

Outlines for Country Preachers by a Country Preacher
Sermon Outlines by Milburn Cockrell

THE BOOK OF HABAKKUK

NAME:

This book is called in the Vulgate Latin and Syriac versions “The Prophecy of Habakkuk.” His name signifies “an embracer” or “the best embracer.” His character and conduct agrees with his name. He embraced Jehovah and His people. He loved both dearly.

AUTHOR:

We know nothing of his family or the place he lived. Because of the description in 3:1 and the inscription in 3:19 some have assumed that he was a Levite who assisted in the music of the Temple. We learn from his Book that he was an educated man, a man of great faith, and a deeply patriotic man. One writer has said: “Who he was, nobody knows; what he was, everybody knows.”

DATE AND PLACE OF WRITING:

The period of the rise of the Neo-Babylonian Empire around 620 B.C. Habakkuk speaks of the Chaldean invasion of Judah as future (1:5-6.12). He probably wrote during the reign of Jehoiakim (608-597 B.C.). The Chaldeans invaded Judah in 606 B.C. (II Kings 24:1; II Chron. 36:6; Jer. 36:9; 46:2). The place of writing was probably some place in the southern kingdom.

CONTENTS:

The Book naturally divides into a burden (1:1), a vision (2:2), and a prayer (3:1). Some would say: (1) Faith grappling with problems, 1; (2) Faith grasping the solution, 2; (3) Faith glorifying in assurance, 3. Another would put it this way: (1) The problems of faith (1:2-2:20) and the prayer of faith (3:1-19).

KEY VERSE:

“The just shall live by his faith” (2:4).

PURPOSE:

(1) To warn Judah of its coming judgment at the hands of the Chaldeans; (2) To comfort Judah concerning Chaldea’s intimate destruction; (3) To cause people to trust God in a dying nation.

STYLE:

In the first two chapters the prophet contends with Jehovah, and in the third he submits to Jehovah. Chapter 3 contains a high caliber of Hebrew poetry. There are no “Thus saith the Lord” in this Book. Compare 1:5 with Acts 13:41. Compare 2:4 with Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11 and Hebrews 10:38.

IMPORTANT FEATURES:

The vices of the Chaldeans are delineated (1: 5-11). They are later named and denounced—insatiable ambition (2:6-8), covetousness (2:9-11), cruelty (2:12-14), drunkenness (2:15-17), idolatry (2:18-20). There is a prophecy of a spiritual revival in the millennium (2:14). The darker the outward circumstances, the greater the succour from God (3:17-19).

There is also some evils practiced by the nobility of Judah against the poorer Jews. The nobility was primarily taken in the first two invasion of Chaldea.

AUTHENTICITY:

It is acknowledged as divinely inspired by both Jewish and Christian scholars. It is quoted four times in the New Testament. Habakkuk 1:5 is quoted in Acts 13:41; and Habakkuk 2:4 is quoted in Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11, and Hebrews 10:38.

CONTEMPORARY PROPHETS:

Zephaniah (630-625 BC), Nahum (625-612 B. C.), and Jeremiah (627-586 BC).

Chapter One

I. THE MYSTERY OF GOD PERMITTING EVIL TO GO UNPUNISHED (1:1-4).

1. The writer (v. 1).

(1) “The prophet”—a man who spoke the message of God to the people. He might interpret the past, explain the present, or foretell the future (II Pet. 1:20-21).

(2) “The burden”—the message of the prophet. He had a heavy, burdensome prophecy for Judah.

(3) “Did see”—in a divinely wrought vision from God beforehand.

2. The prophet felt that his prayers had been in vain (v. 2).

(1) Sin had reigned in Judah a long time. He had cried for God to judge their sins, but it seemed his prayers were to no purpose.

(2) Why does God remain silent when we pray (Ps. 18:41; Job 19:7)? Why does He permit modernism to undermine faith? Communism and Catholicism to advance while the cause of our Baptists wanes?

Why does He allow wrong to be done in His name? Why does sin go unpunished? Why are His churches in their present condition?

(3) Why have some prayed for lost sinners so long? Why for revival so long? Or a pastor so long? Why is God silent?

(4) He cried out “Violence,” as one would cry “Murder!” or “Fire!” He cried out to God the name of the evil being done in his nation.

(5) Punishment does not come without sin, nor does sin endure long without punishment. Although He does not answer our cry for help when we want Him to do so, God is never unjust.

3. God seemed to do nothing even when violence filled the land (v.3).

(1) Had God forgotten Numbers 23:21 where He had said He will not tolerate sin among His people? Was He not permitting what He said He will punish (Jer. 12:1)?

(2) Abounding wickedness in a nation is a grief to God’s people (Jer. 9:2). Sin is a reproach to any people!

(3) God often allows things to get worse before they get better. He answers our prayers in His own good time and in the manner that He pleases.

(4) Every possible violation of human rights and Divine law was being perpetrated in Judah (Jer. 23:3-17).

4. God seems to have forgotten to enforce His law (v. 4).

(1) “The law is slacked”—paralyzed, ineffective, and dormant. Why did God make a law if He did not

intend to enforce it? Why does He permit this condition of lawlessness to prevail among His own people? Why doesn't He do something?

