

BIBLE COMPANION COMMENTARY: HABAKKUK

HABAKKUK

PREFACE

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Are there errors of thought and intellectual process in these volumes? Surely there are. Let me know about them. But don't fail to see the wood for the trees. Never let the wonder of the simple, basic Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Kingdom become obscured by all the angst over correctly interpreting this or that Bible verse. Believe it, respond to it, be baptized into Him, and let the word become flesh in you as it was so supremely in Him.

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HABAKKUK CHAPTER 1

Habakkuk Chapter 1

Habakkuk 1:1 *The oracle which Habakkuk the prophet saw*- According to :5,6, the Babylonians would be raised up and would invade Judah in the lifetime of Habakkuk's audience. This would suggest that Habakkuk lived some time before the first Babylonian invasions of Judah, perhaps in the time of Manasseh or Jehoiakim.

Habakkuk 1:2 *Yahweh, how long will I cry, and You will not hear? I cry out to you Violence!*- The impression we get is of Habakkuk constantly pointing things out to God- as if He were unaware! Jehoiakim's reign (see on :1) was full of such violence (Jer. 22:3,3-17). Habakkuk may be complaining about the violence threatened at the hands of the Babylonians. But he may be complaining that he has cried out to God about all the violence ongoing within Judah, and yet there has been no Divine intervention in the form of the sending of a Divine Saviour, Yah's salvation.

And will You not save?- This is the Hebrew idea of 'Jesus'. By the end of the book, Habakkuk is rejoicing in the God of his "salvation" (Hab. 3:18)- the same word. We see therefore in this intriguing dialogue how a man begins with many questions about the justice of God, both in His actions within the community of believers and in the Gentile world... and

how through the humbling struggle with God over these issues, he comes to realize that God is indeed his very own saviour God, even though there is no fruit on the vines, the promised blessings of the covenant aren't realized in his life; yet for sure, God shall be His salvation ultimately in the Kingdom. And in a related way, we could say that through this path of struggle with injustice, Habakkuk finally comes to 'Jesus', to realizing that God does in fact save.

Habakkuk 1:3 *Why do You show me iniquity, and look at perversity?*- Habakkuk uses the same words to complain of what the Babylonians do (:13). The idea seems to be that he finds it unjust that sinful people are punished by equally sinful people. The injustices within Israel which Habakkuk complains of are those of the reign of Jehoiakim, who was punished by the predicted Babylonian invasion (Jer. 22:3,13-17). Habakkuk was therefore contemporary with Jeremiah, and his struggle with God is similar to the way Jeremiah reasons (e.g. Jer. 12:1; Jer. 20:8).

The complaint that God sees iniquity and perversity in Israel is perhaps an allusion to the way that God earlier did not behold these things in Israel (Num. 23:21). Habakkuk was doing what many try to do- proving God wrong from His own book, accusing Him of moral inconsistency etc. Yet the prophets contemporary with Habakkuk had repeatedly and clearly explained that judgment was to come on Judah at the hand of the Babylonians- for very good reason. And Habakkuk, despite surely being aware of that, seeks to wriggle out of it by complaining that the Babylonians were no better, and just asking God to 'sort it out' somehow in a way that meant Judah would not be destroyed.

God's oscillations of feelings, the sharp opposition between judgment and mercy, were felt equally by the prophets, who were breathing in God's spirit. Consider all the oppositions and paradoxes which there were in the prophetic experience:

- Speaking for God against Israel, when they themselves were members of Israel
- Appearing to be on the side of their own peoples' enemies
- Holding an understanding of Israel's God that was contradictory to Israel's own understanding of their God
- Understanding why judgment should come, and yet like Habakkuk crying out with the question "Why?" (Hab. 1:2-4). After twice approaching God with this question, and each time being given fresh insights into the awful nature of the judgment to come as a response, Habakkuk ends up with a trembling body and lips that 'quivered at the sound'... and yet, at the very same time, feels that he still "will rejoice in the Lord" (Hab. 3:16,18). What a torn man he was.

For destruction and violence are before me. There is strife, and contention rises up- He was mentally exhausted at all the insights he had been given into the perversity of God's people, and yet also exhausted at the breadth of evil and destruction which he was being shown as the judgment for it.

Habakkuk 1:4 *Therefore the law is paralyzed, and justice never goes forth; for the wicked surround the righteous, therefore justice is perverted-* The reference to "the law" suggests Habakkuk is complaining at the wickedness he was beholding within God's people. Because the wicked within Judah surrounded the righteous, therefore Judah was to be surrounded by the wicked Babylonians. All Divine judgments are really reflections of prior human behaviour. Out of all the terrible sins in Habakkuk's time (probably that of Manasseh, see on :1), typical of the prophets, Habakkuk focuses on lack of justice. The Hebrew terms for "justice" and "righteousness" are the same; to do justice is the essence of righteousness.

Habakkuk 1:5 *Look among the nations, watch, and wonder marvellously-* This is God's response to Habakkuk's psychological exhaustion noted above. God is open to dialogue with man. God's response to that injustice and sin in Judah would be to raise up the Chaldeans. We could infer that at Habakkuk's time, they were still being prepared; hence he is bidden look

and watch "among the nations", for out of them, the Chaldeans / Babylonians would be raised up (:6). Whatever historico-social reasons there were for the Babylonians coming to dominance, they were controlled by God's hand in human history. He specifically developed that group of people to be the judges of His sinful people.

For I am working a work in your days, which you will not believe though it is told you- These words are quoted in the New Testament about Israel's disbelief in the Lord's resurrection or 'raising up'. Yet that isn't the context here- rather is it of the raising up of the Babylonians as judges of God's people. Words are sometimes quoted without attention to context; and that is hard for Western minds to accept, obsessed as they are with seeing logical connections in context, so called 'intertextuality'. Context is not therefore 'king', the main key to correct interpretation, as is claimed by many who set out to explain 'How to interpret the Bible'.

Paul appropriates the words of Hab. 1:5 LXX to his work of preaching: "I *work a work* in your days, which ye will in no wise believe though *a man* declare it unto you". And so when we read of the *men* Barnabas and Saul being sent out on the *work* of the first missionary journey, we are to see an allusion back to Hab. 1:5 (Acts 13:2; 14:26). And yet this passage goes on to say that the work would not be believed. Yet hoping against hope, they embarked on the missionary journey. Cyprus didn't respond, initially- as they had expected. But soon their positive spirit was rewarded, and converts were made, against all odds. The raising up of the Babylonians was as it were grabbed hold of in the New Testament and presented as somehow similar to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, through which God's sinful people would likewise be judged.

