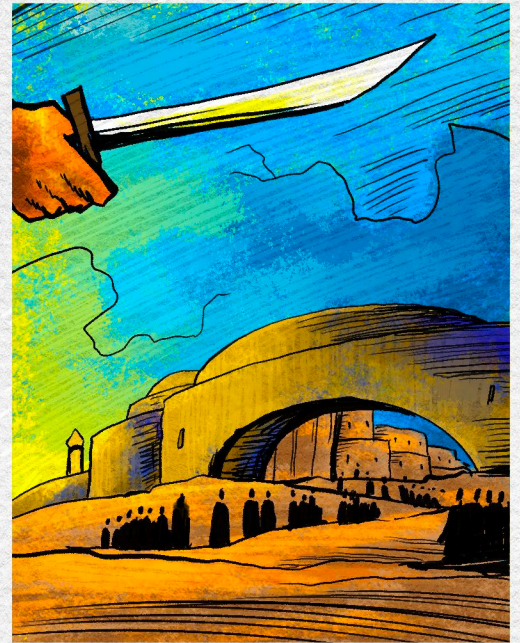


SO HERE THE LORD SAYS, "I AM RAISING THE BABYLONIANS UP." IT WAS **GOD** WHO RAISED THEM UP LIKE HE RAISED **PHARAOH** (ROM 9:17). WHEN **PHARAOH** REBELLED AGAINST **GOD**, **GOD CRUSHED** HIM AND THUS MANIFESTED HIS **MIGHTY** POWER. AT THE SAME TIME **GOD** RAISED UP **MOSES** IN THE **SAME** GENERATION TO MANIFEST HIS POWER IN HIM IN QUITE ANOTHER WAY. IF YOU **COOPERATE** WITH **GOD**, HE WILL USE YOU TO MANIFEST HIS POWER **THROUGH** YOU. SO IT IS BEST TO **HUMBLE OURSELVES** BEFORE **GOD**, SO THAT HE CAN MAKE US A **GOOD** EXAMPLE RATHER THAN A **BAD** ONE.

HABAKKUK SAID TO THE LORD, "YOU **HAVEN'T** ANSWERED MY QUESTION. YOU HAVE JUST SAID THAT THE **WICKED** ARE GOING TO PROSPER." BUT **GOD DID** ANSWER HIS QUESTION. HE SAID, "I AM **FULLY** IN **CONTROL**, AND I AM ACCOMPLISHING MY **PURPOSE** THROUGH **BABYLON**, EVEN IF YOU CAN'T **SEE** IT **FULLY**."



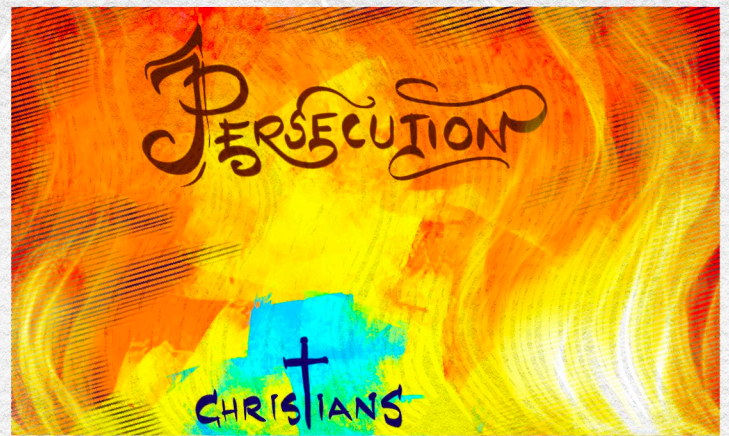
THE **BABYLONIANS** WERE "A **CRUEL** AND VIOLENT NATION, **NOTORIOUS** FOR **CRUELTY** AND MORE **FIERCE** THAN WOLVES" (VERSES 6--9). THEY ADVANCED LIKE THE WIND **SCORNING** THE **DEFENCES** OF MANY **NATIONS**. YET THEY WERE DEEPLY **GUILTY** BEFORE **GOD**, BECAUSE "THEY HAD **MADE THEIR STRENGTH** THEIR **GOD**" (VERSE 11).