(2) The innocent are not acquitted by the judges, nor are the guilty punished. Our modern court system punishes the victim and protects the criminal! The victim has no rights!

(3) We must not think it strange that wickedness prevails much and prospers long (Eccl. 8:11). God has good reasons for His long-sufferings.

(4) The day of Judgment will come though it is deferred long. The cry of sin will be avenged (Ex. 34:6-7). The cry of those that suffer under oppression will be heard by much prayer (Luke 18:1-8).

II. MAN DOES NOT UNDERSTAND GOD (1:5-11).

1. The Lord answers the prophet's complaint (v. 5; cf. Isa. 55:8-9).

(1) The Chaldeans will invade Judah in this generation. They will correct Judah. The Lord is using Communism, Socialism, Humanism, and Catholicism to correct His churches today.

(2) "Behold, ye among the heathen"—a public punishment that the heathen will notice (Deut. 28:24-25). The judgment will be heavier than what God inflicted upon the heathen nations.

(3) "Wonder marvelously"—literally, be amazed, be amazed. The word is doubled to express how amazement will follow amazement. There will be shock and astonishment, even terror and fear, at what God was about to do.

(4) "I will work a work"—God is not inactive. He controls all nations and is the Lord of history. He is about to do what they did not expect, and that soon "in your day."

(5) You must see to believe. You will not believe it if I tell you. Men never believe that God is in earnest until His judgment comes—the flood, Sodom and Gomorrah, and the Jews in the time of Christ (Acts 13:41).

2. The Lord will bring the Chaldeans upon Judah (v. 6).

(1) A powerful and warlike people had been raised up under Divine Providence. A people famous for their soothsaying, divination, and astrology (Deut. 28:49-50; Jer. 5:15).

(2) God sometimes uses a wicked nation to accomplish His purpose (Ex. 9:16; Rev. 17:17). Only repentance and reformation can turn away His judgment.

(3) The Chaldeans had already conquered the Assyrian Empire, along with Egypt, and made Babylon the mistress of the world. Things do not just happen—they are planned. Events are not accidents. History follows a Divine timetable.

(4) God was arousing the Chaldeans to move against Judah. Habakkuk had said God was inactive, but God had already planned judgment for Judah.

(5) God used one wicked nation as a rod of His discipline to punish another nation for her sins (I Kings 11:14-23; Amos 6:14). What nation is He about to bring against us!

(6) "The dwelling places that are not theirs"—not theirs by right, but they shall have them as long as God

wills.

3. They are described and their actions are foretold (v. 7).

(1) Their countenances are fierce, come in great number, and with shining armor, and also with powerful weapons of war.

(2) They will show no mercy or pity—spare no pain for either man, woman, or child. The law of God will mean nothing to them. Their own wills are a law unto themselves. This power originates from their arrogance.

4. Their horses and men were trained for war (v. 8).

(1) The Hebrews never had a cavalry and were alarmed when they saw one. Their horses were faster than leopards and fiercer than hungry wolves.

(2) The soldiers on the horses will loot, rape, kill, and spread panic wherever they go. They will sweep as an eagle that hastens to its prey. Seeming to fly rather than ride.

(3) Other nations were said to fly like an eagle (Deut. 28:49-50; Jer. 48:40; 49:22; Lam. 4:19; Ezek. 17:3; Dan. 7:4).

5. God punishes violence with violence (v. 9; cf. 1:2-3).

(1) Every soldier will be committed to oppression and violence.

(2) Just as plants wither and die before the east wind, so will this army cause men to sink and die through terror.

(3) They will gather up captivities in number as the grains of sand and with as little resistance as the sand before the wind.

6. The Chaldeans will scoff at kings and princes (v. 10).

(1) Certainly true of the Chaldeans (II Chron. 36:5-6, 9-13; Dan. 1:2; 2:37-38; 4:22; Jer. 22:18-19).

(2) They will laugh at the efforts of the citizens of Judah to defend themselves, for capturing a fortress will be as easy as a child at play.

7. They will conclude that their military victories came from their god—Bel or Nebo (v. 11).

(1) They did not know God was using them. They were ignorant of God's ways (Isa. 44:28-45:4).

(2) God's use of the Chaldeans increased their sin of self-deification (Dan. 4:30).

(3) God permits a particular evil to go unpunished temporarily because He is working on a larger plan. He does not settle all His accounts the first of the month. He works on a different time schedule from man.

(4) God does not work by our standards. A finite man cannot recognize the work of an infinite God.

