

Habakkuk

*Written and taught by Ray Nickles, Teacher, Lighthouse Bible Church
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Introduction

Habakkuk's profession was that of a prophet and he probably worked at the temple. Assuming he worked in the temple he was most likely of the tribe of Levi.

Based on what is contained in his writings he lived during the last half of the 7th century B.C. An early dating of his writings would put him living during the reign of either Manasseh or Amon making him a contemporary of Nahum or Zephaniah. Most commentators prefer to place his book later, during the reign of Jehoiakim. He was a contemporary of Jeremiah. During both times there is injustice outside Judah since the Assyrians then the Babylonians were in power and there is injustice inside Judah from the wealthy taking advantage of the poor.

Habakkuk is living in troubled times and is seeking answers from God to questions about why things are as they are. God's answers seem to pose even more questions.

His book gives a general perspective of what he perceives to be the course of events and then some advice on how he will live his life. It is unique in that the prophet speaks to God about the people and the nation rather than to the people and the nation about God.

The message given by Habakkuk is that God has sovereignty over people and nations, that his judgments are morally right and those who are righteous should live by faith.

v.1:1 The burden which Habakkuk the prophet did see.

This verse serves as an introduction to the writer and his profession. That he is a prophet is the only thing known about Habakkuk personally. What he sees about his country and people is a burden to him. It is a giant weight on his shoulders as he tries to understand and seek solutions to the situation.

v.1:2 O Lord, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear! even cry out unto thee of violence, and thou wilt not save!

The situation in Judah has reverted back to what the other prophets have written about. There are forces outside the nation exerting pressure on Judah. Babylon has overrun the area and is making demands on the people for tribute with consequences if it is not paid.

Within Judah itself the people are being treated cruelly by those with the greater power. (i.e. rulers, judges, prophets, priests) Habakkuk has been watching these injustices taking place over a period of time and has been appealing to God in prayer for him to stop the evil from happening. He does not see any changes taking place and feels God is not responding to his prayers.

Habakkuk has questions concerning two major areas of his faith. First is whether or not God answers prayer. The situation seems cut and dry, evil is being done to the people and it should be stopped and punished. His concern is that either prayer is ineffective or God isn't listening.

Secondly, Habakkuk may feel God could not have total control over evil. If he had why doesn't he save the people from the violence being done to them.

v.1:3 Why dost thou shew me iniquity, and cause me to behold grievance? for spoiling and violence are before me: and there are that raise up strife and contention.

As a follow up to this he wants to know why God allows the violence to be done so openly with total disregard to the law. *Iniquity*, as used here, is the lack of justice or righteousness. Having a *grievance* is having a condition thought to be unjust, possibly inflicting injury or hardship.

Spoiling is to strip a person of goods, money... etc. by force. It is the practice of plundering and pillaging. *Strife and contention* indicates there is a struggle, quarreling or contesting over some situation.

During this time Jehoiakim is king and is taking advantage of the people by using them as slaves, coveting their property, and oppressing and doing violence to many. The advance of the Babylonian army is doing much of the same as they take silver and gold from the temple and take children as slaves. (Jer. 22:13, 17; Dan 1:1-3)

v.1:4 Therefore the law is slacked, and judgment doth never go forth: for the wicked doth compass about the righteous; therefore wrong judgment proceedeth.

Habakkuk reaches the conclusion that if the violence continues and goes unpunished the law eventually is of no effect. If the law is of no effect there cannot be any justice because no judgments can be made.

If this conclusion is true then everyone will be tempted into thinking they too should take advantage of the situation. And as the number of law breakers grow the righteous become more and more isolated, being surrounded by wickedness.

Finally, as injustice grows it becomes harder and harder for justice to prevail. Eventually judgments are no longer made on what is right but what is wrong. Judgments are based on who can exert the most pressure, who has the most influence, who has the most money.

v.1:5 Behold ye among the heathen, and regard, and wonder marvellously: for I will work a work in your days, which ye will not believe, though it be told you.

God gives his reply to the questions asked by Habakkuk. He first tells Habakkuk to look at the heathen nations around him and observe and study them. As he does this he is told to be prepared to be totally amazed.

No doubt Habakkuk's prayers are to be answered but in a way he never imagined. He is probably expecting the evil to be punished and a great reformation to occur as was the case when Josiah took control.

He is told the prophecies given by the various prophets will come to pass in his lifetime. He must have known about them and even heard them directly from Jeremiah but refused to believe they were true. (Is. 29:14; Acts 13:40-41)

v.1:6 For, lo, I raise up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, which shall march through the breadth of the land, to possess the dwellingplaces that are not theirs.