NOTICE THE **RESULT** OF JUDAH BEING TAKEN TO BABYLON FOR 70 YEARS. FROM THE TIME OF THE JUDGES (1300 B.C.) TO THE TIME OF THE BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY (600 B.C.), ISRAEL WORSHIPPED **IDOLS** FREQUENTLY. EVEN DURING **DAVID'S** TIME MANY WERE WORSHIPPING THE **BRONZE SERPENT** (2 KINGS 18:4). IDOL WORSHIP WAS GOING ON **CONTINUOUSLY** IN ISRAEL FOR ALMOST **700 YEARS**. THEN GOD SENT THEM TO **BABYLON** FOR 70 YEARS. WHEN THE JEWS RETURNED, THEY **NEVER AGAIN** WORSHIPPED IDOLS (FOR THE LAST 2500 YEARS). GOD SOLVED THAT PROBLEM **PERMANENTLY** THROUGH THE **CAPTIVITY**.



GOD CAN SOMETIMES TEACH ONE FINAL LESSON LIKE THAT TO A PERSON AND **CHANGE HIM FOREVER**. HE BROKE **JACOB** WITH A **ONCE-AND-FOR-ALL BREAKING AT PENIEL** -- AND JACOB WAS A DIFFERENT MAN EVER AFTER. SOMETIMES GOD HAS TO USE **STRONG-ARM METHODS** TO TEACH US A **PERMANENT LESSON**. WE MAY NOT ALWAYS UNDERSTAND WHY GOD ALLOWS CERTAIN THINGS IN OUR LIVES. IT IS ENOUGH TO KNOW THAT **GOD IS IN CONTROL**.



GOD, "THE BLESSED **CONTROLLER** OF ALL THINGS" HAS USED PEOPLE WHO **HATE CHRISTIANS** TO FULFIL HIS PURPOSES -- IN ANCIENT **ROME** AND IN MODERN **COMMUNIST COUNTRIES**. SOME OF THE **FINEST CHRISTIANS** IN THE WORLD CAME FORTH FROM THOSE COUNTRIES -- **FAR BETTER CHRISTIANS** THAN THE **MONEY-LOVING, COMFORT-LOVING CHRISTIANS** LIVING IN COUNTRIES **WITHOUT PERSECUTION**. THROUGH THE **FIRES OF PERSECUTION**, CHRISTIANS GOT **PURIFIED**.

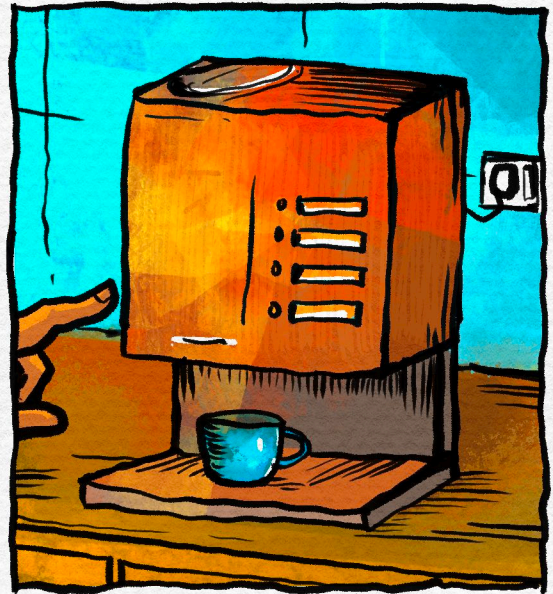


THEN HABAKKUK QUESTIONS THE LORD LIKE A LAWYER IN COURT: "O GOD, YOU HAVE DECREED THE RISE OF THESE CHALDEANS (BABYLON) TO **CHASTEN** AND **CORRECT** US. WE ARE **WICKED**, BUT THEY **FAR MORE!** 'THESE ARE THE GODS WHO MAKE US RICH,' THEY'LL SAY. WILL YOU LET THEM GET AWAY WITH THIS FOREVER?" (1:12--17). HE TELLS THE LORD THAT THE **BABYLONIANS** WILL **WORSHIP THEIR OWN ABILITIES**, IF THEY **SUCCEED** IN CAPTURING JUDAH.





