

HABAKKUK COMMENTARY

*In reading through Habakkuk several times recently, I have been struck with several of the statements recorded by this little known prophet that are very well known themselves. It is likely, however, that few people know that this obscure prophet's writing is the source of the striking statements. One is in Habakkuk 1:13, "You who are of purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong." This is of course the answer to Christ's plaintive questioning Calvary cry, "My God, My God, Why has Thou forsaken Me?" My earliest memories of church life include the choir singing a call to worship taken from Habakkuk 2:20, "... the LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him." Hannah Hurnard's famous book, Hind's Feet on High Places, got the inspiration for its title from Habakkuk 3:19, "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**." Of course, the most frequently quoted passage in our little book is from Habakkuk 2:4, "The just shall live by faith." Three New Testament books quote this directly from Habakkuk.*

Habakkuk was predicting the rise of Babylon, which places his work somewhere in the last half of the seventh century before Christ - about 640 - 615 B.C. Much of the book seems to be a conversation between Habakkuk and Yahweh. That chat contains a good many questions, of which I find six in chapter one and five in chapter two. The third chapter has only two interrogatives, as hope replaces perplexity. The prophecy closes with the prophet resting in God and rejoicing in spite of earthly circumstances.

CHAPTER 1

By the time Habakkuk prophesied, the northern kingdom, Israel, had already fallen to Assyria (722-721 BC). Heads of state had long before ceased to come to Jerusalem to honor the Jewish monarch, as the Queen of Sheba did to Solomon. Israel's division into 2 kingdoms had weakened her standing on the world stage. Such ancient powers as Assyria, Egypt, and Babylon were now front-page news. Babylon had pushed Assyria into history, and at the Battle of Carchemish (605 BC), the Chaldeans (another name for the Babylonians) had defeated Pharaoh Neco of Egypt, establishing their military supremacy among nations. Judah (the southern kingdom) was about to fall to wicked Babylon.

A PUZZLED PROPHET

THE PUZZLE ABOUT WHAT HABAKKUK SAW

1) Habakkuk the prophet saw a word from God; this is what prophets did - they received a word from God and delivered it to His people. "Oracle" is often translated "burden," signifying that the message was weighty. Surely it was here!

2) God's people, and sometimes even His prophets, like Habakkuk, grow weary in waiting for the fulfillment of His word. Over sixty times the expression "how long" occurs in Scripture. Sometimes it is God questioning man's timetable, and at other times it is the reverse. Habakkuk voices two complaints: 1) he feels that his cry to God is not heard, and 2) God does not respond and save. Man is not a very good "waiter." And yet (Isaiah 40:31) "*They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength.*" The Jews in captivity wondered often, "How long until this is over?" Jeremiah had given them the answer before the captivity began. In seventy years, there would be the chance to return home from the exile. God spoke of an end, and His word will prove true. The return home, that blessed event, will be well worth the wait. God has appointed its time, and it will come not a minute late. And still today we can depend on God to

be timely in His dealings with us. His timing is always perfect. The present silence of God doesn't mean He hasn't heard us. Nor does the appearance of His inaction reveal the reality - God is always at work, even when we cannot see His hand moving to help.

3) The "how long" question is followed by a "why" query; there is something puzzling the prophet. Habakkuk sees iniquity, wrong, destruction, violence, strife, and contention. The sense of right and wrong in the prophet give him grief at these observations! Yet his assertion that God was indifferent and/or idle was way off the mark. Man's vision is limited to the past and present, and even then we cannot see all that God is doing.

4) Perverted justice, paralyzed Law, pernicious men surrounding good men - this all looked so wrong to Habakkuk, and it was wrong. We might say God was patient to allow men time to repent. We know also that behind the scenes He was (and is) preparing to act in a very visible, public way. I'm glad God is patient with me, and with others.

