

Habakkuk:

Inspired Reasoning of God's Chastening and Love of His People

Preparatory Reading: Exodus 19; Joshua 10,11; Psalm 68; 73; Isaiah 13; Jer 15,25,50,51; II Chron 36; Daniel 5.

Introduction:

1. We believe every word of God is pure and necessary for our spiritual lives (Prov 30:5; Luke 4:4).
2. Our goal will be to admire the forest and trees of this book, but we will avoid examining the bark; we want the lessons for the good of our souls, rather than speculative thoughts for mental entertainment.
3. We are thankful for 1:6, which indicates exactly what historical events and timing we are studying.
4. Consider a simple chronology: if Jesus died in the year 30 A.D., then Cyrus released the Jews in 456 B.C. (486.5 years by Daniel 9:24-27), then Israel was taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar in 526 B.C.
5. We do not know the exact timing, but it was likely during Jehoiakim's reign, for the terrible sins of Manasseh (II Chr 33:1-11; Jer 15:4), for 1:5 indicates Nebuchadnezzar came during the hearers' lives.
6. World history is His story – the working of Jehovah in the affairs of nations for His glory and people.
7. A summary of much of the books of Isaiah and Jeremiah is found by learning the book of Habakkuk.
8. What lessons? Do not be discouraged by rich basking and prospering around you in sin (Jer 12:1-4).
9. What lessons? Do not despair if you see God's people seeming to get away with sin (Ps 50:16-23).
10. What lessons? Do not be dismayed at all by the dark clouds of God's providence (Job 1:20-22; 2:10).
11. What lessons? Realize that the God of heaven will not allow America to continue in sin (Ps 9:15-20).
12. What lessons? You ought to prepare your heart by considering His works of old (3:3-15; Ps 143:1-6).
13. What lessons? With the right attitude and spirit – precious keys – you can dance at anytime (3:16-19).
14. What lessons? Faith is the key (2:4), which lays hold of His purposes and promises (1:12; 3:9), and it remembers that the LORD is in His holy temple (2:20), and that God can give rest in trouble (3:16).

Chapter 1

Introduction of the prophecy (1); Habakkuk complains about Judah's terrible sins (2-4); the LORD answers with a description of the coming judgment by the Chaldeans (5-11); Habakkuk admits his confusion about such a wicked nation being used to chasten God's people (12-17).

1 The burden which Habakkuk the prophet did see.

- A. The burden is a prophetic expression describing God's judgment (Is 13:1; Nah 1:1; Mal 1:1).
- B. This burden, unlike the other prophets, is not named, for it included both Judah and Babylon.
- C. We know nothing about Habakkuk other than he was a prophet and his words are inspired!
- D. We cannot prove when this prophecy took place; but it could have been Jehoiakim's reign.

2 O LORD, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear! even cry out unto thee of violence, and thou wilt not save!

- A. Habakkuk cried to the LORD about Judah's violence, but there was no revival or progress.
- B. As a prophet of God, Habakkuk was disturbed to see the violent oppression of the righteous.
- C. Jerusalem and Judah were a cesspool, as many passages indicate (Jer 5:1-9; Mic 3:8-12; etc.).
- D. God's ministers grieve about the spiritual condition of His people, and God responds slowly.
- E. God's providence may delay His intervention longer than we desire (Ps 13:1-2; 80:4; 89:46).

3 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.

- A. The sins of Judah were now very public, and Habakkuk and other righteous men saw it all.
- B. God had also revealed to His prophet the full measure of wickedness of the Jews in Judah.
- C. The city and country were full of oppression and trouble, raised by violent troublemakers.
- D. It was hard for Habakkuk to see and know such evil by God's help but not see any remedy.

4 Therefore the law is slacked, and judgment doth never go forth: for the wicked doth compass about the righteous; therefore wrong judgment proceedeth.

- A. He made an appeal to the righteousness of God for the sake of the Law and the righteous.
- B. Because of wickedness at all levels, true judgment was gone: wrong judgment was the case.
- C. God should be offended when His Law, His judgments, and His people are evilly corrupted.

5 Behold ye among the heathen, and regard, and wonder marvellously: for I will work a work in your days, which ye will not believe, though it be told you.

- A. The answer of the Lord to Habakkuk promises Him just retribution upon the wicked nation.
- B. These profane Jews were no different than the heathen nations around them, in that the king of Babylon was going to overrun them just as he was overrunning the rest of the world.
- C. The marvelous or stupendous event was God's temple, city, land, priests, etc. being ruined, which the foolish and blinded Jews could not believe or react to in any saving way.
- D. God declared it to the Jews by many prophets, but they could not and would not believe.
- E. God judged these hardhearted wretches with blindness for sin (Isaiah 6:9-13; 29:13-14; etc.).
- F. Paul's use of this text in Acts 13:41 has a different purpose and timing than intended here.

6 For, lo, I raise up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, which shall march through the breadth of the land, to possess the dwellingplaces that are not theirs.

- A. The Babylonians were coming, and their existence and coming were by God's providence.
- B. This empire, compared to a lion in Dan 7:4, was cruel and fast in their military expeditions.
- C. They shall violently invade the entirety of Israel to occupy assets and property of the Jews.
- D. See 1:8 to see further references to their speed and 1:9 to see more of their bitter cruelty.