Habakkuk 1:6 *For, behold, I raise up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, that march through the breadth of the earth, to possess dwelling places that are not theirs-* As explained on :5, the bitterness of the Chaldeans was raised up by God in order to be the ideally appropriate judges of His sinful people. Their whole psychological makeup was controlled by God, developing them to be the tool in His hand to judge Judah. But these words are used of the raising up of the Lord Jesus. Just as the Jews didn't believe that their sin would be judged by the raising up of the Chaldeans, so they were to later disbelieve in the raising up of God's Son in resurrection in order to bring judgment upon them.

Habakkuk 1:7 *They are feared and dreaded-* The Hebrew idea is that they elicited dread or fear. And yet the same word is used throughout Deuteronomy of how an obedient Israel would not fear their enemies or invaders.

Their judgment and their dignity proceed from themselves- The GNB may be correct in offering "in their pride they are a law to themselves". They were not under Divine law in terms of the Mosaic law; and yet they were still judged for their actions in so far as they were responsible for their actions. This would suggest that the level of knowledge which makes men responsible to God is far lower than some might think; although the question of responsibility leading to resurrection and future judgment is maybe another question.

Habakkuk 1:8 *Their horses also are swifter than leopards, and are more fierce than the evening wolves-* These words are alluded to be Jeremiah when the Chaldeans had indeed arisen as a nation and were about to attack Jerusalem (Jer. 5:6). The many allusions and quotations from Habakkuk made by Jeremiah are a way of saying that Habakkuk's words had come true. Wolves hunt at night and so in the evening when they begin hunting they are hungry and at their most aggressive. But the same term is used of how Judah's leadership were the same (Zeph. 3:3). Again, Divine judgment is appropriate to the sin. They would be made to feel how others felt when they had abused them.

Their horsemen press proudly on. Yes, their horsemen come from afar, they fly as an eagle that hastens to devour- This is the promised judgment of Dt. 28:49 for an Israel who had broken covenant with their God.

Habakkuk 1:9 *All of them come for violence-* "Violence" alludes to Habakkuk's complaint that Judah was full of violence (:3). The *eretz* was full of such violence in Noah's time, resulting in the flood (Gen. 6:11,13 s.w.). And so the injustice and secret sins of Judah (:4) were counted by God as actual violence (s.w. Hab. 2:8,17; Zeph. 1:9), and were punished by violence. We need to think through the implications of our positions and actions; for just as God counts secret hatred as murder, so Judah's injustice against their brethren was counted as actual violence.

Their hordes face the desert- The pack of wolves were about to set off into the desert towards Judah. The implication surely was that Judah just about had time to repent and avert this. An alternative translation is as AV "they shall be as the east wind"; which is how the Babylonian invasion is described in Jer. 18:17; Ez. 17:10; 19:12, coming in across the desert from the east.

He gathers prisoners like sand- The seed of Abraham were as the sand; but they would be gathered and taken into captivity.

Habakkuk 1:10 *Yes, he scoffs at kings, and princes are a derision to him-* Judah trusted in their kings, assuming that having Davidic kings reigning on God's behalf would be enough to save them, whereas the ten tribe kingdom only had usurpers as their kings. But being God's people and having a leadership sanctioned by Him were not, and are not, enough for salvation. That would not avert Divine judgment.

He laughs at every stronghold, for he builds up an earthen siege ramp, and takes it- All human strength and military technology is no way to salvation. Whatever human strength we may trust in is as nothing before God's judgment.

Habakkuk 1:11 *Then he sweeps by like the wind, and goes on further. He is indeed guilty; his strength is his god-* The Babylonians were given the power to judge Judah, but as AV they would "offend, imputing this his power unto his god". There are times when we are indeed used by God; but that is so sign that we are personally acceptable with Him. And we can go beyond that, and assume that the abilities we were given are not from God but rather from our own strength, which we then glory in. Babylon was actually intended to show mercy to the Jews, but their pride in their own strength meant that they didn't: "I was wroth with My people... and given them into thine hand; thou didst shew them no mercy; upon the ancient hast thou very heavily laid thy yoke. And thou saidst, I shall be a lady for ever; so that thou didst not lay these things to thy heart, neither didst remember the latter end of it" (Is. 47:5-7).

Habakkuk 1:12 *Aren't You from everlasting, Yahweh my God, my Holy One? We also will not die! Yahweh, you have appointed him for judgment. You, Rock, have established him to punish-* Habakkuk responds by arguing that "we", the righteous remnant, ought not to die; for Nebuchadnezzar would do all this evil in the name of "his god" (:11), whereas Habakkuk and the faithful believed in the one true God as "my God". And he struggles with how such an evil nation, attributing their success to their god (:11), could be used by Him. How is this reflective of the holiness of God? Habakkuk develops these complaints in the next verses. But the answer seems to be that Judah had indeed sinned grievously, and so this judgment would really come; but Babylon would themselves not go unpunished for their attitudes and actions. Habakkuk recognized Judah were sinful, and complains of it at the start of this

chapter; but he like us didn't realize how awful sin is, and the judgment which must come if we are not repentant.

Habakkuk 1:13 *You who have purer eyes than to see evil, and who cannot look on perversity-* There can be no sinful beings in heaven, seeing that God is "of purer eyes than to behold evil" (Hab. 1:13). In similar vein, Ps. 5:4,5 explains: "Neither shall evil dwell with you. The foolish shall not stand" in God's heavenly dwelling place. The idea of there being rebellion against God in heaven by sinful angels quite contradicts the impression given by these passages. But the allusion may also be to how God had imputed righteousness to Israel and did not look upon their evil (Num. 23:21). This of course looks forward to the basis of our salvation by grace in Christ, as Paul develops in Rom. 1-8. But status alone will not save us from judgment; we must live out that status in reality.

Why do You tolerate those who deal treacherously, and keep silent when the wicked swallows up the man who is more righteous than he- Habakkuk believed God's threat of judgment at the hands of the Babylonians would happen, but he considers sinful Judah more righteous than the very sinful Babylonians. As noted above, Habakkuk failed to realize the seriousness of sin- any sin. He is the one who has just been complaining at the wickedness of Judah; and God is making him see the real implication of it. Or maybe he has in view the idea that the righteous remnant too would be swallowed up by the threatened invasion, and like Abraham pleading for Sodom, was therefore pleading that the judgment on the majority would therefore not come. See on Hab. 2:4.

But although the Babylonians would "deal treacherously", so had Israel (s.w. Ps. 78:57), and so specifically had Judah (Jer. 3:8,20; 5:11 s.w.); and God had 'tolerated' them for so long. Habakkuk's objections were stated in hot blood and in a moment of emotion, but thinking them through would lead to the conclusion that the enormity of God's tolerance to Israel's sin had not been appreciated by him as it ought to have been. Indeed the idea of being treacherous is an allusion to Jacob, as confirmed in Is. 48:8. If God had tolerated them so long, there was no basis for his objection that God tolerated and used the Babylonians. "Tolerate" is the same word as "look" in :3. Habakkuk beheld or tolerated sin in Judah; why should not God also use or 'look to' a sinful nation like Babylon?

