

Journey Into God's Word



Esther

Nahum

Habakkuk

II John

III John

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Perhaps you have had moments as you faithfully served the Lord that you have felt like crying, “How long, O Lord, must I call for help, but you do not listen?”(Hab. 1:2) The pain, the loneliness, and the emptiness just seems to drag on and on. As we journey into God’s Word this week we want to ask the Lord to help us to stand steadfast on the scriptures in spite of the circumstances. We want to discover the courage of Esther & the Lord who is good, a refuge in times of trouble that Nahum speaks of. As we journey let us believe God to show us the deeds of the Lord that Habakkuk talks of and the love and faithfulness that II and III John tells us of.

“How long, O Lord, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, ‘Violence!’ but you do not save? Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict abounds. Therefore the law is paralyzed, and justice never prevails. The wicked hem in the righteous, so that justice is perverted.”(Hab. 1:2-4) All of us have those moments of hopelessness when we find ourselves crying out, “How long, O Lord?” How long must we experience the pain, the loneliness, and the despair? When will we understand that God wants us to come to Him with our struggles and doubts? Surrendering to Him in quiet hope is not bitter resignation. It is the realization that God is in control of this world in spite of the triumph of evil. Trusting God in the midst of hopelessness is possible because of the hope provided through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. As a result of this resurrection we can abide in the truth that God has everything under control. We can receive “grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father’s Son... in truth and love.”(II John verse 3) When we are going through trials and tribulations, thousands of things can go through our minds. Fear and despair can overwhelm us until we begin to wonder what truth really is. That’s why we must let Jesus embrace us with His truth and love. In John 14:6 Jesus declares, “I am the way and the truth and the life.”

Habakkuk in the midst of his hopelessness declared, “O Lord, are you not from everlasting? My God my Holy One, we will not die”(Hab. 1:12) As we cry out to the Lord we have the assurance He will answer if we will but listen. He tells us that in spite of the circumstances we must remember that “the righteous will live by his faith.”(Hab. 2:4) This verse has inspired countless numbers of people. Paul quotes it in Romans 1:17 and Galatians 3:11. Also it is quoted in Hebrews 10:38. This passage that “the righteous will live by faith” will enable you to live through difficult times when you have no visible sign of hope. At such times we must believe that God is directing all things according to His purpose.

In Hab. 2:6-19 what five woes does God state exists for those who don't trust in Him? “Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist. Watch out that you do not lose what you worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully. Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son.” (II John verses 7-9) In spite of the circumstances we must continue to remain in Christ Jesus. Our steadfastness during these difficult times provides encouragement and joy to others who are struggling. As III John verse 3 declares, “It gave me great joy to have some brothers come and tell about your faithfulness to the truth and how you continue to walk in the truth.” Walking in the truth of Jesus Christ also involves living and sharing the love of Jesus. I know when I am hurting it is hard to share hospitality and love. Yet, abiding in the truth and love of Jesus enables me to rise above my hurt and reach out to others. As I do this there is a freeing of my spirit, allowing His love to flow and the pain to be washed away. How does III John verses 5-8 show that the sharing of hospitality is an important factor in sharing the love of Jesus Christ? Daily we are given choices. Will we share the love of God and do good or will we imitate evil? III John verse 11 tells us, “Dear friend, do not imitate what is evil but what is good. Anyone who does what is good is from God. Anyone who does what is evil has not seen God.”

The book of Nahum demonstrates God's judgment on those who do evil, “The Lord is a jealous and avenging God; the Lord takes vengeance and is filled with wrath. The Lord takes vengeance on His foes and maintains His wrath against His enemies. The Lord is slow to anger and great in power; the Lord will not leave the guilty unpunished.”(Nahum 1:2-3) Although God is a just God it is so refreshing to know that, “the Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in Him. (Nahum 1:7) It is so good to know that God cares. People I trust may let me down, but the “Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble. “What I must do is continue to trust Him in spite of the circumstances.

Habakkuk does this by expressing his trust for God even when it seems everything is going wrong. “Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior.”(Hab. 3:17,18) I want to see results. After all isn't faith believing until you get results? Habakkuk says no. Faith is much more than that. It is rejoicing in the Lord, knowing that God is love and He has everything under control. Even if there are no apparent changes in my circumstances I can still “be joyful in God my Savior.” Remember James 1:2-4? Please compare that passage of scripture with Hab. 3:17,18. What similarities do you find? Consider it pure joy as James 1:12 declares, “Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love Him. “What trial are you persevering in at this time? I know it's hard to continue on in the midst of these trials. I must, every hour of every day be mindful that, “the Sovereign Lord is my strength; He makes my feet like the feet of a deer, He enables me to go on the heights.”(Hab.3: 19) Thank you Lord for your faithfulness, your strength and your daily help. Because of your grace Jesus I can arise above these circumstances and go on to heights unknown. What a mighty God we serve. Because of Him what confidence and hope we can have in this confusing world. Praise God our feelings do not have to be controlled by the events around us but by our faith in a loving God. So many times these past few weeks it seemed like very little made sense. Yet as these troubles seemed more than I could bear I was reminded over and over by the scriptures and fellow believer to look to God. He is faithful. You and I must never forget that like a deer we can run over the rough terrain of life through the strength of the Holy Spirit. Because of this resurrection of Jesus Christ we will ultimately by His grace be victorious over evil.