7 They are terrible and dreadful: their judgment and their dignity shall proceed of themselves.

- A. God raised up this fierce and efficient empire, which dominated the known world of the time.
- B. Though no nation could resist them and the prophets warned Judah against the attempt, the Jews were blinded and too proud to see or hear, and they were soon overrun by Babylon.
- C. They did not and would not abide by any code of military ethics like the Geneva Convention.
- D. Consider Nebuchadnezzar cutting his own counselors in pieces, turning their houses into dunghills, or burning them in a furnace to see how they treated enemies (Dan 2:5; 3:1-7,29).

8 Their horses also are swifter than the leopards, and are more fierce than the evening wolves: and their horsemen shall spread themselves, and their horsemen shall come from far; they shall fly as the eagle that hasteth to eat.

- A. The “hasty nation” described in 1:6 is further explained here as to their speed of conquest.
- B. Instead of intimidating aircraft or tanks, the horse cavalry of Babylon was fast like eagles.

9 They shall come all for violence: their faces shall sup up as the east wind, and they shall gather the captivity as the sand.

- A. The “bitter nation” described in 1:6 is further explained here as to their terrible cruelty.
- B. They will be entirely united in their violent overthrow of the Jews by virtue of *all for violence*.
- C. They would devour Judah as the very dry and harsh winds out of the deserts east of the Jews.
- D. The number of captives they would take to Babylon would be numerous like grains of sand.

10 And they shall scoff at the kings, and the princes shall be a scorn unto them: they shall deride every strong hold; for they shall heap dust, and take it.

- A. The kings and princes would be a joke to them, for they would attack without any fear at all.
- B. Fortifications will not hinder them in the least, for they regard no defensive measures at all.
- C. Fortifications of trenches or moats would be filled with dirt and walls taken by ramps of dirt.

11 Then shall his mind change, and he shall pass over, and offend, imputing this his power unto his god.

- A. The Babylonians and their kings would get so haughty by their successes to blaspheme God.
- B. Consider how much Nebuchadnezzar idolized himself and his ideas (Dan 3:1-7; 4:29-30).
- C. Especially consider how Belteshazzar praised Babylonian gods for his successes (Dan 5:1-4).

12 Art thou not from everlasting, O LORD my God, mine Holy One? we shall not die. O LORD, thou hast ordained them for judgment; and, O mighty God, thou hast established them for correction.

- A. Hearing at the last a harsh word from the Lord about Babylon, Habakkuk rejoices in his God!
- B. Habakkuk responded to the news by praising God and trusting it as temporary chastening.
- C. Habakkuk had been grieving over Judah’s wickedness (1:2-4): here was God’s judgment!
- D. His words *we shall not die* refer to his confidence it was only temporary chastening for sins.
- E. God’s covenant with His people is forever, even if they disobey (Ps 89:28-37). Take comfort!

13 Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity: wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?

- A. As with a second response, once he understood the chastening and trusted God’s continued care, Habakkuk questioned using Chaldeans for chastening, since they were more wicked.
- B. God is of *purer eyes than to behold evil and look on iniquity approvingly*, for He beholds all evil acts of all men without any difficulty at all (Prov 15:3; Jer 16:17; Job 34:21-22).
- C. To prove that the above sense is correct, note that he immediately wrote that God does look!
- D. It was difficult for Habakkuk to understand how God could approve of such a wicked nation.

14 And makest men as the fishes of the sea, as the creeping things, that have no ruler over them?

- A. Fish are not organized in any efficient or defensive way to avoid capture and are taken freely.
- B. Nebuchadnezzar, the fisherman, could take as many fishes of the nations and Jews as desired.
- C. The ordinary providence of God over nations and special protection of Judah had been lifted.
- D. Nebuchadnezzar could take any with impunity, as fishermen gather fish and creeping things.
- E. The situation was under the providence of God, for Habakkuk admits His role in the matter.
- F. Keep the argument before you – Habakkuk cannot believe God allows the Chaldean killing.

15 They take up all of them with the angle, they catch them in their net, and gather them in their drag: therefore they rejoice and are glad.

- A. Fishermen may take solitary fish by hooks or take whole swarms of them by a net or a drag.
- B. The Chaldeans could focus on a single nation, for they could sweep up all men before them.
- C. Destroying nations and the Jews was without compunction or difficulty, as taking fish.
- D. They rejoice at all kinds of military successes – solitary expeditions or expansive campaigns.
- E. They gladly rejoice, not merely in their great successes, but also in the desolation of enemies.

16 Therefore they sacrifice unto their net, and burn incense unto their drag; because by them their portion is fat, and their meat plenteous.

- A. The Babylonians, flushed with their easy and large successes, take confidence in themselves.
- B. They give credit to their gods by sacrifice and incense, though God's providence allowed it.
- C. They did not literally worship their net or drag (military means), but gave credit to their gods.
- D. Their angle, net, and drag (military means) were raking up unbelievable wealth and power.
- E. Babylon accumulated wealth and built the most glorious city that can hardly be imagined.

17 Shall they therefore empty their net, and not spare continually to slay the nations?

- A. Habakkuk reasoned, if you allow this to continue, they will just keep doing this indefinitely.
- B. They will swallow up every man, city, state, nation, and kingdom under the whole heaven.
- C. If this rapacious slaughter of nations is not stopped, evil shall overcome good (Ps 58:1-11)?
- D. Keep the argument before you – shall not the Judge of all the earth do right (Gen 18:25)?
- E. The answer will come forth from the Judge of all the earth in the next chapter. Glory!