III. THE SECOND QUESTION: HOW CAN A HOLY GOD USE A WICKED AGENT AND YET REMAIN JUST (1:12-17).

1. The attributes of God are a comfort to God's people (v. 12).

- (1) God's attributes considered.
 - A. His eternity—"Art thou not from everlasting?" If God is from everlasting, He shall be to everlasting. Go back as far as you can in thought, God was still before.
 - B. His self-existence—"LORD" or Jehovah (Ex. 3:14-15). This is the proper name of God.
 - C. His holiness—"mine Holy One." Men are unholy; God is glorious in holiness. He cannot do any unrighteousness.
 - D. His almightiness—"O mighty God." The Chaldeans cannot thwart His purpose.
- (2) How these attributes comfort God's people.
 - A. This great God was his—"My God, my Holy One." We have offended Him, but He is still our God.
 - B. Habakkuk infers the perpetuity of Israel from the eternity of God: "We shall not die" (John 14:19). The prophet has changed from the singular number to the plural number. He speaks now before God as the representative of the people of Judah.
 - C. God has designed to judge Judah by the Chaldeans. The power of mighty men comes from God. Those whom God has ordained shall do no more than God has ordained.
2. God uses some people that we would not use (v. 13).
 - (1) God cannot be the author of sin. He cannot do any iniquity Himself. He cannot look upon sin with pleasure, and when He does it is for the purpose of judging and punishing it.
 - (2) Sin is an offense to God's holiness and obnoxious to His justice. He is reconciled to sinners by the death of Christ, but He is never reconciled to sin!
 - (3) The prophet could not understand why a holy God would use a people that were wicked idolaters. How can He look upon these sinners with indifference and allow them to come to Judah? The prophet could not reconcile the holiness of God with the justice of God (Job 21:7; Ps. 73:2-3; Jer. 12:1-2).
 - (4) God sometimes uses the more wicked to discipline the less wicked for reasons known only to Himself. He holds His tongue while seeing them continue in their wicked course of idol worship.
3. The Chaldeans made no more of killing a man than fishers did of catching a fish (v. 14).
 - (1) The "creeping things" are crabs and shrimps (Ps. 104:25).
 - (2) Providence allows the stronger to make a prey of the weaker. Judah will be given up to the Chaldeans as fish to the fisherman.
 - (3) Judah will suffer because God will not defend them. The Chaldeans will fulfill their purpose of conquest with as much ease as a fish is drawn from the water by a hook or net.
4. The Chaldeans have many ways of conquering people, as men do in catching fish (v. 15).
 - (1) Three methods of fishing in that day: "angle" (fishhook), "net" (small net used by one man), and "drag" (a large seine-net which had weights on the bottom).
 - (2) The fishing net was an ancient symbol of a worldly sovereign. All the Babylonian deities are pictured

as holding or dragging a net in which they captured enemies squirm.

(3) Satan cast his baits and nets in the sea of life, taking some by individual craft and sweeping others in whole masses to do evil. They do not have Christ to reign over them. Satan caught Adam on his hook and drew him out of Paradise.

5. The success of idolaters only increased their idolatry (v. 16).

(1) A pagan fisherman would burn incense to his net as an act of worship when he had a large catch.

(2) The Chaldeans would offer sacrifices to their military strength, which made their nation strong and filled their coffers with wealth.

(3) Whatever a man trusts in is his god. The idol is first set up in the heart (Ezek. 14:4).

(4) Men love themselves and admire their abilities (Isa. 10:13, 15; Job 31:25; Luke 12:19). We take the glory of outward success and prosperity to ourselves (Deut. 8:17).

6. The prophet pleads that they may not be permitted long to continue their wicked invasion (v. 17).

(1) Will God not assert His right as the holy Governor of the nations? Is He not jealous of His own honor (Ps. 74:22-23)?

(2) How can God be just and let such evil go unchallenged and unpunished?

(3) The prophet lodges the matter in God's hands. This is the place to take all our problems, and then we should leave them there.

Chapter Two

I. THE PROPHET MUST WAIT FOR GOD TO REVEAL HIS RIGHTEOUS WAY (2:1).

1. “I will stand upon my watch.” “Will watch and see”—as a sentinel on the walls of a besieged city, as a military watchman, looking for the slightest movement. The prophet will give himself to meditation and prayer.
2. “Set me upon the tower”—a high place from which he could behold things at a distance.
3. “What he will say unto me”—he waited for an answer from God (Ps. 85:8; 77:6).
4. “What I shall answer when I am reproved”—the Word of God explains the work of God. The prophet will speak God’s words to the people, not his own words (II Pet. 1:19-20).
5. When we are tempted to think fate and fortune rules the world and not an all-wise God, we must wait for God to explain His work of righteousness.
6. If we will hear the voice of God we must rise above the distractions of earthly things and temporal desires.

