

I Will Exult in the Lord!

A Journey through the Burden of Habakkuk

5- Trusting God in the Days of the Chaldeans

Church October 17, 2021

Habakkuk 3

1 A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, according to Shigionoth.

2 Lord, I have heard the report about You and I fear. O Lord, revive Your work in the midst of the years, In the midst of the years make it known; In wrath remember mercy.

3 God comes from Teman, And the Holy One from Mount Paran. Selah. His splendor covers the heavens, And the earth is full of His praise.

4 His radiance is like the sunlight; He has rays flashing from His hand, And there is the hiding of His power.

5 Before Him goes pestilence, And plague comes after Him.

6 He stood and surveyed the earth; He looked and startled the nations. Yes, the perpetual mountains were shattered, The ancient hills collapsed. His ways are everlasting.

7 I saw the tents of Cushan under distress, The tent curtains of the land of Midian were trembling.

8 Did the Lord rage against the rivers, Or was Your anger against the rivers, Or was Your wrath against the sea, That You rode on Your horses, On Your chariots of salvation?

9 Your bow was made bare, The rods of chastisement were sworn. Selah. You cleaved the earth with rivers.

10 The mountains saw You and quaked; The downpour of waters swept by. The deep uttered forth its voice, It lifted high its hands.

11 Sun and moon stood in their places; They went away at the light of Your arrows, At the radiance of Your gleaming spear.

12 In indignation You marched through the earth; In anger You trampled the nations.

13 You went forth for the salvation of Your people, For the salvation of Your anointed. You struck the head of the house of the evil To lay him open from thigh to neck. Selah.

14 You pierced with his own spears The head of his throngs. They stormed in to scatter us; Their exultation was like those Who devour the oppressed in secret.

15 You trampled on the sea with Your horses, On the surge of many waters.

**16 I heard and my inward parts trembled, At the sound my lips quivered.
Decay enters my bones, And in my place I tremble. Because I must wait
quietly for the day of distress, For the people to arise who will invade us.
17 Though the fig tree should not blossom And there be no fruit on the vines,
Though the yield of the olive should fail And the fields produce no food,
Though the flock should be cut off from the fold And there be no cattle in the
stalls,
18 Yet I will exult in the Lord, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.
19 The Lord God is my strength, And He has made my feet like hinds' feet,
And makes me walk on my high places. For the choir director, on my stringed
instruments.**

To the Glory of God

A few years ago, a man asked me why I preach so much about Suffering. *“Why do you spend so much time on that one Subject?”* he asked me. *“Is it because of the many things that God has brought into your own life? Or is it because of the tragic circumstances surrounding your daughter? You really ought to Preach about other things because there is so much more you could talk about. And I really think it would help your Ministry if you stopped spending so much time on this one Subject of Suffering. People get tired of hearing about it all the time. Preaching about Suffering so much is just too morbid- people want to be encouraged.”*

And I just stared at him for a moment. And after a very awkward silence I replied, *“I’m not doing that at all. I’m not preaching on Suffering because of anything that has happened to me. I am trying to preach expositionally through various Books of the Bible. So, I take a particular Book and I go verse-by-verse through the entire Book. And so, whatever Subject the biblical writer talks about- is what I talk about. So, if I spend an enormous amount of time talking about Suffering- then that is the Subject that God the Holy Spirit spent the most time putting into the Scriptures. As I have said many times, ‘I didn’t write the Bible. I had nothing to do with what it says.’ But I do believe that the Bible is the inspired, inerrant, and infallible Word of the living God. And so, if God the Spirit thought enough about the Issue of Suffering for it to be a major Topic of the Bible- who am I that I should disagree with Him?”*

Now I don’t think he liked my answer or that he even believed me. But the Reality is that the Issue of Suffering is one of the most *common* experiences that God’s people have. By God’s Grace, I have been saved for over 50 years now. And I have never met the first person- saved or lost- who hasn’t hurt to some

extent; or who hasn't experienced Pain and Tragedy and Sorrow through their Suffering. Now I'm not the brightest star in the sky- but it seems to me that the Issue of Suffering is a "Universal Issue"- meaning that it applies to *all* of Humanity.

Now sure, you can *always* find people, who have suffered *less* than you have. But it is also true that you can always find people, who have suffered *more*. Some people seem to suffer frequently while others only seem to suffer occasionally. So, I see no sense at all in trying to compare Sufferings with anybody else. Hurt is hurt; Pain is pain; and Suffering is suffering- no matter how much or how little or how often.

But another Observation I have come to over the last five decades is that the Issue of Suffering is one of the most Mysterious and Misunderstood Issues that we humans face. So, even though Suffering is common- it is NOT understood very well. And that is true- even though God has discussed the Issue of Suffering very frequently on the pages of the Holy Bible. And so, "*Why does God allow His Own people to suffer?*" is a Question that is almost *universally* asked. By everybody. All the time. And perhaps if we were more willing to actually study the Bible- we wouldn't be so confused about why Suffering comes to God's people.