The instrument of God's punishment will be the Chaldeans, aka Babylonians. God makes it clear to Habakkuk that everything transpiring is not fate or an accident of history but that he is causing it to happen. (Is. 23:9)

The Babylonians were a bitter and cruel people and along with being rash (hasty) it meant they could be very dangerous. Habakkuk is told they will eventually march across the entire area and take possession of lands that do not belong to them.

v.1:7-8 They are terrible and dreadful: their judgment and their dignity shall proceed of themselves. Their horses also are swifter than leopards, and are more fierce than the evening wolves: and their horsemen shall spread themselves, and their horsemen shall come from far; they shall fly as the eagle that hasteth to eat.

God follows the prophecy with a description of the Babylonians. They are terrible and will strike fear into all those to whom they come into contact.

The invading army will advance quickly on horseback and they will be fierce fighters. They are likened to a wolf on the prowl and as an eagle in search of food.

The consequence of disobedience will be realized as the distant army invades and overruns the land. (Deut. 28:49-50; Jer. 4:13)

Regarding the keeping of the law it has been shown that it had no effect on the actions of many, particularly the rich. When the Babylonians come they will bring a new law. Basically, they will be the law. Whatever judgments are made will come from within them. Likewise whatever is noble or honorable will be decided by them. Whatever the Babylonians decree they do so according to their own will.

v.1:9 They shall come all for violence: their faces shall sup up as the east wind, and they shall gather the captivity as the sand.

The violence brought upon Judah would be their punishment for the violence its people had done. (Lev. 24:20) But the object of the Babylonians was not make things right or establish justice, in their eyes it was to get whatever they could through violence. Eventually they themselves will be judged for this.

To "*sup up*" is interpreted as 'swallow up'. The "*east wind*" in Palestine is known as a destructive wind, it brings burning heat, and is destructive to plants. Figuratively in this case the east wind would be the Babylonians. So what is depicted here is the nation and people being swallowed up in the face of the enemy just as the destructive force of the east wind swallows up the land when it comes. (Hos. 13:15)

When the Babylonians come they will take large numbers of people captive. There will be so many taken the number will be as grains of sand. (Gen. 22:17)

v.1:10 And they shall scoff at the kings, and the princes shall be a scorn unto them: they shall deride every strong hold; for they shall heap dust, and take it up.

The Babylonians might bolstered them as a nation and they had contempt for all other forms of authority. They took kings and princes and royal families captive to suit their purposes. (2 Chron. 36:6; Dan 1:3-4)

The defenses of the cities did not stop the Babylonians from conquering them. No defense was great enough. They would even build huge earthen ramps to scale the walls. (2 Kings 19:32)

v.1:11 Then shall his mind change, and he shall pass over, and offend, imputing this his power unto his god.

Then, after having success in conquering the mid-eastern nations the attitude of the Babylonians changes. They become more proud and arrogant. Where there was a measure of restraint in their thoughts and deeds this is now gone. They have increasingly ‘passed over’ the bounds of reason and equity. To this extent they have become guilty men and offended God with their pride.

Becoming proud of the power they now have they attribute their success to their gods Bel and Nebo. Since Israel is now their captive to them it meant their gods were stronger than Israel’s. This was the same mistaken conclusion the Assyrians came to as they expanded their influence throughout the world. (Dan. 4:30)

v.1:12 Art thou not from everlasting, O Lord my God, mine Holy One? we shall not die. O Lord, thou hast ordained them for judgment; and, O mighty God, thou hast established them for correction.

What God has revealed to Habakkuk has answered some of his questions but he still doesn't completely understand. Part of his dilemma was that he thought God was not responding to his prayers. God has now shown that he is responsive, Habakkuk's trust was not misplaced. It is to his credit that he was persistent enough to seek further explanation in his situation.

Habakkuk was also expecting immediate action as confirmation his prayer was being answered. What he did not know was that God was at work even though his actions were not evident. What should be coming clear is that Habakkuk had limited vision. He thought God was doing nothing when in reality it was just that he could not see what God was doing.

Another thing is when Habakkuk prayed he probably had some preconceived idea of what God's response should be. He knew what the problem was but just did not have the power to make the corrections. Now that he sees the answer God has given he is unprepared to deal with it. Unable to see the big picture Habakkuk does not understand how God could arrive as such a totally different answer than what he expected.

Since God's actions have taken a different path than what he expected Habakkuk feels he must show God he is going counter to his very nature. Habakkuk does not want to come right out and tell God his decision is wrong so he is going to be tactful in explaining why God's direction shouldn't be what it is.

He begins by acknowledging the fact that God is eternal. He acknowledges his own position in relation to God's. God is the Holy One of Judah and his Lord. This is done in the form of a rhetorical question. Habakkuk knows what the answer is but uses this as a way of softening his position. It's as if he is making sure what he has to say is not meant to be offensive.

