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A Thriving Faith, Part2

The story is told of one July 4th where the couple had the perfect seats to the fireworks display when on that particular evening God appointed a lightning storm to grace the sky! What normally would have been an impressive showing of various and sundry fireworks became an awesome display of the glory of God! In fact, the grand finale of the fireworks was completely humbled as multiple bolts of lightning flashed across NOT just the section of the sky where the fireworks were going off, BUT the entire sky- miles across! Everyone watching that display walked away saying, "What a God!"

This is how a thriving faith is fostered! It feeds on the greatness of God! Recall, Habakkuk wrote a Psalm to encourage a nation that was about to go through a severe trial, which literally would shake their world to pieces! The year was 605 BC and the nation of Judah was at the precipice of judgment on account of its rebellion against the Lord!

God established the nation upon the condition of Covenant fidelity of both nation and king to God (cf. Leviticus 26). Yet Israel rebelled and sought to live like the nations around them. Accordingly God sent many prophets to warn His people, yet the nation rejected every one of them. Speaking to the Jewish leaders of his day, Stephen said:

Acts 7:51-52b, "You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did. Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One..."

And so the time came, in Habakkuk's day, when God said, "Enough!" At first, Habakkuk was frightened when he heard of the horrible future that lay in front of him. So he went to God in prayer and something happened! His anger and disillusionment gave way to glorious trust.

Habakkuk 3:18-19, "I will exult in the Lord, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation. The Lord God is my strength, and He has made my feet like hinds' *feet*, and makes me walk on my high places."

Talk about a transformation! One moment there was anger... the next, a peaceful trust! We see it in Asaph and the psalm with Asaph angry and frustrated over God and His doings, but then it ends with these words:

Psalms 73:25-26, "Whom have I in heaven *but Thee*? And besides Thee, I desire nothing on earth. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever."

How does this transformation happen? It occurs when our eyes are drawn from gazing upon the very real trials and difficulties of this life and are placed on the Lord! Asaph declares prior to his affirmation of love and trust in God:

Psalms 73:16-17a, "When I pondered to understand this, it was troublesome in my sight until I came into the sanctuary of God..."

Job 42:5-6, "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye sees Thee; therefore I retract, and I repent in dust and ashes."

It wasn't until Job saw his struggles in relation to God that his wrestling match ended! And this is what happened with Habakkuk! One moment all he could see was temporal difficulty! The next he beheld the Lord whose Person and Work fed his faith and so gave him courage to face

an uncertain future! And so he wrote a Psalm to be sung by the people of God who themselves had a horrible baptism to undergo! Yet this “valley of weeping” would “become a spring” if only they kept their eyes on the Lord!

Toward that end, Habakkuk spent the majority of this Psalm describing the God whom we are privileged to serve in this life. Notice Habakkuk began first by describing His Person and so His Coming.

His Person and Coming

Habakkuk 3:3a, “God comes from Teman, and the Holy One from Mount Paran. [Selah].”

First off notice that Habakkuk writes this passage in such a way that the reader might *experience* God’s coming! The movement and flow reflects an oncoming approach of an awesome Being in His glory! In fact, “God’s coming” has enormous Biblical significance. The expression brings us back to the final words of Moses as he reflected upon the manifestation of God on Mount Sinai.

Deuteronomy 33:1-2, “Now this is the blessing with which Moses the man of God blessed the sons of Israel before his death. And he said, ‘The Lord came from Sinai, and dawned on them from Seir...’”

This “coming” of the Lord became the source of hope for the Lord’s people throughout Redemptive History! They were always looking for the day when the Lord would come again and so manifest the glory of His greatness! In this regard, it is most notable that Habakkuk speaks of God as coming from “Teman” and “Mount Paran.” *Teman* is associated with Edom, the last place through which God’s people journeyed before they entered the Promised Land (cf. Obadiah 9; Amos 1:12). *Paran* designates the desert area in and around Sinai and Egypt (cf. Genesis 21:21; 1 Kings 11:18; Deuteronomy 33:2). Accordingly Habakkuk depicts God’s movement from Sinai through Edom on the way to the possession of the Land which He promised His people. In other words, by alluding to the sojourn of God’s people in the Exodus as God “came and led them” from slavery to the Promised Land, Habakkuk essentially is saying that God’s people still were in the desert and God still was leading them to THE Promised Land!

Do you see? The exile wasn’t God’s people being bereft of the Promised Land! Rather, it was just another difficulty along the way as God continued to lead His people there! *It truly is appropriate here to “pause and wonder”*- which is the nuance of “selah!” in the Psalms! With this, notice how “the Holy One”¹ will manifest Himself.

Habakkuk 3:3b, “...His splendor covers the heavens, and the earth is full of His praise.”

As Habakkuk envisions the coming of the Lord in glory, he first sees the magnitude of that glory from afar. Notice, the majesty of God blankets the heavens above and his splendor permeates

the earth (think of the lightning storm)! In fact, the word for “splendor” (הֹד [hôd]) speaks of a glorious majesty! It is used in parallel with such words as “greatness,” “glory,” “victory,” “majesty,” “excellency,” “praise,” “brightness,” and “power”! It speaks of a splendor so glorious it overwhelms the senses!

Habakkuk 3:4, “His radiance is like the sunlight; He has rays *flashing* from His hand, and there is the hiding of His power.”

Have you ever stared at the sun? You can’t look at it very long for it will destroy your sight- *and yet it is 93 million miles away!* Imagine if we could move toward it! How close could we come before we would be consumed?! Yet the sun is as nothing in comparison to God who “dwells in light unapproachable” (1 Timothy 6:16)! In fact, because Habakkuk is dealing with an infinite Being, the only way to comprehend God’s greatness is by comparison. Notice Habakkuk says that God’s glory is “like the sunlight.” In other words, it no doubt is greater and more glorious, but for lack of words to express it, Habakkuk must revert to comparison: “it is like the sunlight!”