Now Suffering is a very broad Subject that includes many different aspects such as:

- Sickness
- Persecution
- Trials
- Tests
- Afflictions
- Tumults

... and, many times, these things *overlap* each other. So, for example, a person, who is suffering may be fighting a Sickness as well as enduring Persecution- which together- is a Test of his Faith.

But in the Bible, Sufferings were also associated with things that are *not* commonly experienced by 21st Century American believers like,

- Famines
- Droughts

... along with Invasions and Occupations by other Nations. And that is what Habakkuk is talking about in this Book. God has promised this Prophet that He is going to discipline His people by raising up a vicious and barbaric and pagan nation to come and subjugate the people of God.

So, another aspect of Human Suffering- at least for the people of God- is the “Divine Correction” that God sends- to bring His chosen ones out of Sin or Compromise or Worldliness- or even to give them an opportunity to prove to the lost world that Jesus truly is the Treasure of the Universe.

Now we know from reading the rest of the Bible that this “Discipline” that God is revealing to Habakkuk here- lasted 70 years. And then- after the repented and after they turned their faces back to God- many of the Jews, who had been taken captive, were returned back to Judah. But Habakkuk knew nothing about that time frame. God doesn’t say anything about 70 years to this Prophet. All that Habakkuk knows is that God is sending the Chaldeans to destroy and dominate God’s people. So, as far as he is concerned- this Judgment might be final and permanent.

And this illustrates another aspect of God’s Discipline on His people. We don’t always know all the details. So, to us- what God is doing may look cataclysmic and final and permanent- when in reality- it is only temporary. Now, granted, 70 years is a long time. I haven’t even lived 70 years yet. But 70 years is still not permanent. So, as bad as it is- as bad and as terrible as the Discipline might be- it isn’t as bad as it *could* be.

But as long as we see the Correction of God to be *worse* than the Sin that brought the Correction- we are NOT in a good place with God. As long as we are more concerned about how hard the Discipline is- rather than how wicked our Sin is- we are NOT in a good place with God. And as long as we cry out about the Method God has chosen to bring us back to Him- rather than cry out about our Compromise and our Worldliness and our Sin- we are NOT in a good place with God.

Beloved, God is not interested in making us safe and secure. Jesus didn’t scream in agony on the Cross so we could enjoy seven different kinds of green beans at the local store. No, God is interested in saving His people from the horror of their Sins. And Jesus screamed in agony on the Cross so that we would know God; and love God; and enjoy God forever. And so, *whatever* stops us from being that kind of people- God has a vested Interest in moving from us.

So, when we look out and see evil people being placed in positions of Authority to rule over us- we get mad; and scared; and, many times, we are tempted to go into complete despair. We love our nation; and we don’t like what we see going on. And sometimes, it appears to us that Evil is triumphing; and that God’s people are in disarray. And like Habakkuk, we are witnessing the complete disregard for Law and Order; the wholesale murder of the innocents; the most off the wall sexual perversions being normalized and promoted; Men completely overwhelmed with Pornography- refusing to love and lead their homes; and the

Government- that is supposed to be by, of, and for the people- forcing its own citizens to speak; and to think; and to act in certain ways- that are contrary to Scripture. And on and on and on.

“So, where are You, Lord? Why don’t You stop this? How is this Evil pleasing to You?” And things are so topsy turvy right now in this Country that the latest political hero to many of God’s people- the “good guy”; the man, who seems to be the one, who could fix the problem is a serial adulterer himself; and a man, who speaks and acts as crudely as a drunken sailor (with apologies to sailors). So, these are NOT normal times. Truly this Nation is as divided now as it was right before the Civil War. And 50% want the Nation to return to its roots; while 50% want to tear it all down and start over.

But the great Reformer, John Calvin gave us some clarity about why God raises up ungodly people to govern over the people of God, when he said this,

“... they who rule unjustly and incompetently have been raised up by him [God] to punish the wickedness of the people ...”¹

... so, Calvin taught that the reason God raises up wicked Rulers- is because God’s Own people are NOT Right with Him.

So, any time that God’s people fall in love with this present evil world; when those called to be “Holy” adopt the Ways of the pagans; when those chosen to live their lives to God’s Glory have forgotten God and no longer hunger and thirst after Righteousness; when they no longer pant after God as the deer pants after the water-brooks; when they no longer weep between the porch and the altar; when they no longer gather to pray; when they no longer hear the Voice of God through the pages of Scripture; when they no longer gather to encourage one another- then out of His magnificent Love- God will allow His people to groan by reason of evil Rulers- so that God’s people may repent and burn brightly again with holy Fire.

Now it is possible that we may well be looking at the final days of the United States- I don’t know. I sure hope not. But I know that if we all do not repent and begin to love what God loves and hate what God hates- we shall all likewise perish. So, I pray for Revival in my own heart and in my own family. And I beg God to send the “latter Rain” of His Spirit to this Church and to this Community. And I seek the Face of God for a great Awakening that will cause people to repent of their Sin and Worldliness and turn to God.

