

PRAYERS OF THE PROPHETS.

The covenant of prayer: 2 Chron. 6+7

Solomon outlines his requested terms of the covenant of prayer in the 'House of God'.
2 Chron. 6 concerning enemies coming against Israel

- (1) 2 Chron.6:24f.
- (2) 2 Chron.6:34

God accepts the 'House/Temple' built by Solomon. 2Chron.7:1ff see also 7:16

The Lord God confirms the terms of the covenant with Solomon. 2 Chron.7:12-22

King Hezekiah renews the covenant with God and restores the temple. 2 Chron.29:10ff

The priests and levites praise God. 2 Chron.29:30.

Hezekiah and the people bowed down and worshipped God. 2 Chron.29:29

King Hezekiah pleads with the prophet Isaiah to pray to God for the nation under siege.
2 Kings 19:1-4.

Those entrusted with the welfare of the people of God, servants of the nation: Prophets,
Priests and Kings.

From the account of the reign of King Hezekiah:

- Prophet Isaiah prays, 2Chron.32:20, 2Kings 20:11
- Priests prayers and praise, 2Chron.30:27, 29:30, 31:2b.
- King Hezekiah prays, 2Chron 30:18b-20, 2Chron32:20,24.
- 2Kings19:14-19, 20:1-3 / Isa.37:14-20, Isa.38:1-6.

HABAKKUK

1. The Prophets Pain.
2. God's Unexpected Providence.
3. The perplexed Prophet.
4. All things Possible. (The just shall live by faith)
5. How to Pray. - Poems of Prayer & Praise.

STUDY ONE

PRAYERS OF THE PROPHETS from ISAIAH

The Prayers of Hezekiah King of Judah. Isa 37 + 38

The occasion:

Looking back to chapter 36 – Sennacherib King of Assyria, began to overrun Judah and eventually came to Jerusalem. He sends his field commander with a message for Hezekiah. This message was given to Eliakim the palace administrator, Shebna the secretary and Joah the recorder.

The, tone of the message was You had better **surrender for** your allies such as Egypt are of little account against my might and cannot be trusted. As for your **god, its no** use depending on him, look at what has happened to the other kings, their gods didn't protect them. † He also used cunning in saying it was the Lord himself who told him to march against this country. Was there any truth in this?

Hezekiah's servants ask the field commander to speak Aramaic so as to not upset any who may be on the wall listening to their conversation. This request only serves to encourage the Assyrian to shout to those looking on trying to persuade them to rebel against Hezekiah.

On hearing the Egyptians are on the march, Sennacarib decides to speed up events with King Hezekiah. He sends him a personal note telling the King. He has no hope, not even from his god, so he had better surrender and save unnecessary bloodshed.

THE PRAYERS:

A Prayer for Jerusalem and its Inhabitants.

On receiving the note Hezekiah spreads it out before the Lord God. Now listen to his prayer.

(A)

see the form of address in 37:16

(a) O Lord Almighty

(b) God of Israel

(c) enthroned between the cherubim

(d) one and only God over all the kingdoms of the earth.

(e) maker of heaven and earth

(B)

- (a) open your ears and hear
- (b) open your eyes and see
- (c) what Sennacharib has said and written

(C) Acknowledgement of the Assyrians victories but only over gods of wood and stone.

(D)

- (a) v20 a personal plea for deliverance for himself and his people
- (b) thereby witnessing to all kingdoms that He alone is truly God.

God answers the prayer through the prophet Isaiah. v21-35.

Then v36f God takes action against the Assyrians.

chapter 38: A personal prayer of Hezekiah during his illness.

Hezekiah is taken ill and Isaiah tells him he is about to die.

Some questions: Did Isaiah have it right? Was he speaking as a prophet or as a priest - "as you are about to die get your house in order - get right with God"? Does prayer over-rule prophecy? Cause God to change His (see Jonah 3) mind?

Let us look at the succinct text of the prayer in vs2+3 then the expansion of its outworking in the life of Hezekiah in his writing after his recovery vs 9-20.

STUDY TWO

HABAKKUK

Part 1. THE PROPHETS PAIN.

