

VIII. “Yet I Will Rejoice in the LORD”

27-Apr-03 Habakkuk 3:1-19

Theme: A matured faith trusts humbly but persistently in God’s design for establishing righteousness in the earth.

Key Verse: Habakkuk 3:18-19 “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.”

Review

Last week we covered Habakkuk 2. **This is the critical chapter, the chapter where God comes and answers Habakkuk’s concerns from chapter 1.** God says, “I have heard your prayer, Habakkuk, and I understand perfectly what is bothering you. Here is My answer. It is true that I have raised up the Babylonians to punish my people, but this does not mean that I am endorsing their evil or sin. On the contrary, I will judge them in due course. I have raised them up; I will bring them down again. They will suffer the full outpouring of My wrath. Meanwhile My people will be purified of their sin and restored to My favor. And while this is happening, the one who is truly righteous must live by faith in Me. Write this down. Make it plain, so that anyone who reads it may live by it.” This is what Habakkuk did. He wrote it down in his prophecy. We are called to read it and live by faith in our great God.

Habakkuk 2:4 has been called “the great text of the Bible.” It is the theme of the book of Romans. It is the heart of the gospel. It teaches both our justification and our sanctification. **The justified-by-faith shall live, and the justified shall live-by faith.** There are only two alternatives. Either we stand in front of our great God with the righteousness of Christ covering us, justified and sanctified through Jesus, or we are the proud, who cannot stand upright in God’s presence. **Most of Habakkuk 2 describes the fate of the proud, the destruction that awaits Babylon and all who follow in her footsteps. Meanwhile, the just are called to live by faith, regardless of circumstance.**

Introduction

Habakkuk 2 closes with the proclamation that the Lord is in His holy temple, summoning all people to keep silence before Him (2:20). This announcement naturally prepares for the celebration of Habakkuk’s third chapter in the context of Israel’s worship. Habakkuk’s **prayer can be divided into three parts.** The first part is an approach to God; we find it in verse 2. The second part is the prayer itself, consistent largely of rehearsal of God’s mighty acts; we find it in verse 3-15. Habakkuk’s psalm focuses on God’s past salvation events (Exodus-Sinai-Conquest) as a basis for trusting in God’s future salvation. The third and final part is Habakkuk’s personal testimony; we find the faith of 2:4 in action in verses 16-19.

The inclusion of a superscription and subscription together with a threefold use of the term *selah* (vv. 3, 9, 13) should be noted. These notations indicate that **the poem was designed for use in the worship of Israel.** Such an incorporation of a prophetic utterance into the regular worship celebrations of the corporate community of Israel underscores the fact that the prophet, although dialoguing with the Lord in the first person singular, was actually spokesman for the whole of the community. As indicated earlier, the message that “the justified (by faith) shall live by his steadfast trust” (2:4) was a prophetic word as significant as the Ten Commandments. It was to

be inscribed on “the tablets,” and would have eschatological consequences. **By presenting his message in a form readied for rehearsal in the worshiping community, Habakkuk has prepared a way for the generations following him to enter into this same life of faith despite awesome calamities.**

The overarching theme of this chapter may be seen as a poetic elaboration of 2:4. Despite all the cataclysmic calamities and judgments that shall come from the hand of God Himself, “the justified (by faith) shall live by his steadfast trust.” This permeating theme of the book now finds explicit elaboration in terms of the necessity of God’s intervention for faith to be victorious. **Faith triumphs in life by the intervening power of God may serve as a theme of this chapter.**

Exposition

III. A Psalm of Submission (3:1-19)

Superscription (3:1)

1 A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet. On shigionoth.

1. Having recognized that the Lord is in His *holy temple* (Hab. 2:20), he now offers his prayer to that temple with the expectation that the Lord will hear and answer. **This prayer indicates that the prophet now has no further case to make.** He has pleaded his cause, he has concluded his dialogue with the Almighty. **Now he leads God’s people to an acceptance of the just and merciful orderings which the Lord has revealed to him.** He reflects the wisdom that has arisen out of confrontation with the will of God.