But, unlike Habakkuk, we must NEVER think that God is not listening. God ALWAYS hears the cries of His people. In fact, look what the angel told Daniel in **Daniel 10:12b**

¹ John Calvin; *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*; Book 4 Chapter 20; section 25

... from the first day that you set your heart on understanding this and on humbling yourself before your God, your words were heard ...

... so, God ALWAYS hears the Prayers of a people, who have these two characteristics:

1. They set their hearts to understand
2. They humble themselves before God

... and I would suggest that *whatever* God has to do to cause us to be a people like that- is a Good thing.

Yet God does NOT always move the Way we want Him to. Sometimes what we want- is contrary to God's Will. And at those times- we must put our hands over our mouths and worship God- because God's Will is *infinitely* better than anything we could ever want.

But you have to understand, that in this Nation- half the country actually wants what is going on now. They are not only happy about what is going on- they want more of it! And that is the problem. Because in a Democracy- majority rules- even if that majority is not godly. So, we must understand that, ultimately, it is NOT merely about the "good guys" defeating the "bad guys"- at the ballot box. Ultimately, if we truly want this Nation to be rescued from the hard Hand of God's Judgment- it is about the majority of the citizens of this Nation becoming born again; Spirit-filled; Sin- hating; Bible saturated people, who love Jesus more than they love Life itself. And there is only one way for that to happen. We must become faithful, fruitful, and busy to herald this glorious Gospel to as many people as possible- every single day- using every means available. And God Himself will save those He has chosen. Other than that- all we are doing by thinking that we can fix this problem politically- is re-arranging the deck chairs on the Titanic- right before it hits the iceberg.

Now as I have told you many times, I do NOT believe that the Solution for our Nation is simply to elect the right people into Office. Now that is *part* of the Answer- but if we are under either the Correction or the Judgment of God- then Politics by itself will NOT lift that from us.

Now some Sufferings or Corrections are "internal"; while others are "external". And there seems to be Sufferings that one person at a time goes through; while there are other types of Sufferings that an entire Nation faces all at once. And again, these things seem to overlap, too. So, for example, a person can live in a Nation where the entire Country is suffering together. And yet, that "general Suffering" causes that individual to experience a crisis in his own

personal Faith- a Test or a Trial of his Faith. In fact, there are so many variables and so many combinations that it would take a super computer just to keep track of it all.

Yet the Bible teaches that God doesn't merely "know" about it all- but that God has specifically *designed*; and has *orchestrated* every detail of it. And God then personally *manages*; and *controls* each individual's Suffering- *to such a degree*- that three things are *guaranteed*:

1. God's Will is carried out *exactly* as God decreed
2. God is glorified
3. Our Joy is made Full

Please consider what the Apostle Paul wrote in **Romans 8:28**:

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

Now please look at three words in this verse:

1. **Know**
2. **Causes**
3. **Good**

The Apostle begins this verse with a very powerful Statement:

And we know...

So, in addition to everything else he has been talking about in verses 1-27- Paul says that believers KNOW something. We don't wonder or guess or hope; or even believe. Paul said, "WE KNOW". And this tells us that *believing* FOR something and *hoping* IN something is great- but it isn't enough. And so, after we have Faith to believe and hope- we then need to move into KNOWLEDGE. And, by definition, Knowledge involves personal Experience. So, if the definition of Faith is,

Hebrews 11:1b

... the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

... then when God moves; and we do *see*; and we do *experience* what we have hoped for- that "Experience" added to our "Faith" becomes "Knowledge." So, we

move past “believing” that God CAN do something into “knowing” that He WILL. And that is what Paul is talking about here in **Romans 8:28**.

So, Paul says, “We KNOW”. So, what is it that we KNOW?

... we know that God causes ...

Now by definition, the word, “**causes**” means that God is complete control over every aspect of whatever we are talking about. And what Paul is talking about here is “ALL THINGS”.

So, Paul is teaching that God sovereignly causes “ALL THINGS” to sovereignly “work together”- to one single End. And the End to which God causes ALL THINGS to work together to- is called,

“GOOD”

Now that word has to be explained because, many times, the End to which God works- does NOT appear to us to be “GOOD” at all. Many times, the End to which God works appears to be “BAD” or “TERRIBLE”; even “EVIL”. So, how is it then, “GOOD”?

Well, it is “GOOD” from God’s Perspective- not necessarily ours. It is “GOOD” in concert with God’s Goals; God’s Ends; and God’s Will- NOT necessarily what is “GOOD” *to* or *for* us.

And what is ultimately “GOOD” to God- is that which glorifies Him; that which makes much of Him; and that which displays His Magnificence. So, how we are to understand this word as used here in this verse is...

... we know that God [sovereignly] causes all things to work together for [the greater] good [of the Glory of God] ...

