



HINDS' SIGHT

*The LORD God is my strength, and he will make my feet like **hinds'** feet,
and he will make me to walk upon mine high places.
Habakkuk 3:19*

Text

Habakkuk 1:1-2:1

Topic

Habakkuk compares himself to a watchman on the ramparts as he waits for God to bring the Chaldeans against Judah

Title

O'er the Ramparts We Watch

Introduction

Stallone is definitely making *Rocky 7*, but not until after he does *Rambo 5*.

In the *Rocky* sequel, Apollo Creed's privileged grandson takes up boxing, and wants Rocky as his mentor. It'll be a slugfest.

In the *Rambo* sequel, Stallone has hinted that John Rambo will "go out in a blaze of glory."

That's movie talk for a ton of violence. In the first four installments, Rambo killed a total of 219 bad guys: 128 with his shirt on, and 91 with his shirt off.

I want to talk a little bit about violence; you'll see why in a moment.

Without making any judgments, or applying any personal or political spin, I'd just like to point out that violence has been a dominant story in the United States in 2014:

- We all became familiar with Ferguson, Missouri, where civil disorder, characterized by violence, began the day after the fatal shooting of Michael Brown on August 9.
- Just recently, two uniformed NYPD officers - heroes - were shot dead assassination-style as they sat in their marked police car on a Brooklyn street corner.
- Violence was big news in the NFL when, on September 8, *TMZ Sports* released a video of Baltimore Ravens running back Ray Rice punching his fiancée and dragging her unconscious body out of an elevator.
- Carolina Panthers defensive end Greg Hardy was convicted of assaulting an ex-girlfriend in June.
- Every television since I believe the year 2000 is mandated to be equipped with a V chip so parents can block violent programming.
- Violence of another terrible kind is rampant in that our nation ranks number four in the world, after China, the Russian Federation, and Viet Nam, in the total number of abortions performed annually.

I'm not going to try to make the elusive connection between violence on film and in real-life. I'm not here to tell you to boycott violent movies and TV shows. I'm not going to try to establish that

violence is at an all-time high. I'm not going to suggest any causes for violence.

I am simply noting that violence is something that seems to characterize us more and more.

That's not good news if you are reading the Old Testament minor prophet, Habakkuk.

His complaint, spoken to God, was that the nation of Judah had strayed far from godliness. He summarized their backsliding by saying,

Hab 1:2 O LORD, how long shall I cry, And You will not hear? Even cry out to You, "**Violence!**" And You will not save.

Hab 1:3 Why do You show me iniquity, And cause me to see trouble? For plundering and **violence** are before me; There is strife, and contention arises.

Wherever Habakkuk looked, whether it was to public policy or in private homes, he could summarize what was wrong by simply saying, "violence." It was a symptom of the larger problem, the spiritual problem, of abandoning God.

God will answer Habakkuk; but the prophet won't like what he hears. God will tell Habakkuk that He is raising up the nation of Babylon to conquer Judah, and to take its people captive.

Speaking about the invaders, God says,

Hab 1:9 "They all come for **violence**; Their faces are set like the east wind. They gather captives like sand.

When violence characterizes a nation, it's not a good thing; and it's likely God will eventually respond in kind.

In fact, when God brought the global flood in the days of Noah, His commentary was, ""The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with **violence** through them; and behold, I will destroy them with the earth" (Genesis 6:13).

Jesus let us know, in the Olivet Discourse, that the end times would be "as the days of Noah," which certainly includes violence. God won't bring another flood; instead, a terrible time of judgment is decreed. We call it the Great Tribulation.

The question we should always ask is, "How should we then live, as Christians?"

Habakkuk gained a perspective - a spiritual perspective - as he struggled to answer that question. By the end of his book, he could illustrate what he had realized, and he did it by comparing himself, and other godly believers, to a type of mountain deer that he called a **hind**.

Hab 3:19 (KJV) The LORD God is my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds' feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places...

For Habakkuk and his countrymen, things were going to get worse-and-worse. Judgment was coming, in the form of the Chaldeans - a people far more violent than the Jews. The godly among them would have to ascend to heights of spirituality they had previously not been familiar with - as if they were hinds fleeing the hunter and being driven ever higher.

I have no idea God's plans for the United States. I pray for revival; I don't predict judgment - although it's possible.

Whatever happens, we need to be like the hind, driven to unfamiliar but wondrous high places in our walk with God.

We need what I'm calling *Hinds' Sight* in these last days.

Hopefully, we can discover **our** hinds' sight as we follow Habakkuk to his new spiritual heights.