In recognizing God's position above himself, Judah, and all men his faith tells him his people will not be utterly destroyed by the Babylonians. Judgment is coming but he still has unshakable faith in the preservation of his people.

Having heard the prophecy directly from God, Habakkuk understands the Lord's decision has been made. The Babylonians have been ordained by God to be the instrument of judgment, to correct or chastise Judah but not destroy them. (v.1:6)

v.1:13 Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity: wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man more righteous than he?

Habakkuk's evaluation of God is that he is pure and perfect. He knows God abhors evil. This is evidenced by the rules and regulations setup for the Jews concerning what a person was and was not allowed to put in his body. Also under what circumstances a person was clean or unclean, how a person was purified, how sin was viewed and how atonement was to be made. (Lev. 11-17; Ps. 24:3-4)

Habakkuk explains that because God is so pure it would be against his nature to look upon evil or to cause evil or to take pleasure in evil. (Ps. 5:4-6) In light of what God is Habakkuk questions why God would stand by and watch as such an evil nation as the Babylonians could be allowed to be so prosperous.

As the Babylonians come into his own country to loot, pillage and take captives he wants to know why evil is allowed to be victorious. From his point of view, Judah, although not without fault, is more righteous than Babylon and by all rights should not be punished by something more evil.

v.1:14 And makest men as the fishes of the sea, as the creeping things, that have no ruler over them?

Habakkuk is in a debate with God and presents his argument using a metaphor comparing the people to fish and insects. Fish swim around in the water having no direction or guidance and have no leader. There is no justice system to set laws or punish violators. The fish merely do whatever they want.

So, if God is not making sure justice is served than everyone was brought into a world where they are totally independent and can do anything without fear of consequences.

v.1:15 They take up all of them with the angle, they catch them in their net, and gather them in their drag: therefore they rejoice and are glad.

In his metaphor the Babylonians are fishermen. With their fishing rods and their nets they catch and gather as many fish as they can. The fishermen are very pleased with what they caught and they have a big party to celebrate their success.

This equates to the Babylonians as they take over countries, as more and more people become captive they are pleased with the results and celebrate.

v.1:16 Therefore they sacrifice unto their net, and burn incense unto their drag; because by them their portion is fat, and their meat plenteous.

Because the fishermen did such a good job and caught many fish with their nets they praise the nets and make the nets gods. The nets have provided them with all their needs and have made the fish helpless before them.

The nets are the mighty armies of the Babylonians. Having defeated other armies and conquered cities and nations their might becomes their god. Their sacrifices are basically to themselves because they have provided for their needs through their own might.

v.1:17 Shall they therefore empty their net, and not spare continually to slay the nations?

Now that the fishermen have found the nets to be powerful weapons should the fishermen be allowed to spread the net wherever and whenever they want? Can they use the net to continue to catch all the fish?

As this applies to the Babylonians, should they be allowed to bring violence to the people and get away with it? Because they have a mighty army should they be allowed to spread throughout all the nations and take them captive? And will they get away with giving credit for their success to themselves and their might rather than realizing it was caused by God?

v.2:1 I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved.

Having completed his discourse on how illogical he thinks God's remedy for Judah's injustice is he now waits for God's reply. He probably feels he did a pretty good job in coming to the conclusions he did. Now God must prove him wrong.

Sitting on the tower and being on watch does not mean he will literally go up to the tower and sit and wait but is used figuratively to express the idea of having patience to wait for God's answer. He is also pondering his own rebuttal to God's reply.

(At this point his faith in prayer has been restored and he knows God will bring him an answer.)

v.2:2 And the Lord answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it.

As Habakkuk expected God replies to his concerns about Judah's future. He will receive a vision detailing the events which will take place. The vision is written legibility or clearly so it is easily readable, concise and to the point. (Deut. 27:8)

What a "table" exactly is is not known but it is most likely more durable than parchment ordinarily used. It is not like the scroll used by Jeremiah which could be easily destroyed or defaced. (Jer. 36:2, 23)

"That he may run that readeth it" means that what is written should be easily understandable. This is so someone could 'run' and communicate the contents to another person. (Dan. 12:4; Jer. 23:21)

v.2:3 For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it will tarry, wait for it, because it will surely come, it will not tarry.

This verse seems to contradict itself but it is broken into two parts. The first is concerning the events of the vision and the second about the vision itself.

The reason for writing down the vision is because it will not happen immediately. God has a specific time already set aside for these happenings. God's timing of events was not the same as that of Habakkuk's and stating this should serve to reassure him and strengthen his faith in the truth and righteousness of the Lord.

Writing the vision down on a durable material will give it a lasting quality since its impact will not be felt for some time. Not only is it something to look forward to it will be something to look back at after everything has transpired to prove God is faithful to his word.