II. GOD HAS AN APPOINTED TIME FOR HIS APPOINTED WORK (2:2-4).

1. The vision of God is to be written down (v. 2).
 - (1) God is not obligated to make an explanation of His ways to man (Dan. 4:35).
 - (2) In grace the Lord reveals His purpose: “And the Lord answered” (Zech. 1:13).
 - (3) The command to write: “Write the vision” (Rev. 21:5), so it can be read over and over, even to future ages. What is handed down by tradition is liable to corruption, but what is written is reduced to certainty. It can be preserved pure.
 - (4) The command to make it very plain: “make it plain”—write in large characters, write legibly, so it can be understood (Prov. 8:9).
 - (5) “Tables” or tablets. He will write with a stylus on tables made of wood and covered by wax.
 - (6) “That he may run that readeth it”—so that he who runs by may read it without stopping, or he who reads it may run and tell the message, or he who reads it may run through it quickly.
2. Prophecy is certain of a sure and exact fulfillment (v. 3; cf Heb. 10:37; II Pet. 3:3-4, 9).
 - (1) “For the vision is yet for an appointed time.” Prophecy is a foretelling of future events. The Chaldeans will conquer, and then God will destroy the Chaldeans all in His good time.
 - (2) God guarantees the fulfillment of the right time: “at the end it shall speak, and not lie.” Prophecy seems to keep silent and then it speaks plainly, for God cannot lie (Num. 23:19; I Sam. 15:29; Tit. 1:2). It will fully answer our expectations and not prove false.
 - (3) The seeming delay of the fulfillment is no delay at all, but a waiting for the time to be right. “Surely come,” is the English translation of the repeated Hebrew word “come.” It is like saying: “Coming, it will come.”
 - (4) Prophecy may have a twofold application: one in the days of the prophet, and a second at the Second

Coming of Christ (Heb. 10:37). The Greek of Hebrews 10:37 can read: "very, very little while."

3. God must be trusted to accomplish His plan at the time appointed (v. 4).

(1) There are two classes of men: the proud and perverted, over against the humble and trusting. One lives by his faith, the other by his depraved nature.

(2) "Lifted up" means "swollen through pride." "Not upright," means "not straight, not righteous." The source of all sin and heresy is pride. Pride shuts out faith in God.

(3) The O.T. taught the importance of faith (Gen. 15:6; II Chron. 20:20; Isa. 7:9; 28:16; 53:1).

(4) A person begins to live by faith in Christ, who gave them life and made them righteous (Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38). Note Romans 4:3-8.

(5) Through faith, our spiritual life is maintained and grows. The faith by which we live is a living faith (Gal. 5:6).

(6) "Faith" can be translated "faithfulness." It is faith which produces firm confidence, which keeps one committed to God. Faithfulness is the fullness of faith.

(7) "Habakkuk, you leave my work to Me. Your part is to persevere in obedience based on trust. I will perform what I have promised. When there seems to be no reason to trust, keep on living a life of faith."

III. WOE TO THE PLUNDERER, FOR HE WILL SUFFER SPOILING (2:5-8).

1. The persons who deserve the judgment of God (v. 5).

(1) He who transgresses by drunkenness. Wine is a deceiver (Prov. 20:1; 23:32; Isa. 28:7; Hos. 4:11). Wine deprives of right reason and lays a man open to pride and deception. Drunkenness was a sin of the Babylonians (Dan. 5:1).

(2) He who is haughty and proud will be judged. Pride and drunkards go together (Isa. 28:1).

(3) He whose desires are never satisfied will be judged.

A. He will not be content with his own house, for he wants the houses of others. He wants to enrich himself at the expense of less fortunate people.

B. His desires are never satisfied. His desires are like Sheol, which is never full (Isa. 5:14; Prov. 27:20), and death which continues to devour the race.

C. "Who enlargeth his desire (literally, soul)." The soul becomes like what it loves. The ruling passion absorbs the whole being (Eccl. 5:10).

(4) He who conquers and oppresses nations shall be judged. The Babylonians sought to bring the whole world under their rule. This is Satan's plan as well.

2. Proud conquerors have no joy in what they have gained, and they shall lose it (v. 6).

(1) Here begins five woes, which extend to verse 19.

(2) The conquered people shall triumph at the fall of Babylon. They shall live to sing their funeral song.

(3) Wealth gotten by oppression is not theirs. Woe is theirs. Nothing is ours but what we have gotten by honesty.

(4) How long will the Babylonians be able to keep what they got dishonestly? How long will it be before they are judged of God?

(5) Gold and silver are but white and yellow dust and dirt. Clay sticks to the heels and hinders a man in walking, so do riches.

(6) "Thick clay" may refer to the clay tablets on which the Babylonians kept their official records of business. A debt or pledge would be written on such a clay tablet. The Babylonians exacted so many pledges from conquered people that they were loaded down with the weight of the clay tablets on which the pledges are recorded.

(7) The Chaldeans had become debtors to the justice of God who cares for the oppressed (Jer. 17:11; Jas. 5:1-6). Heavy punishment awaits them.

3. He who profits by force shall be punished (v. 7).

(1) The victims of these ruthless conquerors rose up suddenly and overcame their oppressors. The Babylonian Empire lasted less than a century. The Medes and Persians made a prey of the Chaldeans, as they had done other nations (Jer. 50:10; Matt. 26:52; Rev. 13:10).

(2) The destruction of the wicked comes suddenly (Luke 17:26-30; I Thess. 5:3).

4. He who gains by force will lose by force (v. 8).

(1) The evil that men do to others shall be turned upon their own heads in multiplied intensity.

(2) The robbers shall be robbed, the spoilers shall be spoiled, those who have taken away the homes of others shall be homeless (Isa. 33:1; Ps. 7:16).

(3) The evil of the Chaldeans upon Judah was threefold:

(A) Murder and mistreatment of the citizens—"men's blood";

(B) Wanton destruction of property—"violence of the land, and of the city";

(C) Harm to animals of farm and forest—"all that dwell therein."