HE DECIDED TO CLIMB INTO HIS WATCHTOWER AND **WAIT** AND SEE WHAT THE LORD WOULD REPLY TO HIS **COMPLAINT** (2:1). THE LORD'S REPLY WAS: "WRITE MY ANSWER IN LARGE CLEAR LETTERS ON A **TABLET**, SO THAT EVERYONE CAN SEE IT AND TELL EVERYBODY ELSE: THE THINGS I PLAN WILL **NOT** HAPPEN RIGHT AWAY. **SLOWLY, STEADILY, SURELY** THE TIME **APPROACHES** WHEN THE **VISION** WILL BE **FULFILLED**." THE LORD URGED HABAKKUK TO BE PATIENT. GOD WAS **NOT** IN A **HURRY** TO JUDGE EVIL.



BUT GOD SAYS WE HAVE TO BE **PATIENT**. **CHARACTER CANNOT BE FORMED IN AN INSTANT**. IT TAKES A **LONG PERIOD** OF TIME, **SUFFERING**, AND **TRIALS** FOR CHARACTER TO BE FORMED. "TRIBULATION WORKS **PATIENCE** AND **PATIENCE PRODUCES CHARACTER**" (ROMANS 5:3, 4). SO THE FIRST THING GOD TOLD HABAKKUK WAS TO BE **PATIENT**.

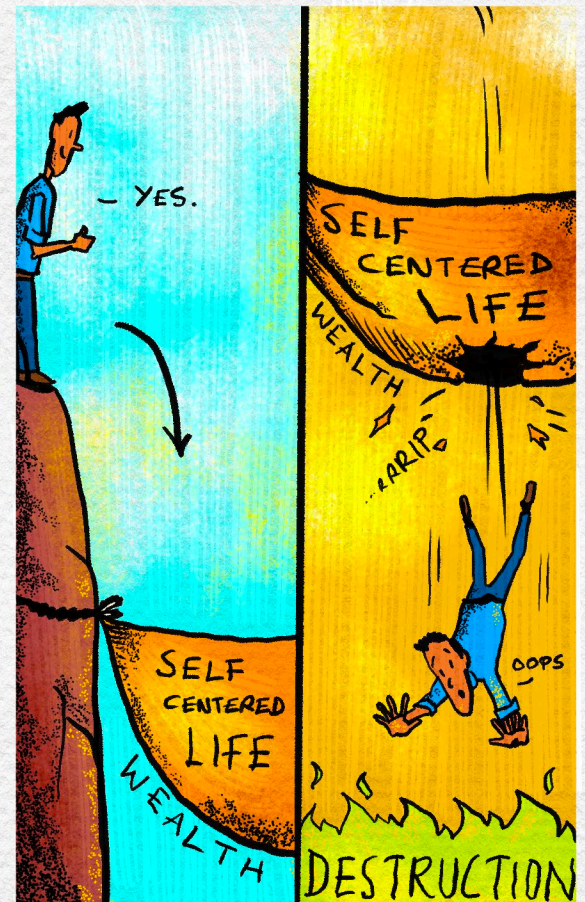
WE WANT **GOD** TO WORK ON OUR BEHALF **IMMEDIATELY**. **PRAYER** FOR US IS LIKE PRESSING A **BUTTON** AND WE WANT AN **INSTANT MIRACLE** -- JUST LIKE WE MAKE **INSTANT COFFEE!!** WE SEEK FOR **INSTANT SALVATION**, **INSTANT BAPTISM** IN THE **HOLY SPIRIT**, **INSTANT MIRACLES**.



THE SECOND THING HE TOLD HIM WAS TO **LIVE BY FAITH** (2:4). **PATIENCE AND FAITH GO TOGETHER** (HEBREWS 6:12, 15). THIS VERSE ("THE RIGHTEOUS SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.") IS QUOTED **THRICE** IN THE NEW TESTAMENT -- IN ROMANS 1:17; GALATIANS 3:11; AND HEBREWS 10:38. "LOOK AT THE **PROUD**! THEY TRUST IN THEMSELVES, AND THEIR LIVES ARE **CROOKED**; BUT THE RIGHTEOUS WILL LIVE BY THEIR **FAITH**" (2:4). ACCORDING TO THIS VERSE, THERE ARE ONLY TWO CATEGORIES OF PEOPLE IN THE WORLD -- THE **PROUD** WHO ARE **CROOKED** AND THE **RIGHTEOUS** WHO LIVE BY **FAITH**. SO THE **OPPOSITE OF FAITH** IS NOT JUST UNBELIEF, BUT **PRIDE** AS WELL. A MAN OF **FAITH** WILL ALWAYS BE **HUMBLE**. WE ALSO SEE IN THIS VERSE THAT A **PROUD** PERSON IS **CROOKED**. **CROOKEDNESS** ALWAYS GOES WITH **PRIDE** - WHICH **GOD RESISTS**.