Chapter 2

Habakkuk professes his willingness to hear God's response to his complaint of chapter one (1); the LORD responds that the judgment is certain and should be plainly declared, but that faith will save the righteous (2-4); the LORD rebukes Babylon's greed and insatiableness (5-8); their covetousness (9-11); their cruelty (12-14); their drunken violence (15-17); and their idolatry (18-20).

1 I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved.

- A. As a prophet of God for the care and protection of the people, Habakkuk committed himself to vigilant readiness to see how God would answer his complaint from 1:12-17.
- B. He prepared to hear from God, so to be ready to answer reproofs of the Jews at his prophecy.
- C. The last clause is further explained by (1) the Lord's answer in 2:4; (2) if Habakkuk truly feared being reproved by God, then he would not have expostulated with Him as he did in 1:12-17; and (3) the style of the Lord's answer as found in 2:2-3 is for the Jews themselves.

2 And the LORD answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it.

- A. The first response of the Lord is for the vision of 1:5-11 to be made very plain for all readers.
- B. Godly ministers strive to use great plainness of speech, so hearers understand the lesson contained in God's word and communicated to them by preaching (Neh 8:8; II Cor 3:12).
- C. The goal of the plain writing of this vision of judgment was to help godly hearers prepare themselves against the horrible destruction coming ... so they could *run* in response.
- D. The text does not say the vision should be made plain, so *that he that runneth may read it*," as commentators imagine. Who runs while reading scripture? The godly run after reading!

3 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.

- A. The second response of the Lord is that the vision of 1:5-11 will definitely and surely come, though it may be delayed; its delay was only to wait for the appointed time of the Lord.
- B. The coming events would totally clarify and fulfill all that the vision contained and declared.
- C. Observe that even the most horrific events are *appointed* by God and shall occur as planned.
- D. Observe the two different senses of *tarry* within the same verse ... it will not tarry too long.

4 Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith.

- A. The third response of the Lord is that Nebuchadnezzar and his successors are arrogant and wrong in their attitude in the judgment; and the just of the Jews should live by faith only.
- B. Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians were lifted up wrongly, as the context declares (1:11).
 - 1. The singular male pronoun fits best with Nebuchadnezzar's offence mentioned (1:11,16).
 - 2. It also agrees with the singular male pronoun next of Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon (2:5).
 - 3. It is a fact that Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar were lifted up (Dan 4:30; 5:3-4,20,23).
- C. If the first clause applies to haughty Jews despising the prophecy, the lessons are not altered, and there is further contrast between the godly response of faith and that of foolish unbelief.
 - 1. One reason for this alternative interpretation is the disjunctive parallelism shown by *but*.
 - 2. Another reason is the indication that Habakkuk knew of ungodly Jewish attitudes (2:1c).

- D. Just men, sons of God, respond in faith by believing every word and submitting cheerfully.
 - 1. The just live by *his faith*, meaning his own trust in God, His promises, His providence.
 - 2. The just do not begin to live by faith, but their lives are faith-based on God's faithfulness.
 - 3. They endure what life brings them, because they trust totally in God's love and promises.
 - 4. Job said it well, even of death, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in Him" (Job 13:15).

5 *Yea also, because he transgresseth by wine, he is a proud man, neither keepeth at home, who enlargeth his desire as hell, and is as death, and cannot be satisfied, but gathereth unto him all nations, and heapeth unto him all people:*

- A. A new section of chapter 2 begins here, for God now pronounces judgment on the Chaldeans.
- B. Observe the inspired *Woe* that identifies five great evils of the Chaldeans (2:6,9,12,15,19).
- C. The opening words *yea also* are another form of *moreover* or *in addition to that* being said.
- D. Not only did Nebuchadnezzar pass over (1:11), but he was also an arrogant drunken king.
 - 1. Wine, common with kings, destroys judgment (Pr 20:1; 23:33; 31:4-5; Is 28:7; Dan 1:5).
 - 2. The luxurious lifestyle of drunkenness leads to greater pride, as in the case of this king.
 - 3. Discipline with alcohol leads to sobriety and prudence, especially so in affairs of state.
 - 4. Remember that Belshazzar partied with wine and his officials while Cyrus took Babylon!
 - 5. Comparing this verse with the next, there is a conditional connection for Babylon's ruin.
- E. The other words describe Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon's insatiable desire for conquests.
 - 1. *Keeping at home* refers to a king who is content with running the business of his nation.
 - 2. *Enlarging his desire as hell and death* is the unsatisfied lust of the grave (Pr 30:15-16).
 - 3. The Babylonians could not be satisfied, if there were *any nations or people still free*.

6 *Shall not all these take up a parable against him, and a taunting proverb against him, and say, Woe to him that increaseth that which is not his! how long? and to him that ladeth himself with thick clay!*

- A. Here is the first of five woes prophesied against this conquering nation (2:6,9,12,15,19).
- B. The nations and people he ambitiously and greedily abused would mock his coming defeat.
- C. Observe the sin at hand – increasing his conquests of other kingdom's people and riches.
- D. The mocking cry in the middle of the proverb declares that such abuse shall not be tolerated.
- E. It is a taunting proverb, so *lading himself with thick clay* mocks his riches of gold and silver.