Habakkuk 1:14 *And make men like the fish of the sea, like the creeping things, that have no ruler over them?-* Habakkuk objects that the Babylonians would treat men like animals, and the Jews did have a ruler over them- God. But this was how Judah had behaved to each other. They too did not perceive the meaning of persons, and had acted as if they had no ruler over them.

Habakkuk 1:15 *He takes up all of them with the hook; he catches them in his net, and gathers them in his dragnet. Therefore he rejoices and is glad-* The idea is that Babylon would drag off his net of fish to captivity in Babylon, rejoicing over them. "All of them" suggests that the various fish represented the nations of men; and Habakkuk objected to Judah being treated like any other Gentile nation. But the truth was that they had acted like the Gentiles, and even worse. The whole record is teaching the seriousness of sin, and how even a faithful prophet might not perceive that as he ought. See on Hab. 2:5.

Habakkuk 1:16 *Therefore he sacrifices to his net, and burns incense to his dragnet, because by them his life is luxurious, and his food is good-* Habakkuk was irritated by the way that he knew the Babylonians would think their success against Judah was due to their idols (:11) and military strategies. Habakkuk speaks in the present tense as if he saw Nebuchadnezzar before him. But actually he was living at a time when the Babylonians had yet to 'arise' (:6). Habakkuk believed in the prophetic word and saw it as already fulfilling; just as we are to

view the promises of the life eternal as so certain of fulfilment that they are already fulfilled in a sense.

Habakkuk 1:17 *Will he therefore continually empty his net, and kill the nations without mercy?*- Is. 47:5-7 criticizes Babylon for not showing mercy to Judah when they were intended to. Habakkuk had seen a prophecy of the Babylonian invasion, and perhaps he saw more than what is here recorded; perhaps he saw Nebuchadnezzar sacrificing to his idols and rejoicing in the luxuries he would take from Judah (:16). But he had not seen any vision of Babylon's judgment. It appeared to go on "continually".

HABAKKUK CHAPTER 2

Habakkuk Chapter 2

Habakkuk 2:1 *I will stand at my watch, and set myself on the ramparts, and will look out-* As a watchman goes to an elevated place to watch, so Habakkuk was eagerly looking out for God's response to his complaints. Perhaps he means that the next time the prophetic word comes to him, he will look carefully for answers. He sensed he would be reproved (:1 AV "What I shall answer when I am reproved"); but he was eagerly looking out for the answer. So often, complaints about the apparent injustice or inactivity of God are posed as questions but those 'questions' are effectively statements of discontent ['Why does God allow suffering?!!'], and judgment upon God. There is no serious looking for an answer. But Habakkuk asks and is confident an answer will come, although he fully expects that answer to rebuke him. The rebuke however doesn't come. God is not mad with man because we have questions. And He will respond to our sincere questioning of His behaviour, if it is made in the right spirit.

To know what He will say to me, and what answer I will get concerning my complaint- As noted on chapter 1, Habakkuk's objections were gut reactions, and the answers are found within the objections. So the answer was really already there. But the original could be translated to the effect: "And what reproof I will receive". Habakkuk senses that God will reprove him, that his complaints are out of step with God's way. And yet we see here the degree of intimacy possible between God and man.

Habakkuk 2:2 *Yahweh answered me, Write the vision, and make it plain on tablets, that he who reads it may run-* "May run" could be an idiom for response to God's word (as in Dan. 12:4). All prophecy, including Habakkuk, has its final fulfilment in the last days. There are a number of hints that there will be a progressive growth in Biblical understanding amongst the latter day faithful. In the spirit of Daniel, Habakkuk was told that the full understanding of his vision concerning the latter day judgment of Babylon was "yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie", and *at that time* the one who reads and understands it will "run"- using the same idiom as in Dan. 12:4 concerning the latter day believers 'running' in response to their understanding of God's word (Hab. 2:2,3). The Olivet prophecy repeatedly talks about 'seeing' or (Gk.) understanding things and then acting upon this knowledge. The English translation somewhat masks this. Thus Mt. 24:15 "Whoso *readeth*" uses a Greek word which really means to recognize, distinguish- and he who recognizes, understands, let him "understand" or, better, *meditate*. Or again, "When ye shall see (Greek, to know, perceive) the abomination that maketh desolate..." (Mt. 24:15).

But the literal meaning was that those who believed this prophecy would flee away and thus escape the Babylonian invasion; or flee out of Babylon because it was to fall. But that would only be perceived by those who lived well in the future (:3), because at the time, the Babylonians were yet to arise as a power (Hab. 1:5,6).

Habakkuk 2:3 *For the vision is yet for the appointed time, and it speeds toward the end-* The time of the establishment of the Kingdom on earth. Similar language is used in Daniel. Habakkuk had asked whether Babylon would continue abusing for ever (Hab. 1:17). Apparently he had not seen any vision of her destruction. But he is comforted that in the future, his concerns of ethics, justice, theology and morality would all be finally resolved in the establishment of God's Kingdom.

And won't prove false. Though it takes time, wait for it; because it will surely come. It won't delay- Quoted in the NT about the return of Christ (Heb. 10:37). The answer to all Habakkuk's concerns about injustice will finally be at the Lord's return; see on :6. We wonder if these assurances were given because Habakkuk was doubting the reality of the visions he had seen. At the time, the Babylonians were yet to arise as a power (Hab. 1:5,6). Only at the "end" would the whole picture concerning Babylon become clear.

Habakkuk 2:4 *Behold, his soul is puffed up-* The individual in view is either a personification of Babylon, or its king Nebuchadnezzar. The following verses clearly speak of Babylon's judgment. Typical of the prophetic perspective, Habakkuk sees the reason for his fall as being essentially because of his pride- when so many other issues could have been raised, such as idolatry and the murder of God's people. This is what makes the prophets so relevant to us; for pride is the weakness which affects us all. And that is at the root of all other sin. "Puffed up" is a term only used elsewhere about the presumption of condemned Israel trying to enter the land when they had been barred from it (Num. 14:44). As so often, a parallel is drawn between the sins of the worst Gentiles and those of Israel, both historically and at the time of the prophet.

It is not upright in him- Babylon was "puffed up", lifted up in pride; but this was not being lifted up "upright" before God. Pride is the depths, and humility is exaltation. Such is the radical inversion of values in God's way compared to man's way.

But the justified one will live due to his faith- Will live eternally, according to how this verse is interpreted in the New Testament. Heb. 10:38 quotes it in this way; and note that the preceding Heb. 10:37 is quoting the preceding verse here, Hab. 2:3. Eternal life will be given at the Lord's coming on the basis of faith. As noted on 2:6, the real answer to Habakkuk's questions is that they will all have their resolution in the coming of God's Kingdom on earth. "The justified one" may immediately refer to Habakkuk and the faithful remnant, about whom Habakkuk had expressed concern in Hab. 1:13. God's answer was that although they might indeed perish in the Babylonian invasion, they would be justified by their faith in Habakkuk's prophecies and live eternally. Again we wonder if "his faith" is a hint that Habakkuk and the faithful were struggling to believe the prophecies he was giving.