A. The Prophet Prays for the Sustaining of Life for the Believer (3:2)

*2 a Yahweh,
b I have heard
c Your report
b I have feared
a Yahweh
c Your work.*

*a In (the) midst
b of (the) years
c make him live;
a in (the) midst
b of (the) years
c make him understand;
a in (the time of) trembling
c remember mercy.*

2. The prophet’s response of *fear* at hearing of the Lord’s activity indicates that he accepts as true the message that he has received. In this case, fear is a significant indicator of the faith of the prophet.

Most likely *the midst of (the) years* refers to **the time between the two acts of judgment revealed to Habakkuk** in the process of his earlier dialogue. In the time between the purging judgment that must fall on the house of God itself and the consuming judgment that must avenge

Minor Prophets: Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah

God's elect—in that crucial period before the destruction of God's enemies—may the Lord be sure to preserve life. Having received the word of reassurance that the justified (by faith) shall *live* by his steadfast trust, the prophet now makes this promise the focal point of his petition.

On a broader scale, the pattern of Habakkuk's prayer provides the framework for understanding the present era. According to Peter, judgment must begin with the house of God (1 Pet. 4:17). **This present era represents the time in which God continues to purify His own by many chastening judgments.** In these circumstances, the believer must plead the promise that the Lord shall preserve the life of His own despite temporal calamities. **Between the time of God's chastening of His own and his bringing final judgment on His enemies, the cry must go up for the Lord to uphold his word and to sustain life for the believing.** *Make him live*, the prophet pleads; make him, the one who believes, to live.

So the petitions of the prophet are threefold: that the Lord will preserve life, that the Lord will provide understanding, and that the Lord will remember mercy. Only the initiative of divine grace will prove sufficient under the calamitous circumstances which the believing shall face. **So verse 2 thus serves as an encapsulation of the message of the book, and as a prayer all today need to make to the ever-just but ever-compassionate God.**

B. The Prophet Envisions God the Savior Coming in All His Glory (3:3-15)

Having offered his petition, the prophet now turns his eyes toward the past and the future, where he sees the Lord coming in all His glory. **He envisions salvation coming amidst the cataclysmic phenomena associated with theophany.** Does Habakkuk talk about the past or the future as he describes God's coming in all his glory? Without doubt he drew from a number of the past manifestations of God's glory in the history of Israel. **A collage, a collecting of many images to convey an impression both of past experience and of future expectation is the medium of the prophet.** Moses' song, Deborah's song, David's song blend to provide a framework for anticipating the future. By such a method, Habakkuk does not dehistoricize the reality of God's coming for salvation. Instead, he colors the reality of the expectation of God's future manifestation by recalling the many concrete instances of his intervening in the history of the past. He does not place the coming of God in the realm of timelessness, but forces his readers to appreciate the magnificence and the imminence of his appearing again.

God's power is expressed in this psalm in terms of two different manifestations of His character. **His coming is described in the language of theophany**, in which the approach and arrival of deity is pictured in terms of extraordinary natural phenomena (3:3-7). **He is also described as the Divine Warrior** who battles both against the elements and against the enemies of His people for the sake of His name and of His kingdom (3:8-15).

1. The Glory of the Lord in His Coming (3:3-7)

- 3 a Eloah
- b from Teman
- c comes,
- a and the Holy One
- b from Mount Paran. Selah

- a His splendor
- b covers
- c (the) heavens

Minor Prophets: Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah

- a and His praise*
b fills
c the earth.
- 4 *a And His brilliance*
b is as the light;
a horns
b (proceed) from His hand.
There
(is) the hiding of His strength.
- 5 *a Before Him*
b goes
c a plague;
c and a burning pestilence
b goes forth
a at His feet.
- 6 *a He stands*
b and measures
c (the) earth.
- a He looks*
b and startles
c (the nations)
- a They are shattered—*
b the everlasting mountains;
a they bow down—
b the eternal hills.
- (But) His goings (are) eternal.*
- 7 *a Under distress*
b I see
c the tents of Cushan;
c the tents of curtains of the land of Midian
a are trembling.