When the events of the vision are fully realized there will be answers and an

understanding of what has taken place. In the end, what will take place will be confirmed as having been the truth and not a lie.

In speaking about the vision itself God tells Habakkuk that the vision may not come to him immediately but it will come and he is to wait for it. The waiting period will not be a long time and this waiting time could give Habakkuk time to prepare himself. (v.1:5)

The emphasis is on continuing to wait on the Lord with faith. Because God is faithful there should be assurance in his word and that what he has said he will do, he will do.

v.2:4 Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by faith.

Having waited for the vision God said would come to him Habakkuk now begins to perceive what God is showing him. They are people whose pride is swelling up. Behold or see, there are those who are puffed up with pride.

There are two thoughts as to who these people are. One is the Babylonians who have taken pride in their might as they have conquered other nations around them.

Second, are the unbelieving Jews in Judah who have become full of pride because of their riches and their ability to circumvent the law.

There is another group of people and they are the ones who are truly righteous. There are those who believe in the promises given by God and this they do by faith.

As it turns out Habakkuk has been thinking on purely human terms. He looked at groups of people and judged which was more evil by their actions. Their works were what made one group more or less righteous in his eyes.

God, on the other hand, does not impute righteousness on the basis of works. Faith, that is believing what God has said is true will be what will save those of Judah. (Gen. 15:6; Rom. 4:1-3; John 5:24)

v.2:5 Yea, also, because he transgresseth by wine, he is a proud man, neither keepeth at home, who enlargeth his desire as hell, and is as death, and cannot be satisfied, but gathereth unto him all nations, and heapeth unto him all people.

In the vision Habakkuk receives he makes some general observations of the Babylonians and their leaders. It appears they have a strong taste for wine and that drunkenness was a sin of the Babylonians. One thing wine does is remove inhibitions. It brings on contempt and a feeling of false pride. (Dan. 5:2-3, 23, 30)

The Babylonians and their leaders were proud men. They were arrogant and boasted

how great they were. (Dan. 3:1, 4-5; 4:30) That they held others in contempt and were proud and arrogant led them to covet everything. (v.1:10) They were not content with what they had and went out and conquered all the more. They were greedy. This greediness was unquenchable or insatiable and is compared to hell or as most interpret it, as the grave. Hell or the grave continues to receive the dead but never is filled. It continues to take more and more without end. Just as death cannot be satisfied neither can the greed of the Babylonians. The culmination of their greed was that they conquered all the nations and ruled over all people. (Prov. 27:20)

v.2:6 Shall not all these take up a parable against him, and a taunting proverb against him, and say, Woe to him that increaseth that which is not his! how long? and to him that ladeth himself with thick clay!

This verse is broken into two parts. The first serves as an introduction to a series of five oracles or taunting proverbs aimed at the Babylonians. (Some believe the Jewish leaders could also be included) The nations and peoples they have subjected will have contempt for them and will put insults on them in the form of parables and proverbs. (Micah 2:4)

Each of the five oracles starts with the word "woe". A 'woe' is an exclamation of calamity and/or misery. Each details a crime committed and implies a consequence for their actions.

The first oracle starts with a warning to anyone who would increase their own wealth by taking the possessions of another. The "him" is recognized as being Babylonian. Whether directed at the leader or the Babylonians in general is not really clear. The Babylonians in typical fashion will loot the temple and palaces and take the fine things for themselves. (2 Chron. 36: 7)

How long is posed as a question to which Habakkuk does not give an answer. The believer must have faith and the patience to wait for God's time. (Jer. 25:11)

To "*ladeth himself with thick clay*" means one of two things depending on who is doing the interpretation. One meaning is that of a 'burden'. Gold and silver are merely yellow and white earth. As the covetous person accumulates vast amounts of wealth it weighs him down. The obsession of having wealth means it must be accounted for, so the person has the burden of caring for it and seeing to it that no one takes it away. There may be guilt about how it was acquired and about how or if it should be spent.

The other meaning is 'pledge'. Property and riches are acquired as a result of heavy pledges. A loan is made and a large amount of collateral is required to secure the loan. Then in many cases even though the loan is repaid the collateral or pledge is not returned. The wealthy in this respect are taking advantage of the poor making themselves rich at their expense. Non-payment meant forfeiting freedom, becoming a servant or slave.

v.2:7 Shall they not rise up suddenly that shall bite thee, and awake that shall vex thee, and thou shalt be for booties unto them?

Although not expressly stated the consequence will be that the people thought to be under control will suddenly rise in rebellion. It is inevitable that people kept in subjection will eventually revolt against their oppressors. When rebellion comes the riches accumulated by the wealthy (Babylonians) will become the booty or spoil of the rebels.

v.2:8 Because thou hast spoiled many nations, all the remnant of the people shall spoil thee; because of men's blood, and for the violence of the land, of the city, and of all that dwell therein.