Paul's quotation from Hab. 2:4 is in the context of human pride: "Behold, his soul is puffed up, it is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith". Paul is interpreting this verse as talking about faith in righteousness being imputed to us, which leads to us being just or justified before God. The practical result of this is humility- for we realize through this process that we have absolutely nothing to be "puffed up" about. Our uprightness isn't because of our own works but because of God's righteousness being imputed to us by grace through faith.

Habakkuk 2:5 *Yes, moreover, wine is treacherous-* This may speak of Nebuchadnezzar, or as a personification of Babylon. His treachery was Habakkuk's complaint in Hab. 1:13. God now uses Habakkuk's word choice, showing that He indeed knows that Babylon will be treacherous, and their leader will be identified with the wine he drinks, so that as wine is treacherous, so will he be. The Bible often demonstrates that God likes to use our words back to us, just as in building rapport in conversation it is helpful to repeat back to our

conversation partner words and phrases which they have used. And God likewise is in dialogue with man.

Again we note that God's people had also been "treacherous" (Mal. 2:10,11,14,16 etc.). They would be deceived by the Babylonians, just as they had deceived others in their lives and had been deceitful toward God.

A proud man who doesn't stay at home- He would go out from his homeland to conquer others.

Who enlarges his desire as Sheol, and he is like death, and can't be satisfied- The way of the flesh is insatiable. Flesh cannot be satisfied. The wealthy man wants another billion, the owner of multiple homes or vehicles wants yet another. And thereby the parallel the grave and death, which likewise are never satisfied. The end of this unsatisfied life is the grave. By contrast, God's way is presented as satisfying the believer, in this life and eternally (s.w. Dt. 14:29 and often). Not being satisfied was one of the curses upon Israel for breaking covenant (Lev. 26:26 s.w.). Again we see a parallel between the judgment of the Babylonians and that upon Israel. This was one aspect of God's answer to Habakkuk's issues- that Israel were no better than the Babylonians. This was the answer to his objection that Israel were being treated like all the other Gentile fish in the sea of nations (Hab. 1:15).

But gathers to himself all nations, and heaps to himself all peoples- The idea may be that he gathers "all nations" [around Israel] into confederacy with him, and heaps together people from all the nations as captives. But it was God who would gather all nations to Babylon, so that He might destroy them (Is. 13:4).

Habakkuk 2:6 *Won't all these take up a parable against him, and a taunting proverb against him, and say-* Isaiah likewise predicts a taunt song being sung over Babylon by those she had once abused (Is. 14). Those nations who sung it would include Judah- or that was the intention. But when Babylon fell, the Divine intention was that the repentant exiles would flee Babylon and return to Judah, rebuilding and restoring God's Kingdom there. But they didn't repent, and instead became prosperous under the Medes and Persians, as the book of Esther witnesses. But finally this will come true in the fall of the latter day Babylon and repentance of the remnant of Judah. The prophecy was therefore rescheduled and reapplied, but will still come true in its essence.

Woe to him- Five woes are now pronounced upon Babylon, in that the word "woe" occurs five times, although in fact seven woeful things are mentioned in this chapter. The idea of seven woes coming upon Babylon is of course the message of Revelation, where such woes are presented as having their fulfilment at the time of the Lord's return. The answer to Habakkuk's questions about justice not being done is therefore that the Lord shall return, and woes shall be poured out upon the wicked. This is why these woes are interspersed with language appropriate to the Kingdom of God upon earth (:3 and 14 especially). On a far more extended scale, this is the broad approach taken in the book of Revelation too- woes upon Babylon interspersed with brief Kingdom visions.

Who increases that which is not his, and who enriches himself by extortion!- The criticism of Babylon is framed in language elsewhere used by the prophets about Judah. This was the answer to Habakkuk's objection that Israel were being treated like all the other Gentile fish in the sea of nations (Hab. 1:15).

How long?' - This is the typical cry of the faithful, and this is perhaps Habakkuk's interjection. For these chapters show him in dialogue with God.

Habakkuk 2:7 *Won't your debtors rise up suddenly-* Initially fulfilled in the sudden overthrow of Babylon by Cyrus.

And wake up those who now make you tremble, and you will be their victim?- The GNB offers: "But before you know it, you that have conquered others will be in debt yourselves and be forced to pay interest. Enemies will come and make you tremble. They will plunder you!". I noted on :6 that the intended Divine program for Babylon didn't exactly come about at this time, although it will in the last days, when the horns of the beast shall hate the whore of Babylon and destroy her (Rev. 17:16).

Habakkuk 2:8 *Because you have plundered many nations, all the remnant of the peoples will plunder you, because of men's blood, and for the violence done to the land, to the city and to all who dwell in it*- Babylon's responsibility before God was for what they had done to "many nations", but in particular to "the land" of Israel and "the city" of Jerusalem. "The remnant of the peoples" is of course intended to suggest the remnant of the exiles, who were to repent and plunder Babylon. But instead, they didn't repent and the majority preferred to remain there and prosper under the Medes and Persians, as the book of Esther explains. The language here is very much that of Is. 14:12-14 about Babylon; and that passage has a clear application to the latter day judgment of Babylon at the Lord's return. Only then will all the angst about justice be answered.

Habakkuk 2:9 *Woe to him who gets an evil gain for his house, that he may set his nest on high, that he may be delivered from the hand of evil!*- Daniel records how Babylon / Nebuchadnezzar wished his house / family dynasty to be eternal; hence he made an image of gold in defiance of the image of Daniel 2, in which his house was to give way to other dynasties. He believed that "the nest" of Babylon was untouchable by "evil". Even though he had made "evil [s.w.] gain" for himself and his family dynasty ["house"]. "Gets an evil gain" is the same Hebrew word translated "to covet". The word means both to covet and to actually grab gain for oneself, reflecting how in God's judgment the thought is as the act. The Lord of course developed this idea powerfully in the Sermon on the Mount.

Habakkuk 2:10 *You have devised shame to your house, by cutting off many peoples, and have sinned against your soul*- Instead of making his dynasty ["house"] wealthy and eternal (:9), by trying to do so, Nebuchadnezzar was thereby shaming them to eternal destruction. He cut off many peoples in order to remove all opposition and establish his house or family line. But by doing so, he sinned against himself, destroying himself and his family.