But who is God doing this for? Certainly NOT for everyone. Now over the years, this verse has been watered down to include all of Humanity. But that is taking this verse completely out of context. This verse is ONLY for those who are saved. How do we know that? Because of what Paul says next...

... to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

Now the way the Greek was worded here shows us that the last phrase, “**those who are called according to His purpose**” simply explains who are the ones who, “**love God.**” So, the *last* phrase explains the *first* phrase. In other

words, the ONLY people, who love God- are those who have been called according to God's Purpose.

Now why am I bringing this up in a Sermon about the Prophet Habakkuk? Because this Truth- that God is sovereignly **“CAUSING ALL THINGS”** to **“WORK TOGETHER”** for the greater **“GOOD”** of the Glory of God and ultimately the fulness of the Joy of His people- is true- even when God raises up the Chaldeans to come and destroy your Country! So, even when God allows pagans to rule over God's people- God is still- **“CAUSING ALL THINGS”** to **“WORK TOGETHER”** for the greater **“GOOD”** of the Glory of God and ultimately the fulness of the Joy of His people!

“But wait a minute, Brother Blair. You just said that God won't lift His Hand of Correction unless there is Repentance and a turning to God.” That's right, I did. *“Okay, but what if there is NO Repentance? What if there is NO turning to God?”* How will God **“CAUSE ALL THINGS”** to **“WORK TOGETHER”** for the greater **“GOOD”** then?

Well, there WILL be Repentance! How do you know? Because we are talking about God's people (not the lost); and we are talking about God's CORRECTION (and NOT God's DAMNATION). So, because of that- God will ASSURE that His people WILL repent and WILL turn back to Him. That is what Discipline; or Correction; or Chastisement is for. Those things are NEVER to finally destroy us. They ALWAYS bring Repentance and a turning back to God!

And that tells us that the Chaldeans are NOT the main Issue. The pagans, who will rule over God's people for a time- are NOT the main Issue. Now as I say that- I realize that these were real Chaldeans; and they really did rule over God's people- brutally and wickedly. But they are NOT the main Issue. All that the Chaldeans were- was God's TOOL to correct His people. That's it! That is the ONLY reason that the Chaldeans are alive; the ONLY reason their hearts beat in their chest; and the only reason they sucked air into their lungs; and occupied space on this planet. They existed- to do God's bidding. They lived in order to bring God's people to Repentance and a turning back to God.

So, the *real* Issue; the *main* Issue- is God getting Glory from a people, who have been so transformed (by what God alone has done for them) that they truly possess the fullness of their own Joy- in God being glorified. And everything that God gives to them and takes away from them- is designed to make them to be a people like that.

But Sin and Worldliness and Compromise stops that from happening. And so, periodically, God has to correct His people. God has to discipline them. Periodically, God has to rescue His people from the snares of the evil one; and of believing the lie that possessing more of this world's Goods is the pathway to Happiness. And so, periodically, God has to remind His people- WHO He is; and

WHY He called them out of Darkness and into His marvelous Light in the first place.

And this illustrates the length that God will go- to assure that He will get Glory from a people, who have been gifted with His Grace. God will even raise up an Empire of people- who have their own language; their own Government; their own military; their own economic system; their own customs and religion and history. And so, the only reason for their existence was to bring about Repentance and a turning back to God- of the Jews- who were chosen at that time- to display the Grace of God to the world!

We need to understand that there is no Nation; no Country; no Culture; no Economy; no Military; no Power; and no People on earth that exists by itself- separated from God and His Will. God has created all things. And all things exist and have their BEING and PURPOSE wrapped up in God and God's Will. There is no such thing as anybody or anything existing or operating in isolation of itself- apart from God and His Will.

And we need to remember that nothing matters to God more than that He is glorified; and that His Will is carried out- *exactly* as He decreed it from the beginning. And there are no exceptions to this Truth and there are no contingencies. What God has determined to be done- will be done. And God will move heaven and earth- to make that happen! Our God will use any portion of His Creation- whether that is godly men; or demons; or wicked rulers- to make sure that those, who have been chosen to know Him; and love Him; and enjoy Him forever- will do just that.

So, when God sees that His people have become worldly; or that they have lost their zeal; or that they have been ensnared in Sin; or deceived by the lies of satan- He is faithful to bring Correction to them- so that the Purpose for which God created and called them in the first place will NEVER be defeated. And that Correction can take the form of gentle and individual Conviction; or it can take the form of an invading Empire of pagan and brutal Chaldeans.

Now notice **Habakkuk 3:1** again:

A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, according to Shigionoth.

Now we have traveled quite a bit in this Book. As I told you in the beginning- the "Burden" of Habakkuk is unique among the other Prophets. Because this Book is NOT mainly about the people of God. Now sure, the people of God are involved. But the *main* Issue of this Book- is Habakkuk himself. This Book is about Habakkuk's own personal struggle to trust in God. To believe God. To hope in God.

