Key Verse: Habakkuk 3:16-19

Opening song: 483 “I Need Thee Every Hour” (*Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*)

Closing song: 469 “Leaning on the Everlasting Arms” (*Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*)

I. Introduction

We have lived a long time in an era of much uncertainty, and the events causing this uncertainty are increasing, leading to crises without precedent. Some of these events include the Covid-19 pandemic and its consequences, wars and their consequences, disasters, unfairness, terror, violence, etc. Each country around the world is going through difficult moments. Society is in crisis—morally and financially as well as with identity. We are going through a time similar to the day when Jesus, seeing the mass of people, “was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd” (Matthew 9:36).

The result of all this leads to fright and uncertainty. But being frightened and having uncertainty is not a problem itself because fright is part of a human being. Fright appeared to the world when Adam, the first man, decided to disobey to God. Then for the first time, the human being was frightened
(Genesis 3:10). Fright has its fair side because it proves to what degree we are limited and weak. Uncertainty determines that we have no control over anything. But both fright and uncertainty will bear fruits if only they are accompanied with hope.

So, in view of this local and universal uproar, what’s left to be done? How do we live one day after another with such bad news of this kind? How should we strengthen our soul so that despair does not crush us? How should we hearten others to continue living even during these terrible times? Let’s learn from Habakkuk’s experience:

“When I heard, my belly trembled; my lips quivered at the voice: rottenness entered into my bones, and I trembled in myself, that I might rest in the day of trouble: when he cometh up unto the people, he will invade them with his troops. Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labor of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation. 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. To the chief singer on my stringed instruments” (Habakkuk 3:16-19).

Background

Let’s go back to see what happened. What is Habakkuk going to tell us and teach us in how to overcome fright and uncertainty by filling us with hope and confidence, even if we do not see any apparent or immediate change.

First, who was the man called Habakkuk? By reading his book, we notice that he was not a man focused on himself, on his own comfort and security. He was deeply anxious for the natural, spiritual, and moral condition
of his compatriots. He loved his nation and his people, but he knew that if they continued to break God’s laws, they would continue to draw closer to a precipice.

We do not know much about the prophet. His name may mean “the one who constrains” or “the one who fights”. Many prefer “the one who constrains”. He constrains his people and embraces them. He comforts his people and gives them courage, like we embrace a crying child, to make sure that if this is the way of God, all will get better very soon.

Habakkuk was addressing the nation of Judah; it was a difficult and dark period. A time when morality, impressed by idolatry, was almost nonexistent. There was widespread injustice. Two questions were close to his lips: Till when and why? If Habakkuk were here today, he may say the same thing. We can ask the question on his behalf: Until when, Lord, and why? The book of Habakkuk appears in the form of a dialog between God and the prophet. Habakkuk was perplexed with current affairs and what is going to happen, such as the Babylonian invasion.

II. Development

During times of fright and uncertainty, how do we not to lose hope? Let’s first look at what hope means. It is waiting with trust. It is a waiting whose origin is belief in God’s promises and above all, belief in God’s person Himself. I trust in God, so I hope in peace. In this study, we will speak about these essential elements so that we will not lose hope, while we are going through tough moments in our lives.
a) The first thing to do if we don’t want to lose hope is to speak to God.

Yes, speak to Him, in other words, pray. It is quite obvious. One can even say that it is too simple. But that is exactly what the prophet did. He spoke to God; he discussed with God. The prophet opened his heart and sincerely spoke to God. And not only did Habakkuk speak to God, but he also listened to. Let’s see, for instance, how Habakkuk addressed God in the following text:

“O LORD, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear! even cry out unto thee of violence, and thou wilt not save! Why dost thou shew me iniquity, and cause me to behold grievance? for spoiling and violence are before me: and there are that raise up strife and contention. Therefore the law is slacked, and judgment doth never go forth: for the wicked doth compass about the righteous; therefore wrong judgement proceedeth” (Habakkuk1:2-4).