Habakkuk 2:11 *For the stone will cry out of the wall, and the beam out of the woodwork will answer it*- Buildings were made of two or three courses of stone followed by one of timber. This was how Solomon's palace was built (1 Kings 6:36). Sins committed in private we tend to accept as irrelevant to us; yet Hab.2:11,12 says that "the stone shall cry out of the wall" because of wicked plans hatched within the walls of that room. The innermost plans of Nebuchadnezzar for his dynasty (see on :9,10) were known by God. Rather than focus upon his idolatry and mass murders, the prophetic perspective instead zooms in upon his internal thoughts. For it is inwards thoughts which are of the essence, and which are the source of our actions.

Habakkuk 2:12 *Woe to him who builds a town with blood, and establishes a city by iniquity!*- The town in view is surely Babylon. But these words are those of Mic. 3:10 about the leaders of Judah: "They build up Zion with blood, and Jerusalem with iniquity". Micah is quoting Habakkuk's words about Babylon and Nebuchadnezzar about Judah. Micah learnt the lesson that this prophecy was trying to teach Habakkuk- that contrary to what he thought (see on Hab. 1:15), Judah were as bad as Babylon. Whilst Habakkuk begins in chapter 1 by bemoaning the sins of his people, he had to learn that it's not enough to just think 'Well yes we are all sinners', but lament the apparently far greater sin of the Gentile world. He had to see that God's people were no better, because sin is serious. Even 'little sins' performed in secret. And this is the abiding challenge to us as the body of Christ today.

Habakkuk 2:13 *Behold, isn't it of Yahweh of Armies that the peoples labour for the fire, and the nations weary themselves for vanity?*- The GNB again is helpful in interpreting the sense: "The nations you conquered wore themselves out in useless labor, and all they have built goes up in flames. The LORD Almighty has done this". Babylon was to be burnt, and all the sacrifices in building it thereby rendered futile. However, the Divine intention to burn Babylon, the judgment for a whore (Jer. 51:30,58), didn't really come true when the Medes conquered Babylon. As noted on :6 and :7, the Divine intention didn't come totally true at that time, because the Jewish remnant didn't repent and generally didn't want to restore God's Kingdom in Judah. And so the prophecy will come true in the last days, when "Babylon" shall be burnt with fire (Rev. 18:8).

Habakkuk 2:14 *For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of Yahweh*- That glory is defined in Ex. 34:4-6 as the characteristics of the Yahweh Name. When Babylon was burnt with fire (:13), then the *eretz* would be filled with the knowledge of Yahweh. Knowledge is used here in the Hebraic sense, not of academic knowledge, but of relationship with Him, on the basis of who He really is, His glory. But as noted on :6, this didn't come about when the Medes conquered Babylon. They didn't destroy it with fire, the Jewish remnant didn't repent, and the *eretz* didn't come into relationship with Yahweh. This shall happen in the last days. See on :20.

As the waters cover the sea- We surely are to read in an ellipsis here; 'sea' must stand for 'the sea bed'. For the waters are the sea, and do not therefore cover it. The idea would therefore be that the knowledge of God will be both deep and widespread. The contrast is with Habakkuk's questions against God in chapter 1. God doesn't specifically answer them, apart from to say that He will indeed judge wickedness because He is intensely aware of what goes on in the world. His broader answer is that true knowledge / comprehension of Him, and of His awesome glory, will one day be both deep and universal. And it will involve a realization of His utter glory, rather than trying to shoot holes in His positions by the kind of petty questioning recorded in chapter 1.

Habakkuk 2:15 *Woe to him who gives his neighbour drink, pouring your inflaming wine until they are drunk, so that you may gaze at their naked bodies!*- Latter day Babylon in Revelation is likewise condemned for making her neighbouring nations drunk with her teachings. We note that the focus is upon the Middle East- the neighbours of Babylon and Judah. And supremely in view is the way that Babylon had made Judah drunk with the wine of her idolatry. But as noted on :16, to drink from a cup of wine is also a symbol of Divine judgment. They were drinking judgment to themselves by partaking. And the end result of accepting Babylon's "wine" was to lay in the naked shame of death, uncovered before all.

Habakkuk 2:16 *You are filled with shame, and not glory. You will also drink, and be exposed!*- Note the present tenses. Babylon had yet to arise (Hab. 1:5,6), but the future of Babylon is so certain, according to God's prophetic word, that what is yet future is spoken of as a present reality. The same is true of promises of the life eternal in John's Gospel. Being exposed and shamed is the language of a woman, especially a prostitute. It is the basis for the condemnation of the whore Babylon in Rev. 17,18. Then, all too late, Babylon will be exposed for what it is. It is the wisdom of God's people to perceive that now.

The cup of Yahweh's right hand will come around to you, and disgrace will cover your glory- To be given a cup of the Lord is a double symbol; we either drink blessing or condemnation to ourselves. For the cup of the Lord is either "the cup of blessing" or of condemnation. This is why the breaking of bread meeting focuses our attention on the only

two possible outcomes of our lives. The fact there is no third way inspires us to choose wholeheartedly for Him.

Habakkuk 2:17 *For the violence done to Lebanon will overwhelm you, and the destruction of the animals, which made them afraid; because of men's blood, and for the violence done to the land, to every city and to those who dwell in them-* God kept a careful note of all Babylon did to His land. Every animal destroyed was noted, and even every animal which was terrified and made to bolt by the Babylonian traumas was likewise noted by God; and how much more the human suffering. This again answers Habakkuk's objection that God appears indifferent to human suffering. There will indeed come a day of reckoning- but not immediately. This again is typical of the prophetic perspective; to focus upon the apparently minor [making animals bolt] in order to reveal the depth of God's appreciation of the more evidently apparent abuses. And all this was in response to Habakkuk's complaint that God appeared unaware of human suffering. See on Hab. 3:11.

Habakkuk 2:18 *What value does the engraved image have, that its maker has engraved it; the molten image, even the teacher of lies, that he who fashions its form trusts in it, to make mute idols?-* The ultimate significance of Babylon's fall was and shall be the declaration that all idols are powerless. We note the tendency of the former of the idol to trust in it- when he of all people ought to have realized that the idol was of his own human device. But this perversity is seen in us all. The woman who labours all her lifetime developing her business is then inclined to trust in its profits as her ultimate salvation; the man who builds his own house is tempted to make that house his idol. But again, the language of Habakkuk about the Babylonians is later applied to God's people. The phrase "teacher of lies" is applied to the false prophets of Judah in Is. 9:15. Likewise the phrase "maker of... images" is applied to the Jews in Is. 44:9,10. Isaiah learnt the lesson that this prophecy was trying to teach Habakkuk- that contrary to what he thought (see on Hab. 1:15), Judah were as bad as Babylon. See on :12.

Habakkuk 2:19 *Woe to him who says to the wood, 'Awake!' or to the mute stone, 'Arise!' Shall this teach? Behold, it is overlaid with gold and silver, and there is no breath at all in its midst-* This woe upon Babylon was equally true for the people of Judah. The same language is used of their false prophets and idolatry; see on :12,18.