We begin with his initial dialog with the Lord. I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 When V Is For Violence, Appeal To The Lord, and #2 When V Is For Violence, Abide In The Lord.

#1 When V Is For Violence,
Appeal To The Lord

(1:1-1:11)

I want to establish one more important point before we get into the verses. In this book, God will be dealing with the southern kingdom of Judah as a nation. It has *national* application before it has *personal* application.

Habakkuk was a victim of the sin all around him - not a target God was aiming at. It may not seem like much of a distinction, since his suffering was so real, but it makes all the difference in the world concerning your understanding of the character of God.

Look at it this way. Often commentators suggest that Habakkuk is asking the "Why, God?" questions, such as, "Why, God, do You allow evil?," or, "Why, God, do You allow the wicked to prosper?"

That's not what this book is about. It is about a nation defying God, and God acting appropriately (as we will see).

Let's get into it!

Hab 1:1 The burden which the prophet Habakkuk saw.

God's prophets often characterized their message as their "burden." They certainly did not mean it in the sense it was to be despised. Quite the opposite.

They meant, by "burden," an overwhelming sense that they had to share what God had given them. Their message was too important to keep to themselves.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is our burden. It's too important to keep to ourselves. And none of us want to; we want to share it with others.

Pray, everyday, for God to give you opportunities to share Jesus with someone.

The rest of this book is what Habakkuk "saw." We know very little about him, personally. He wrote in the seventh century BC, just as Babylon was rising as a world power. He was contemporary with Jeremiah, who was also predicting Judah's downfall.

In fact, Jeremiah was telling the Jews to surrender to Babylon.

Hab 1:2 O LORD, how long shall I cry, And You will not hear? Even cry out to You, "Violence!" And You will not save.

Hab 1:3 Why do You show me iniquity, And cause me to see trouble? For plundering and violence are before me; There is strife, and contention arises.

There was a lot wrong in Judah - a lot of "iniquity." If you were here for our series in Jeremiah, you got an earful. The Jews were worshipping idols; they were involved in disgusting pagan religious rituals; there was child sacrifice; they were oppressing the poor; they took advantage of widows, "plundering" what little monies they had.

Habakkuk sums it all up by using the word "violence." We normally think in terms only of physical violence; but it's a word that can have a much broader application.

I read an article whose clever title hints at this broader use of the word: *California's video game law **does violence** to the First Amendment.*

The author contended that California's law against selling "offensively violent" video games to minors does its own violence to free speech.

Habakkuk felt he had been appealing to the Lord a long, long time. He could not understand why God had not acted to overcome the violence among His chosen people. He couldn't comprehend how, or why, God put up with it.

Too bad Habakkuk didn't have the Book of Jeremiah to read. There is an incredible passage that speaks directly to God's dealings with nations.

Jer 18:7 The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy it,

Jer 18:8 if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it.

Jer 18:9 And the instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it,

Jer 18:10 if it does evil in My sight so that it does not obey My voice, then I will relent concerning the good with which I said I would benefit it.

Jer 18:11 "Now therefore, speak to the men of Judah and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying, 'Thus says the LORD: "Behold, I am fashioning a disaster and devising a plan against you. Return now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good." ' "

Straightforward. Simple. Obey God and He will benefit your nation. Disobey Him, and He will see to it your nation suffers disaster, in an effort to correct your evil ways.

Habakkuk and his fellow Jews in Judah had already seen this happen to the northern kingdom of Israel, who had been overrun by the awful Assyrians.

They did not believe it could happen to them, because they had the Temple in Jerusalem, and they believed God would never allow it to be destroyed.

He would; He did.

I'm not predicting the fall of America. I'm still praying for revival.

I will say this: no matter how hard you look in the Bible, you won't find the United States in prophecy. My theory (not unique to me) is that Jesus will resurrect and rapture the church prior to the Tribulation, and our country will lose so many of its leaders and citizens that it will be relegated to a much lesser position on the world stage. After the rapture, with its devastation, the US will probably need to become part of a North American Union in order to survive.

Hab 1:4 Therefore the law is powerless, And justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous; Therefore perverse judgment proceeds.

Habakkuk is suggesting, to God, that because He does not act, the Jews think His "law is powerless" over them, and they are encouraged to act unjustly.

In other words, it was sort of God's fault for not doing something about it. His seeming hesitation was allowing "the wicked [to] surround the righteous" and "perverse judgment [to proceed]."