Habakkuk expressed to God his anxiety as if God where his friend. If we go through the Bible, we’ll see people in times of crisis, and the first thing they did was to speak to God. King David fasted and prayed so that the son he had with Bathsheba did not die. Daniel, because of the king’s edict on the lion’s den, was found in his prayer room. In Mark 14, when Jesus was at Gethsemane, He was anxious and prays to the Father because of the cup that He was about to drink. And in verse 38, Jesus told Peter: “Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak.”

The temptation is losing hope. The temptation is being lied to by circumstances. Thus, it is in prayers that our spirit is strengthened. It is in
prayers that our spiritual eyes are opened. In short, so as not to lose hope, we should establish a prayer life that involves a strong desire to be with God.

What are the advantages in that? To His close friends, God reveals His secrets (Psalms 25:14). Those who seek Him will find Him, according to Jeremiah 29:13).

**What does God reveal to Habakkuk in His conversation with him through prayer?**

To answer Habakkuk’s first complaint, the one concerning knowing how much time evil will prevail (Habakkuk 1:2-3), God assured that He would exercise His judgement through the Babylonians (Habakkuk 1:6).

To answer Habakkuk’s second complaint, the one about why God chose the Babylonians to punish Judah (Habakkuk 1:13-2:1), God assured that He knew the Babylonians’ sins and that He would also punish them when their turn came, but as for the righteous one, by his faithfulness he will keep living in God (Habakkuk 2:4).

That is the way to resuscitate Habakkuk’s hope, just like God will do for us when we cross into uncertainty. In comparison with our anxiety, God tells Habakkuk the following:

“…Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it. For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry. Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith” (Habakkuk 2:2-4).

Paul cites parts of this verse in Romans 1:17 and Galatians 3:13 and in Hebrews 10:38, just before his famous chapter on faith. It is a particularly useful affirmation to the Christians when they experience difficult moments,
without any sign of hope: they should continue believing that the Lord orients all according to His will.

It is common that there are difficult moments even when we pray, but God will be glorified because He gave us the Holy Spirit. According to Romans 8:26, Paul says that when we do not know what to say, the Holy Spirit expresses what is in our hearts. That is when the Holy Spirit helps us and shares our supplication with the heavens. Our Father gives us means to go directly to Him. Can you see how good He is?

How is your prayer life? Do you really use that weapon for your own spiritual support?

b) The second thing to do if we don’t want to lose hope is to take a realistic view of the situation.

Although the prophet learned from God that invaders will be judged, he was yet in distress. He was in despair; his legs shook but he decided not to move. He decided to wait silently which means he had a rest. The prophet knew what was going to happen. He had a vision.

“When I heard, my belly trembled; my lips quivered at the voice: rottenness entered into my bones, and I trembled in myself, that I might rest in the day of trouble: when he cometh up unto the people, he will invade them with his troops” (Habakkuk 3:16). Habakkuk gave a deep declaration in view of imminent tribulations which were coming to the Judah nation. In verses 17 - 19 of chapter 3, it is said: Whatever comes up, I will put my trust in God, my Force.

Verse 17 proves that Habakkuk understands that the country will be destroyed by Babylonians. All will be taken away from the people who
decided to turn away from the Lord. So, we can conclude that this situation is just, that they were worthy of going through temptations. As they sowed, so should they reap (Galatians 6:7).

But we can now ask a question: If I did not sow disobedience, why then does the fig tree not bloom with flowers, why does the fruit not come, why does this work not appear? Why does it not happen?

Do we find anywhere in the Bible where Jesus promises only glory and peaceful days? You cannot find it. But He has been very honest by saying that in this world we will have tribulation (John 16:33). So, in order not to lose hope, we should understand that everybody undergoes tribulations. Like the apostle Paul said to the Philippians “For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake” (Philippians 1:29).