IV. WOE TO THE COVETOUS, FOR HE SHALL LOSE ALL (2:9-11).

1. The covetous spirit in a man is condemned (v. 9).

(1) The first woe was against persons who plundered and wasted; the second was against the spirit of covetous greed, which inspired the acts of plunder. Emphasis changes from the act to the motive behind the act.

(2) Covetousness is love for illegal gain, a greedy profiteering. The Bible forbids this (Ex. 20:17; Luke 12:15; Eph. 5:3).

(3) Covetousness is a great evil upon a family (Prov. 15:27).

(4) Nebuchadnezzar thought Babylon was like an eagle's nest that could not be reached or destroyed. How

foolish he was!

(5) Men will seek to justify their covetousness by saying it is for their safety and security, but they are self-deceived (Prov. 28:11). Wealth is no guarantee against destruction (Jas. 5:1-6).

2. The covetous person will suffer for his sin (v. 10).

(1) The ambition to satisfy avarice and greed brings shame and guilt upon the family of the covetous. An estate raised by iniquity is a scandal to a family (Prov. 15:27).

(2) Those who wrong their neighbor do a much greater wrong to their own souls (Prov. 6:32; 8:36; 20:2; Jer. 7:19).

3. The stones and timbers cry to Heaven for vengeance (v. 11).

(1) Babylon was built by the blood and tears of a captive people. These stones and timbers cried out against the king and nation (Dan. 4:30). The stones cry out in their testimony today (Ps. 127:1).

(2) All things made by God have a voice (Ps. 19:1; 65:13; Isa. 55:12; Luke 19:40; Rom. 8:22).

V. WOE TO THE VIOLENT, FOR HE WILL SUFFER VIOLENCE (2:12-14).

1. Profit made by violent means is evil (v. 12).

(1) Babylon was built with the blood of its subjects and with the blood of its invaded neighbors.

(2) This third woe stresses the ultimate downfall of all that is secured by violence and injustice.

(3) To “build a town with blood” means to build a town with blood guiltiness. The verbs “buildeth” and “establisheth” are of a grammatical form to indicate continual and repeated action.

(4) Verse 12 is a quotation based on Micah 3:10. Micah spoke of the oppression of Jews by Jewish rulers; Habakkuk spoke of oppression of Jews by Babylonians. The principle in God’s sight is the same.

2. Profit through violence is useless (v. 13).

(1) This verse is related to Jer. 51:58. Who quoted whom as the prophets ministered at the same time?

(2) Such persons kindled their own fire and walked in the light of its sparks. Babylon was so sure of being destroyed in the fires of judgment that it was as if they labored in a fire of their own making (Jer. 51:58).

(3) Nothing is truly lasting and profitable unless it is built on the principle of righteousness.

3. Profit through violence will be judged (v. 14).

(1) In Habakkuk’s day, people believed that when one nation conquered another, it meant the god of the victorious nation had subdued the god of this conquered nation.

(2) Habakkuk repeats the words of Isaiah (11:9; cf. Num. 14:21). This happened at the fall of old Babylon and it will happen again at the fall of the two Babylons.

(3) One day all earthly glory will sink, and the glory of God will fill the earth in the Millennium (Phil. 2:9-11; Rev. 14:6-8; 18:1-2).

(4) The goal of all history is in the days when the Lord God is known as the Sovereign of the world. World

empires must be destroyed. “Glory” here means “glorious appearance, shining brightness.”

(5) Waters compose the sea, but they do not cover it. The Hebrew word translated sea means “the bottom of the sea.”

VI. WOE TO THE PROMOTER OF DRUNKENNESS, FOR HE SHALL SUFFER SHAME (2:15-17).

1. The promoter of drunkenness is condemned (v. 15).

(1) To give a disciple or weary traveler a cup of cold water is to earn a reward (Matt. 10:42; 25:35).

(2) But to give a person wine with the design of intoxicating him is abominable wickedness. Such a person is a rebel against the God of Heaven and a promoter of the Devil and his cause.

(3) Drunkenness is associated with nakedness (Gen. 9:20-21; Lam. 4:21).

(4) “Puttest” is a verb form that suggests strong insistence and repeated action—forcing a person to drink.

2. God will punish such evil persons (v. 16).

(1) The judgment upon Babylon is pictured here as a drunkard lying naked, wallowing in his own vomit. Instead of the honor craved, shame will cover them.

(2) They had given others the cup of drunkenness. That cup had gone around to the conquered nations (Jer. 51:7; Isa. 51:17), and soon it will pass to the king of Babylon (Jer. 25:15, 27-29; Matt. 7:2). This is true of Babylon in the tribulation period (Rev. 16:19), and of all the ungodly (Ps. 75:8).

(3) The Babylonians will be exposed to shame—“foreskin be uncovered”—showing them to be uncircumcised.

(4) Man veils deeds under fair words, but God in His Word uncovers the foulness.

3. Violence returns upon the head of violent men (v. 17).

(1) Lebanon, a mountain range northwest of Palestine, is marked by beautiful scenery, fruitful vineyards, abundant game, and majestic cedars (Deut. 3:25; Ps. 92:12; Isa. 35:2; 37:24; Jer. 22:6, 23). The cedars of Lebanon were in the temple (Zech. 11:1). The Babylonians destroyed both.

