

9) THE TRUE TEST OF FAITH
(SUNDAY, OCTOBER 11, 2020)

Scripture reading – Romans 5:1-5; Habakkuk 3:16-19

INTRODUCTION

We are under judgment as a nation and as Christians in our nation, but not the fullness of judgment that we deserve.

We continue to see the promotion and practice of all sorts of wickedness - abortion, many perversions, worship of creation, etc.

Many people have tried to prophesy and predict and continue to do so in terms of when and how God is going to judge.

God's Word shows us that although God promises that He does judge, we cannot predict the timing.

Consider the history of God's people after the time of King David.

David's reign was from 1010 – 970 B.C.

Solomon then reigned for another 40 years until 930 B.C.

Most of the history of God's people as they divided into two kingdoms was of total rebellion.

For Israel the great judgment of captivity came after about 200 years of rebellion in 722 B.C.

Judah lasted a little longer with the great judgment of Babylon coming in about 586 B.C.

God gave to Judah after Solomon 344 years.

Now, we don't try to compare the US and Israel in terms of what this means for our nation, except to say that God is patient.

Romans 2:4 Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?

As we come to the end of this short but profound book, we see two points.

Habakkuk was overwhelmed as He considered God's power and the judgment that was coming.

By God's grace and by faith alone, God's people were to rejoice in the LORD no matter the circumstances that they were going to face.

You must rejoice in the Lord no matter what your circumstances. Your duty to trust and to praise always stands.

[1] Holy Terror when God Judges, v. 16

[2] Determined to Praise, vv. 17-19

1) HOLY TERROR WHEN GOD JUDGES, v. 16

Listen to two familiar verses in Hebrews 10.

Heb. 10:30 For we know Him who said, "*Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,*" says the Lord. And again, "*The LORD will judge His people.*" **31** It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

And then listen to the final two verses of Hebrews 12.

Heb. 12:28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. **29** For our God *is* a consuming fire.

The final four verses of Habakkuk provide a wonderful summary of the book:

1) Holy terror in light of God's judgment, and 2) the determination to live a life of faith and praise by God's grace.

Verse 16 describes the physical and spiritual reaction of Habakkuk in considering God's awesome presence and power in bringing judgment.

The verse has two parts which again provide a great summary of this book in terms of judgment.

The first part is Habakkuk's reaction to the knowledge that God was going to bring a fearsome judgment upon his people through the Babylonians.

I hear and my belly/insides trembled.

You can identify very well with this feeling.

Notice the word **voice** in verse 16.

This word in Hebrew can be translated as either voice or sound.

It is the same word used in Genesis 3:8 when God came to judge Adam and Eve.

Gen. 3:8 And they heard the sound [voice] of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool [wind/ruach] of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

The voice of the LORD, the presence of the LORD in terms of bringing judgment brought Habakkuk to a place of trembling and quivering.

Two additional descriptions are given of the physical reaction to God's judgment - rottenness in the bones and trembling.

The NET Translation reads:

My frame went limp, as if my bones were decaying, and I shook as I tried to walk.

Walter Chantry wrote:

"It is exactly because God would invade Israel at the head of the Babylonian army that Habakkuk trembled in his body with quivering lips and rottenness in his bones. All he could do was to wait submissively for the divinely appointed invasion of Israel. The prophet told Jehovah that he awaited the event with divine trembling. There was

no other suitable salvation for the faithful along with destruction of the wicked but the Lord's perfect plan."¹

Recall the opening words of Habakkuk – The **burden** which the prophet Habakkuk saw.

Our **reaction** to this passage is not going to be identical to Habakkuk's reaction.

It is not that our goal is to have our body shake, our lips quiver, deep pain in our bones, and difficulty walking.

We do read this and pray that we will live always in light of God's awesome presence and judgment.

We pray that in considering what we deserve as a nation and church in our land, that we will not be cavalier or frivolous.

The second half of verse 16 picks up another key theme in Habakkuk.

God was also going to bring a fearsome judgment upon Babylon.

God's appointed tool to bring judgment would also suffer God's fearsome judgment.

The last half of verse 16 is challenging to read.

The NKJV reads, **that I might rest in the day of trouble**. The verb can mean to wait patiently, though some believe the correct Hebrew verb is one that means to long for something.²

The NET Bible here reads: **I long for the day of distress to come upon the people who attack us.**

¹ Chantry, 83.

² HALOT vs. NET Bible on this.

Another thing we keep in mind both from here in Habakkuk and many other portions of Scripture is how these judgments foreshadow the ultimate **Day of the LORD** that come with the return of our Lord.

David Baker writes:

This, like similar days of judgment upon Israel and the nations, is but an anticipatory representation of what the final Day will be, a guarantee of its coming and an indication of its character as punishment for the wicked but joy for the followers of God. Babylon's day finally did come in **539 BC**, when she fell to the Medes and Persians.³

2) DETERMINED TO PRAISE, VV. 17-19

The book of Habakkuk is a book of judgment and what we call the problem of evil as well as being a book of faith.

The just shall live by faith.

Some Bibles have a heading before verse 17 that reads **A Hymn of Faith**.

The only problem I have with this heading is that the entire chapter is a hymn of faith.

Verse 16 is also a statement of faith.

Maybe a better heading would be a **Final Expression of Faith**.

Verse 17 describes a very bleak situation.

Imagine you had no supermarkets, Walmarts, Costcos, or even smaller stores where you could buy food.

Imagine you had a small patch of ground and your life and your family's well-being depended on how much food you could raise on your acre or two of land.

³ David W. Baker, *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 27 of Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. IVP/Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 75.