7 *Shall they not rise up suddenly that shall bite thee, and awake that shall vex thee, and thou shalt be for booties unto them?*

- A. Oppressors never last long, for those who have been ground underfoot will rise up to bite!
- B. All governments are popular, so unpopular ones will soon be overthrown, as this evil tyrant.
- C. Therefore, the wise Preacher taught his son the important role of mercy (Prov 20:28; 29:14).
- D. Babylon had plundered many nations and taken spoil, and now they would be so plundered!
- E. Booty, or *booties*, is the captured plunder or spoils of war (Num 31:32; Jer 49:32). The plural may be as simple as recognizing that many nations would spoil Babylon, as follows (2:8).

8 Because thou hast spoiled many nations, all the remnant of the people shall spoil thee; because of men's blood, and for the violence of the land, of the city, and of all that dwell therein.

- A. Nebuchadnezzar had plundered many nations of spoil, and now they would do so to Babylon.
- B. All governments are popular, so unpopular ones will soon be overthrown, as this evil tyrant.
- C. Note this descriptive explanation: "because of men's blood ... all that dwell therein" (2:17).
- D. What goes around, comes around. Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. Those who live by the sword shall die by the sword.

9 Woe to him that coveteth an evil covetousness to his house, that he may set his nest on high, that he may be delivered from the power of evil!

- A. Here is the second of five woes prophesied against this conquering nation (2:6,9,12,15,19).
- B. Connected with the previous sin of insatiableness, Babylon's covetousness is clearly named.
- C. Babylon thought she would sit a lady of kingdoms forever by virtue of accumulated wealth.
- D. But there is no safety from the LORD, the Redeemer, who brought him down to the ground!

10 Thou hast consulted shame to thy house by cutting off many people, and hast sinned against thy soul.

- A. Babylon's greedy ambition and covetousness was sin against themselves and to their shame.
- B. Their war councils and consultations against others brought shame and ruin on themselves.
- C. The Preacher's wise counsel was that rejecting wisdom is the same as loving death (Pr 8:36).
- D. Nebuchadnezzar could have lengthened his tranquility by mercy, but he did not (Dan 4:27).

11 For the stone shall cry out of the wall, and the beam out of the timber shall answer it.

- A. The following verse interprets this one, for the stones and the beams were by blood and sin.
- B. The prophetic speech describes building materials crying for justice against the murderers.
- C. The LORD informed Cain that Abel's blood cried to Him from the ground (Genesis 4:10).
- D. Job understood this role of his assets, and he worked to avoid their curse (Job 31:38-40).
- E. The hoarded wealth of the persecutors of the saints cried out against them (James 5:1-5).

12 Woe to him that buildeth a town with blood, and stablisheth a city by iniquity!

- A. Here is the third of five woes prophesied against this conquering nation (2:6,9,12,15,19).
- B. It is vanity and certain judgment for men to steal and plunder to build their towns and cities.
- C. Jeremiah condemned using a neighbor's services on your house without wages (Je 22:13-14).
- D. Murder is a crime that God does not overlook for long – He will avenge (Proverbs 28:17).

13 Behold, is it not of the LORD of hosts that the people shall labour in the very fire, and the people shall weary themselves for very vanity?

- A. When you consider things carefully, you can see God turning the efforts of pagans to vanity.
- B. Though no earthly kingdom could threaten Babylon, the LORD of hosts would destroy it!
- C. Though no host on earth could overthrow the glory of kingdoms, there was a host in heaven!
- D. The rise of the Medes and Persians, their confederacy, and their strategy were of the LORD!

- E. The Chaldeans labored to build a great city that would burn, making labor vain (Jer 51:28)!
- F. The Chaldeans labored as the city burned to save what they could of their vanity (Jer 51:28)!
- G. Note how the IRS rewards those with children and giving, and punishes those without them!

14 For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.

- A. This text must be understood first and foremost in its context, rather than the reader's fancy.
- B. Habakkuk has just introduced the LORD of host's role in the destruction of Babylon (2:13).
- C. We should not leap to Christ's death, Holy Spirit regeneration, or worldwide spread of the gospel, though similar words may mean such things in other contexts (Isaiah 11:19).
- D. The destruction of a haughty and impregnable city is the context, getting God great glory.
- E. God is known by the judgments He executes (Job 40:11-12; Ps 9:14-20; 83:1-18; 98:1-3).
- F. Compare similar expressions about Assyria or Babylon's overthrow (Isaiah 37:20; 41:14-20; 43:11-15; 44:23-28; 45:1-6; 47:1-9; 49:24-26; Jeremiah 50:33-34).
- G. God got the glory, for (1) scripture foretold the event in detail, (2) Cyrus gave credit to the God of heaven, and (3) the Jews were freed (II Chron 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1-2; Is 44:21 – 45:6)!
- H. Pharaoh existed, reigned, and was drowned for God's worldwide name (Ex 9:16; Rom 9:17).
- I. Those who will not learn of His glory by His mouth shall learn of it by His hand (M. Henry).

15 Woe unto him that giveth his neighbour drink, that puttest thy bottle to him, and makest him drunken also, that thou mayest look on their nakedness!