(2) God punishes men for crimes against nature. “Violence of the land” is the destruction of natural resources. The animals belong to God (Ps. 24:1).

VII. WOE TO THE IDOLATER, FOR HE SHALL BE LEFT WITHOUT HELP (2:18-20).

1. There is no profit in idolatry (v. 18).

(1) In each of the other verses the “woe” came first. Here, verse 18 prepares one to hear the woe of verse 19.

(2) Nothing can be gained by idol worship (I Sam. 12:21; Isa. 44:9-10, 20; Jer. 2:8, 11). The idols of Babylon availed them nothing.

(3) An idol is nothing and its priest is a teacher of lies (Isa. 9:15; Zech. 10:2).

(4) The idol made is inferior to its maker. It is a god of his own creation—dumb nothing (Isa. 29:16).

2. An idol has no speech or breath (v. 19).
 - (1) Note I Kings 18:1-46. Sincerity is no substitute for truth.
 - (2) The pagan cries to his image for help (Isa. 44:17; Jer. 10:14; 51:17). We can cry to our God (Ps. 44:23).
3. The prophet declares the unseen presence of God on His throne in Heaven (v. 20).
 - (1) God is not in dumb idols or in some idol temple; but in Heaven, which is the habitation of His holiness and the place of His residence (Isa. 57:15; 66:1). There He is worshipped by men and angels.
 - (2) He is everywhere by presence and power (I Kings 8:27). Strictly speaking, you cannot localize God.
 - (3) Jehovah is not a dumb idol, but a living God (Deut. 32:31; I Thess. 1:9-10). He is elevated above all that is unclean and unholy. Men may destroy the temple in Jerusalem, but not the heavenly Temple where God sits upon the throne of His eternal sovereignty.
 - (4) Let all creatures on earth be still and refrain from vain talking. Let idolaters be as silent as their idols, convinced of their folly and shame.
 - (5) God's people are to attend Him with silent adorning (Ps. 46:10; 65:1; Zech. 2:13).
 - (6) This God who is in His holy Temple finds sin intolerable. In His providence He sees that it works its own destructive penalties and that it cannot endure permanently. Sin is moral suicide because of coming judgment.

Chapter Three

This third chapter has long been recognized by scholars as a superb example of poetic genius. In the late 1700's, a company of learned men gathered in France; each was to bring the finest quotation of poetry that he could discover. Benjamin Franklin was in attendance. He read the third chapter of Habakkuk, without informing the scholars of its source. They were enraptured by it, and asked to have it published, saying it was the best poetic expression they had ever heard. This chapter has the third question: How can the righteous endure the destruction brought by the judgment of God?

I. HABAKKUK'S PRAYER FOR REVIVAL (3:1-2).

1. Prophets were praying men (v. 1; cf. Gen. 20:7).

(1) This chapter is a psalm or prayer-poem. Note the musical term "Selah" (vv. 3, 9, 13). It occurs only in those Scripture passages that were to be sung in public worship. It is a hymn with the subject that the just shall live by faith.

(2) Shigionoth indicates the tune to be used when sung in public worship (Ps. 7). Here is a psalm to be sung with lively rhythm and strong emotion as the people declare their faith.

2. The words of the prayer (v. 2).

(1) "I have heard thy speech"—the report concerning judgment upon Judah and Babylon (Rom. 10:17).

(2) "And was afraid." Religious fear is a wholesome emotion. It keeps us from being familiar with God and careless in our worship of Him (Eccl. 12:13-14). Let us stand in awe of the majesty of the eternal God.

(3) "O Lord, revive thy work"—grant us a little reviving in our bondage (Ezra 9:8; Ps. 85:6), or save a remnant alive to be a seed of another generation. Revive thy work because it is thy work—do something for your own honor.

(4) "In the midst of the years"—in the midst of these years of captivity coming upon us (1:5; 2:3). We often need revival in the midst of our years.

(5) "Make known"—perform your acts before the eyes of all the people that they may know that God reigns supreme.

(6) "In wrath remember mercy." In the midst of righteous wrath upon sin show forth your great mercy (Ps. 85:7; Luke 1:54, 72; Rom. 5:8). This prayer was answered in the deliverance of the three Hebrews from the fiery furnace in Babylon.

(7) Mercy is God's sympathy and help to man in His weak and wrong condition. Not remember our merit, but remember your own mercy.

II. GOD APPEARS TO THE PROPHET AS THE FINAL ANSWER TO HIS QUESTIONS (3:3-15).

1. The theophany—a God-appearance (v. 3).

(1) A theophany is a temporary, visible appearance of God to man. This theophany is pictured as a great tempest in the heavens in the midst of which God is present.

(2) Two names of God are here: (1) “God” is “Eloah” in the Hebrew, singular form of “Elohim,” which is a common name for God in the OT. (2) “Holy One,” which suggests the personal purity and holiness of God.