This Book is about Habakkuk going from total despair at why God didn't correct the people of God for their Sins in the first place; to total shock at the Means that God has chosen to bring about that Correction. And what Chapter 3 is all about is the Victory that Habakkuk receives from God as he learns to simply believe. But even in his Victory- it is a strange Victory.

So, here in verse 1- we see that Chapter 3 is the Prophet's Prayer. And in the original Hebrew- this Prayer is written as a Poem. Now notice at the end of verse 1- that Habakkuk uses a odd word,

“Shigionoth”.

... and Habakkuk says that his Prayer is...

... *according to Shigionoth*

So, his Prayer is NOT Shigionoth- it is ACCORDING to Shigionoth. So, what in the world does that mean?

Well, we're not sure. David used the *singular* form of this word once in **Psalm 7**, where he began the Psalm by writing,

A Shiggaion of David, which he sang to the Lord concerning Cush, a Benjamite.

... and from that we can say that *part* of the definition of a Shiggaion is that it is a song- that is sung. And we know that ALL of the **Psalms** were songs. So, that fits. But Habakkuk says that he prayed. So, what do we do with that? Well, we do know that the ancient Jews considered *certain* songs- like the **Psalms**- to be considered as Prayers; and certain Prayers were considered to be like songs. So, in certain circumstances- the ancient Jews sang as they prayed; or they prayed as they sang.

But what *kind* of Prayers and what *kind* of songs were considered to be a **Shiggaion**? Well, we know that the noun, **Shiggaion** comes from a Hebrew verb- “*shagah*”. And this verb literally means: “*reeling about through drink*”. And this verb was used to discuss a lyrical poem that was composed under strong mental and emotional stress. It is a song of impassioned imagination and sung- accompanied with appropriate music. And in the music world- it would be called, a “*dithyrambic ode*”.

Well, I went to Gulfport High School- so that doesn't help very much. But a “*dithyrambic ode*” is also called a “*dithramb*”. And a “*dithramb*” was *not* uncommon in 7th Century BC Greece (about the time of Habakkuk) where an

improvised lyric was sung by banqueters under the leadership of a man who, according to the poet Archilochus, was “*wit-stricken by the thunderbolt of wine.*”

So, a “Shiggaion” was a song that was prayed- that sounded like a man, who was “under the influence of wine”. Now please don’t come to the conclusion that this was simply a song that sounded crazy from the lips of somebody that was drunk. Because that would be wrong. A Shiggaion was mentioned twice in inspired Scripture- so this is important. The reference to wine here has to do with musical Confusion- NOT mental Craziness. And so, a Shiggaion was a prayer that was sung (or a song that was prayed) that didn’t fit in with normal music. So, it was both mournful and rejoicing. It was both happy and sad. It was both upbeat and disturbing.

And Habakkuk uses the *plural* form of this word- so from that it may have been that Chapter 3 is a summary or a collection of more than one song that was prayed or more than one prayer that was sung. And we know that because of what the Prophet said in the last phrase of this Book:

... For the choir director, on my stringed instruments.

... so, this Prophet wrote this Poem as God the Holy Spirit moved upon him. And he instructed the choir director to play this Poem- this song that was Prayed and this Prayer that was sing- on the “stringed instruments”- probably a lyre or chordophone².

Now why would Habakkuk use this musical mixture here? Let’s go through the Chapter and we will see.

The verses of Chapter 3 give us the reason the Prophet was mournful and distressed and sad. Here we see that Habakkuk realizes that God is really going to bring the Chaldeans to his nation and tear everything apart. And after these vicious pagans get finished- NOTHING will ever be the same again. So, Habakkuk’s neighbors and friends, countrymen, and perhaps even his own family are all going to be *negatively* affected by what God is going to allow the Chaldeans to do. And that doesn’t make the Prophet happy at all.

Now please hear me when I tell you that we need to take note of this. Because there are some, who consider themselves to be so spiritual; so in tune with God- that they no longer possess any human emotions. And these people are stoic in their behavior about God’s Judgments. Now in reality- NOBODY is a real stoic- so, these people simply harden their hearts so that they won’t show any emotion about the destruction of the wicked.

² An instrument in which strings constructed from various materials are stretched across the surface. When struck, the strings vibrate to produce sound and may be amplified by a sound box or resonator. Chordophone examples from the Hebrew text and archaeology are lyres and harps (kinnor, nevel). These instrument types often appear in religious ceremonies (e.g., **1Chronicles 16: 4-7**).

Beloved, we should weep over the destruction of the sinner. Nobody should rejoice that human beings are destroyed. We should not want our worst enemy to go to Hell. Hell is horrible beyond any comprehension and it is a very hard heart that allows no remorse; no regret; no fear; and no sadness when God judges them. And it is also a touch of Self-righteousness as well- because if God had not *forced* His Grace on us- we wouldn't be any different than them. Truly it is a sign of great spiritual maturity to weep over the sins of people rather than merely get angry.