Habakkuk 2:20 *But Yahweh is in His holy temple-* This continues the answer to Habakkuk's complaints of chapter 1, that God appears distant from the sin and suffering on this earth. But His apparent silence doesn't mean that He is not watching nor judging; He is in his heavenly temple. And in awe of that, the earth should be silent before Him, rather than arguing back with Him as Habakkuk had done.

Let all the earth be silent before Him!- The same Hebrew word is used in calling for silence because of God's presence (Zeph. 1:7 "be silent at the presence of Yahweh") and because He has arisen up in active outreach in the earth (Zech. 2:13 "Be silent all flesh before Yahweh; for He is raised up out of His hold habitation"). Although God appeared to be inactive in response to the injustices Habakkuk so struggled with, His presence is indeed active. And men should be silent before Him rather than make petty complaint about His injustice. The invitation to "all the earth" to be respectful of Yahweh is part of God's intention that the fall of Babylon would coincide with the repentance of Judah and the spread of relationship with Him to the entire *eretz*. This didn't happen at the time, but will come true in the latter day fulfilment; see on :14.

HABAKKUK CHAPTER 3

Habakkuk Chapter 3

Habakkuk 3:1 *A prayer of Habakkuk, the prophet, set to victorious music-* We could infer from this that Habakkuk was a Levite involved in the temple worship songs. The preceding verse has spoken of Yahweh being in His temple and the earth being silent before Him (Hab. 2:20). But Habakkuk now breaks that silence; maybe another reflection of his being out of step with God.

Habakkuk 3:2 *Yahweh, I have heard of Your fame. I stand in awe of Your deeds, Yahweh-* This could be Habakkuk responding to God's statements in chapter 2 of what He would do in judging Babylon. In faith, he speaks as if these future actions have already been done, and he praises God for them. But it could be that Habakkuk is still not totally persuaded by the answers given in chapter 2. He concludes in :17,18 that although the blessings he looked for immediately hadn't come, yet he still rejoiced in God by faith. But he reflects here that although he cannot understand God's current and prophesied future actions (as he explains in chapter 1), and he is not totally persuaded by God's responses in chapter 2; yet he takes comfort from the hand of God in history. He realizes that God has worked justly in the past and saved His people from Gentile oppression at the Red Sea, and so He would surely do so again. The Messianic Psalms 22 and 69 represent the Lord Jesus on the cross being in some crisis as to why God was not immediately saving Him, but taking comfort in His historical actions. Habakkuk is doing likewise, as should we.

Renew your work in the midst of the years. In the midst of the years make it known- GNB: "Now do again in our times the great deeds you used to do". But the idea of renewing or reviving "in the midst of the years" may mean that Habakkuk didn't want to have to wait until the "end" appointed to see the destruction of Babylon (Hab. 2:3). Knowing that God is open to dialogue, he asks if God can revive His work in the midst of the appointed years, i.e. at his own time. The element of renewal or revival would be in God openly acting as He had done historically, at the Red Sea and the conquest of Canaan- which is the content of the next verses. See on :6.

The LXX renders: "Thou shalt be known between the two living creatures, thou shalt be acknowledged when the years draw nigh; thou shalt be manifested when the time is come". This would be broadly saying the same as just suggested- that God's glory would again be visible between the Cherubim, once "the time" of the end of Hab. 2:3 has come, and God is "acknowledged" by repentant Judah and the nations around her.

In wrath, You remember mercy- God's wrath differs from human wrath in that God is outside of time as we know it. He sees what shall be, and in no way does He lash out due to provocation. His wrath, as expressed in His judgments, always have mercy factored in. Habakkuk recognizes now that Judah have indeed sinned and deserve God's wrath, but he asks that God "remember mercy" and perhaps ameliorate the planned Babylonian judgments, or limit their extent, intervening to save Judah "in the midst of the [appointed number of] years".

Habakkuk 3:3 *God came from Teman, the Holy One from Mount Paran. Selah. His glory covered the heavens, and His praise filled the earth-* The idea is that despite

Habakkuk's reservations about God's judgments, as expressed in chapter 1, he takes comfort in God's historical activity to save His sinful people. And he believes that therefore God can do the same for them, despite the threatened Babylonian judgments. GNB "God is coming again from Edom" suggests that there will be a revival of what God had historically done; as stated in :2. As His glory was revealed and the earth was filled with His praise, so it was the Divine intention that the judgment of Babylon would involve the repentance of Judah, God's glory being revealed and the *eretz*, the peoples of the land promised to Abraham, coming to praise Yahweh. But Judah didn't repent, and the judgment of Babylon didn't involve these things. But the prophetic scenario will in essence be fulfilled at the time of the destruction of latter day Babylon. Israel at the time of the exodus and wilderness journeys were weak, and still took with them the idols of Egypt. God's praise didn't fill the earth at that time, although it was intended to. But this was the future which Habakkuk now envisaged and prayed for; a delivery from Babylon after the pattern of the deliverance from Egypt, but this time with God's people repentant and the surrounding nations praising Him.

Habakkuk 3:4 *His splendour is like the sunrise. Rays shine from His hand, where His power is hidden-* This fits in with the picture of Christ's return in Mal. 4:2. This will be the time for the fulfilment of the prophecy of Babylon's fall in fullness. This is the language of the lightning flashings of the cherubim alluded to in the LXX of :2 (see note there). Habakkuk is envisaging or praying for the open manifestation of God as it was previously. This was however not granted at his time; but he takes comfort that it has been in the past, and that although things with God haven't turned out immediately as he expected, yet he would trust in Him (:18,19), confident that His saving pattern in history would ultimately continue. In this we see the value of reading Biblical history. Whatever our short term struggles with God about His present and future actions, His past history points forward to "the sunrise" of a new age ultimately. His power in this sense is "hidden" and yet still there.

Habakkuk 3:5 *Plague went before Him, and pestilence followed His feet-* As Egypt had been judged by plagues and this had been the path to Israel's release from them, so Habakkuk foresees that the fall of Babylon will involve plagues upon her which will lead to Judah's release from them. Jer. 50:13; Rev. 18:8 likewise see Babylon suffering "plagues". But the fall of Babylon and her "plagues" at the hands of the Medes didn't lead to the captives returning- because they didn't repent, preferred to stay there and didn't flee Babylon. But this will come true in the overthrow of the latter day Babylon (Rev. 18:8). Historical Babylon wasn't smitten by "plagues" as Egypt was.