In a most dramatic fashion, the prophet depicts the actual process of the coming of the Lord in all His glory, and the awesome effects this coming has on nature and nations. **As the Lord in His glory draws nearer and nearer, the effects of His presence become more and more dramatic. From his position in the middle of Israelite history, the psalmist looks back to God's might actions at the Exodus and ponders over the future.**

3a. The poem begins by referring to God as *Eloah*, using an ancient poetic form of the name of God (cp. Dt. 32:15, 17; used 40 times in Job). **The stunning revelation about this God is that He actually comes.** The emphasis on the coming of God Himself as the source of hope for the Lord's people appropriately finds its consummate expression in the new covenant Scriptures. Through all the ages only the coming of the Lord Himself can provide genuine hope for His people. According to Habakkuk, the Lord comes from *Temán* and *Mount Paran*. By these

Minor Prophets: Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah

designations, the prophet traces back along the steps by which God led Israel into the possession of the land. *Teman* is associated generally with Edom (cf. Ob. 9; Amos 1:12). *Paran* designates the desert area about Sinai and Egypt (cf. Gen. 21:21; 1 K. 11:18; Deut. 33:2). Habakkuk depicts God in movement from Sinai through Edom on the way to the possession of the land for His people. **Habakkuk recalls Israel's past experience as a means of anticipating the intervention of the Lord in the future.**

Now Habakkuk sees the righteousness and holiness of God in action. With impartiality He shall strike down first the ungodly in Israel, and then the heathen Babylonian. In such a manner He will be established as the Coming Holy One. The remainder of this section (vv. 3b-7) develops the extensiveness (v. 3b), the intensiveness (v. 4), and the effects of the glory of God (vv. 5-7) as He comes to provide salvation for His people.

3b. As the prophet envisions the coming of the Lord in glory, he first sees the magnitude of that glory from afar. The majesty of God blankets the heavens above, and his splendor permeates the earth, the particular glory radiating from the theophany of God as he comes to deliver His people. These past manifestations on a limited scale may be regarded as anticipations of the great final epiphany of the glory of God, when the Son of Man shall come in the clouds, accompanied by lightning shining from the East to the West (**Matt. 24:27**). **Then every eye shall see Him, and the vision of Habakkuk shall receive its finalized fulfillment.**

4. The purest, the most brilliant element of the created universe is light itself. So the prophet declares that God in His coming is as the essence of light. "God is light," say the new covenant Scriptures (1 John 1:5), and so this same tradition continues to communicate the perfections of the divine glory. This is probably speaking of the **Shekinah glory**, the cloud by which God manifested His presence. As he approaches, the concentration of His glory is seen in the *horns* or "rays" that (*proceed*) *from His hand*. The *horn* naturally symbolizes the concentration of power. Habakkuk's allusion to the past traditions of Israel is quite clear. He depicts the coming glory of God in terms of the past glory associated with the theophany of Sinai. As Moses descended from the mountain, his face "horned," which is the only other place in Scripture where this particular term is used to describe the shining of rays of light (cf. Ex. 34:29-30, 35). **The connection of Habakkuk's imagery with the manifestation of God's glory at Sinai is further seen by a more detailed comparison with Deut. 33:2.**

5. Having depicted something of the glory of God in its essence as He comes to deliver his people, the prophet now describes the **effects that accompany the manifestation of God's glory**. References to *plague* in the OT cluster especially **around the events of the Exodus**. The coming of the Lord is an awesome sight to behold. The closer He comes, the more fearful appear the consequences of His approach.

6. Now the Lord actually arrives. In underscoring the cosmic significance of the coming of the Lord, Habakkuk depicts the effect of his arrival on the most fundamental masses of creation. In contrast with the proven temporality of the foundational structures of the present creation is the everlasting stability of the Lord Himself. The prophet deliberately sets one *eternal* back to back with another: the *eternal* hills bow down, but (even) the goings of the Lord are *eternal*. **This verse moves into the cosmic and eschatological aspects of Yahweh's coming. It moves from a unique experience of God when He brought His people out of Egypt and conquered Canaan to a declaration about God's character, the way He is for all time, and so will be again.**

