



Handout for week of 9/30/19 Luke 17:5-10 & Hab. 1: 2-3, 2: 2-4

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Hab. 1: **1** The burden which Habakkuk the prophet did see. **2** How long, O LORD, shall I cry, and Thou wilt not hear? I cry out unto Thee of violence, and Thou wilt not save. **3** Why dost Thou show me iniquity, and beholdest mischief? And why are spoiling and violence before me? so that there is strife, and contention ariseth. **4** Therefore the law is slacked, and right doth never go forth; for the wicked doth beset the righteous; therefore right goeth forth perverted.

2: 1 I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will look out to see what He will speak by me, and what I shall answer when I am reprov'd. **2** And the LORD answered me, and said: 'Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that a man may read it swiftly. **3** For the vision is yet for the appointed time, and it declareth of the end, and doth not lie; though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not delay.' **4** Behold, his soul is puffed up, it is not upright in him; but the righteous shall live by his faith.

COMMENTARY:

Sometimes a “hidden” reading joins the Sunday lectionary. Like an uninvited guest, an implied text looms in the background. Today is one of those days. And the surprise guest is the letter to the Romans, with its teaching on faith and law.

The book of Habakkuk (Ha-BAK-kuk) appears only once among the Sunday readings.

Nor is it quoted much in the New Testament—just three times (Romans 1:17; Gal 3:11; Hebrews 10:38). And in each case the quoted line is “The just man, because of his faith, shall live” (Hab 2:2). These citations are big, however. And for Romans this is especially true, since Paul uses the verse to state the letter’s theme. And to some degree this is true of Galatians as well—a letter that might be viewed as a first draft for Romans.

A dialogue between the prophet and God begins the book of Habakkuk. Today’s liturgical selection includes the first question and the second answer. The opening question seems standard prophetic fare, complaining about God’s willingness to put up with disorder and injustice in Israel. How long, O Lord?

God’s first answer tells Habakkuk not to worry. Things are being taken care of. The Babylonians (also known as Chaldeans) are being sent. They will clean things up rather briskly. God’s answer spells out the cruel savagery for which they were known. “See, I am raising up Chaldea, that bitter and unruly people.” Leopards, wolves, and eagles, raptors all, contribute imagery for describing their violence.

In the prophet’s opinion this is not so good. The cure would appear to be worse than the disease. So Habakkuk objects, strenuously. Commentators suggest that this may be the first time in scripture that the ways of God are so seriously questioned.

And now the second answer arrives, included in today’s reading. It is the verse that provides Paul with his quote. “The just man, because of his faith, shall live.” For Habakkuk it seems to be making the point that the virtuous will survive the coming judgment, if their faith is maintained. God will make sure they are spared the harsh reckoning that Babylon threatens.