Even though many people were taken into captivity there was still a remnant left in the nations the Babylonians had conquered. These people will rise up to defeat them, as did the Medes and Persians. (Is. 13:17; Jer. 51:11; Dan. 5:28)

The reasons given for the overthrow of the Babylonians are; 1) because of the ruining of the nations, 2) because they shed much blood of the people of these nations, 3) for the violence done to the land (scorched earth policy?), 4) the violence done to the cities, and 5) the violence done to the people living in the nations and cities.

v.2:9 Woe to him that coveteth an evil covetousness to his house, that he may set his nest on high, that he may be delivered from the power of evil!

The second oracle expands on the covetousness of an individual to take in the family or even farther as it desires a dynasty. The coveting of anything is a sin but to covet and get it through evil ways is “*evil covetousness*”. The ruling family obtains wealth in an effort to insure their power, to insure “*his house*” will continue to be strong.

The setting up of “*his nest on high*” indicates he is using the wealth and power as a foundation for the government. The wealthy may rule over those without wealth using their wealth to keep the people in subjection. This can also take in the actual building of great structures with elaborate fortifications.

All these measures are to secure the fortunes and power against enemies desiring to take it away. Just as the present rulers gained control by evil methods they in turn must protect themselves from being overthrown in the same manner thus delivering themselves from the “*power of evil*”.

v.2:10 Thou hast consulted shame to thy house by cutting off many people, and hast sinned against thy soul.

One of the objects of being wealthy and having a great many possessions is to bring dignity to the individual and/or family. But to get this wealth by evil and deceitful means will only bring shame on to the house (family name).

Even greater than bringing shame onto the family name is that they have brought condemnation from God on their own soul by their actions.

v.2:11 For the stone shall cry out of the wall, and the beam out of the timber shall answer it.

As all this takes place it will be impossible to try to deny the evil committed. Even if there were no eyewitnesses it would be plain to see the purpose and intent. The stones and beams would testify to the evil committed. The actions and works of the Babylonians are proof of their guilt in breaking God's law to which they must answer. The implied consequence is that punishment will be dealt out resulting in their destruction.

v.2:12 Woe to him that buildeth a town with blood, and stablisheth a city by iniquity!

The third oracle refers to the building of cities or the expansion of the empire. The cities which make up the empire, principally Babylon, are built on the blood of its captives. The implication here is that a nation which would treat the people cruelly could not survive. The idea of establishing a lasting government where the people would only be there to serve its rulers with total disregard for human life is doomed to failure.

v.2:13 Behold, is it not of the Lord of hosts that the people shall labour in the very fire, and the people shall weary themselves for very vanity?

Laboring to build great cities using evil ways is pointless. The end result is that in God's sovereign plan they are laboring on something that will be destroyed. Their energy is in vain. It is wasted on earthly greatness which will not last. (Jer. 51:58)

v.2:14 For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.

The consequence to the Babylonians is destruction. This destruction will be brought about by the Lord and the knowledge of how and why destruction came will be known to all people. This knowledge of the Lord's glory will be so well known it is compared to the water which covers the earth.

v.2:15 Woe unto him that giveth his neighbor drink, that putteth thy bottle to him, and maketh him drunken also, that thou mayest look on their nakedness!

The fourth oracle can have two meanings, one being literal the other figurative. Regarding the literal interpretation it has already been noted that the Babylonians were partial to wine. (v.2:5) Here they are condemned for encouraging others to also drink. The purpose of leading the people into drunkenness was to bring shame on them, expressed by looking "on their nakedness". (Nahum 3:5)

In the figurative expression this deals with the cruelty of the Babylonians in the treatment of the nations they had conquered. Drunkenness is also used figuratively when referring to something done to excess. (Jer. 46:10)

The word "*bottle*" is translated as 'pouring out wrath'. The intention is that the conquest and subjugation of the nations are represented as making them drink (act) with the wrath of the Babylonians. This does not however refer to the violence done to the nations but to the cunning way they bring the nations into their confidence only to exploit them, ultimately bringing on disgrace and shame.

v.2:16 Thou art filled with shame for glory: drink thou also, and let thy foreskin be uncovered: the cup of the Lord's right hand shall be turned unto thee, and shameful spewing shall be on thy glory.

The glory the nations thought they would have would instead be shame and the actions of the Babylonians will also bring shame to them rather than glory. Just as they caused the nations to be put to shame they also would bring shame on themselves..

At this time God's chosen people were identified by being circumcised, the uncovering of the foreskin would identify the Babylonians as not being circumcised thus meaning they were not God's chosen people.