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7. Although the term *Cushan* does not appear by itself outside Hab. 3:7, it does appear in the compound phrase “Cushan-Rishathaim” in Judges 3:8-11. In that context, Cushan arises as the first of the oppressors of Israel, sent by God to chasten them because of their sin. For this reason, a reference to Cushan-Rishathaim in the framework of Habakkuk’s expectation is quite appropriate. The very problem which Habakkuk had to face was the prospect of a chastening invasion by a foreign power. This nation in Judges is identified as coming from the land of Aram-Naharaim, “Aram of the two rivers.” This identification has some significance because in the very next verse Habakkuk poses the rhetorical question, “Did Yahweh rage against the rivers? The reference to the *tent curtains of the land of Midian* might intend to echo a distinctive aspect of the confrontation of the Lord with the invading Midianite oppressors in the days of the Judges. **The prophet’s placing of the anticipated chastisements of Israel in terms of Israel’s past experience with Cushan-Rishathaim and with Midian indicates that Habakkuk finally had accepted the fact that a chastening judgment of the severest type must come on Israel for their persistence in sin.** But he never lost hope that the remnant would survive. For he had been given the sign that “the justified (by faith) would live by his steadfast trust.”

2. *Dialogue with the Lord at His Coming (3:8-15)*

- 8 *Is it against the rivers
that Yahweh rages?
Toward the rivers
(is) Your anger?
Toward the sea
(is) Your wrath?

that You ride
on Your horses
Your chariots of salvation?*
- 9 *You fully unsheathe Your bow;
Battle rods are sworn by oath. Selah*
- With rivers
You cleave the earth.*
- 10 *The mountains
see You—
they flee.
Tempest of waters
overflows.
The abyss
gives its voice;
it lifts its hands high.*
- 11 *Sun, moon
stand in their lofty abode;
at the light of Your arrows
they flee,
at the radiance of Your gleaming spear*
- 12 *a In indignation
b You march through the land;*

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*a in wrath
b You thresh the nations.*

*13 You go forth
for (the) salvation of Your people,
for the salvation with Your anointed.*

*You crush
(the) chief of (the) household of (the) wicked (one),
laying bare (from) the foundation
up to the neck. Selah*

*14 You pierce with his (own) rods
the chief of his throngs.*

*They storm in
to scatter me.
Their rejoicing (is)
as one who devours the poor in secret.*

*15 You tread
on the sea
with Your horses
(amidst) the heap of many waters.*

The transition **from God's coming to God's actually being present** is made apparent by the prophet's addressing God initially in the third person and in the very next phrase in the second person (v. 8). He continues by addressing God as "You" until the end of this section (v. 15). The imagery also changes, for God is here presented as the **Divine Warrior**. **This and the preceding passage are united by common references to events of the period of the Exodus, Sinai, and the Conquest.**

8. The reference *to the rivers and the sea* constructs a collage of past deliverances to depict God's action in the future. A river often serves as a territorial border. Therefore to smite rivers suggests movement toward a fuller possession of God's promises. **The Lord had smitten the Red Sea, the Jordan River, and the river Kishon. In each case, He had moved His people closer to the full possession of the promises concerning the land.** In the context of Revelation (Rev. 16:3-4ff), the anticipated judgments of God are described in images reminiscent of God's wrath as it was manifested against Egypt and Babylon. He shall show his wrath against sea (Egypt) and rivers (possibly including Babylon) by turning the waters to blood (Egypt), and by drying up the Euphrates (Babylon). In any case, the book of Revelation has depicted the same judgmental interventions found in the prophetic anticipations of Habakkuk. **God's redemptive acts of the past provide the basis for an expectation concerning the future.**

That You ride on Your horses, Your chariots of salvation. **Horses and chariots are associated with the Red Sea event, only here in Habakkuk they are part of God's own army rather than that of His enemies.** Particularly in the period of Israel's monarchy, God's appearance on horses and chariots became a characteristic imagery. In the Psalms and the prophets God is also depicted as having at His disposal horses and chariots to enforce His sovereign will (Ps. 18:10;

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68:17; Is. 66:15; Jer. 4:13; Ezek. 1:15ff.; Zech. 6:2-3,6). As Habakkuk faces devastations by an alien army, he depicts the greater wrath and the greater power found in Yahweh's own horses and chariots of salvation. No nation shall be able to stand against Him when he comes to accomplish salvation for His people. It was indeed a step of great faith that enabled Habakkuk to affirm an expectation of *salvation* in view of the revelation he had received.