God's hesitation to act is most often, if not always, to give people a chance to repent. He had shown Judah what would happen to them, when Assyria destroyed Israel, taking the Jews captive, and dispersing them.

He had been sending prophets to them, to warn them of coming judgment unless they repented.

At least some of those prophets had pointed out that certain physical calamities, e.g., low crop yields and droughts, were a warning of impending judgment.

They had His Law, which spoke clearly, in the Book of Deuteronomy, about the national consequences of obedience and disobedience.

In short, God *was* acting, and would continue to act. But His people were not reacting by repenting.

God is not willing that any should perish, but that all would come to repentance.

One source I read claims that in Africa alone, everyday, 16,000 Muslims convert to Christianity.

Another source says:

- Daily, 35,000 conversions occur in Latin America.
- Daily, 28,000 conversions occur in China.
- Missionaries in India report 100,000 conversions monthly.

God is not slack; He is longsuffering. True, His longsuffering leads to our suffering, while He waits. But the souls saved are precious.

His longsuffering will not always wait; and that is what God tells His prophet.

Hab 1:5 "Look among the nations and watch - Be utterly astounded! For I will work a work in your days Which you would not believe, though it were told you.

Hab 1:6 For indeed I am raising up the Chaldeans, A bitter and hasty nation Which marches through the breadth of the earth, To possess dwelling places that are not theirs.

Hab 1:7 They are terrible and dreadful; Their judgment and their dignity proceed from themselves.

Hab 1:8 Their horses also are swifter than leopards, And more fierce than evening wolves. Their chargers charge ahead; Their cavalry comes from afar; They fly as the eagle that hastens to eat.

Hab 1:9 "They all come for violence; Their faces are set like the east wind. They gather captives like sand.

Hab 1:10 They scoff at kings, And princes are scorned by them. They deride every stronghold, For they heap up earthen mounds and seize it.

Hab 1:11 Then his mind changes, and he transgresses; He commits offense, Ascribing this power to his god."

The Chaldeans had not yet risen to prominence. But they would.

The Chaldeans were people who lived in southern Babylonia which would be the southern part of Iraq today.

In 731^{BC} Ukinzer, a Chaldean, became king of Babylon. A few years later Merodach-Baladan, also a Chaldean, became king over Babylon. Then in 626^{BC} Nabopolassar, another Chaldean, began what would be an extended period of time during which Babylon was ruled by a Chaldean king.

During this time the word Chaldean became synonymous for Babylon, and we see many verses in Scripture where the word Chaldean was used to refer to Babylonians in general (Isaiah 13:19; 47:1, 5; 48:14, 20).

Successors to Nabopolassar were Nebuchadnezzar, Amel-Marduk, Nabonidus and then Belshazzar, "king of the Chaldeans" (Daniel 5:30).

God is at work among the nations. Daniel, in his prophecy, spoke of the succession of nations that would be world powers. He correctly and accurately listed Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome.

He spoke of a revived Roman Empire in the end times, yet future to us.

Nations rise; nations fall; and a great deal of it has to do with whether they obey or disobey God, which can be gauged - to an extent - by their violence.

We can certainly make a case that V is for Violence in America. We don't need to be the most violent nation in order to be on God's radar for judgment. In fact, given the light we've had in the form of the Bible and the Gospel, we should be held to a higher standard.

We shouldn't be number four on the list of abortions. We shouldn't be on that list at all.

It hit Habakkuk in the face that God was going to judge Judah. If it hits you in the face that America is ripe for judgment, appeal to God to bring revival.

#2 When V Is For Violence,
Abide In The Lord

(1:12-2:1)

"Be careful what you pray for" could summarize the next set of verses.

Habakkuk wanted God to do something to bring the nation of Judah to its spiritual senses. But he strongly disagreed with God's plan.

Hab 1:12 Are You not from everlasting, O LORD my God, my Holy One? We shall not die. O LORD, You have appointed them for judgment; O Rock, You have marked them for correction.

Habakkuk did something here that is important for us to do whenever we are questioning God or His methods. He declared what he knew to be true about God:

God is "from everlasting," meaning He is always working, providentially, to accomplish what He has set forth in His Word. For the Jews, that meant God would not allow them to be destroyed. For us, it means that He Who began a good work in us will be faithful to complete it.

God is "my Holy One," meaning (among other things) that He will work all things together for the good.

"We shall not die." Jesus Christ has conquered death and Hades. We will be resurrected or raptured. It makes us more than conquerors - no matter our outward circumstances.