THE NEXT THING WE SEE HERE IS THE **TREACHEROUS** NATURE OF **WEALTH** (2:5). **WEALTH** OF ANY SORT -- WHETHER IT BE **WEALTH** OF **MONEY** OR **INTELLIGENCE** OR ANYTHING **EARTHLY** -- IS **TREACHEROUS** IN THAT IT CAN MAKE ITS **OWNER PROUD**. ONE OTHER CHARACTERISTIC OF SUCH PEOPLE IS THAT THEY ARE **NEVER CONTENT**. "THEY ARE **NEVER SATISFIED**. THEY ARE **GREEDY** -- ALWAYS WANTING **MORE**" (2:5). ONE DAY **JUSTICE** WILL CATCH UP WITH SUCH PEOPLE (2:6).



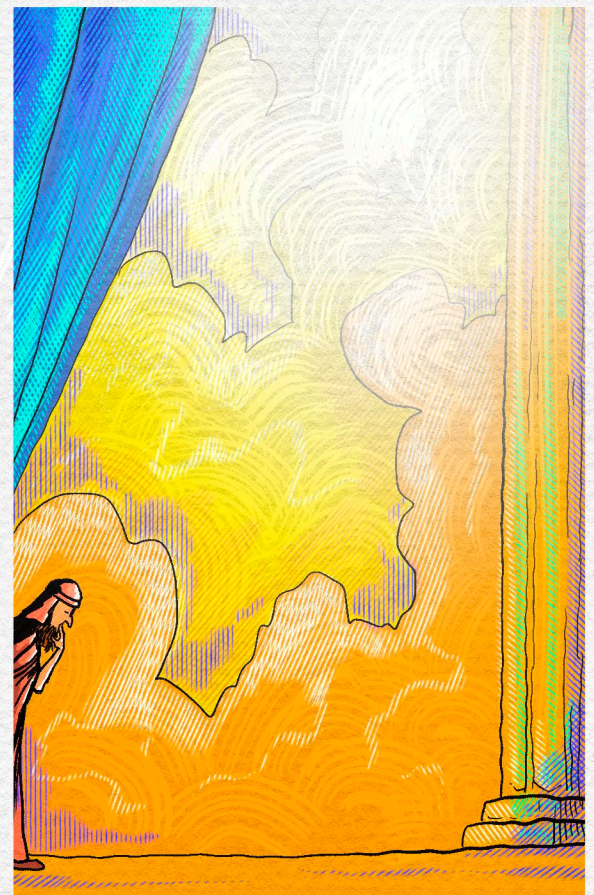
CHAPTER 2:6--19 IS A DESCRIPTION OF HOW A **SELF-CENTRED** LIFE FINALLY **DESTROYS** ITSELF. A **PROUD** PERSON IS **CENTRED** IN **HIMSELF**. HE DOES **NOT** LIVE BY **FAITH**, BUT HAS TOTAL **CONFIDENCE** IN **HIMSELF**. A PERSON WHOSE **SECURITY** IS IN HIS **WEALTH** WILL **ULTIMATELY** DESTROY HIMSELF.



BUT IN THE MIDST OF SUCH **ARROGANT** PEOPLE THE MAN OF **FAITH** BELIEVES THAT, "THE **WHOLE EARTH** WILL (ONE DAY) BE FILLED WITH THE **GLORY** OF THE **LORD** AS THE **WATERS** FILL THE **SEA**" (2:14). HE LOOKS FORWARD TO THAT DAY AND HAS **PATIENCE** TO WAIT FOR IT.