9a. *You fully unsheathe your bow.* God's laying bare his bow dramatizes this action by which **the Divine Warrior readies Himself for attack against His enemies.** Now His ire has been aroused, and He acts with the full force of His destructive powers. *Battle rods* (or spears, staves) *are sworn by oath* captures the flavor of the context and suits the basic meaning of the words. God had enlisted weapons and pledged them on oath for the destruction of His enemies. In the oath of the covenant as recorded in Deut. 32:40-43, the Lord swore by lifting up His hand to heaven that His sword and arrows would consume His enemies, avenging the blood of His servants and rendering vengeance on His adversaries, while having mercy on His land and His people. Habakkuk now discerns that the hour in which that oath shall be fulfilled has come.

9b-10. Now it becomes plain that this warrior for righteousness is no ordinary personage. **His weapons of offense include the primeval elements of the creation.** The reference to the *abyss* reflects on the depths of waters that originally covered the entirety of the earth (Gen. 1:2). In His assault on His enemies, the Lord shall employ the most basic elements of His created order.

11. *Sun, moon stand in their lofty abode.* Despite the objections of some, it appears most likely that this phrase **intends to reflect the "long day" of Joshua**, in which the sun and moon stood still allowing Joshua to complete his work of judgment on the Lord's enemies. In this case, they remain in their "habitation," a term usually used of God's dwelling-place, the Temple. This is the opposite of the events in Joshua, where the sunshine was prolonged. Darkness, rather than light, is a sign of God's power presence and of judgment. **This allusion adds further imagery in terms of God's bringing all of nature in subservience to His purposes of redemption.**

12. It is in response to the wickedness of the nations that the Lord unleashes his indignation. *In wrath You thresh the nations.* The Lord's threshing of the nations moves even closer to the specific point of his theophanic manifestation.

13a. This verse reminds the reader again that the **overall setting of this poem is in terms of God's coming to His people, manifesting His glory in creation as He comes, and always with the ultimate intent of bringing salvation. God does not destroy the wicked simply for the sake of destroying the wicked. He destroys them for the sake of His people. God has a special people, and He saves them from their enemies.**

The first half of the verse provides the key to understanding the relationship of this chapter to the rest of the book. Rather than ignoring wrongdoing (1:2-4), or allowing oppression of His people to go unpunished (1:12-17), God remembers His covenant and acts on their behalf. **The whole purpose of the psalm and of God's theophany is to indicate the continued presence of gracious care coupled with divine judgment.** Here we have God's answer to Habakkuk's complaints (1:12, 17)—His people will be saved.

The sudden introduction of a reference to *Your anointed* in this seventh-century prophet must be recognized for its distinctiveness. God's salvation is *for* His people, but it is accomplished *with* His anointed. But who is this *anointed* that is to serve as the agent by which the Lord accomplishes his salvation? Possibly the prophet could be anticipating the appearance of an

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ideal “David” of the future. Yet another interpretation should be acknowledged as a possibility. The only other passage in the prophets using the term *messiah* refers to Cyrus as God’s servant when he devastates the Babylonians (Is. 45:1). **The circumstances of this reference in Habakkuk conform rather closely to the role that Cyrus fulfilled in redemptive history.** Habakkuk has been led to recognize that after God had judged His own people by the hand of the Babylonians, He would then raise up another power that would execute just judgment on Babylon for their excesses of cruelty. The identification of the messiah of Hab. 3:13 with Cyrus does not inherently exclude a reference to the **realization of this “salvation” in terms of the coming of the final messianic king-deliverer of God’s people.** Isaiah already had intertwined with his presentation of Cyrus the servant-deliverer (Is. 44:24-45:7) a development of the Suffering Servant motif (Is. 42:1-4; 49:1-6). **These two deliverers and their deliverances are intentionally layered so that the one must be understood in relation to the other. As one anointed servant restores the people in a limited politico-geographical sense, so the other anointed servant restores the people in the fullest redemptive setting.**

13b. Military conquest of Babylon, the wicked, is resumed, using **the imagery of “striking the head.” God crushes this principal leader of the throngs of the wicked** (v. 14) in the same way in which the star of Jacob was to smite the corners of Moab (Num. 24:17), and Jael smote Sisera (Jdg. 5:26), and **Messiah would smite through the head of many (Ps. 110:5-6).** Standing in contrast to the anointed one who goes forth to accomplish salvation for his people (v. 13a) is this chief of the wicked who oppresses God’s people (v. 13b).