The consequence of not being one of God's chosen will be that his power will be turned against them represented by the cup of the Lord's right hand turning to them. (Lam. 2:3)

"*Shameful spewing*" or vomiting is the reaction the Babylonians can expect from their so called greatness.

v.2:17 For the violence of Lebanon shall cover thee, and the spoil of beasts, which made them afraid, because of men's blood, and for the violence of the land, of the city, and of all that dwell therein.

Continuing to speak about the treatment of people, the curse on the Babylonians would be that they would be treated the same way as they treated those in Lebanon when they fall from power. There is a difference of opinion as to whether Lebanon means Israel or is used figuratively to represent nature.

If representing Israel, Babylon would be judged for their treatment of the people whereas if representing nature the judgment is based on the impact of their treatment of the natural resources and animals. Both issues have been previously addressed in verse 2:8.

v.2:18 What profiteth the graven image that the maker thereof hath graven it; the

molten image, and a teacher of lies, that the maker of his work trusteth therein, to make dumb idols?

Before giving the final oracle Habakkuk sets the stage by questioning the power of idols and wondering why someone would trust in them. If someone makes an idol what profit will it bring him? It can neither hear nor speak nor take any action, it is therefore of no use.

Additionally, why would someone put their trust in something made with their own hands. If learning is said to come from the idol or the god symbolized by the idol it is a lie. Therefore the idol itself becomes a teacher of lies aided by the priest of the false deity. The basic truth is that God does not work through idols so anything attributed to the idol is not the truth.

v.2:19 Woe to him that saith to the wood, Awake; to the dumb stone, Arise, it shall teach! Behold, it is laid over with gold and silver, and there is no breath at all in the midst of it.

Having stated how stupid it is to think that an idol can in any way be responsive to human needs and desires Habakkuk follows with an oracle against those who call upon idols.

It doesn't make any difference whether the idol is made of wood or stone, or whether it is covered with precious metals the fact is it has no life and cannot respond. Since there are no other gods but one there are no gods to work through the idol or make it come to life. The idol will remain lifeless.

v.2:20 But the Lord is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him.

In contrast to all that is not truth, the Lord, who is truth, can be found where he said he will be, in his holy temple. This is not the temple at Jerusalem, which is the visible temple, but in his heavenly dwelling place. (1 Kings 8: 27, 30, 32, 34, 36, 39, 43, 45, 49)

From his heavenly dwelling place God rules and passes judgment. For this reason all people should be silent in submission to his glory and might. (Zeph. 1:7; Zech. 2:13)

v.3:1 A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet upon Shigionoth.

Following the vision Habakkuk responds to God in what is called a prayer but the majority, except verse 2, is more appropriately a psalm, which is a song or hymn. This is evidenced by the word *Selah* which is believed to be a musical pause, (v.3, 9, 13) and its similarity to the poetry of the Psalms.

The meaning of the word "*shigionoth*" is unknown but some think it is used to describe a particular type of psalm, being similar to *shiggaion*. (Psalm 7)

v.3:2 O Lord, I have heard thy speech, and was afraid: O Lord, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known, in wrath remember mercy.

Based on what Habakkuk has heard he understands the coming judgment and petitions God in a short prayer. He was afraid but not in a 'fearful' way. The workings of God put him in awe but also with concern for his people.

He knows about the past acts of God and asks him to bring them about soon, "*in the midst of the years*". He wants the past acts to be revived or renewed so that God's power and might will be made known again to his people.

Habakkuk also knows there are two aspects of God; justice and mercy. Understanding Judah will be punished justly for its sins he asks God to temper his judgment with mercy.

v.3:3 God came from Teman, and the Holy One from mount Paran. Selah. His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise.

In his prayer Habakkuk is looking to the future as he asks God to bring about a new work among his people. He has good reason to believe God can make this come about. In his psalm he praises God for what he had done in the past. His faith and confidence are based on this past work of God. The psalm is called a theophany which is a manifestation of God to man by actual appearance.

He begins by referring to God's appearing to the children of Israel during the Exodus from Egypt. Teman is a location in the southern part of Edom also known as the Seir region. (Jer. 49:7, 20)

Mount Paran is farther south and west and joins with Sinai. These three places are mentioned by Moses from which God's glory was manifested. From there "*his glory covered the heavens*" (Deut. 33:2)

Teman and mount Paran are probably mentioned because they represent the boundaries of the wanderings in the desert.