WHEN HABAKKUK **SAW** THE **LORD**, HIS HEART WAS FULL OF **PRAISE**: "THE **LORD** IS IN HIS HOLY TEMPLE, LET ALL THE **EARTH** BE **SILENT**" (2:20). THE CONFLICT OF HIS FAITH ENDED IN THE TRIUMPH OF FAITH. HE SAYS, "LORD, I AM **SILENT** BEFORE YOUR **MAJESTY**. I HAVE NO MORE QUESTIONS." WHEN **JOB** **SAW** THE **GLORY** OF **GOD** HE ALSO SAID, "**NOW** I **SEE** YOU. I PUT MY HAND OVER MY MOUTH" (JOB 42:5; 40:4, 5). **JOB** HAD NO MORE QUESTIONS ONCE HE **SAW** THE **LORD**. **GOD** WILL **NOT** ANSWER ALL YOUR **10,000** QUESTIONS BECAUSE IF HE DID, YOU WILL THEN HAVE **10,000 MORE** QUESTIONS! THE ANSWER (AS IN **JOB'S** CASE AND **HABAKKUK'S** CASE) IS TO SEE THE **LORD** HIMSELF.



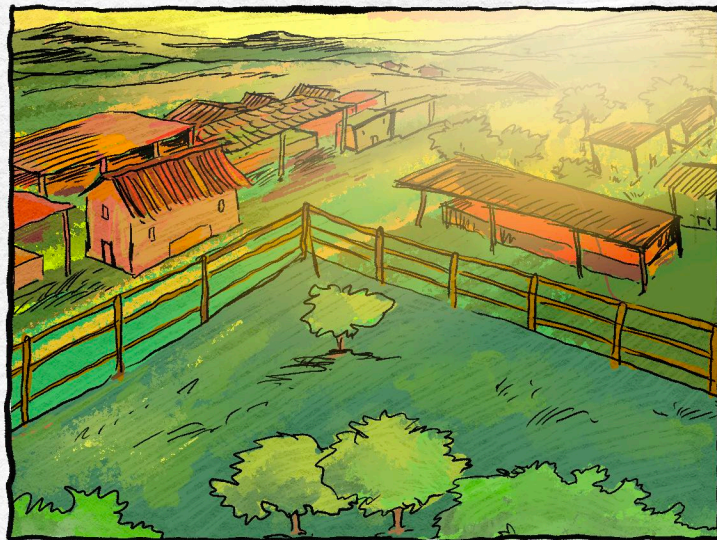
WHEN HABAKKUK SAW **GOD**, HE SAW THE **REWARD** OF LIVING A **LIFE OF FAITH**. A LIFE THAT IS **GOD-CENTRED** IS A **TRIUMPHANT** ONE. HABAKKUK WHO HAD **THOUGHT** THAT GOD WAS DOING **NOTHING** TO **PUNISH** EVIL PEOPLE NOW PRAYS THAT GOD WILL BE **MERCIFUL** IN THE MIDST OF HIS **ANGER** (3:2). HE WHO HAD IMAGINED THAT GOD HAD FORSAKEN HIS PEOPLE NOW SINGS A **SONG OF PRAISE**.

I AM FILLED WITH **AMAZEMENT** AT THE THINGS YOU HAVE DONE. WHEN I SEE **GOD THE HOLY ONE**, HIS **BRILLIANT SPLENDOUR** FILLS THE **HEAVENS**. THE **EARTH** IS FULL OF HIS **PRAISE**. WHAT A **WONDERFUL GOD** HE IS

HABAKKUK NOW SAW **GOD FIRST** AND NOT THE **BABYLONIANS**. THE **PURE IN HEART** WILL SEE **GOD EVERYWHERE** AND **ALL THE TIME** (MATTHEW 5:8).