14. Rather than being terrified at the strength of their enemies, God’s people ought to rest confidently in the assurance that the strength of the enemies’ power only displays their capacity to destroy themselves. Set as a poetic counterpoint to the Lord’s destruction of His enemies is the description of the ferocity of the alien’s attack. But who is the *me* who suffers the brunt of this tempestuous assault? It seems rather appropriate to **regard the *me* of v. 14 as referring expressly to the prophet himself.** He senses that he too must bear the brunt of the enemy’s ferocity.

15. But the newborn faith of the prophet encourages him to remember the great salvation provided by the Lord from the hands of the oppressor in ages past. Disdaining the strength of the enemy, the Lord treads on the sea with His horses, raising like a dust cloud the heap of many waters. **In a clear allusion to the deliverance of the Israelites at the Red Sea,** the prophet reminds himself and his contemporaries of the saving strength inherent in the Lord’s coming. **Thus the section closes with the motif with which it opened in verse 8, God’s horses trampling on the sea.**

So the prophet has depicted God the Savior coming in all his glory (vv. 3-15). The faith that gives life must look to the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior. **He shall come, and He shall devastate all His enemies. But in the interim, judgment must begin with the house of God.**

C. The Prophet Resolves His Struggle by Triumphant Trust (3:16-19b)

The prophet’s reaction to this awesome interchange includes three elements: (1) a response of stunned awe (v. 16); (2) a recognition of coming loss (v. 17); and (3) a resolution of joyful entrustment (vv. 18-19b).

Minor Prophets: Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah

1. A Response of Stunned Awe (3:16)

16 a I heard
 b and my belly
 c trembled.
a At the Voice
 b my lips
 c buzzed.
Rottenness has come into my bones,
and beneath me I tremble,
because I must wait quietly
for the day of adversity,
for the coming up of the people
who will invade us.

16. Particularly *the Voice* that is the occasion of the prophet's trauma should be noted. **His response to the speaking of God reminds of Israel's poem about the Voice (Ps. 29:3-5, 7-9).** The last portion of verse 16 directly explains the reason for the prophet's stunned awe. It is *because* of the terrible devastation that God's own people must undergo prior to their full possession of the promises that the prophet trembles from head to toe. Habakkuk's distraught body shudders to consider that he must live with the constant anticipation of God's coming judgment. Although deliverance is certain, it will come only after judgment.

2. A Recognition of Coming Loss (3:17)

17 Even though
 a the fig tree
 b shall not blossom
 b and no fruit (shall be)
a on the vines;

 a shall fail
 b the making of the olive;
 b and the fields
a shall not make food;

 a shall be cut off from the fold
 b the flock
 b and no cattle
a (shall be) in the stalls.

17. The passage describes a series of facts that shall transpire. These dreadful things shall happen. But they shall not occur as a consequence of drought or a plague of locusts. Instead, the ravages of war shall leave the land desolate. The prophet's rehearsal of items that shall be denied the inhabitants of the land is arranged in the form of three poetic stanzas of four lines each (see the translation above). The *a-b-b-a* interchange of subject and verb is perhaps the most typical of Hebrew poetic parallelism. Within this formal structure, **a double triad of objects may be noted, moving from the optional to the essential items for human survival. The fig**

tree, the fruit, and the olive represent the choicest products of the land as seen in passages such as Joel 1:7; Hos. 2:12; Mic. 4:4; 6:15; Deut. 6:11; 8:8. **The grain of the fields and the flock and cattle encompass the necessities of bread, milk, and meat.** Habakkuk openly recognizes the coming loss of all these luxuries as well as life's necessities, but believes nonetheless. Even though these sources might fail in some way, **the psalmist sees that ultimately his existence is not based on them, but upon their source, Yahweh.** The promised mercies of God to His people extend well beyond all material losses. **Stripped of all else, he can never be deprived of His covenant God.** The entire present world order may pass away, but God's grace to His people shall endure.