THE PLAN GOD WAS ALREADY EXECUTING

5) God responds: "Habakkuk, you are looking in too small a circle. Look among the nations, and you will see that I am at work. Watch international news, for what I am about to do is BIG! When it happens, you will be awestruck and astonished. But if I told you now, you would not believe my plan. It is incredible, but it will come to pass!"

6) Yahweh had disciplined Israel, the northern kingdom, with Assyria; now He has a new rod for Judah - they will feel the whip of the Chaldeans. Nations rise on the world stage and have their day. Then others come along and replace them. The constant is God, and His people Israel have outlived their ancient enemies - Israel is a nation today, and where are the others?

7) The arrogance of Nebuchadnezzar, described in Daniel 4, is characteristic of the nation he ruled. They feel that they answer to no one. Nations dread and fear them, for they are known to be ruthless - a law unto themselves.

8) Please stop here and read Jeremiah 5:17 and Lamentations 4:19. The prophet Jeremiah puts in more detail what Habakkuk mentions here. These mounted warriors are fast, fierce, and untiring. Distance is no barrier to them, as they, like the eagles, fly high, measure their prey, and then swoop down to attack and devour. "This, Habakkuk, is what I am preparing to address the evils of My people, Judah. I'm not ignoring their wrongdoing."

9) Like sin, like punishment. Violence had been an offense of Judah; the Chaldeans would show them real violence! "*Whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap*" (Galatians 6:7). The chickens do come home to roost! The advance of this enemy will be formidable and irresistible. Their captives will be as innumerable as grains of sand in the desert.

10) The arrogant confidence of these Chaldean warriors leads them to scoff at kings and to ridicule other rulers. This was seen when they slew the princes of Judah before the eyes of King Zedekiah, and then they put out his eyes so the last thing he saw was the deaths of his sons. Earthen ramps enabled the penetrating of walled cities.

THE PROPHET'S PERPLEXITY WITH GOD'S ANSWER

11) A strange twist is seen to God using Babylon to chasten Judah - He then will hold the Chaldeans accountable for their guilt in being so ruthless in carrying out their divinely appointed task. Their sacrilege in worshiping their military might also is deserving of God's punishment. "*I will bless them that bless you and curse those who...*" (Genesis 12:3).

12) Habakkuk entreated God in verses 1-4; God replied in 5-11. Now Habakkuk speaks again to Yahweh in 12 ff. The prophet calls upon the eternal and holy God. He acknowledges that Yahweh is raising up Babylon to reprove and to judge Judah. God's sovereignty over the nations is seen in the verbs "ordained" and "established."

13) Here is an answer to the cross-cry of Jesus (Matthew 27:46, Mark 15:34), "*Why hast Thou*

forsaken Me?" Jesus became sin for us, and God had to turn away. He was too holy to look upon His Son when Jesus became sin. Habakkuk uses that holiness of God as a reason to question why He would use such a wicked nation as Babylon to punish the less-wicked nation of Judah? The truth is likely that Judah's possession of the law, the Temple, and the priesthood made their sin even more egregious than the sin of Babylon.

14) Habakkuk bemoans the helplessness of Judah against Babylon, comparing the people of Judah to schools of fish, with no leader or protector, being snared in the net of the fisherman. Would God allow this to happen to His chosen people? Yes, He would.

15) Idols representing Babylonian deities are seen holding fishing nets in which squirm captured enemy populations. These wicked armies had as little regard for captured people as commercial fishermen have for fish caught in their nets. The only emotion is joy at the victory, with no feelings at all for the mistreated captives.

16) Oblivious to the sovereign purpose of Yahweh that included them in this history, the Babylonians worship the things which brought them victory - their military might, the superior battle strategies, which were pictured as nets capturing fish. Their livelihoods and even their luxuriant lifestyles they attribute not to God, but to themselves and their military prowess. And so they literally worship themselves!

17) When a fisherman has enough of a catch to meet his needs, we presume that he will cease fishing for the time. But these voracious for power and conquest Babylonians empty their nets only to cast them again and again and again! Will they never cease their violence against other nations, destroying lives, separating families, and taking captives?