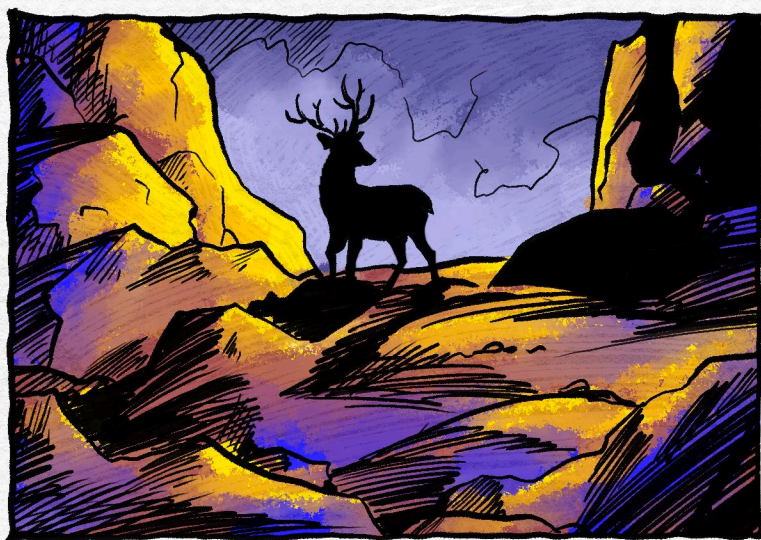


WHEN HABAKKUK **WAITED** AND **LISTENED** TO **GOD**, HIS COMPLAINT WAS TURNED INTO A **SONG**. THE SAME WILL BE TRUE OF US. THE **HARDEST** WORK OF ALL IS TO **WAIT**.



HABAKKUK'S WONDERFUL SONG OF PRAISE IS ONE OF THE MOST BEAUTIFUL SONGS OF **FAITH** IN THE ENTIRE OLD TESTAMENT. HE SINGS HERE LIKE A **NEW-COVENANT SAINT**: "EVEN **THOUGH** THE **FIG TREES** HAVE **NO BLOSSOMS**, AND THERE ARE **NO GRAPES** ON THE **VINE**; EVEN **THOUGH** THE **OLIVE CROP** FAILS, AND THE **FIELDS** LIE **EMPTY** AND **BARREN**; EVEN **THOUGH** THE **FLOCKS** DIE IN THE **FIELDS**, AND THE **CATTLE BARN**S ARE **EMPTY** -- YET I WILL **REJOICE** IN THE **LORD**! I WILL BE **JOYFUL** IN THE **GOD** OF MY **SALVATION**" (3:17, 18).

LIKE **JOB**, HIS **BUSINESS** MAY BE **RUINED** AND HE MAY HAVE LOST **EVERYTHING**. BUT HE WILL **STILL** REJOICE BECAUSE HIS **JOY** IS FOUND IN THE **LORD** AND **NOT** IN ANYTHING ON **EARTH**. EVEN IF EVERYTHING AROUND US FAILS, WE WILL **STILL** **REJOICE** IN THE **GOD** OF OUR **SALVATION**. SONG OF **PRAISE** IS THE **OUTWARD** EXPRESSION OF THE **INNER TRIUMPH** OF FAITH. "THEY **BELIEVED** HIS WORDS -- AND **SANG** HIS PRAISE" (PSALM 106:12).



HABAKKUK GOES ON TO SAY, "THE **SOVEREIGN LORD** IS MY **STRENGTH**! HE WILL MAKE ME AS **SUREFOOTED** AS A **DEER** AND BRING ME **SAFELY** OVER THE **MOUNTAINS**" (3:19). THIS PROPHET WHO HAD SO MANY **DOUBTS** AND **FEARS** AT THE **BEGINNING** NOW SAYS THAT THE **LORD** WILL TAKE HIM **SAFELY** OVER EVERY MOUNTAIN OF **DOUBT** AND MAKE HIM AS **SURE-FOOTED** ON THOSE MOUNTAINS AS THE **DEER** THAT **DON'T LOSE** THEIR **FOOTING** ON THE **ROCKY CRAGS**.

HABAKKUK ADDS AN INTERESTING LITTLE NOTE AT THE END: "(FOR THE CHOIR DIRECTOR: THIS PRAYER MUST BE ACCOMPANIED BY **STRINGED INSTRUMENTS**)" (3:19).



IT MUST BE SET TO **JOYFUL** MUSIC. JESUS IS **VICTOR**, NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS IN THIS UNIVERSE. LET US THERE-FORE USE OUR **VOICES** AND **ALL** THE **MUSICAL** INSTRUMENTS GOD HAS GIVEN US, TO **PRAISE** HIM AND EXALT HIS NAME. AMEN.