Why? Because the Judgment that is coming to the unrepentant sinner is MORE than he can bear. And, as Habakkuk has now come to understand- God DOES care about Sin. And God DOES see the Wickedness of the Land. And God DOES hear the cry of His people. And so, Correction for God's people and Judgment- even Damnation for the lost- is certain. It is coming. And no one will be spared.

Jesus spoke of this Himself in **John 15:1&2**, when He said,

I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit.

So, every single human being on earth will come underneath the Vinedresser's Knife. And people will either be judged or disciplined. They will either be destroyed or pruned. God loves His people so much- that He is not about to allow them to remain the same.

We all have to come to Jesus initially, "*Just as I am*". We can't come any other way- we are lost sinners. But once we have come to Jesus- ALL who are truly saved- will then enter into the life-long process of progressive Sanctification (Holification)- where they will go through the Fire of Purification- so they may bear MORE fruit and so they may bring God MORE Glory. And so, all human beings will either be "cut off" (the damned) or they will be "cut up" (the elect).

But because he loves his people and his Nation- Habakkuk is NOT happy that God is sending the Chaldeans as a Tool of His Correction (for His people) and an Instrument of Justice (for the lost). And that's NOT because he doesn't fully understand that this is needed; and that God is correct for doing it. He does. It is simply because Habakkuk understands that he is a creature of the dust- a wicked sinner- who deserves the same Judgment. So, this Prophet is conflicted. And his Poem reflects that. And this is illustrated at the end of verse 2, where he says,

... In wrath remember mercy.

... so, even though he knows that God is coming with the Rod of His Correction and the Hammer of His Judgment- Habakkuk begs God for Mercy.

But then in verses 3&4 Habakkuk sings of God's Glory:

3 God comes from Teman, And the Holy One from Mount Paran. Selah. His splendor covers the heavens, And the earth is full of His praise.

4 His radiance is like the sunlight; He has rays flashing from His hand, And there is the hiding of His power.

... but then in verses 5-12- Habakkuk switches back again and he prays this song (or sings the Prayer) concerning the Power of God to judge people:

5 Before Him goes pestilence, And plague comes after Him.

6 He stood and surveyed the earth; He looked and startled the nations. Yes, the perpetual mountains were shattered, The ancient hills collapsed. His ways are everlasting.

7 I saw the tents of Cushan under distress, The tent curtains of the land of Midian were trembling.

8 Did the Lord rage against the rivers, Or was Your anger against the rivers, Or was Your wrath against the sea, That You rode on Your horses, On Your chariots of salvation?

9 Your bow was made bare, The rods of chastisement were sworn. Selah. You cleaved the earth with rivers.

10 The mountains saw You and quaked; The downpour of waters swept by. The deep uttered forth its voice, It lifted high its hands.

11 Sun and moon stood in their places; They went away at the light of Your arrows, At the radiance of Your gleaming spear.

12 In indignation You marched through the earth; In anger You trampled the nations.

So, this is the Poem of Habakkuk as he sings this Prayer (or prays this Song) about God's Sovereignty; and the Right that God has- to correct or judge the nations. And we can see that this Song or Prayer- this Poem is musically confused. It is truly a combination of great Sadness and a solemn Recognition that God is True and Good and Powerful and the Nations of the world reel underneath Him.

But what about Habakkuk? What about his own personal struggle to understand God? How has that struggle progressed? How has this man come to understand the God he loves and worships? Habakkuk was in complete desperation back in Chapter 1. And now that he has heard the Voice of God in Chapter 2- how has this Knowledge changed him? Well, let's read verses 17-19:

**17 Though the fig tree should not blossom And there be no fruit on the vines,
Though the yield of the olive should fail And the fields produce no food,
Though the flock should be cut off from the fold And there be no cattle in the stalls,**

18 Yet I will exult in the Lord, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.

**19 The Lord God is my strength, And He has made my feet like hinds' feet,
And makes me walk on my high places. For the choir director, on my stringed instruments.**

Now like most things with God- Habakkuk's spiritual growth to be able to say these words came over time. We see only 3 Chapters in this Book, but we have no idea of the time frame. This Book may have covered several years of Habakkuk's life. We simply don't know. But what we do know is that Habakkuk loved the Lord and he WAS growing in Grace- because at some point in verses 3, 9, and 13- he wrote a familiar word,

*Selah*³

... and this tells us that his Poem; his Song; his Prayer- his growth in the Knowledge of God- was NOT just for himself. Habakkuk wants us to be able to sing this Prayer (or pay this Song) with him. This world is not here to merely inform us about Habakkuk's own, personal piety. It's here to show us how we should face the Judgment of God.

The Chaldeans are coming against Judah for sure. So, how should the godly prepare for this Tribulation and Calamity and Suffering? And because Habakkuk said, "Selah", indicates that we should ask the very same Question. Tribulation is coming upon us. The dark clouds of Hardship and Calamity and Suffering are swirling around us. Everybody sees it. We talk about it often. This nation has sinned and refuses, for the most part, to repent. And some of us have preached about the coming Judgment for decades. Now it is on the doorstep. So, how should we prepare for it? How shall we endure it?