3. *A Resolution of Joyful Entrustment (3:18-19b)*

18 *Yet I—*

a in Yahweh

b I shall exult;

b I shall rejoice

a in the God of my salvation.

19 *Yahweh my God (is) my strength.*

a For He will set my feet

b like hinds' (feet);

b and on my high places

a He will make me walk.

Finally a resolution of the conflict that began the book appears. The prophet now understands through divine revelation the justice of the ways of God with men, and the inevitable judgment that must come even upon the faithful remnant of Judah. Even the prophet himself shall suffer the deprivation of all things necessary for the sustaining of life. Yet he shall live! He shall rejoice! He shall mount to the highest peaks of the earth! Notice that **it is in the person of Yahweh himself that the prophet rejoices. He now has learned that he may be deprived of all material benefits, comforts, and blessings—yet he can rejoice because of his faith in Yahweh.**

18. The transition from the complaining prophet to the rejoicing prophet surely must be seen as a work of God's sovereign grace. May the Lord himself continue to provide the grace of life to people of this generation by the faith that justifies. **This is a practical commentary on, and example of, the faith noted in 2:4.**

19a, b. The prophet echoes the words of David's psalm of triumph when the Lord delivered him from all his enemies: "He makes my feet like a doe's feet, and on my high places he makes me stand" (**Ps. 18:33**). Surefooted, untiring, bounding with energy, the Lord's people may expect to ascend the heights of victory despite their many severe set backs. The heights of the earth, the places of conquest and domain, shall be the ultimate possession of God's people. As spokesman for God's people in this song to be celebrated through the ages, **the prophet displays the magnificence of a victorious faith.** Even the most horrifying setbacks cannot break the confidence in ultimate victory. **So before our very eyes the message of Hab. 2:4 finds fulfillment. Habakkuk lives—by faith.** He keeps on trusting God, despite the utter chaos and absolute calamity of the Exile. As a consequence, he lives.

Subscription (3:19c)

19c To the chief musician on my stringed instruments.

Conclusion

Something has happened in the interval between the prayers of the first chapter and the prayer of the third, and it **changed Habakkuk**. Quite simply, Habakkuk has taken his mind off himself, the Israelites, and the Babylonians and focused on God. So long as Habakkuk was looking at Israel and the Chaldeans, he was troubled. Now he has forgotten Israel as such, and the Chaldeans, and his eyes are on God, so he is able to see things in an entirely new light. **He is now concerned for the glory of God and for nothing else.**

The third chapter of Habakkuk is a confession of weakness and fear on the part of the embattled prophet. But it is more than about Habakkuk's fear. Habakkuk also turned to God, and turning to God gave him victory over this weakness. It is significant that the book does not end on the note of fear. Fear is mentioned (3:16), but it is surpassed by faith as Habakkuk comes to rejoice in the God of salvation (3:17-18). This victory is available to all God's people, whatever they are called upon to go through. This is entirely different from the world's approaches to fear—resignation, detachment, or bravado. **The Christian way of dealing with fear is to rejoice in the God of salvation.**

Faced with fear, Habakkuk reminds himself of what he knows. **He knows that he worships a mighty God, and he remembers the powerful acts of God in past days.** A God like that is a joy forever. Remembering Him restores his joy and brings him victory over fear of the future. It is important to emphasize knowledge, for there are situations in life which only knowledge will help us. Emotion will not save us. Reason will not save us. **The only thing that can save us is knowledge of what we know to be true.** Habakkuk had knowledge of God's mighty acts. Indeed, this whole chapter is a rehearsal of them, as God brings Israel out of Egypt, to Sinai, and into the Promised Land. **God's mighty past acts in history amply demonstrate that He is able to save those who look to Him in faith. But He has also promised to save His people and therefore will save them.**

Habakkuk, who starts in depression, and doubts as to God's righteousness and justice, ends with a lively confidence in God's provision and sustaining power. Habakkuk's faith has matured to the point that he humbly but persistently trusts in God's design for establishing righteousness on the earth. So a book beginning with complaint and distress ends in joy. Faith triumphs in life despite many calamities. The "just shall live by faith" regardless of circumstance.

Next week: Lesson 9 – Zephaniah 1 – "The Great Day of the LORD Is Near"

Close in Prayer.