(3) Teman means the south (Is God a southerner?). Mount Paran and Teman is a high plateau lying between the wilderness of Kadesh on the north and the region of Sinai on the south. This is the region through which Israel traveled on her way to Canaan during her exodus from Egypt (Deut. 33:2).

(4) “God came” is literally “shall come.” The verb is prophetically perfect, and it refers to what has been as the proof of what will be. It treats of a future act as if already accomplished.

(5) This can read according to some: “He who shall come is God, the Holy One”—the Messiah who will come from the south of Jerusalem (Micah 5:2). Some also read: “Thy work is his life in the midst of the years”—Christ’s resurrection.

(6) “His glory covered the heavens”—like as at Sinai (Ex. 24:10, 16-17). God is greater than His creation. There may be a reference here to the glory of the Lord at Christ’s birth (Matt. 3:16-17; 17:2; Luke 2:14; II Pet. 1:17-18). Or, it may refer to His Second Coming in all His glory.

(7) “The earth was full of His praise.” This may refer to either the first advent of Christ (Matt. 4:23-24; 15:31) or His second (Ps. 149:2-9).

2. The brightness and power of God (v. 4).

(1) His “brightness” means the luster of His appearance (Rev. 1:16), “the rightness of the Lord’s glory” (Ezek. 10:4). Like Sinai (Ex. 24:16).

(2) “Horns” are symbols of His majestic power (Ex. 33:17-23).

(3) The visibility of the invisible God was manifest by the garment of light He wore and was the manifestation of His invisible power.

(4) The operations of His power, compared to what He could have done, were rather the hiding of it than the discovery of it (Job 11:6).

(5) There may be a reference to Christ’s first advent (Heb. 1:3; John 1:9, 14; Isa. 9:2). He hid the power of His Godhead in the weakness of manhood (II Cor. 4:6).

3. Pestilence and fire attend His steps (v. 5).

(1) Pestilence was a common method of judgment in the OT (Lev. 26:25; I Sam. 5:9, 11; II Sam. 22:16).

(2) This is like in the early history of Israel (Ps. 78:50-51; Ex. 9:23-24; Ex. 23:27-28).

(3) This may be a reference to the Second Coming of Christ (Ps. 11:6; Matt. 24:7).

4. God is greater than any thing He has made (v. 6).

(1) “He stood and measured the earth.” He measured out its length and breadth that the earth might be filled with His glory (v. 3). Or, it may mean He examined the people of earth in the sense of evaluating them—their persons, qualities, deeds, etc., to judge them (II Sam. 8:2).

(2) “Drove asunder the nations”—the Canaanites out of the land (Ps. 78:55).

- (3) “The everlasting mountains were scattered, the perpetual hills did bow.” Those ancient mountains and hills which had stood for many generations trembled and shook (Judg. 5:5; Ps. 68:8, 16). The creation could not stand under the examination of its Creator, seeing it was under the curse due to Adam’s sin (Rom. 8:19-22).
- (4) “His ways are everlasting.” All the motions of His providence are according to His eternal counsel and being. The world is under His government and all things in it are subject to His providence. He can rule or overrule all things for His glory.
5. In sovereign power God reigns over men (v. 7).
- (1) “Cushan” is Ethiopia and is located to the west side of the Red Sea. The “land of Midian” is the country on the Gulf of Akaba on the eastern arm of the Red Sea.
- (2) This verse seems to be a reflection of Exodus 15:11-16. Note also Josh. 2:8-9 and Num. 22:3-4.
- (3) “Cushan in affliction” may refer to Judges 3:7-10.
- (4) “Midian did tremble” refers to the time of Gideon (Judg. 7:13, 21-22). The Midianite were objects of God’s wrath (Num. 25:16-18; Judg. 8:10; Ps. 83:9).
6. The merciful purpose of God is not always clear (v. 8).
- (1) “The rivers”—the rivers of Egypt (Ex. 7:20) or Jordan (Josh. 3:14-17).
- (2) “The sea” (Ex. 14:19-28). The God of nature controls the powers of nature.
- (3) The reaction of nature to the presence and power of God in suffering under His wrath. If inanimate nature flees, how much more should man? (Rev. 6: 12-17).
- (4) “Thou didst ride upon thine horses and thy chariots”—either clouds (Ps. 104:3) or angels (II Kings 2:11; 6:17; Ps. 18:10; 68:17; Zech. 1:8; 6:1-5).
- (5) “Thy chariots of (or were) salvation.” Human armies march to bring destruction. God’s judgments are for the salvation of His elect.
- (6) In the seven-year tribulation, the sea and rivers will again come under God’s wrath (Rev. 8:8-11; 16:3-4). Christ and the saints will ride upon white horses (Rev. 19:11, 14) to the salvation of Israel (Jer. 30:7; Dan. 12:1; Matt. 24:13).
7. God’s judgments come suddenly (v. 9).
- (1) God is pictured here as a great warrior standing ready to wage war with His enemies. He has taken the battle bow from its sheath for immediate use.
- (2) The bow represents the threat of the vengeance of Almighty God. It will be like a swift arrow coming from an unseen bow at a distance. Compare with Deut. 32:39-43.
- (3) “The oath of the tribes”—probably the oath to put them in possession of Canaan (Gen. 12:3; Luke 1:72-73).
- (4) “Cleave the earth into rivers” (Ex. 17:1-7; Num. 20:1-13; Ps. 78:15-16; 105:41).
8. Nature attests the presence of its Maker (vv. 10-11).