**There are many reasons why tribulations strike us:**

1. Some sins have been committed but not confessed or abandoned.
2. Bad choices we have made, by acting without discretion or with lack of patience.
3. The world around us is under the aegis of evil’s power (1 John 5:19).
4. God’s permission to achieve the great and endless aim (Job 1:12).

In short, to have a realistic vision of life helps us not to lose hope. And finally, after understanding what would happen, something inevitable, Habakkuk ended his prayer by turning his eyes towards Who is really important.

c) **The third thing to do if we don’t want to lose hope is to have a clear vision of God.**
We still need to contextualize verse 17 of Habakkuk chapter 3 so that the rest have a sense for today. The Prophet mentions: the fig tree, wine, olive tree, wheat, sheep, cattle. It is all he needed to live. Having what’s recorded in verse 17 would have been similar to the following: Even if there is no food on the table and if there is no stick on the shelf, the wine producers would charge for branches, the internet connection would disappear … I extrapolate of course.

Think about something without which you could not live, something really important and vital to you. That is what the prophet speaks about. Even if things don’t go the way you wished. Even if all seems strange. Even if there is no response. Even if you do not understand why this or that. Even if there is insecurity. Even if bereavement takes you aback! Then Habakkuk says in verse 18: “Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation.”

Even within his trouble (v. 16), Habakkuk expresses his trust in the LORD (v. 18); he is fed and fortified with divine answers. When you don’t have a clear vision of God or if you lose sight of who God is, tribulation will push you more and more to the brink of collapse. And the consequence is despondency.

In Ephesians 1:3, it is said that God the Father “blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.” In Romans 5:8, it is said that “God commendeth His love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” Habakkuk chose to rejoice in God who rose from His throne of glory and fell to our level. He came and sought us. He opened the way of freedom. The source of our joy is in the God of our salvation.

As Jeremiah says: “This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope. It is the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail
not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness” (Lamentations 3:21-23).

The God of my salvation means the God who loves me, the God of my victory, the Victorious God. The One who delivered the people from Egypt with His powerful hand. The one who delivered us from death and sin’s clutches with the help of the powerful blood of Jesus. Remember that Jesus died for us. Remember also that Jesus was raised from the dead. He is our God, Hallalujah!

Even if something is missing, I want to be in a joyful mood, because the Lord is my God. Moreover, the Lord fortifies my encouragement and joy. Again, the prophet says: “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. To the chief singer on my stringed instruments” (Habakkuk 3:19).

The conviction comes from the One who can tackle all, like David tackled Goliath. As David himself said: “The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?” (Psalms 27:1). The LORD will make us run fast; He will make us go higher than we can imagine.

So, to not lose hope and to continue rejoicing, have a clear vision of God. Have a true knowledge of and a profound friendship with Him. God the Creator, Savior and Father.

III. Conclusion

Habakkuk’s experience is a demonstration of faith and perfect joy in the worst circumstances. What a victory he had in his soul!
Dear brethren and friends, whatever goes on in your life, do not lose hope. God invites you to continue in your prayer life, to approach Him more and more, to have true experiences with Him. Know that in this world, we shall have tribulations and things may be missing. But we should have a clear vision of God’s purpose for our salvation, that is to say Jesus Christ. So, our hope will remain untouchable.

Then, if such is God’s will, very soon all will be better because God is God and remains God forever. Does any person here today seek God for any need? I can tell you that God wants to give you more than those things. He would like to give you something which will satisfy your soul, forgiveness, restoration, eternal life. If you understand this, make a decision and accept the Lord’s call. Go to Him and confess from your mouth that Jesus is Lord. If you can, do it today, right now, because Jesus asks: “For what shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” (Mark 8:36)\(^1\).

My prayer is that that would be our everyday experience in life. AMEN.

*(Have a special prayer for those who have accepted the Lord’s call and who have confessed Him as their Savior and Lord.)*

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\(^1\) Unless noted otherwise, all scripture references in the program are from the *King James Version* of the Bible.