- A. Here is the fourth of five woes prophesied against this conquering nation (2:6,9,12,15,19).
- B. Further condemnation of the Babylonians and Chaldeans concerns their deceitful treachery through the use of alcohol to inebriate their guests and take advantage of them sexually.
- C. Wine left Noah naked, and Lot's daughters used it for their incest (Gen 9:20-23; 19:30-38).
- D. It is clear the Babylonians were drinkers, for they drank with an army nearby (Dan 5:1-4)!
- E. Such absurd and profane conduct is not befitting any noble men, especially kings (Pr 31:4-5).
- F. The Assyrians before them were drunkards, as shown by Benhadad's life; the Babylonians assimilated many of their people and practices (I Kings 20:16; II Chron 33:11; Ezek 23:23).
- G. Why did Persia not compel drinking (Esther 1:7-8)? Was it to avoid the Babylonian excess?
- H. To use this or similar texts to condemn moderate drinking proves great ignorance or malice.

16 Thou art filled with shame for glory: drink thou also, and let thy foreskin be uncovered: the cup of the LORD'S right hand shall be turned unto thee, and shameful spewing shall be on thy glory.

- A. What shameful things Babylon did to others would be turned on their heads (Psalm 7:11-16).
- B. The wicked treacheries they did to others to despise and shame them would be done to them.
- C. The cup of the LORD, a metaphor for God's judgment, would be forced down his throat.

17 For the violence of Lebanon shall cover thee, and the spoil of beasts, which made them afraid, because of men's blood, and for the violence of the land, of the city, and of all that dwell therein.

- A. Similar to 2:8, the text promises God's vengeance on Babylon for their bloody violence.
- B. Lebanon is used for Israel, for it was the vengeance of His people that mattered (Deut 3:25).
- C. The *violence of Lebanon* is the violence done upon and to Lebanon by the Chaldean armies.

- D. The *spoil of beasts* describes the slaughtering of beasts by the Chaldeans, which caused great fear in the beasts before dying – this *shall also cover* the inhabitants of Babylon in revenge.
- E. The fearful judgment of Babylon that was coming was for the blood they shed violently.

18 *What profiteth the graven image that the maker thereof hath graven it; the molten image, and a teacher of lies, that the maker of his work trusteth therein, to make dumb idols?*

- A. A final woe is issued against Babylon for idolatry, which God despises as a heinous sin.
- B. God mocks idiots who would be foolish enough to make graven images and to trust in them.
- C. What power is there in a graven idol that a man had to make and haul around like a chair!
- D. The trust the Babylonians had in their gods would be shown to be utterly foolish and vain.

19 *Woe unto him that saith to the wood, Awake; to the dumb stone, Arise, it shall teach! Behold, it is laid over with gold and silver, and there is no breath at all in the midst of it.*

- A. Here is the fifth of five woes prophesied against this conquering nation (2:6,9,12,15,19).
- B. It is hard to imagine such blindness and insanity, but much of the earth has worshipped such.
- C. The blessed Creator God of heaven loves to mock such idols and their makers (Is 44:9-20).
- D. He said idols are senseless objects and makers and worshippers also (Ps 115:3-8; 135:15-18).
- E. Babylon had false gods (Is 46:1; Dan 5:4). Nebuchadnezzar even made his own (Dan 3:1-6).
- F. God is Jealous! He will not allow men to share or steal His glory, especially for idols!

20 *But the LORD is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him.*

- A. Contrary to the profitless and vain wood and stone idols of Babylon, the LORD is God alone.
- B. Rather than being an inanimate object to be hauled about, the LORD Jehovah was in heaven!
- C. Where is the LORD Jehovah? In His holy temple – where He measures all the actions of all men by the holy standard of His infinitely pure character and mind, and He will revenge!
- D. What a glorious capstone to this prophecy of God's judgment on idol-adoring Chaldeans!
- E. What a glorious conclusion to the lengthy answer of Habakkuk's concern and questions!
- F. Let every captive humbly submit and wait in faith and hope on deliverance from this LORD.
- G. Let every foolish idolater and sinner break off his sins before the coming fury of judgment.
- H. This is the summary lesson you must learn and remember, no matter what the circumstances – the LORD is in His holy temple, and he will deliver. Wait on the LORD! Wait, I say. Wait!

Chapter 3

Our prophet submits to God's sovereign judgment on both Judah and Babylon as described in the previous two chapters with a prayer/song (1-2); he comforts himself and worships the LORD by recounting God's glory and majesty in delivering His people in times past (3-15); and in spite of the terrifying chastening coming, he professes his complete joy and trust in God's providential correction, care, and eventual deliverance (16-19).

1 A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet upon Shigionoth.

- A. With the LORD in His holy temple (2:20), Habakkuk presented an inspired prayer of praise.
- B. This chapter is a prayer, but it was also a song, which was to be used in worship (3:19b).
- C. Consider his use of *Selah* as David used it for effective pauses (3:3,9,13 cp Ps 3:2,4,8 etc.).
- D. What is *Shigionoth*? It seems to be some reference to being a song, similar to Psalm 7, which could be a place for singing, a kind of singing, a kind of tune, a kind of instrument, etc.
- E. David and Moses used prayers for psalms (Ps 86:1; 90:1), so Habakkuk did for a song (3:19).