Some will turn inward to themselves. Others will seek solace in their possessions- their money; their land; their vacation spots. Still others will turn to Politics- thinking that if they could only get the right man in Office- that we could avoid what is sure to come. But how should the godly respond?

First of all, in 3:2 Habakkuk prays,

³ This ancient Hebrew word, found often in the Psalms indicates a pause in the singing for contemplation. This word may also literally mean: "forever"- indicating that the song in which it is found is an eternal song that applies to all generations.

Lord, I have heard the report about You and I fear. O Lord, revive Your work in the midst of the years, In the midst of the years make it known; In wrath remember mercy.

Then in **Habakkuk 3:3-15**- the Prophet sings the Greatness of God's Power, and especially His Power to save- in the midst of the darkness of His Wrath. For example, verse 13:

You went forth for the salvation of Your people, For the salvation of Your anointed. You struck the head of the house of the evil To lay him open from thigh to neck. Selah.

The prophet knew God's Power from His Work in the past, and so he counted on God's ultimate Victory in the future. So, verse 16 says that even though his body trembles at the thought of the coming Invasion, he "waits quietly" for what must be. And finally, in 3:17-19, Habakkuk breaks out into a wonderful song of faith:

**17 Though the fig tree should not blossom And there be no fruit on the vines,
Though the yield of the olive should fail And the fields produce no food,
Though the flock should be cut off from the fold And there be no cattle in the stalls,**

18 Yet I will exult in the Lord, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.

**19 The Lord God is my strength, And He has made my feet like hinds' feet,
And makes me walk on my high places. For the choir director, on my stringed instruments.**

... in other words, no matter how severe the Suffering when the Chaldeans invade the land, Habakkuk will never stop trusting God. Even though God Himself has roused this "fierce and impetuous people" (**Habakkuk 1:6**), Habakkuk is confident that in His Wrath, God will show Mercy to those who trust Him and rejoice in Him alone when all else fails.

Now as we step back from our Journey through this Book- it shouldn't be too hard to see what the main Point is. Negatively it is this:

Proud people, whose strength or ingenuity is their god (**Habakkuk 1:11, 16; 2:4, 19**), will come to a woeful End, even though they may enjoy Prosperity for a season either as God's chosen ones in Judah, or as the victors over Judah. All the Proud, whether Jew or Gentile, will perish in the Judgment.

But that is NOT the only Point of this Book. Habakkuk also stresses the positive side of his main Point:

“the righteous shall live by his faith.”

... and he states it as a Principle in 2:4, and then he celebrates it as his own song in 3:16–19. When Habakkuk says,

“Even when all the fruit and produce and flocks and herds are destroyed and my very life is threatened, yet will I rejoice in God,” —

... and when Habakkuk says that, he shows us what he means by “Faith” back in 2:4: He means placing your Hope on God- no matter what.

Remember that Habakkuk’s Prophecy began with his attack on Judah’s Violence and Strife and perverted Justice in **Habakkuk 1:3&4**. So, you might expect that when he comes to tell the people how to be saved in the Judgment he would say: “*Cease being violent! Do justice! Put away strife!*” (because that’s exactly what Amos said.) But he doesn’t. When the Judgment is certain and the question is, “*How can my life be spared as I stand as a guilty sinner before the Wrath of an infinitely holy God?*” And Habakkuk’s answer is: “*Trust in Him!*” “*Hope in Him!*” “*Believe in Him!*” That’s what he meant when he said,

“The righteous shall live by his faith” (Habakkuk 2:4b).

Now later on, as people began to translate the Bible into Greek and Latin and English, the word, “**Righteous**” in this verse was translated into Latin as “*Justus*”. And this Latin word was then translated into English as “*Just*”. And it is from this word that we get the term, “Justification”- which has to do with God forgiving all of our Sins (past, present, and future) and God imputing the spotless Righteousness of Jesus onto us. So, to be “*just*” with God is to be MADE “*Righteous*”. So, now we use the phrase, “the JUST shall live by Faith” to mean the same thing as what Habakkuk said here.

Now the Prophet Amos had said to Israel,

14 Seek good and not evil, that you may live; And thus may the Lord God of hosts be with you, Just as you have said!

15 Hate evil, love good, And establish justice in the gate! Perhaps the Lord God of hosts May be gracious to the remnant of Joseph. (Amos 5:14&15)

... so, Habakkuk *could* have said to Judah: “*The Just shall live by his Goodness! The Just shall live by executing Justice in the gate!*” And he would not have been wrong. For it is a thoroughly biblical Teaching that people, whose everyday lives are not changed by the Holy Spirit, will NOT inherit Eternal Life (**Galatians 5:21**). So, in a very real sense- we DO gain our lives by becoming “better people” in God’s Power and by “doing Justice” and by “loving Mercy”.