CHAPTER 2

The prophet Habakkuk probably prophesied just before the first siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon. He is a most philosophical prophet, and he dialogues with God over issues he doesn't understand. His first quiz for God is about Judah's perpetual sin with apparent impunity. The historic books and the prophetic books catalog Judah's sins including violence, bloodshed, perverted justice, and more. The prophet has cried to God over and over, but he feels that God has ignored his cries. God responds that He is aware, and He is active. "Look to the north, and you will see a bitter and hasty nation, the Chaldeans; I will raise them up and bring them against Judah to punish them for their sins against me." God describes the violent propensities and powerful aggression of the Chaldeans (also known as the Babylonians and Mesopotamians). That leads Habakkuk to ponder an even larger philosophical question - how can a holy God use such a wicked, violent, idolatrous nation to judge His own people? Is He not, after all, of purer eyes than to countenance sin? The dialogue between God and Habakkuk is intense, and it contains some precious nuggets of truth that extend far beyond their limited immediate contexts. As Habakkuk ponders the inequities he sees, and as he presents his inquiries to God, the answers that come from God cause him to be comforted, In the end, the God Who brings judgment does so in justice, and He brings to His people a glory that we still await as the drama unfolds.

GREED AND GORE GIVE WAY TO GLORY

THE CRY FOR UNDERSTANDING - WHEN WILL IT END?

1) The prophet takes his place as a sentinel on the city wall to get a word from the Lord. He saw a problem, posed a question, and now he will await an answer. He will not concern himself with lower life, nor will he amuse himself with its toys. He will show his earnestness to the Lord, and he will not let Him go until He shall bless him, like Jacob of old. He will not quit his post until an answer for the people is at hand. He awaits an answer from God.

2) How blessed we are that God has given us His written Word. Word of mouth is so easily forgotten, but the written record is ours for time to come. Matthew Henry put it this way, "What is handed down by tradition is easily mistaken and liable to corruption; but what is written is reduced to a certainty and preserved safe and pure." God often told His prophets to write down the things that He told or showed them - that is how we got this blessed Book. Habakkuk was to write it plainly so that we who are to herald it to others may read it, and then read it again. And then we are to run to share it with others. He did his job - now comes the question, "Are we doing what God has given us to do with it?"

3) Sometimes the people of God get a bit impatient, waiting for His promises to be fulfilled. What seems to us to a delay may make us wonder if the thing is really going to happen or not. The prophets were not immune to similar thinking. God here reminds his impatient prophet that He did not lie to him - the prophesied judgment will indeed come to pass. Babylon will pay for her unnecessary cruelty in carrying out God's chastening of Judah. Yes, Habakkuk, it may seem slow, but just wait for it. It will surely come to pass."

THE CHARACTER OF THE WICKED - GREEDY & AND GORY

4) Here Habakkuk sets two opposing views of life before us. One is characteristic of the arrogant Babylonians, the other ***should be*** the character of God's people, the Jews. The negative side of the contrast is that Babylon is a bastion of pride, puffed up and haughty. The positive side describes the righteous man, with a life of faith, simple trust in God. One writer said this was like a "diamond in a pile of soot." This great statement is thrice repeated in the New Testament, in Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews. In the mind and from the pen of Martin Luther, it became the battle cry of the reformation - *"The just shall live by faith!"* Pride and faith are always mutually exclusive. While the proud may seem to win, the trusting one knows the truth of 1 John 5:4, *"This is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith."*

5) The haughty, restless Chaldean, like many who came before and after him, is deceived by wine (Daniel 5:1-40). Like the insatiable grave (Proverbs 27:20), the conquering nature of the Chaldean is never satisfied. The likes of Nebuchadnezzar would never be satisfied, even if all earth's nations were under their thumbs. In the end, however, she would be victim and not victor, conquered and not conqueror. Only God makes the final conquest, and He does this in Christ, the great Victor. He subdues the last enemy, death, and He becomes the King of all kings, the Lord of all lords (Revelation 19:16). Several vices characterize the Babylonian: 1. He is a drunkard; 2. He is proud; 3. He is one who roams, unable to be at rest; 4. He is insatiably greedy; 5. He likes to dominate others. Habakkuk could easily be describing many a modern-day American. We Christians should rather be sober, humble, peacefully stable, content, and meek. These we may be only through the work of the Holy Spirit in us.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF WRONGDOING - SOWING AND REAPING