All history is Kingdom History

The problem of history:

There are two main problems facing people of faith (a) science, (b) history. The great advance in science in the latter half of the 19th century and into the 20th century causes concern for many who think there is a conflict between the God of the Bible and new scientific knowledge, but when scientific theories become fact they substantiate a powerful force, (God) [the mind behind the universe] beyond the rationale and ability of man.

Yet the problem of history can also cause anxiety for some.

The main reason it would seem is that there are those who use the Bible in a narrow sense, as being exclusively a textbook of personal salvation.- The sole theme being mans personal relationship to God. It is a central theme, but not the only one. Ultimately the MAIN message of the Bible concerns the condition of the entire world and it's destiny; and you and I as individuals part of that larger whole. Starting with creation not man, we have to read the Bible with this view to understand what is happening today in the world around us.

In the book of Habakkuk the prophet treats the problem of history as the personal perplexity of one man - himself. The prophet as greatly troubled by the fact that Israel had backslidden and turned away from God, no wonder he exclaims

“O Lord how long must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you of violence, but you will not save?”

Therefore the law is slack, and justice never prevails. The wicked hem in the righteous, so that justice is perverted.”

Serious religious falling away had been followed by general moral and political decline. Those in authority and entrusted with government were slack and indolent. They did not apply the law equitably and honestly. It was a real problem. He could not understand why God allowed it all. He had been praying but God did not answer.

“O Lord how long must I cry and you will not hear? Crying out to you of violence but you do not save?”

But this was only the beginning of his troubles - for when God did answer it was to say something most unexpected. “I am going to work a work in your days that you would not’ believe I am raising up the Babylonians (Chaldeans) who will march through the land and possess it.”

At this point let us look at 2 statements: (1) Gods ways are often mysterious (until there reason is revealed) (2) Gods ways are often misunderstood.

Gods ways are mysterious.

(a) **His inaction.** When we study Gods actions He may seem to be strangely silent. Why is it that God permits certain things to happen? “How long shall I cry and you wontlisten?” We pray for the Church, a friend, relatives, why is God so silent?

(b) **His unexpected answers.** This is what startled Habakkuk. He had worked out the-way God should answer his prayers ‘chastise the people, then send revival’. We all tend at times to prescribe answers to our prayers. Scripture teaches us that God sometimes answers our prayers by allowing things to become much worse before they get better.

(c) **His unusual instrument.** *The Chaldeans*, unthinkable God would not permit such a terrible people to harm His own nation. The importance of this lies in the fact that if we do not view these things in the right way our prayers will be wrongly conceived and wrongly directed.

Gods ways are often misunderstood

(a) By In Hab.1:5 God refers to the godless in Israel as those who have become careless and slack. Their attitude was that this prophet was just an alarmist. These thing could never happen. See the New Testament reference to this attitude Acts 13 where Paul quotes Hab.1:5

(b) By the world.... The Chaldeans completely failed to see they were a tool of God and attributed their success to their own powers.

Returning to our point *concerning the* problems of history let us now look at three things to help us. (1) History is under divine control (2) History follows a divine plan and timetable (3) History is bound up with the divine Kingdom.

1. History is under divine control.

“I will raise up the Chaldeans...” God controls all the *nations they* are under His hand. He is Lord of history.

2. History follows a divine plan and timetable.

Things do not just happen. God “sees the end from the beginning” and “When the fulness of time came.....God sent forth His Son.”

3. History is bound up with the divine Kingdom.

The key to the history of the world is the Kingdom of God. In the OT stories of other nations are only relevant as they relate to the destiny of Israel. And ultimately history today is only relevant as it bears on the history of the Christian Church. What really matters in the world is the Kingdom of God.

Some questions can be asked here:

1. How does Habakkuk come to terms with this truth?
2. How do we understand this revelation to us in our own generation or history?
3. What is the relevance of this event to the Kingdom of God?
4. What is God teaching me through this?

We need not be bewildered and doubt the love and justice of God.

STUDY THREE

HABAKKUK Chapter 2

Part 2. God's Unexpected Providence

The prophet was a man of faith. After telling God how perplexed he is concerning the problems facing Israel, he goes on to say "I will stand at my watch and station myself upon the tower and watch to see what He will say to me Habakkuk realizes the one thing to do is to wait upon God.