But that is NOT the “Heart of the Gospel”. In fact, in many minds- it fights against it. Because unless we have the Heart, that part of God’s Message will become a dreadful Legalism and a horrid Burden to the Conscience. Habakkuk’s Message comes close to the Heart of the Gospel. When he says, “**The righteous shall live by his faith,**” he implies two things.

1. **All those who are Righteous are also ones who have Faith in God.**
Having a “right standing” before Man and God ALWAYS includes Faith in God.
2. **Faith is what saves us from God’s Wrath.** “The righteous shall live by his faith” means: righteous people are people of Faith, and Faith is what *secures* their Life and keeps them Safe for Eternity.

The reason Habakkuk’s Message comes *close* to the Heart of the Gospel (but doesn’t reveal the heart) is that he does not tell us explicitly HOW Righteousness and Faith are related. He simply says, “*Righteous people have Faith, and this Faith saves them.*” The Heart of the Gospel is that the Righteousness which God requires comes by Faith, and it is possible for us sinners to have it- because Jesus died for our sins. **Genesis 15:6** says, “**Then he [Abraham] believed in the Lord and He reckoned it to him as righteousness**”

The Relationship between trusting God and standing Righteous before God- is that God looks at our Faith and counts us Righteous. And the Reason God can do that for us sinners- is because Jesus took the Punishment for our Iniquities on Himself. Already in **Isaiah 53:11** this is plain:

By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, As He will bear their iniquities.

When God “reckons” a person Righteous because Jesus died for him and because he puts his Trust in Jesus- that is what we call, “*Justification by Faith Alone*”. And THAT is the “Heart of the Gospel” and is the very “Best News” in all the world- to people, who know they are sinners and God is holy.

But let's not move beyond Habakkuk too quickly. There may be more here than we think for the Encouragement of our Faith. The Judgment of God is coming- *most immediately* in the Chaldean Invasion of Judah. But an even *greater* Invasion is coming at the End of the Age. Jesus is coming back! And when He comes- he will make the Destruction of the Chaldeans look like child's play. So, what is it that will bring Life instead of Death- then? Before I give Habakkuk's answer, let me make clear that if this is not your Question, you are in a dream world. You are living in a fool's Paradise of Unreality if you do not ask with all your heart, "*How can I stand in the Judgment, which is coming?*"

Those, who resist God, are "**storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God,**" (Romans 2:5). On that Day it will appear clearly to all how utterly naïve it was for millions of people to live their lives as though the God, Who made this world for His Glory, would never call them to Account for how little He has meant to them. It squares with Scripture and with reason: "**He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness**" (The Acts 17:31).

Therefore, I urge you to ask yourself: "*Would I gain my Life before a holy God if I died tonight? Am I ready to take my Stand in the Divine Courtroom and hear the Judge pass an eternal Sentence on me?*" Because there will only be two Verdicts in that day, and one or the other of them will be passed on every single person: either "Condemned" or "Justified;" Hell or Heaven; eternal Death or eternal Life.

Now Habakkuk knew that everybody in Judah was a sinner- including himself. And he knew that the Holiness of God prevented him from ignoring their Sins: "**Your eyes are too pure to approve evil, And You can not look on wickedness with favor...**" (Habakkuk 1:13a)

So, Habakkuk taught that the only thing that could save us is Faith. But Faith in what? Faith in God's Mercy. In **Habakkuk 3:2-** he prays, "**In wrath remember mercy.**"

Because he never knew the fullness of God- Habakkuk couldn't see ahead to how God would preserve both His holy Hatred for Sin and His merciful Forgiveness of sinners who trust Him. But God had revealed it, and so he proclaimed it: "*the righteous will gain their lives in the Judgment- by Faith.*" In other words, "*We won't be ultimately destroyed- NOT because we have earned it- but because we believe.*"

Now the Prophet knew that when he called the people, "Righteous"- they were NOT sinless. He meant, "*those who are right with God- IN SPITE OF THEIR SINS- are those who trust God for His Mercy.*" But how can a holy God, Who hates Sin, show eternal Mercy on guilty sinners, who simply trust Him for Mercy? God did NOT reveal that Answer to Habakkuk.

But he did to the Apostle Paul! And the Answer is, “the Death of Jesus.” Paul said it like this:

Romans 3:24-26

being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

When you put your Trust in Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord, when you give up trying to lead your own life and establish your own Worth, and instead surrender your heart to Him and bank on Him for your Future, three things happen:

1. Your Sin receives its deserved Condemnation
2. God’s Righteousness receives its deserved Glorification
3. You receive your undeserved Justification.

Habakkuk taught us that when Judgment comes, the Righteous will live by his Faith. And when that Old Testament Seed came to full flower in the New Testament, we see that the Reason the Righteous (the Just) shall live by Faith- is because those who are righteous- are justified by Faith! And THAT is the Message of the Book of Habakkuk!

Amen. Let’s pray.

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.