Esther is an example of a woman whose courage saved the lives of many people. The book of Esther in the Bible was named after this courageous woman. After she was made queen she found herself in a situation where she could quietly enjoy life or risks everything to save the Jewish people. Her cousin Mordecai summed up the choice she had to make when he said, “For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this.”(Esther 4:14) How would you have replied if you had been in Esther's situation? Here is her response.” Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: “Go gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will fast as

you do. When this is done, I will go to the King, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish.”(Es. 4:15,16)

In order to appreciate this bold step of faith that Esther took we have to understand the dynamics that led up to this event. Haman the King’s number two man had it out for all the Jews because Mordecai, a Jew, refused to bow down to him. He slanders the Jewish race before the King and then offers to contribute his personal funds for their extermination. “ ‘Keep the money, the King said to Haman, ‘and do with the people as you please.’”(Es. 3:11) Mordecai, after learning of the situation had it shared with Esther. The book of Esther does not mention the word God. It shows how God is at work and the victory that awaits those who trust Him and move forth by faith.

Cautiously and carefully Esther steps into the unknown and approaches the King on behalf of her people, the Jews. She knows that if the King is having a bad day and doesn’t receive her by extending the gold scepter in his hand to her, she will die. She asks Mordecai to have the Jews fast for her and of course pray. In the story of Esther we must remember that two themes are unfolding. One is the threat of the Jewish people and the second is the threat to the happiness and welfare of women.

All too frequently too many men consciously or unconsciously subscribe to the pagan philosophy that Esther’s husband believed in. That is “every man should be master in his own house.”(Es.1:22) Esther knew she was queen because the previous queen rebelled against this ungodly belief. In order for Esther to succeed in saving the Jews she also as a woman had to be more than just her husband’s property. She had to gain authority in her fight to save her people. She could have just walked out on him and the whole problem but she didn’t.

How hard it is to exercise courage and faith when the end results seem so uncertain. When Esther approaches the King she knows she is breaking several of the empire’s laws. This does not stop the courageous queen who must plead for her people. As Esther approaches the King the prayers of the people are answered and she is received. Instead of immediately telling the King what she wants she invites him and Haman to a banquet. The King and Haman go to the banquet and are requested to attend a second one. The King begins to change. He doesn’t demand she tell him what she wants but begs her to tell him her desire. This formerly cruel husband is now intrigued by what is going on in his wife’s mind. At the second banquet Esther brings forth her desperate plea for the lives of her people. When the King realizes he has been tricked he stomps off in rage and then

orders Haman's execution. Again Esther must risk her life and come before the King pleading for the revoke of the decree her husband has foolishly issued. The King passes the responsibility on to Esther and Mordecai. "Now write another decree in the King's name in behalf of the Jews as seems best to you, and seal it with the Kings' signet ring--for no document written in the King's name and sealed with his ring can be revoked."(Esther 8:8) This once powerless woman has the power to stop the evil and do it in the name of the King. Royal decrees are sent forth stating that the Jews living in the empire can take up arms and defend themselves if they are attacked. "For the Jews it was a time of happiness and joy, gladness and honor."(Esther 8:16)

On the appointed day that the Jews gather to defend themselves, the King gives Esther a progress report. Then King Xerxes asks her, "Now what is your petition? It will be given you. What is your request? It will be granted."(Es. (9:12) Far from being indifferent to this wife's wishes he sought her advice as to how he can be more helpful. This time he approaches her. Their marriage has taken on new dimensions of partnership. Ultimately not only does Esther gain authority in her own right, but she has empowered all the women as well. Now Esther sends a directive to them "with full written authority"(Esther 9:29). "The command of Queen Esther fixed these practices of Purim, and record in writing."(Esther 9:32) She has spoken with her own voice and the King has listened. He has learned from the courage of his wife and that reality has changed his kingdom. The attitude that devalued women was replaced by an affirmation of faith and courage because of one woman. As result, Esther's fame lives long after her husband's empire and laws have fallen. Esther's resistance of injustice and fear sends a message to us today. That message is we may not know what the future holds but by knowing the one who holds the future we can exercise faith and courage in spite of the circumstances.

Often believing that something good can come out of all this pain seems so hard. When I am hurting I want a quick instant fix. The pain and loneliness seems almost overwhelming. Its times like that I must not only read Romans 8:28 but also take a deep breath and dare to believe and apply it. "We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." Esther believed and lived. But such belief at times almost seems impossible. How do I move from my "How long, O Lord, must I call for help" of Hab.1: 2 to the victorious declaration of the Lord that "the righteous will live by his faith?"(Hab.2: 4) At times I must admit I feel anything but alive. How I need the spirit of God quickening the Word of the Lord inside of me until I can declare in spite of the circumstances, "I will rejoice in the Lord, I

will be joyful in God my Savior. The Sovereign Lord is my strength;”(Hab.3: 18,19) Dear Lord please be my strength. Help me to rejoice in you, my God and my Savior.

Next week as we journey deeper into the Word of God and the application of it please join me in reading the first fourteen chapters of Job, Zephaniah 1-3, Haggai 1-2, the book of Jude and Revelations 1-3. “I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face. Peace to you.”(III John verse 14) May God continue to bless you as you faithfully serve Him through the love of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Yours in that Precious Name of Jesus,

Larry Rice