It is not enough to just pray, to tell God of our problems and just cast our burdens on the Lord. We must **go further** and wait upon the God. This means a detachment from the problem. The prophet gives an illustration of a high placeclimbing out of the valley of despair that we might search the horizon to see God. Once we've taken the problem to God we should turn our backs on it and centre our gaze on God. Habakkuk said "I'm going to the height to look to God and Him alone". (see Phil 4:6-7) Do not be anxious about anything Faith expects an answer - 'I will watch and see' the prophet looked for an answer.

Prophecy:

In considering Salvation History it is important to understand prophecy - for it occupies a large place in the Bible. Unbelief is always critical of prophecy along with miracles. While these two are central to true evangelical faith as to the teaching of scripture. It is God's revelation to man. "Write the vision and make it plain". God revealed to Habakkuk what was going to happen. Sceptics claim the prophets were merely men with special wisdom. The Bible says God took hold of a certain man and gave him a message. God said to Habakkuk 'You have brought your problem to me and I am going to give you an answer, it was a divine revelation.

2Peter 1:20 says “no prophecy of scripture came about by the prophets own interpretation.”

It was not something from the mind of man. The prophet was moved by God.

“Men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Spirit (Holy)”.

So Peter gives encouragement to his readers in their troubled times to look and believe the prophets. Prophecy is certain of fulfillment. “Write the vision make it plain for the (revelation) is yet for an appointed time” it will happen in God’s time. There is a tone of complete finality in all Bible prophecy. It will be exact in fulfillment. “Write down the vision and in the end it will speak and will not prove false”.

An example is found in Gen.15:13-14 then Ex.12:40-41.

So to Habakkuk God has fixed a time “the appointed time”.

STUDY FOUR

HABAKKUK chapter 3

Part 3. The Perplexed Prophet

Chapter 3 of Habakkuk is described as a prayer (v1) but in another sense it is like a psalm and could be put to music and sung as a song of triumph and victory. Prayer is often more than petition including praise, thanksgiving, recollection and adoration. Calling upon history, as here, can be an essential part of prayer. So it is with many prayers in the Bible -reminding God of what He has done in the past and basing petitions upon these facts.

The essential elements in true prayer as we find them here in Habakkuk.

(i) Humiliation.

Note the self humbling of the prophet in vs2. No longer arguing with God or questioning His ways. No protest or request to spare Israel. We find rather a recognition that what God says He will do is perfectly right. An attitude of complete submission to the will of God. Ref. Daniels prayer (Dan 9) What has changed? Habakkuk has taken his eyes off Israel and the Chaldeans and looks only to God. He has returned to the realm of spiritual truth, the holiness of God against sin in man and the world, so he sees things in a new light.

He is now concerned for the glory of God and nothing else. The lesson learned by Habakkuk was that it no longer was a question of nationalism or antagonism to others, nothing else mattered except the holiness of God and sin.

(ii) Adoration.

See Hebrews 12:28-29

Hab 2 - I stand in awe (I was afraid) filled with reverence and Godly fear. Thank God we can come into His presence with boldness through the blood of Christ, but that should never lessen our reverence and Godly fear.

(iii) Petition

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer supplication and thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God Phil 4:6

What is Habakkuk's petition? He does not pray that God will change His plan. In effect he says "Whatever I and my countrymen may have to suffer is of no concern so long as 'Thy work' is revived and purified." His one great plea was that God would revive His work in the midst of **the years**. (AV)

In the midst of the years: while these terrible things take place. Revive: Hebrew - to preserve or keep alive.

Habakkuk's fear was that the 'Church' would be destroyed so he prayed 'preserve it, keep it alive'

Habakkuk's final appeal - 'in wrath remember mercy'. He appeals to the nature of God and not to any good in the people or their past. Wrath: means God's perfect righteousness and justice, so the prophet reminds Him of His own nature and the other aspect of His Holy Being - 'His mercy'. He seems to say temper wrath with mercy. We have nothing to say but to ask that You should act like Yourself, and in the midst of wrath have mercy upon us.