6) Men who see the greedy consume the powerless are not impressed. They will at some point speak out against them, asking how long their extortion will be allowed to continue? A declaration of hope for their destruction rises up - "Woe to the greedy person whose wealth is made by doing wrong to others!" God loathes social injustice.

7), 8) Several times in the prophets, greedy men have been pictured as "eating up" the weak to get further and further ahead. Their wickedness will no longer go on uninterrupted. At last, those whose debts have grown because of the greed of powerful men will wake up and rise up and "bite back!" The hunter will be captured by the game as their roles are reversed. Babylon's plundering of the nations will come back to haunt them. They will be plundered because they have lived unjustly. American colonists rose up against British tyranny. The *proletariat* in Russia overthrew the *bourgeoisie*. The books which oppressed men are not able to balance

now, God will balance by and by.

9) Instead of the taunting of the weak who rise up against their oppressors, this seems now to be God's voice speaking out against those profiting by unjust gain. The security they thought to obtain by their ill-gotten gain will not keep them safe from the hand of the great Avenger.

Babylon would fall to Medo-Persia, and the fall would be great!

10) Nebuchadnezzar was not unlike his modern counterpart, Saddam Hussein. Each had designs of a vast, spreading empire, to rival or exceed all that went before it. The plan to grow was at the expense of the deaths of many peoples, a thing shameful to their own people. Each shamed his house, and each died in infamy.

11) God's prophets often used metaphors to call testimony against those who had made themselves God's enemies. *"I call heaven and earth to witness"* (Deuteronomy 4:26), was such a metaphor. Here inanimate objects like stones and timbers in a building speak out in testimony against the wicked Babylonians who destroyed many buildings.

12) There are three woes here: **1.** Verses 6 - 8 there is the ***woe of plunder***, greed; **2.** Verses 9 - 11 tell of the ***woe of pride***; **3.** Verses 12 - 14 describe the ***woe of perversity*** that leads a man or nation to build up their own things with the blood of others. It is about violence of the powerful against the powerless. Bloodshed and crime do not make a good foundation for a town, city, or nation. Babylon paid an awful price for her aggressively violent pursuits.

13) For a nation like Babylon, who built themselves on violence and oppression, all their labors were really only building an altar on which their nation would burn in destruction. Nothing on earth is permanent - especially those things improperly constructed. Babylon, in all her might, was built on a foundation of sand, and she would not last.

THE CONTRAST IN THE END - GOD'S GLORY ON EARTH

14) The woe against Babylon was not to be the last word from the prophet. His message would include words of hope for the future. The time will come when men over all the earth will acknowledge the glory of the Lord. This will be a joy for any who will repent of sin and turn in faith to the God of heaven and earth, even the Babylonians. This world once knew God, but it did not acknowledge Him as God, and that knowledge is largely missing today. What a blessed joy it will be when the knowledge of God's glory moves like a tsunami over the earth!

THE CAUSES OF BABYLON'S COMING JUDGMENT

15), 16) The Babylonians were masters of conquest. Here Habakkuk sets forth a metaphor to teach how they conquered some of their foes. He paints a word picture of a banquet at which the Babylonian host offers strong drink to the guests. The goal is to get the visitor drunk and suffer the loss of moral filters, followed by the removal of their clothes. The image is meant for us to understand as the nation being stripped of her freedom, her self-determination, and become a vassal of Babylon. Yahweh has a word for the wicked nation; it is that they will exchange their so-called "glory" for shame in the end. It is they who will be stripped naked and put on shameful display. The chickens will come home to roost.