Selah is a pause in the chant or song. Most think that during the pause music continued to play while the individual thought about what had just been said.

v.3:4 *And his brightness was as the light; he had horns coming out of his hand: and there was the hiding of his power.*

God's glory is manifested as light and is used to describe God's presence. At Mount Sinai it is manifested by lightening and by Isaiah as fire. (Ex. 19:16; Is 4:5)

Two meanings of "*horns*" are 'emit rays' and 'projections', and "*hand*" is again used in connection with God's power. (v.2:16) The light was a sign of God's power, a power not shown to man (hidden from man) until this time at Sinai and throughout the wilderness wanderings.

v.3:5 *Before him went the pestilence, and the burning coals went forth at his feet.*

The power of God is revealed in judgments made on behalf of his people. In the context of the Exodus plagues were used to convince the Egyptians to let the people go. "*Burning heat*" can be used in reference to the plagues and pestilence or to a general destruction which would come on all those who would oppose him. (Deut 32:24; Ps. 18:8-9)

To show his sovereignty in these matters the actions God takes are said to go "*forth at his feet*". This indicates he is in complete control and all things are subject to him.

v.3:6 *He stood, and measured the earth: he beheld, and drove asunder the nations; and the everlasting mountains were scattered, the perpetual hills did bow: his ways are everlasting.*

A major event in history took place from the time the children of Israel left Egypt until they settled in Canaan. A major force was at work as large numbers of people were moved and nations displaced. This force is attributed to God as he proceeded with his plan.

As Israel left Egypt they left an indelible mark on those people and as they later moved into Canaan they drove the inhabiting nations out of existence. (Deut. 15:14-16)

The mountains and hills are symbols of permanence and grandeur but in the face of God's power they are easily broken down and become nothing next to his will. Man's position on earth may seem just as permanent as the mountains but in actuality they are just as easily moved and must inevitably bow before the Lord. This is true, and as Habakkuk understands, it is eternal.

v.3:7 *I saw the tents of Cushan in affliction: and the curtains of the land of Midian did tremble.*

In the wilderness God revealed himself and his power through light and nature to the children of Israel. After they entered Canaan God showed his power by the way he dealt with other nations and protected his people. Two of the nations mentioned here are the Cushans and Midians.

The Cushans are less known than the Midians and there is disagreement as to who they really were, however there are references to a king in Mesopotamia who took Israel captive and who was subsequently defeated by the Israelites. (Judges 3:1, 7-10)

The Midianites were another nation called on by God to prove Israel. Once Israel recognized its sin God again freed them from their captors. (Judges 6:1 - 7:25)

The main thought here is that God intervened and brought victory and peace to Israel during the time when they were obedient to him. And the fact is, that, as they were able to do this, it put fear into the other nations around them.

v.3:8 Was the Lord displeased against the rivers? was thine anger against the rivers? was thy wrath against the sea, that thou didst ride upon thine horses and thy chariots of salvation?

Again as he is praising God another two events are recalled by Habakkuk. They are the parting of the Red Sea when leaving Egypt and dividing the Jordan River when entering Canaan. (Ex. 14:21-22; Josh. 3:16-17)

As a form of verification that God did this for the people and not for some other reason he forms questions to prove this was so. Did these events take place because God was angry at the water? The obvious answer is 'no'. He showed his power over his creation to save the people. This power to save is depicted as riding horses and chariots. It was the power and might of God which delivered salvation to the Israelites.

v.3:9 Thy bow was made quite naked, according to the oaths of the tribes, even thy word. Selah. Thou didst cleave the earth with rivers.

The power of God was also made manifest over the nations as they came up against their enemies. God made a promise to their forefathers that if they followed his statutes he would protect them from their enemies. (Gen. 12:2-3; Ex. 23:22)

The bow being naked is the bow being taken from its covering and being made ready for use. It represents the threat of God's wrath or vengeance prepared to be dealt out to any nation to come up against Israel.

Selah, is again a pause to reflect on the promise of peace, protection and prosperity given to them by God through their ancestors.

Then to reinforce the promise he follows up with the memory of the power unleashed on Israel's enemies through the parting of water.

v.3:10 The mountains saw thee, and they trembled: the overflowing of the water passed by: the deep uttered his voice, and lifted up his hands on high.

To emphasize the great majesty of God, what he did and is capable of doing, Habakkuk again refers to the things of nature that were seemingly immovable. If the mountains had emotions they would tremble at the sight of God. If water had a will the flooding rivers would pass by quietly and the waves would obey his commands and praise him.

Nature, if it could speak out, would proclaim these things about God. Why, if man is so intelligent, can't they see what nature is trying to say?

v.3:11 The sun and moon stood still in their habitation: at the light of thine arrows they went, and at the shining of thy glittering spear.

Not only did God have control over the earth, but also the heavens and to prove this he had the sun and moon stand still. This event took place during the invasion of Canaan.