2 O LORD, I have heard thy speech, and was afraid: O LORD, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy.

- A. He opened the prayer and song by appealing for God's mercy in light of coming judgments.
- B. The judgments on Judah were to be severe enough to cause fear (1:5-11). And how could the captive Jews in Babylon escape the entire overthrow of that city and kingdom (2:5-19)?
- C. When we hear the threatening warnings of scripture against sin and sinners, we should fear.
- D. He knew the coming wrath was loving chastening for their correction, but it was still fearful.
- E. He begged the LORD to *revive His church* during the coming years of chastening judgment.
- F. He begged the LORD to *make Himself and His mercy known to His church* during the years.
- G. Though knowing God had promised mercy, he begs for it anyway, which is wise praying.

3 God came from Teman, and the Holy One from mount Paran. Selah. His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise.

- A. Moses used similar words for God's dramatic dealings with Israel at Mount Sinai, which interprets the verse and direction for us (Deut 33:2-5; Judges 5:1-5; Ps 68:7-8; I Cor 2:13).
- B. Where was *Teman*? In Edom, the heritage of Esau, also called Seir, near Mount Sinai (Gen 21:21; 36:15; Num 10:12; Deut 1:2; Jer 49:7,20; Amos 1:12; Ob 1:9).
- C. Where was *Paran*? In Edom, the heritage of Esau, also called Seir, near Mount Sinai (Gen 21:21; Num 10:12).
- D. How did *God come* from these places? God is everywhere at all times, but prophetic language describes Him as coming for His presence, blessing, favor, defense, or judgment.
- E. *Selah* is a meditative pause to reflect on God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt to Canaan.
- F. Read about the glory of that great event at Mt. Sinai, when He displayed His glory for His praise (Ex 19:9-25; 20:18-21; 24:12-18; Deut 5:23-29; Ps 68:17; II Cor 3:7-8; Heb 12:18).
- G. God at Sinai was so glorious and terrible, Moses exceedingly feared and quaked (He 12:21)!

4 And his brightness was as the light; he had horns coming out of his hand: and there was the hiding of his power.

- A. God's glory on Sinai was like fire (Ex 19:18; 24:17; Psalm 104:2; I Tim 6:16; Heb 12:18).

- B. Horns in prophetic/poetic language are emblems of glory and strength (I Sam 2:1,10; Ps 75:10; 89:17; 92:10; 132:17; 148:14; Jer 48:25; Lam 2:3,17; Zec 1:21; Luke 1:69).
- C. And He had these somewhat visible in His powerful hand and right arm, which no man can stay (Ps 20:6; 78:54; 98:1; Is 62:8; Dan 4:35).
- D. His power was clear and visible, but He had much more (Job 26:14; Ps 145:3; Is 40:26-29)!
- E. He dwells in a light no man can enter, hiding some of His power (Ex 33:17-23; I Tim 6:16).
- F. While we seek to provide literal examples of the description of God's glory and power, remember the nature of similitudes as used by the prophets (Hosea 12:10; Rev 1:1).

5 Before him went the pestilence, and burning coals went forth at his feet.

- A. As God led Israel out of Egypt, He dealt with their enemies by pestilence and hornets and other supernatural uses of natural enemies (Ex 9:15; 12:29-30; Deut 28:21-22; Ps 78:50-51).
- B. The prophet describes God descending in fire, leading of Israel by a pillar of fire, and judging their enemies with fire (Ex 9:23-24; 13:21; 19:18; 24:17; 40:38; Num 9:15-16; 11:1-3; 16:35; Deut 1:33; 4:11-12,23-24; 9:3; Isaiah 30:30-33; Nah 1:5-6; II Thess 1:8).
- C. While we seek to provide literal examples of the description of God's glory and power, remember the nature of similitudes as used by the prophets (Hosea 12:10; Rev 1:1).

6 He stood, and measured the earth: he beheld, and drove asunder the nations; and the everlasting mountains were scattered, the perpetual hills did bow: his ways are everlasting.

- A. The God of Israel measured the earth, drove out the nations, and gave Canaan to His people for their inheritance (Gen 15:18-21; Ex 15:17; Num 34:1-12; Deut 4:38; 32:8-9; Josh 11:23).
- B. Remember that the land of Canaan had been measured before to Abraham (Gen 15:18-21).
- C. He did literally move Mount Sinai, which quaked greatly (Ex 19:18; Judges 5:5; Ps 114:4-7).
- D. Everlasting mountains and perpetual hills represent the nations, which God scattered asunder; compare the shaking of the heavens and the earth (Hag 2:6-9; Heb 12:26-29).
- E. Jehovah is of greater eternity and certainty and duration than any mountains, hills, or nations.
- F. His deliverance, grace, mercy, and power may be trusted at all times and in all situations.

7 I saw the tents of Cushan in affliction: and the curtains of the land of Midian did tremble.

- A. We take Cushan to be Cush, or Ethiopia, by the origin of the word and proximity to Midian.
- B. Ethiopia was neighbor to Egypt and Midian, near the passage of Israel to Canaan, and saw God's destruction of powerful Egypt (Gen 10:6; Ps 105:27; Is 43:3).
- C. Midian faced Moses and Israel before they got to the land of Canaan (Num 22:1-4; 31:1-8).
- D. All nations in that part of the world were frightened by Israel (Ex 15:14-16; I Samuel 4:5-9).