God has appointed nonbelievers "for judgment." While that comforts us - knowing the bad guys will get what is coming to them - it should also incite compassion for them as nonbelievers, because what they've got coming to them is an eternity separated from God, alone, suffering torment, in the Lake of Fire.

"O Rock" is a great declaration of the abiding strength of God. He is, indeed, the Rock of Age, cleft for me...

*Let me hide myself in Thee;
Let the water and the blood,
From Thy wounded side which flowed,
Be of sin the double cure*

Finally, Habakkuk declares, "You have marked them for correction." God marking them, the Chaldeans, means He had set the boundaries of their behavior. And "correction" means that they could not destroy the Jews, but were God's instrument to punish and discipline them.

It's always a good idea to rehearse what you know to be true about God when you face troublesome times.

It was a little over-simplified, but in the recent film, *God's Not Dead*, the main characters reminded themselves about God's character by saying, "God is good, all the time; and, all the time, God is good."

Standing in the cleft of the Rock of Ages, Habakkuk was nevertheless still troubled:

Hab 1:13 You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, And cannot look on wickedness. Why do You look on those who deal treacherously, And hold Your tongue when the wicked devours A person more righteous than he?

Was Habakkuk talking about the Chaldeans? Probably. But his comments accurately described Judah at that time, too.

On one hand, the Chaldeans were far more wicked. But, considering that the Jews had the covenants, Scriptures, and the prophets, and the priesthood, and the Temple... Who's more wicked?

Habakkuk throws out an analogy. Seeing the rise of pagan nations against other nations, he compares the stronger nations, the conquerors, to successful fishermen.

Hab 1:14 Why do You make men like fish of the sea, Like creeping things that have no ruler over them?

Hab 1:15 They take up all of them with a hook, They catch them in their net, And gather them in their dragnet. Therefore they rejoice and are glad.

Hab 1:16 Therefore they sacrifice to their net, And burn incense to their dragnet; Because by them their share is sumptuous And their food plentiful.

Hab 1:17 Shall they therefore empty their net, And continue to slay nations without pity?

Again, I would suggest that, since God was dealing with the Jews as the nation of Judah, and had already for quite some time been warning them by various unmistakable signs, His sending another nation against them was the appropriate response.

And the fact it was a godless nation was to expose their shame at failing to be His people.

What was a prophet to do in all this?

Hab 2:1 I will stand my watch And set myself on the rampart, And watch to see what He will say to me, And what I will answer when I am corrected.

By comparing himself to a watchman on the "rampart," Habakkuk was submitting to God's plan. The Chaldeans were coming, so be on the lookout for them.

But Habakkuk wasn't an average watchman. He was a spiritual watchman. When he saw the Chaldeans approaching, he would see God's hand behind it all, for Judah's good and God's glory.

As believers, we must look behind, or beyond, what is happening, to its spiritual importance. Our eyes may never be opened to see armies of angels surrounding our enemies; but we know there are armies of angels.

Wherever you find yourself, there is a battle for souls waging. The eternal destiny of folks you are in contact with is more important than your temporary trials. Look beyond the obvious to the spiritual.

"I will watch to see what he will say **in** me" is a possible translation. I'm not sure what Habakkuk meant, but I take it to mean, for us as Christians, that we can be led by the indwelling Holy Spirit - listening for His still, small voice.

"When I am corrected" is better translated, "when I am reprov'd."

Now, this could mean that Habakkuk expected to be corrected and reprov'd by God for questioning His methods. If that is the case, we know that any correction, any reproof, that comes from God is done because He loves us as our gracious heavenly Father.

Habakkuk might also mean that he was going to be reproved by his fellow citizens, in Judah, once he began proclaiming this message - that God was raising up the Chaldeans to conquer them.

Nevertheless, he would continue to "answer," continue to proclaim, the message he had been given.

The image of Habakkuk on the rampart isn't one of retreat into spiritual seclusion. Far from it.

It portrays Habakkuk as active; as watchful; as vigilant; as expectant. Sure, he was waiting on God. But his waiting is what I'd call **abiding**. It was a disciplined waiting that involved ministering to others, not withdrawing from them.

As I said, I don't know what is in store for the United States. I'm going to go on making an appeal to God for revival.

I do know what I'm supposed to be doing; what we are empowered to be doing. It's to be sharing the Good News that Jesus died, rose from the dead, and is coming back.

The Declaration of Independence mentions "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness"; and we value those as citizens.

As believers, we have a Declaration of Dependence upon God, and should value spiritual life, giving liberty to those held captive by the devil and by sin, and the pursuit of holiness, without which no one will see the Lord.