Habakkuk 3:6 *He stood, and shook the earth. He looked, and made the nations tremble. The ancient mountains crumbled. The age-old hills collapsed-* Habakkuk was aware that Babylon would have the *eretz* promised to Abraham under their control. But God had stood up and shaken the entire area when Israel left Egypt, and he saw this happening when they were released from Babylon. Hills and mountains represent peoples and kingdoms. But again as often noted, this didn't happen quite on the scale planned; because actually Judah didn't want to leave Babylon nor repent as required. But it will happen in the fall of the latter day Babylon. The original for "Tremble" is also translated 'to be released / unloosed' (Ps. 105:20; 146:7; Is. 58:6). All the nations subject to the Babylonian empire, including Judah, were to be liberated and used that

liberty to turn to Yahweh. But they didn't. They preferred bondage to the Medes and Persians.

His ways are eternal- The idea may be that there is a style and hallmark to God's actions which is eternal. As He had acted at the time of the exodus, so He would to redeem Judah from Babylon (see on :2).

Habakkuk 3:7 *I saw the tents of Cushan in affliction. The dwellings of the land of Midian trembled*- Cush, the same word translated "Ethiopia", was the border of the Babylonian empire, later taken over by the Persians (Is. 11:11; Esther 3:9). And it was Cush which was one of the areas, along with Egypt, that the Jews were to seek help from against Babylon, rather than trusting in Yahweh (Is. 20:5). Habakkuk sees Cush as falling along with Babylon. And at that time, the exiles in Cush were to return to Zion (Zeph. 3:10; Is. 11:11). But again, this didn't quite happen as had been potentially possible. The great regathering of a repentant remnant will happen at the fall of latter day Babylon. And this will lead to the people of Cush and Midian also turning to Yahweh (Is. 60:6), as had been His intention at the fall of historical Babylon. In this sense we could read 'trembling' as 'trembling in respect'.

Habakkuk 3:8 *Was Yahweh displeased with the rivers? Was Your anger against the rivers, or Your wrath against the sea, that You rode on Your horses, on Your chariots of salvation?*- Perhaps we are to draw a distinction between mountains / hills, representing nations collectively; and rivers / waters, symbolizing individual people. Habakkuk began praying, but ends up having a vision within that prayer. And he finds himself saying things in that prayer under inspiration which are God's perspective on his questions of Hab. 1 about the fairness of God and the problem of suffering. In this verse we learn that God was not angry against the individual Egyptians; but there was suffering amongst them as God as it were rode forth in *His* Angelic, cherubic horses and chariots to redeem His people from Pharaoh's horses and chariots. This response is reframing the question of God's fairness and the problem of suffering- in saying that all these things must be seen within the context of His purpose of redeeming His chosen people.

Habakkuk 3:9 *You removed the sheath from Your bow, You called for many arrows. Selah*- The ISV seems to best capture the nuances of the original: "Your bow was exposed, and your arrows targeted by command". The NET says the arrows were 'commissioned'. In the context of answering Habakkuk's complaints about the problem of suffering and evil, the idea may be that God's arrows are not sent out at random. They are commissioned to hit specific targets. Hence "Selah", a pause for reflection. If apparently random people perish, we can perhaps assume that God knows that had they lived further, they would have refused His message. See on :14.

You split the earth with rivers- A quotation from Ps. 74:15. The drying up of the Red Sea seems to have involved huge earthquakes and topographical changes throughout the *eretz* promised to Abraham- perhaps a way of softening up the tribes of Canaan for conquest. But Israel didn't make use of that potential.

Habakkuk 3:10 *The mountains saw You, and were afraid. The storm of waters passed by, the deep sea roared and lifted up its hands on high*- For "Waters", see on Rev. 16:5. Mountains may represent nations and empires, and the seas the individual peoples. Before God and His people at the exodus, they were fearful and lifted up their hands- perhaps in surrender, or to God in prayer and submission. This happened

no matter how loudly they roared or appeared powerful. And so the historical actions of God at the exodus were to assure Habakkuk that the visions he had seen of the Chaldeans judging Israel would also have their resolution, this storm of water would also 'pass by'.

Habakkuk 3:11 *The sun and moon stood still in the sky at the light of Your arrows as they went, at the shining of Your glittering spear-* This may not necessarily be a reference to the incident at Gibeon in Joshua's time. The context is definitely about the exodus from Egypt rather than the conquest, developing the idea that the fall of Egypt was the release of Israel, just as the fall of Babylon was intended to enable the release of the exiles. The idea may be that God took especial notice of the flight of His arrows; sun and moon stood still as they flew. This again is in answer to the opening dialogue between God and Habakkuk, where Habakkuk expresses his concern with the problem of suffering and evil. God here reveals Himself as carefully targeting every arrow (see on :9), and as it were stopping the sun and moon for the arrows to pass; this was and is the extent of His passionate awareness of the result of His judgments. It's not as if He indiscriminately drops a nuclear bomb upon a nation, and is indifferent to the fall out of suffering and the collateral damage to people and animals. As explained on Hab. 2:17, He was intimately aware of every animal that suffered and bolted for fear because of the actions of the Babylonian military; and how much more was and is He aware of the effects of His judgments upon people, especially His chosen people.

Habakkuk 3:12 *You marched through the land in wrath. You threshed the nations in anger-* The past tenses could be prophetic perfects, i.e. speaking of that which is yet future in the past tense, so certain is it of fulfilment. As just explained on :11, God is not indiscriminately judging people and making them suffer for no reason. The imagery of threshing speaks of judgment; Armageddon is the threshing place. Those who are judged will be responsible to that judgment; God's anger and wrath will have been provoked by how those people had treated His people. He is angry with abusers of His people. Judgment will come, as it has done from God historically.

Habakkuk 3:13 *You went forth for the salvation of Your people-* As explained on :12, this part of the prayer merges into prophecy, so certain of fulfilment that it is expressed in the 'prophetic perfect', as if it has already happened. Again we have the problem of suffering addressed; the threshing of nations in :12 was part of God's going forth to save His people. The fall of Babylon, like the fall of Pharaoh's Egypt, was in order for God's people to exit to salvation. Tragically, they for the most part chose not to do this when Babylon fell historically, and so the prophecies have been rescheduled and reapplied.

For the salvation of Your anointed- The idea could be that all God's people are anointed, in that they were chosen for special rulership (2 Cor. 1:21). This would have been great comfort to the exiles reading or hearing these prophecies in Babylon; they were chosen for something special, to rule the nations, when Israel were the head and not the tail. But the ideas behind "salvation" and "anointed" suggest in Greek 'Jesus Christ'. When historical Babylon fell to the Medes, the prophetic scenarios didn't come very accurately true; because Judah didn't repent and didn't really want to quit Babylon. And so these prophecies were reapplied to salvation from a wider Babylon, in and through Jesus Christ.

You crushed the head of the land of wickedness. You stripped them head to foot. *Selah*- Crushing the *rosh* of the wicked could refer to the latter day conquest of a similar *rosh* by the Lord Jesus at His return, as spoken of in Ez. 38:2-4. The reference would be to a standoff between the Lord Jesus as the seed of the woman, and the antiChrist personal leader of "the land of wickedness", latter day Babylon. Crushing the head recalls the struggle of Gen. 3:15, in which the seed of the woman emerges finally triumphant in the last day.