8 Was the LORD displeased against the rivers? was thine anger against the rivers? was thy wrath against the sea, that thou didst ride upon thine horses and thy chariots of salvation?

- A. Here is prophetic mockery about the dividing of the Red Sea and the Jordan River, similar to David's mockery of the hills and mountains of the Sinai Peninsula (Psalm 114:1-8).
 1. Rejoice in the dividing of the Red Sea to save Israel from the Egyptians (Ex 14:21-22)!
 2. Rejoice in the dividing of the Jordan River to intimidate the Canaanites (Josh 3:16-17)!

- B. Contrary to Pharaoh's difficulty with his chariot, the LORD came with glorious salvation!
- C. Compare Moses' description of God coming to rescue Israel from trouble (Deut 33:26-27)!
- D. Compare David's description of God coming to His rescue from trouble (Psalm 18:6-10)!

9 *Thy bow was made quite naked, according to the oaths of the tribes, even thy word. Selah. Thou didst cleave the earth with rivers.*

- A. God pulled His bow from cover to fulfill His promises to the tribes to destroy their enemies!
 - 1. David described God bending His *bow* to destroy His enemies with arrows (Ps 7:12-13).
 - 2. God had made promises by *oaths* to the fathers and the 12 tribes, not just Abraham, to promote and defend them (Gen 15:18-21; 17:7-8; 28:13-14; Ps 105:8-15).
 - 3. Do you trust the *word* of the living God? It is this word that gives strength to our souls.
 - 4. This glorious promise and *word* was worthy of a *Selah*, a meditative pause for reflection.
- B. God defend His people from military enemies, but He also defended them from thirst!
 - 1. He cleaved the earth with rivers of waters for His people from rock (Ex 17:6; Nu 20:11)!
 - 2. This was cause for celebration and praise from David years later (Ps 78:15-16; 105:41).

10 *The mountains saw thee, and they trembled: the overflowing of the water passed by: the deep uttered his voice, and lifted up his hands on high.*

- A. Here are prophetic repetitions of things already mentioned for the sake of emphasis and faith.
- B. Mountains, whether Sinai or kings and nations, quaked and trembled (Ex 19:18; Num 22:3).
- C. The deep waters of the Red Sea and flooding waters of the Jordan moved out of Israel's way.
- D. The Red Sea, a very frightening thing to men, shouted, "Yes, Sir!" to the God of Jeshurun!
- E. It piled up water on the left and right hands of Israel to swear obedience to God's command!

11 *The sun and moon stood still in their habitation: at the light of thine arrows they went, and at the shining of thy glittering spear.*

- A. Joshua defeated five kings of the Amorites, and the LORD made a slaughter (Josh 10:1-28)!
- B. He prayed to the LORD for the *sun and moon to stand still*, which they did (Cp Ps 19:4-6).
- C. If God can and will stop the sun and moon in their circuits, what can or will He not do?!
- D. They, the children of Israel, followed the Lord's destructive storm of hailstones (Josh 10:11).
- E. This clear reference to a signal event of Israel in the wilderness directs our interpretation.
- F. Why not understand this of the violent storm, including hailstones, which killed the most?

12 *Thou didst march through the land in indignation, thou didst thresh the heathen in anger.*

- A. God displayed glory and power for or through His people like an indignant and angry king!
- B. They were not close battles with the outcome in doubt; there was no quarter given to any!
- C. Israel could not have beat these foes naturally, but Jehovah was their Captain and Conqueror.
- D. God hardened their hearts to come in battle, so He would not have to give mercy (Jos 11:20).
- E. Pick up from Psalm 68, which is one of David's psalms that describes God help to Israel.

13 Thou wentest forth for the salvation of thy people, even for salvation with thine anointed; thou woundedst the head out of the house of the wicked, by discovering the foundation unto the neck. Selah.

- A. The glorious display of God's power in Egypt and Canaan was for His favor toward Israel!
 - 1. Consider how Moses explained the salvation of God to them (Exodus 14:13-14; 15:1-2).
 - 2. Though secondary causes are mentioned, the primary cause was for Israel (Gen 15:16).
 - 3. It was for groaning and sighing in Egypt that God saved them (Ex 2:23-25; Deut 26:7-9).
 - 4. It was because of their begging prayers when in need that He saved them ().
- B. The *anointed* were the leaders of Israel, such as Moses and Joshua (Num 27:15-23; Deut 34:9; Ps 77:20; 105:13-15; Is 63:11-12).
- C. The great God attacked and destroyed both the head and the support of Israel's enemies.
 - 1. Consider the firstborn of every family in Egypt from Pharaoh to paupers (Exodus 12:29).
 - 2. He destroyed both kings and armies, princes and people, rulers and servants, even all!
- D. The total destruction of their enemies and the reason for it deserve a quiet pause, a *Selah*.

14 Thou didst strike through with his staves the head of his villages: they came out as a whirlwind to scatter me: their rejoicing was as to devour the poor secretly.

- A. God smote the wicked rulers of Canaan, large and small, with their own staves and weapons, a common event in the history of Israel (Judges 7:22; I Sam 14:16-20; II Chron 20:23).
- B. The wicked overthrew Israel's villages, so God's retribution overthrew theirs (Judges 5:7)!
- C. The first person pronoun *me* is used by Habakkuk to connect himself with Israel as in 1:12.
- D. In spite of all the works in Egypt, the enemies of Israel came out furiously against them.