17) Israel's northwestern neighbor is Lebanon. Isaiah 14 prophetically relates how Babylon denuded that neighbor of her often regaled "cedars of Lebanon" to make war machines for her military ambitions. This is just one illustration of Babylon's merciless cruelty to men and their lands, which violence is justification for her judgment to come!

18), 19) I often wonder in reading such passages as this if the author is laughing to himself as I am while reading it. What a joke idolatry is! God is the Creator, and His creations are designed and destined to worship Him! An idol is made by the hand of man, who then in turn worships the thing he has made! How ludicrous is such a concept! The idol-maker then trusts in his creation, and he tells the one made of wood to "Awake!" Really, does he think this can

happen? He says to the idol chiseled from stone, "Arise!" No rock ever moved on its own; God, man or animal must dislodge it from its place. Finally, the prophet reminds us of how much we learn from the true God by contrasting Him with these false deities. Can they teach anything, though they are beautifully overlaid with precious metals? No, they cannot, for there is no breath in them. Foolish humanity, bow before the genuine Article, the God Who made you, not something fashioned by human hands!

THE CALL TO BOW BEFORE YAHWEH

20) Now comes the inspiration for the call to worship which I recall from my childhood worship services, even before I became a believer in Jesus. Remember that in most translations of the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) the word "LORD" in all capital letters represents the Jewish "tetragrammaton" (four-letter word) that is considered so holy that they will not pronounce it. They substitute "Adonai" for "Yahweh" in speech. It occurs (so says my Logos Bible program) 225 times in the Hebrew Scriptures. This Lord is in His Holy Temple, and one way to worship Him is to have times of keeping silence before Him. Men may speak to false gods represented by idols, but there is no response. True worshipers may bow in silence before the real God, and it will be a scene of glory. I remind you that since Pentecost, the bodies of the saints have been the temples of God's residence on earth. Every day and every place can and should be a setting for worship.

CHAPTER 3

The book and story of Habakkuk are worth reading at a sitting, only taking a few minutes. The historical setting seems to be the reign of Jehoiakim, one of several wicked kings Judah endured in succession. His leadership took the people into idolatry, injustice, violence, and other evils. When men fail to worship the one true God, evil conduct will always follow. So the prophet cries out in complaint to God about how Judah is over-run with sin, and He seems to do nothing about it. God replies that He has a plan, and that is to bring the wicked and terrible Babylonians against Judah to judge His people for their wrongs. Habakkuk then comes forth with another complaint - "The Babylonians are more wicked than the Judeans! How then can a holy and just God allow them to be His chastening rod against His own people? Where is the righteousness in that?" A patient God goes the extra mile with His prophet; then He replies that He will also judge Babylon. They will lose their empire as surely as Judah will lose her self-determination and freedom.

HIND'S FEET IN HIGH PLACES

THE REQUEST BY THE PROPHET

1) This is a title, and it implies a song, music from an instrument. We are to see motion and emotion, a transition as complaint and controversy have ended. Habakkuk now lifts an anthem of praise to heaven. Normally he exercises prophetic ministry, speaking to man for God. Now he is more like a priest, reaching out to God on behalf of man. So the prophet becomes a priest, picks up an instrument, and sings a poem to God for the people.

2) In this final round of dialogue between the prophet and God, Habakkuk recalls and applauds the awe-inspiring deeds of Yahweh. Did he know about these marvelous works from the account in the Pentateuch? Was the fame of God alive in oral tradition in such a wicked time? Perhaps Habakkuk recalled the days of good King Josiah, when there is no doubt that the exploits of God were much-praised. In any case, he calls for God to do some such miraculous things in the present times - but, in the judgment that he knows must come on Judah, to also extend mercy to His people. This last phrase, "*In wrath remember mercy*," will always resonate

with those whose sins have been forgiven because of Jesus. God's wrath was poured out on His beloved Son so that He might be merciful to us sinners. What a glorious "**gospel hint**" here in the Hebrew Scriptures!