Here we have a model prayer for just such a time as this.

The message here is that until we humble ourselves forgetting other people, and those who are worse than us, until we see ourselves as we are in God's sight, confessing our *sins and* committing ourselves into the Lord's hands, we have no right to look for peace and happiness. Whom the Lord loves He chastens.

Study 5

Habbakuk

Part 4. ALL THINGS POSSIBLE. (The just shall live by faith)

The message we get from Hab.2:4 on is that the Chaldeans are to be used to chastise Israel but they themselves will be punished by God. The details in these verses describe the arrogance and depravity of the Chaldeans, which is confirmed by secular history.

Remember, historical events must be interpreted in the light of God's Kingdom. In our present world situation **proper understanding** of this principle is urgent. If we desire inner peace in spite of world-happenings, the way to do so is to understand this biblical view of history which explains the happenings in the world and its bearings on the church.

The essential thing to know is history is understood only in terms of God's Kingdom - the rule of God in the whole world, including the church. There is nothing new under the sun. (Eccles. 1:9) our problems of the 20th century are not new. History repeats itself. Some times we have a peculiar pride that what is happening in modern times is unique. Not so remember Psalm 73:11ff.

In the message to the Hebrew Christians they appear to be facing persecution. We've believed the gospel, joined the church, left Judaism behind because of Christ's

salvation, and His coming to reign in His kingdom, but He has not come. We are being persecuted and our goods taken, these are hard times we face. How come?

And Peter's readers ask: Where is the promise of His coming? So Peter says: Don't listen to the scoffers it is just what people said before the flood, and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, it is what they have always said, but the Lord is not slack concerning His promises.

Now this is what Habakkuk says: The vision (revelation) is for an appointed time but at the end it will speak and not lie. Though it tarry wait for it because it will surely come.

The two ways of life: Reason or Faith. In our passage 'the righteous will live by faith (or faithfulness) in other words Faith in the faithfulness of God. We find the same statement quoted in the NT. Heb.10:38, Rom.1:17, Gal.3:11.

The truth expressed in these two attitudes to life in this world is faith and unbelief. As in Hebrews 10:35-39, we can withdraw from faith or live by faith. As a man believes so he is. His beliefs determine his conduct. If we turn the words around: 'the man of faith is righteous 'the man drawing back is unrighteous, not in a right standing with God.

This applies to all of life, politics, philosophy, social, etc.

The common denominator is faith or no-faith. What really matters in all of life is whether I accept God's rule or not see Heb.10, 11,12.

The will of man is to choose between these two alternatives. Faith means taking the word of God and acting upon it. Believing what God says, because HE says it. The secret of the OT characters, Heb.11, was they lived as seeing Him who was invisible'.

They preferred as Moses to suffer affliction with the people of God than enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.' This is our position in the world today as -Christians.

The choice is being forced upon us more and more to conform to the ways of the world. Are we foolish enough to bank on this world system and what it offers? What is the controlling principle of our lives? Is it calculation? Is it worldly wisdom, a shrewd balanced view based on history and human knowledge? Or is it the Word of God, warning us that this life and this world are only transient, a passing part of God's plan of creation, merely preparation for the world to come? It does not tell us to turn our backs entirely on the world, but it does insist that we have the right view of the world.' Living in the world but not of it'.

It emphatically states that what really matters is the coming in fulness of God's Kingdom. We must ask ourselves as in the presence of God, the simple question: is my life based on the faith principle? Am I submitting myself to the facts that what I read in the Bible is the truth, the very word of God? And am I willing to stake everything, my life included, upon this fact?

For the righteous will live by faith! For those living by faith are righteous, having through Jesus Christ a right standing with God.

JONAH

1. The Runaway Prophet.
2. The God of Perseverance
3. The Out Of Depth Prayer.
4. Great Revival Power.
5. Merciful God so Patient.

STUDY FIVE

JONAH.

INTRODUCTION: The Runaway Prophet

Many Christian and-Jewish expositors consider this book to be a narrative of actual fact. Whereas others judge it to be an O.T. parable made to convey in pictorial form great spiritual truth

We wont labour the point either way for our study, but just make note of a couple of things for background to the story, especially as-to the message for the early readers of the time.