15 Thou didst walk through the sea with thine horses, through the heap of great waters.

- A. He returns for the third time to God's great work at the Red Sea and Jordan River (3:8,10).
- B. Again, you should discern the difference between the LORD's horses and Pharaoh's horses!
- C. Yet, all great difficulties and troubles are sometimes described as a stormy sea or great waters, from which the Lord delivers (Psalms 32:6; 42:7; 69:1-2,13-15; 124:1-5; Isaiah 43:2).
- D. Here ends the glorious praise and worship of Habakkuk's review of Israel's history (3:3-15).

16 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.

- A. Habakkuk, still in prayer and song, returns to the warning of Judah's judgment (1:5-11; 3:2).
- B. The means to find rest during trouble is humble fear and faith, not ease, pride, or any rebellion (Job 34:31-37; 35:14-16; 36:15-18; Psalm 94:12-13; 126:4-6; Ezek 9:4-6).
- C. Compare this to David encouraging himself in the Lord (I Sam 30:6; Ps 77:1-20; 78:9-16).
- D. The coming troops were the Chaldeans, as promised, to invade Israel under Nebuchadnezzar.

17 Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour 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:

- A. War brings famine, and Habakkuk here described agricultural destruction by six hard clauses.
- B. Those who find purpose and pleasure in creature comforts will be ruined by such troubles.
- C. Those who find purpose and pleasure in God Himself will not be moved even if losing all.

18 Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation.

- A. Having detailed total economic and financial disaster, Habakkuk still finds joy in the LORD.
- B. Though great danger arises, the just can be confident and joyful by their faith (Psalm 27:1-6).
- C. Job found the same faith and strength in the LORD in his severe calamities (Job 1:20-22).
- D. The Jews would be saved from Babylon, and Babylon would be permanently destroyed!
- E. The LORD our God is our salvation, for He will never desert those who trust in Him.
- F. If we view salvation to heaven rightly, nothing on earth can move us (Ro 8:18; II Cor 4:17).

19 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.

- A. As David earlier, Habakkuk found his strength and joy in the LORD Himself, and there is truly no other place to find it (Ps 27:1-6; 73:25-26; Isaiah 12:1-3; Col 1:9-11; Heb 13:5-6).
- B. The LORD is in His holy temple (2:20), why should any man question or fear any matter – He is the only holy God incapable of evil and the only Jehovah God incapable of failing!
- C. A *hind* is a female deer, which is noted for lightness and fleetness of foot, indicating escape from trouble, speed of purpose, or easily pursuing enemies when needed (Cp Ps 18:29).
- D. The *high places* indicate the most eminent places in an estate for protection and/or glory.
- E. For his song, Habakkuk used wording David had used earlier (II Samuel 22:34; Ps 18:33).
- F. This was a prayer and song, as shown by the opening Shigionoth (3:1) and the last sentence, which shows similarity to several of David's psalms (Ps 4:1; 6:1; 7:1; 54:1; 55:1; 67:1; 76:1).
- G. Both David and Moses had used prayers for two psalms, so Habakkuk here (Ps 86:1; 90:1).

Conclusion and Keys:

- 1. Though the wicked multiply and righteous judgment ceases, God will punish the evildoers (1:2-4).
- 2. God's judgment of His saints is consistent corrective chastening short of death or destruction (1:12).
- 3. Regardless of others' pride, godly men will live a faith-based life regardless of circumstances (2:4).
- 4. In spite of all the arrogance, violence, and claims of the wicked, God is in His holy temple (2:20).
- 5. When the chastening hand of God falls upon a man, it is time to call for mercy in the wrath (3:2).
- 6. The LORD has given His word for the sake of His elect, and you should always trust in it fully (3:9).
- 7. Humble fear before God and remembering His old works can bring rest in the day of trouble (3:16).
- 8. Habakkuk took the lessons of this book and used them for joy and strength in the LORD (3:17-19).
- 9. The overall lesson of the book is the life of faith, which should provide our joy, hope, and peace in the face of any difficulties by the power of the Holy Ghost (Job 13:15; Ps 73:25-26; Rom 15:13).

For Further Study:

- 1. The sermon, "Why Bad Things Happen," ... <http://www.letgodbetruer.com/sermons/pdf/why-bad-things-happen.pdf>.
- 2. The sermon, "When It Seems Hopeless" ... <http://www.letgodbetruer.com/sermons/pdf/when-things-seem-hopeless.pdf>.
- 3. The sermon, "The Dominion of God," ... <http://www.letgodbetruer.com/sermons/pdf/dominion-of-god.pdf>.
- 4. The sermon, "The King of Kings," ... <http://www.letgodbetruer.com/sermons/pdf/king-of-kings.pdf>.
- 5. The web document, "Making Sense of Daniel," ... <http://www.letgodbetruer.com/daniel/daniel-intro.htm>.
- 6. The sermon outline, "The Life of Faith," ... <http://www.letgodbetruer.com/sermons/pdf/life-of-faith3.pdf>.
- 7. The sermon outline, "Ass's Heads and Dove's Dung," ... <http://www.letgodbetruer.com/sermons/pdf/dove-dung.pdf>.