The 'stripping from head to foot' may simple mean 'crushed both from the head down and from the foot upwards'. Or if read as it stands, it would refer to the sign of conquest- stripping the slain.

Habakkuk 3:14 *You pierced the heads of his warriors with their own spears*- "Spears" is literally 'rods'. The word is used in Is. 10:24 of how Judah were to be beaten with the rod of Assyria which was the rod of Egypt. And that would continue the many allusions here to the exodus. The rod would be grabbed from the hands of the abusers and used to slay their leaders. "Spears" or rods is the same word translated "arrows" in :9, where we are assured that God's arrows go to the right target and do not cause indiscriminate damage. Now we learn that the arrows or rods used by God are actually the arrows or rods used by the abusers of Israel, with which they abused them just like the Egyptians beating them with rods. Those arrows or rods used to abuse Israel are grabbed from their hands and used against those who have been using them. This is far from the indiscriminate fear of the 'problem of evil' with which this prophecy opens, and which is constantly addressed throughout it.

They came as a whirlwind to scatter me, gloating as if to devour the wretched in secret- Those slain in the judgments had come as whirlwind to scatter God and His people, thinking they could abuse "the poor" (AV) without facing any justice for doing so ("in secret"). Coming as a whirlwind to scatter is the language of Divine judgment; these people had played God, assuming they had some Divine right to act as they wanted against the very vulnerable, and not face judgment for it because they were somehow playing God. This speaks of many abuse scenarios, but particularly of the abuse of the weak by jihadist Islamists of the last days. This is how they will treat God's people, and they will be judged for it. Habakkuk's opening fears that abusers would somehow get away with it are here resoundingly answered.

Habakkuk 3:15 *You trampled the sea with your horses, churning mighty waters*- The waters represent individual peoples. God's riding forth to save His people inevitably churned the waters; Gentiles were affected. Israel's salvation out of Egypt required the fall of Egypt, their potential salvation from Babylon required the fall of Babylon; Lot's salvation from Sodom required the fall of Sodom (2 Pet. 2:6-9), just as Noah's required the destruction of the world around him (2 Pet. 2:5,9; 1 Pet. 3:20,21). The picture is clear- out of the judgment of the Gentiles there emerges God's redeemed, saved people who would otherwise have been overcome by those Gentiles. In Judah's context, they would only go to Babylon for their sins; but God would destroy Babylon so that spiritually and physically they might emerge free, to restore God's kingdom. It's a tragedy that they didn't do this; but the potential will finally be realized in the fall of latter day Babylon.

Habakkuk 3:16 *I heard, and my body trembled*- What began as a prayer ended up in a Divine revelation. Whilst we don't receive prophetic revelations in the way Habakkuk did, it's true for us that intense personal prayer often leads to spiritual realizations and

God opening our eyes to truths. Habakkuk believed what he had understood so deeply that his body trembled. Such trembling was to be the effect upon Judah when God's judgments came (Is. 5:25; 13:13; 14:16; 32:11). Habakkuk identified so strongly with his sinful people that he took all this deeply into himself, and felt as they would, although he had the personal hope of resurrection to blessing (:17). In this he looks ahead to the Lord Jesus, representative of sinful man, internalizing the judgment for our sins so deeply that He carried them for us, to rise again in triumphant resurrection.

My lips quivered at the sound- "The sound" may be that of God's word pronouncing judgment; or the sound of the invaders which he had heard. His lips quivered rather than his ears because he had to speak this forth to others. What a challenge to us, to speak forth God's word of judgment and salvation with lips quivering at the reality of it all.

Rottenness enters into my bones, and I tremble in my place, because I must wait quietly for the day of trouble- This is an intimation that he must die and wait quietly in the grave [another evidence against heaven going] until the day of Jacob's final trouble which would herald the Lord's return, the resurrection and establishment of God's Kingdom in Israel (Dan. 12:1-4).

For the coming up of the people who invade us- This coming up could be the general arising of the Babylonians which was yet future to Habakkuk's time (Hab. 1:5,6), or their coming up upon Judah. Although Habakkuk would not personally experience it, he had to "wait quietly" in the grave, he still felt that he would be amongst those invaded ["invade us"] and suffer with them. This contrasts with Hezekiah who was delighted that judgment wouldn't come in his day, and got on and enjoyed himself.

Habakkuk 3:17 *For though the fig tree doesn't flourish, nor fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive fails, the fields yield no food; the flocks are cut off from the fold, and there is no herd in the stalls-* The promised covenant blessings aren't going to be experienced by Habakkuk in this life, and yet he accepts that finally he personally will be saved (:18) and rejoices in this. See on 1:2 *Will You not save?* His opening objections in chapter 1 to the way God is operating, and his struggle with the problem of suffering, are all now revealed as being a desire to have blessing right now. This is a natural human desire, reflected in the "How long?" question of all the faithful.

Habakkuk 3:18 *Yet I will rejoice in Yahweh. I will be joyful in the God of my salvation!*- See on 1:2 *Will You not save?*. As noted on :17, Habakkuk had expected to see the covenant blessings of a Messianic Kingdom come in his lifetime. But he had been told like Daniel that he must quietly wait in the grave (:16), and Judah must be abused by Babylon before emerging from that abuse as a people ready for God's Kingdom blessing. Habakkuk concludes by focusing upon his personal salvation, which he rejoices in. This perhaps is the answer to the problem of suffering articulated in chapter 1. Like Habakkuk we may not find the ideal explanation, and yet even without that intellectual satisfaction, we can still rejoice in our personal salvation. The Lord was asked "Are there few that be saved?", and He wisely didn't engage with that question, with all the "problem of evil" issues of ethics and morality which are bound within it; rather does His response urge men to focus upon their own walk with God (Lk. 13:23,24).

Habakkuk 3:19 *Yahweh, the Lord, is my strength. He makes my feet like deer's feet, and enables me to go in high places-* Despite being still intellectually dissatisfied over

the answers to the problem of evil with which he began in chapter 1, Habakkuk concludes full of joy at the prospect of being like a deer, able to climb any mountain in God's strength. This is not spiritual selfishness, focusing upon ourselves and disregarding the wider suffering of others. As noted on "invade us" in :16, this was not how he was. But although the wider questions remain, these should not diminish our personal faith in salvation. That is the crescendo of this prayer which was turned into a temple song.

For the musical director, on my stringed instruments- As noted on :1, Habakkuk was apparently a Levite and he wanted his personal prayer to be sung by others. He knew that his questions about the problem of evil and suffering were those of every man. And he wished to share with others the simple, joyful truth of his personal salvation.