In 2Kings 14:25 we have revealed to us the fact that there was an actual prophet named Jonah Ben Amittai. If the author is other than the prophet why he fixed on this person to bring his message is not clear but there are those who would suggest a possible reason.

The Ninevehites were known to worship the fish god dagon who was also called Oannes. Now if you put the letter I in front you have Ioaness or otherwise Jonah. The inference being this representative of the God Yahweh is greater than Oannes having broken free or been released by his own God. This fits in with the line of thought that this story depicts the prophetic release of God's people from-captivity. See Jer.51:34-44 where the Babylonian captivity has already' been compared to the swallowing of the nation by a huge sea dragon and the deliverance from exile to being cast out alive. In the latter part of Isaiah we have reference to Israel's mission to be a light to the Gentiles proclaiming the knowledge of Yahweh. They quickly turned aside from this missionary ideal becoming narrow and exclusive. So some commentators suggest that possibly-the book of Jonah is a beautiful powerful protest calling on Israel to accept the mission so appointed to save the Gentiles by the proclamation of the truth.

Could a man survive being swallowed by a whale?

A story has been told of a James Bartly, a sailor on the whaler 'Star of the East', who according to the ships log, fell overboard and was swallowed by a whale.

The entry was dated Feb. 1891 and the map reference revealed the area to be near the Falkland Islands. While chasing a large spurm whale the account claims that two men were lost when one of the small boats collapsed. Later when the whale was captured and killed James Bartly was found alive in its stomach and though unconscious was revived. His only ill effects was some bleaching to the face neck and hands. After a period of rest the sailor resumed his duties.

THE PRAYERS OF JONAH Jonah 2 + 4

Introduction: Jonah was commissioned by God to go to Nineveh.

He tries to run away.

Takes a ship bound for Tarshish.

A violent storm brings the ship into distress.

The sailors confront Jonah and he confesses to being a Hebrew worshipper of the one true creator God.

Jonah realizes he has caused this calamity and pleads with the sailors to throw him overboard.

They cry out to the Lord - instant converts? More likely worshippers of many gods and ready to acknowledge Jehovah at this time when in dire distress if He is the God of all creation.

So overboard goes Jonah, but not to drown for God has provided a large fish to transport him to dry land.

Now while in the belly of the fish we have the first prayer of Jonah.

This **first prayer of** Jonah has been considered by some as an insertion of later date using various Psalms. Regardless of this it has an important part to play in the narrative where Jonah has faced the end of himself, and the right of God to dictate the terms of his life. (v7) When my life was ebbing away I remembered you Lord and my prayer rose to you, to your holy temple. Surely this speaks to us when in similar manner of distress. Of course Jesus gives different instruction to His disciples. He claims that prior prayer (and Fasting) equips one to face the unexpected or difficult situation and provides the faith to trust to God the outcome with assurance and peace. Matt.17:21; Mark 9:29.

STUDY SIX

JONAH. PRAYER No1

Jonah's prayer has four characteristics of true prayer. These characteristics should be in our own prayers particularly when we get into trouble because of disobedience.

The first is HONESTY.

Jonah's prayer is starkly honest. So often we Christians are not so honest in our prayers. Christians ought to be the greatest realists in the world. But they are not, especially when they are disobeying God. or running away from Him.

See what Jonah did. vs 3-6. He not only acknowledged his misery he acknowledged it was God who caused it "You hurled me into the deep". Not circumstances, not the sailors, it was "Your (God's) waves and billows" God had addressed Jonah as judge; summoned him to trial, witnessed against him, cast the verdict of guilty and then sentenced him to death. This was terror almost beyond words. on the other hand there is also a sense in which the acknowledgement of God's presence, even in judgement, is a comfort. For it is better to fall into the Hands of God, even in judgement than to be apart from Him.

See the account of king David in 2Sam.24:10ff. God is a God of judgement but His judgement is tempered with mercy.

Second: PENANCE.