After passing over the Jordan into Canaan Joshua led the Israelites in conquering two cities, Jericho and Ai. The city of Gibeon, having made peace with Israel, was besieged by five Amorite kings. Israel came to the aid of Gibeon and was promised victory by the Lord. Knowing God was behind them assuring victory the Israelites could go into battle confidently. The power of God is again depicted as light giving confidence that he was behind them. During the battle Joshua commanded the sun and moon to stand still. (Josh. 10:12-14)

v.3:12 Thou didst march through the land in indignation, thou didst thresh the heathen in anger.

As Israel moved to establish its nation in the promised land Habakkuk envisions God leading them in conquest over the heathen nations. God's indignation, his resentment of what Canaan represented, led him to use Israel as his instrument of judgment on them. He set the heathen as an example of what he would be angry with and followed through with the punishment characterized by threshing, a violent action.

v.3:13 Thou wentest forth for the salvation of thy people, even for salvation with thine anointed; thou woundedst the head out of the house of the wicked, by discovering the foundation unto the neck. Selah.

In every situation God led his people and delivered them from their enemies either directly or through a mediator. Even those appointed by him looked to him for their salvation. Israel could not or never did deliver themselves.

In delivering his people God will wound the head of their enemies, the head being the leaders of the other nations. (Ps. 110:6)

The way the nations would be conquered would be to first destroy the foundation of

the government, presumably the army or the city walls. Once the foundation of the country was destroyed then the head, the leaders, could be cutoff.

v.3:14 Thou didst strike through with staves the head of his villages: they came out as a whirlwind to scatter me: their rejoicing was as to devour the poor secretly.

The destruction of Israel's enemies did not only come from God being within the Israelites but also by him causing the enemy to fight among themselves. (Judges. 7:22)

Habakkuk identifies himself as being representative of the nation by referring to the nation as "me".

Nations came after them zealously and fully expecting to defeat the hapless Israelites. The picture of the Egyptians pursuing them after leaving Egypt is given and they, the Egyptians, are said to be rejoicing at the opportunity to destroy them, the 'poor' meaning the Jews.

In another illustration the rejoicing is as that of a robber secretly waiting in the dark to attack a poor defenseless person thinking they will be an easy prey.

v.3:15 Thou didst walk through the sea with thine horses, through the heap of great waters.

Again the picture is of God leading his people through the parted waters of the sea or river. (v.3:8) The heaps are the mounds of water. (Ex. 15:8)

In response to the threat of violence by their enemy God would deliver them, proving to the enemy it would not be easy to overcome the nation having God behind them. In the back of Habakkuk's mind is probably the threat posed by the Babylonians as they look to easily take over Judah. Habakkuk is also looking to the day when God will show his power and deliver the nation as in the past.

v.3:16 When I heard, by belly trembled; my lips quivered at the voice: rottenness entered into my bones, and I trembled in myself, that I might rest in the day of trouble: when he cometh up unto the people, he will invade them with his troops.

It may be that Habakkuk's fear was more than just concern for his people as indicated in verse 2. Here he expresses a feeling of apprehension of the coming judgment. He had just had remembrances of what judgment God had brought on the heathen nations and now Israel stands before God in that same position.

What Habakkuk feels is deep within his being. He is sincerely troubled about what the judgment will bring.

Even through this time of trouble Habakkuk still exhibits strong personal faith.

Fearing the worst he rests on God's mercy to get him through the troubling times that lie ahead. His faith is such that he knows God will come back to his people, that God will raise a mediator to bring judgment on their oppressors, the Babylonians.

v.3:17 Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: v.3:18 Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.

The prosperity enjoyed by Israel was contingent on its obedience and upholding the covenant. Habakkuk acknowledges the nation's apostasy and the as a result the coming judgment.

Israel's economy was based on agriculture and the punishment would bring about failure in all areas of crop production. Failure to produce crops would mean animals would die off and the entire economy would be devastated.

Despite this gloomy picture Habakkuk had unparalleled faith and confidence in the salvation of Israel. He had seen the vision and based on past performance knew God would keep his promise to bring them back into the covenant relationship.

v.3:19 The Lord is my strength, and he will make my feet like the hinds' feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places. To the chief singer on my stringed instruments.

The prophet's attitude has totally changed from the beginning of the book. At the beginning he was questioning, a little doubtful, and concerned about whether God cared enough about what was going on. Now he makes a great confession of faith and places all of his confidence in God. He gives himself over to God knowing that without him he is nothing but through God's strength he can do anything.

In explaining the great heights to which God can take him and his nation he parallels David after being delivered from Saul. (Ps. 18:33)

"Hinds' feet" means 'deers feet' or 'gazelles feet' and implies swiftness. To "walk upon mine high places" indicates a return to his own land. So Habakkuk is showing his confidence that God will bring this judgment to a swift conclusion and restore the nation to former prosperity.