- (1) "Mountains trembled"—as at Mount Sinai (Ex. 19:18).
 - (2) "Deep uttered his voice, and lifted up his hands" (Ps. 106:9; Ex. 14:22; Josh 3:16).
 - (3) God's armory eclipsed the heavenly bodies (Ex. 10:21-23).
9. God marched through the land, showing His indignation toward sin (v. 12).
- (1) He drove the Canaanites out that Israel might possess the land promised to them.
 - (2) He threshed or trod them down as corn in the barn (Micah 4:13).
 - (3) This will happen at the time of the end when God is angry with Babylon again (Rev. 18:5-6,10) and tread her armies down (Isa. 63:1-6).
10. God goes forth for the salvation of His people (v. 13).
- (1) All the powers of nature are shaken and the course of nature changed for the salvation of God's people. There are a people in the world who are God's people. All the circumstances of His providence are for their salvation. Heaven and earth shall sooner be removed than for any of the links in the golden chain of their salvation be broken.
 - (2) This verse looks to the past in Israel's history with a promise of the future. First, there will be the salvation of Judah from Babylonian Captivity. Later, the salvation of Israel from Babylon at the end at Christ's coming (Jer. 30:7; Dan. 12:1; Matt. 24:13; Rom. 11:25-26).
 - (3) In the strict sense God does not go forth, but the unseen God does manifest His power to men.
 - (4) "Thine anointed"—the Jewish nation (Ps. 89:38, 51) or the Jewish kings (I Sam. 24:6), or most probably the Messiah (Isa. 61:1; Luke 4:18).
 - (5) "Thou wentest forth" can be rendered "thou goest forth," showing how the Father went forth with Christ for our salvation in His purpose and decree concerning it, and in His council and covenant relating to it.
 - (6) "Woundest the head"—probably Satan at Calvary (John 16:11; 12:31; Col. 2:15; Heb. 2:14), including his final overthrow (Rom. 16:20; Rev. 20:10) and the destruction of the antichrist (Ps. 110:5-6; Isa. 11:4; II Thess. 2:8; Rev. 17:14; 19:11-21).
 - (7) The "head" of the house is the gable, and the "neck" is the central part. Verse 13 describes the destruction of a house as occurring at the same time from top to bottom—one blow destroys it all. Note Daniel 2:34-35.
11. The leaders of the nation and the people are destroyed (v. 14).
- (1) The destruction of Babylon will be like that of Israel's enemies in the past (Jud. 7:22; I Sam. 14:12, 16, 20; II Chron. 20:22-23).
 - (2) This is also true of Russia's destruction (Ezek. 38:21). They too come as a whirlwind (Ezek. 38:9) and rejoice over their destruction (Ezek. 38:10-13).
12. The power of judgment will be divinely sovereign (v. 15).
- (1) No power is too strong for God to subdue. He who walked through the Red Sea can certainly subdue the Chaldeans.

(2) God Himself is pictured as leading the way (Ps. 77:20; Isa. 63:13; Zech. 10:11). The waves of the Red Sea rose in heaps.

III. THE TRIUMPH OF TRUST (3:16-19).

1. A fear at the presence of God (v. 16; cf. Ps. 119:120).

(1) He is in a state of near-collapse as the vision ends. Fear covers his whole body.

(2) He had seen the LORD and heard Him speak (3:2). He saw what God could do to His enemies.

(3) “His troops”—His angels in the prophet’s day, and at the end with His saints and the angels (Jude 14-15; Rev. 19:14-21).

2. Desolation may come in spite of faith (v. 17).

(1) This is Judah suffering under the Babylonian invasion (Jer. 5:17; 8:13). The orchards, the vineyards, the cultivated land and cattle will be gone—total collapse of the economy.

(2) Faith does not cancel the consequences of sin or avert the announced judgment of God.

3. The prophet will rejoice because of faith (v. 18).

(1) Others may fret and fear, worry and wonder, but I will rejoice. Rejoicing “in” the Lord is wholesome and abiding—an inexhaustible source of joy (Neh. 8:10).

(2) God is the source of our eternal salvation. Joy in Him is never out of season.

(3) Here is the most beautiful expression of faith recorded in the Scriptures—the hilarity of faith. “Rejoice” is literally “to utter a shout of joy.”

4. God is sufficient for His people (v. 19).

(1) Faith is founded upon the availability of God to His children (Ps. 73:26; 121:1-2; Phil. 4:13; II Cor. 3:5). This is the basis of all courage and freedom from fear.

(2) “Hinds’ feet”—an animal known for its speed and the sureness of its steps upon the mountains (Ps. 37:31; 18:32-33).

(3) “High places” of the enemy (Deut. 32:13; 33:29). The saints shall walk one day in the highest Heaven among the angels.

(4) “To the chief singer”—this psalm is to be sung in public worship that the people may be led to faith in God.