Its an old fashion word but a good one meaning 'self abasement, confession, or mortification, showing sorrow for and repentance of sin.' There are two ways we see this in Jonah. He acknowledged what happened to him was his own fault. (see v8.) When a believer puts anything else in the place of God and thereby turning from Him, he inevitably turns from His mercy. God is not less merciful, but His mercy is rejected., Second Jonah did not ask God for anything. If he had we might have suspected a hidden motive in his repentance. He is genuinely contrite for his disobedience.

Third: THANKSGIVING.

What could Jonah-swallowed by the fish, in the ocean awaiting death, possibly be thankful for? True Jonah had no hope of deliverance from the fish. But he had found grace in the eyes of God again and for this he was profoundly grateful (thankful). He was thankful that God caused him to call on the Name of the Lord. He was thankful for salvation. He was thankful for the abiding Grace of God. A true miracle happens even when facing severest trial, when a person acknowledges his or her sin and confess it before God and when, as a consequence, God restores the broken Creator -creature relationship.

Fourth: SACRIFICE & VOWS.

Jonah is now ready to take his place alongside the ungodly. Earlier he has held himself aloof as a Jew expecting preferential treatment, but now he is just another sinner needing God's mercy. See the parallel between v9 in this passage and 1:16 where the sailors offered sacrifices and vows. The scripture is explicit, God doesn't look to human

merit. Eph-2:8,9, 'on the other hand' a broken and contrite heart He will not despise' Salvation is possible only because God' makes it possible.

JONAH. PRAYER No2

Instead of being sent home because of his failure in **the 3rd** chapter we find God re-issuing the commission to Jonah to go to Nineveh and-preach the message of pending doom. This time Jonah obeys and goes. His message is not a call to repentance but the people hearing him do repent, turning from their sin (violence) and cry out to God [Jahweh]. God acknowledges their repentance and stays His hand so that they are spared. Now to Jonah's prayer and reaction. We from our vantage point would anticipate him rejoicing at the further evidence of the mercy of God so soon after his own personal experience of the grace shown him at his own repentance.

But Jonah is actually greatly displeased, even angry. (read 4:1-3.) His own experience still hasn't opened his eyes to the universal nature of God and the extent of His grace to all the nations.

He received grace as an Israelite, this was acceptable according to covenant, but surely not for these gentiles.

Now we will look at the three aspects of his prayer

Firstly Jonah tries to justify himself both in his own eyes and in the eyes of God. That is he tries to justify his original disobedience. 'this is why I refused to go to Nineveh-when you first called me; what is more I was right in refusing.'

How often do we find excuses for our disobedience?

Second. He tries to turn God's word against God. In his perverted desire to show he is right in not going along with this plan he quotes Exodus 34:6-7, "Now then if this is the way you are going to act why did you send me to Nineveh with a message that you never intended to fulfill?"

We should find this frightening. See the parallel with Satan's misuse of scripture in his temptation of Jesus. Matt.4:6. where he misquotes Psalm 91:11-12. Then the following quote from Jesus 4:7 (Deut.6:16) clarifies the matter. At no point is the diabolical nature of Jonah's rebellion more evident than here. This should stir us to great caution in the reading and use of the Bible. It is not a neutral book which one can read and then take arguments from. It has volatile power which must be handled with care.

Third. Jonah did one more thing in his anger, and at that point it was almost comic: he asked for death again. v3. when he had run from God and been caught up with he thought it was better to die than to obey. So overboard he goes. Now having obeyed, he is still unhappy and says once more that he would rather die and get it over with. Warning - it is possible to obey God but do so with such a degree of unwillingness and anger that, so far as we are concerned, the obedience is no better than disobedience.

ASSIGNMENT:

(1) Construct a brief outline and then write your own commentary on the book of HABAKKUK or JONAH.

There are various ways you can go about this exercise:

- (i) Going through the book verse by verse with an explanation of the important words or points.
- (ii) Take each passage and explain the main thrust of the passage.
- (iii) Write your own paraphrase of the book, ie put the main passages into your own words.

(2) Use whatever commentaries are available and quote them as extensively as you like, but if you do so, please indicate where the quotes come from.

(3) Conclude with your brief statement of the intent of the book as you understand it.