We know that not everyone in Israel lived the life of a subsistence farmer, but obviously the country did not enjoy the vast food production that we have in the US.

I looked up the statistic, how many items are in grocery stores today?

According to MarketWatch, there used to be, as late as the 1990s, 7,000 items in a grocery store, and now it's 40,000 to 50,000.⁴

This is a little off the subject, but there is a famous story of the Soviet President Boris Yeltsin who in September 1989 visited a grocery store near Houston, TX.

Quoting from an article about his experience:

Yeltsin admitted the visit made a profound impression on him. It cemented his growing view that the Soviet state-run economic system had left the Russian people far behind Americans, forcing them into a much lower standard of living.⁵

It is almost impossible for us to imagine living the much simpler and difficult lives that God's people had to endure 2600 years ago.

Verse 17 describes the failure of the agricultural system in terms of some of the key products of the day – figs, grapes, olives, corn or wheat, sheep, and cattle.

Verse 17 does not describe the cause of the judgment – it could be famine or disease; it could be the result of the armies of Nebuchadnezzar consuming all that supports life and leaving behind devastation leading to incredible trouble.⁶

⁴ <https://www.marketwatch.com/story/grocery-stores-carry-40000-more-items-than-they-did-in-the-1990s-2017-06-07>

⁵ <https://www.houstonpublicmedia.org/articles/shows/houston-matters/2020/02/21/361467/boris-yelstins-1989-visit-to-a-houston-grocery-store-is-now-an-opera/>

⁶ Chantry, 87.

One of the songs that you may know is the hymn, "Now Thank We All our God." This hymn was written by Martin Rinkart who lived during the terrible days of the Thirty Years War, 1618-1648.

This was an incredible time of suffering because of the combination of war, plague, and famine.

In 1637, the village of Eilenburg was visited with a terrible plague, and in one year 8000 people died.

Rinkart had to do the work of three men and he did it manfully at the beds of the sick and dying. **He buried more than 4000 people** and was protected through this terrible time, living another 12 years.

A famine followed this terrible pestilence.

Descriptions are that thirty or forty people could be seen fighting over a dead cat or crow.

Rinckart who served as a church deacon did all that he could to provide relief while still trying to provide for his family.

Then came the Swedish army who imposed a sizeable tribute on the beleaguered city.

Rinckart pled for mercy but was refused. After this he turned to the citizens who followed him, saying, "Come, my children, we can find no hearing, no mercy with men, let us take refuge with God."

Rinckart's prayer and testimony moved the Swedish general to lower the imposed demand on the city.

But through this Rinckart still suffered and had trouble providing bread and clothes for his children.

It was in 1644 after many years of suffering that Rinckart composed the hymn "Now Thank We All Our God."

The contrast between verse 17 and verse 18 must not be missed.

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

The word translated as **rejoice** is not as common as other words of praise and thanksgiving. It is interesting to see it used here, but the verb can have the idea of **triumph**.

Verse 17 is not a triumphant situation, but one of total failure, **and yet Habakkuk states he will exult or rejoice or triumph in the LORD.**

The verb **joy** has a similar meaning.

It can mean to shout in exaltation.

Both verbs are not 'quiet' verbs.⁷

Given the context of this passage, they really stand out.

Job 13:15 Though he slay me, I will hope in him;
yet I will argue my ways to his face.

The Word Biblical Commentary states:

The words "rejoice" and "exult" each have the **cohortative** attached. This is the strongest possible way to say that one is determined to rejoice in the Lord regardless of what does or does not happen. Faith means loving and serving God regardless of circumstances. For the just to live by faith means that he is to be faithful to God in his living.⁸

Then we consider again the beautiful truth of verse 19 in contrast with verse 17.

The LORD God is my strength;

⁷ Some argue the opposite. NIDOTTE: Crüsemann (48) suggests that the vbs. שוש, רנן, פצח, עלו, גיל, and זמר denote manifestations of joy without spoken or sung words, distinguishing them from שיר, הלל, etc., which clearly involve spoken language. However, a spontaneous/planned contrast, rather than Crüsemann's unspoken/spoken contrast, seems more valid. NIDOTTE, s.v. "גיל גיל גילה," n.p.

⁸ WBC, 117.

He will make my feet like deer's feet,
And He will make we walk on my high hills.

The imagery here comes both from other places in Scripture and also from the battlefield. The feet of a deer come in handy if you are running away from an enemy or chasing down an enemy.

High Places – element of security and victory.

Soldiers would run along the highest ridges overlooking the valleys after a victorious battle.⁹

The language of verse 19 is similar to what we have in Psalm 18.

Psalm 18:33 He made my feet like the feet of a deer
and set me secure on the heights.

Amos 4:13 For behold, he who forms the mountains and creates the wind,
and declares to man what is his thought,
who makes the morning darkness,
and **treads on the heights of the earth** –
the LORD, the God of hosts, is his name!

Listen to these verses one more time:

Though the fig tree may not blossom, Nor fruit be on the vines; Though the labor of the olive may fail, And the fields yield no food; Though the flock may be cut off from the fold, And there be no herd in the stalls –

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

The LORD God is my strength; He will make my feet like deer's *feet*, And He will make me walk on my high hills.

⁹ Chantry, 91.

CONCLUSION:

1] Our duty does not come naturally.

We need the encouragement of God's Word. We need the conviction that God can bring.

We also consider how this attitude is all of God's grace.

Romans 5:1.

2] It may well be that the LORD is going to give us opportunity to practice even more what we have in this section.

Prayer

Closing Hymn: 27

BENEDICTION - 1 COR. 15:57-58

But thanks *be* to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.