THE REVELATION TO THE PROPHET

3) The first phrase of verse 3 is set off by the musical expression, "Selah." This calls special attention to what was just said, with the idea that one should pause and reflect on the thought. He mentions Teman and Paran, areas south of Judah where God visited His people in the giving of the law to Moses. This was accompanied by great signs and wonders. Such glory shone that men praised God throughout the earth. Habakkuk wishes to see God's glory in his day in such a demonstration of power. Alas, it was not to be so; judgment would come.

4) Habakkuk seems to see into the past, when God met Moses on Sinai. He describes the scene as one of light and power. A sunrise would be a natural parallel with the vision. Rays of light would first be seen after the dawn had broken, looking like so many horns rising as though a herd of bulls would charge over the horizon at any moment. But the light was from God's hand, where His great power is concealed. This awesome God is about to display some of that power in punishing His people for their sin, and then delivering them in His love.

5), 6) It seems now that the prophet looks ahead to what is about to happen - describing God's work in using, and then judging Babylon for their cruelty in chastening Judah. In his vision, Habakkuk sees God walking toward the land of Judah. Before Him walks a servant named "plague." Babylon's armies will decimate the population of Judah as would a death-bringing sickness that spreads without remedy. Behind the oncoming God marches another servant - this one also leaves devastation in his path. Many die from physical ailments that slay men by a burning fever. The footfall of God, bringing judgment, is a terrible thing. At each step the earth shakes like a tree branch before a mighty wind. The prophets were like a mother saying, "You just wait 'til your father gets home." Well, he is home, and he is coming up the stairs. His, God's, glance makes the nations tremble. The mountains have stood since God piled them up, and so have the hills been around longer than the memory and record of man. They will crumble and collapse while the immutable God goes on forever.

7) In the days following the Exodus, nations around the Red Sea sat in awe of God's great works for the Israelites. Perhaps Habakkuk is seeing the same nations awe-struck again as God works another series of miracles relating to Israel. This time it is not an escape to freedom, but it is an entrance into bondage and captivity in Babylon. As God through Babylon moves toward Judah, the nations in His path tremble in fear!

8) Was God angry at the waters in His path (the path of Israel coming out of Egypt - the path of Babylon coming to Israel)? The implied answer is "No." In the Exodus, He had smitten the Nile, the Red Sea, and the Jordan River. But His anger was not at nature; it was at the nations, and He used nature to show His power. His concern then (Exodus) was for the deliverance of Israel; now it was for their chastisement at the hand of Babylon.

9), 10) The God Who judged Egypt in the Exodus now moves to judge His own people, Israel. Nature reacts to His powerful presence to judge; when man is judged, often his environment, his habitation, suffers in the wake of that judgment. Psalm 7:12, 13, illustrate God's readiness to judge with the symbols of bows and arrows. The earth has been sectioned in many places by rivers - this is certainly true here in Tidewater, Virginia. It is also true in the Middle East region - Tigris, Euphrates, Jordan, Red Sea, Nile. Habakkuk personifies the mountains; as they see the coming judgment of God, they writhe in anguish! It would take something to do this to a great mountain! As Adam hid in fear when God came walking in the Garden after Adam's sin, so the landscape quakes with fear when God comes walking in judgment upon the apple of His eye. Psalm 77:16 and 114:3 illustrate this phenomenon.

11) The sun and the moon, the celestial heaven's king and queen, retreat into the tabernacles from which they come forth to lighten the day and brighten the night, when God comes forth to judge. Sometimes God used nature as a part of His execution of judgment; here they only observe, and they quake in fear! Peter tells us (2 Peter 3:12) of a coming day when the elements in the celestial heavens and the terrestrial earth shall be dissolved and re-created when God makes new this universe that has been cursed by sin.

12) A good many places in the Scriptures find God using the image of harvest for judgment. Psalm 1:5; Isaiah 41:15; Jeremiah 51:33; Micah 4:12, 13; Matthew 13:30 are just a few of these. God is here, and in other places, shown to be angry with sin - Habakkuk tells of the sin and judgment of Judah by the rod of Babylon, followed by God judging Babylon for their cruelty in dealing with Judah! So God threshes His own people and the people He used to thresh them! The tender heavenly Father, Who can gently cradle His young, can also march forth in wrath to judge sin!

13) It may seem strange, but the purpose of God's destruction was deliverance - the salvation of His people. When Judah went into the Babylonian captivity, there was chastisement involved, yes. But the greater purpose was to rid them of idolatry, and the submersion in idolatrous Babylon for those decades did just that! They were never charged with that vile sin again after the return from exile. And when God crushed Babylon with Persia, He was setting things up for the release and return of the Jews to their homeland. After all, Messiah would not be born abroad; He would come to the land of Israel - His own place and things (John 1:11).

14) God's judgment on Babylon is seen here under the metaphor of battle. The cruel oppressor had turned over every stone looking for Jews to kill or capture. The spear he used for that is now taken from his hand and used against him! God had promised Abram, "*I will curse those that curse you*" (Genesis 12:3). No nation can stand against the "*apple of God's eye*" (Zechariah 2:8) and not pay a dear price for their folly.

15) As throughout this passage, one is reminded of the Exodus, and the churning of the waters of the Red Sea. The wall of water was salvation to the Israelites and destruction to the oppressing Egyptians. Job had seen God "*trampling the sea*" (Job 9:8). Psalm 77:19 describes God as making His way through the sea but leaving no trail for men to follow. God's deliverances of the past are figures of what He will do again when His people are in distress. The days of Moses were not the last days of great salvation for the people of God - He was still at work!

THE RESPONSE BY THE PROPHET

16) Habakkuk had asked the Lord to act (3:2), and when He did, the prophet was awestruck. He describes the wonders of the works of God - His splendor and glory, His anger and rage. The sea and earth and even the celestial heavens moved before His presence. Habakkuk trembled in awe, but he also rested inwardly in peace that God would deal properly with Babylon for their cruelty in carrying out the chastisement of Judah.

17), 18) Habakkuk here sets forth sentiments that thrill any trusting heart in any time of distress or need. The substance is this, even though things may not appear to be going my way - in fact, they may appear to be just plain against me, God is still on His throne, and I am still in the palm of His hand, protected and provided for. In that, I rest! The joy of the heart does not depend upon the prosperity of the life. The Babylonian army may come and plunder my fields, vineyards, and orchards. They may also empty my sheepfolds and cattle pens to feed their troops. My life does not consist in the abundance of the things I possess. I can say with Job (1:21), "*The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away; blessed be the name of the Lord.*" God is the Savior of my life, but more than that, He is the Deliverer of my soul - something no army can undo. With Paul from a prison cell I can say, "*Rejoice in the Lord alway, and again I say,*

rejoice" (Philippians 4:4). We only fully possess that which no one can strip away from us. Thus, our relationship with the Savior is our only permanently secure holding. Therefore, let us hold it the more dear because it is so precious. Let us hold to the passing things of earth with a very loose grasp. A favorite old chorus of mine is appropriate here:

"What though wars may come with marching feet and beat of the drum,
for I have Christ in my heart!

What though nations rage as we approach the end of the age,
for I have Christ in my heart!

God is still on the throne - a mighty God is He.

And He cares for His own throughout eternity.

So let come what may, whatever it is I always say, I have Christ in my heart!

I have Christ in my heart!"

When the Lord is our portion, our barns and cupboards are always bursting.

19) Habakkuk did not view Babylon as sovereign - God occupied that position in his life. From that relationship flowed strength for any trial, even national submission to the invading Chaldeans. Captivity would not be a low place for the God-trusting Hebrew. Even in exile from the Land of promise, his feet would climb to the high places in the strength of the Lord. Ron Blue wrote, "The Sovereign Lord gives triumph over circumstances to those who trust Him." Let us find our joy and victory in any circumstance of life in the Lord Jesus Christ.