Now in the ancient world, the “hand” was the picture of a person’s power or ability. That is why when a nation was conquered, oft-times the hands of the king would be chopped off (as well as his feet and his head). In light of this, notice that God’s glory here is depicted as coming from His hand- “there is the hiding of His power!” What this means is that the sum total of God’s majesty will someday intersect time, and it will be with God with whom man and nations will have to do! God does not appear simply as a brilliant specter to inspire awe; He comes as an active Person, powerfully and awesomely working to establish His supremacy over this world and among the nations! That is what He is doing right now; and that is what He will do when He returns to the earth!

To a people about to face a tribulation which would change their world, how encouraging would this be? It isn’t that God would be asleep when Babylon destroyed Israel or powerless to do anything about it: God truly was and is on the throne! “The nations are but a drop from a bucket!” (Isaiah 40:15) “The king’s heart is like channels of water in the hands of the Lord!” (Proverbs 21:1) All is subject to the pleasure of God! And so God’s Coming truly is Glorious! Notice further, it also is overwhelming.

God’s Coming is Overwhelming

God’s coming is overwhelming. Herein are the effects that accompany the manifestation of God’s glory.

Habakkuk 3:5, Before Him goes pestilence, and plague comes after Him.”

This is quite an amazing description. “*Before*” the Lord’s glory is manifested on the earth, the land is scarred by “pestilence”! And then after His judgment is expressed, “plagues” abound- literally “a burning abounds” which clearly has reference to hell! From this we see that God is

NOT a decorative idol placed on a shelf which can do nothing to protect the worshipper. He is glorious and in His majesty He acts!

Once again, with the reference to “pestilence/plague” we are brought back to the Exodus and the plagues which God inflicted upon Egypt in judgment. In fact you may or may not know, but “plagues” are the promised recompense for rebellion in scripture (cf. Leviticus 26:25; Deuteronomy 28:21–22). In other words, when the Lord comes to this earth, it will be to settle accounts with all who dare to live in rebellion against Him! Nations and people beware!

With this, Habakkuk pictures the Lord as actually arriving. Notice what He does:

Habakkuk 3:6a, “He stood and surveyed the earth [with a view toward taking it back]; He looked and startled the nations.”

The idea behind “startled” is that of a grasshopper leaping in fright. In like manner, when the Lord comes in His glory, entire nations will “leap with fright” as they are forced to deal with the Most High God! In underscoring the cosmic significance of the coming of the Lord, Habakkuk depicts the effect of His arrival on the most fundamental masses of creation.

Habakkuk 3:6b, “...Yes, the perpetual mountains were shattered, the ancient hills collapsed. His ways are everlasting.”

The language here is significant! God created the mountains to be the stabilizers of the world; they are immovable! From the beginning they have stood firm, binding together the earth. They say to the ocean’s depths, “you may go this far, but no farther” (Psalms 104:9). But when the Lord returns, these massive, immovable structures will be “shattered”- the idea is “reduced to nothing.” As a kid, I used to take my dad’s hammer and shatter rocks. When I was finished, all that remained was dust. That is the idea here!

Furthermore, “the ancient hills [will] collapse!” The idea is that they will be dopedestalsed! In other words, their permanence and grandeur will be utterly and completely removed! Truly, “His ways are eternal” and so they are beyond the thought, apprehension, and comprehension of man! And yet there is more.

Habakkuk 3:7, “I saw the tents of Cushan under distress, the tent curtains of the land of Midian were trembling.”

There is much debate as to identities of “Cushan” and “Midian.” Most likely the significance of “Cushan” is that they were the first of the oppressors of Israel sent by God to chasten His people on account of their sin (Judges 3:8-11). “Midian” on the other depicts the temporal nature of all suffering. Recall the time of Gideon when the Midianites inflicted great pain upon God’s people and then were gone almost before they began (cf. Judges 7:13). Accordingly the idea behind the references is that God doesn’t miss a thing! If the Lord still remembers the first nation that oppressed His people and if He also remembers the fleeting moments of pain and

suffering which His people have endured (and most of which have been forgotten by man)- recall, God stores our tears in a bottle, (Psalms 56:8), you can be certain that any and every one of God's enemies will be addressed and dealt with on the Day of Judgment!

The message of Habakkuk is both brutal and glorious! The most insignificant sin to the greatest violation will be dealt with by a God whose glory will both smash the mountains to dust and humble the sun in its greatness! Now it is this God who has ordained the pain and suffering which we encounter as Christians! So:

- What are the nations?
- What is cancer?
- What is any and every bitter providence?

They are nothing in comparison to the Great Assembly of the gods over the heavens and the earth with a purpose and plan that transcends the **STANZA #3** "The Person" we serve. Notice "His work."

Christ's Conquest

Notice the language changes from third Person to second Person. Accordingly, the Psalm moves from talking about God to addressing God directly.

Now to frame our thinking Habakkuk began and ended this portion of the Psalm with the same reference:

Habakkuk 3:8-9a, 15, "Did the Lord rage against the rivers, or *was* Thine anger against the rivers, or *was* Thy wrath against the sea, that Thou didst ride on Thy horses, on Thy chariots of salvation? Thy bow was made bare, the rods of chastisement were sworn [that is, the spear that God would use for judgment was set apart for this very end]. [Selah]... ¹⁵Thou didst tread on the sea with Thy horses, on the surge of many waters."

It should be obvious, but once again we are back to the Exodus with which Habakkuk book-ended his description of God's Conquest. In this regard it is very interesting to note what Habakkuk emphasizes with regard to the Exodus: the parting of the rivers/sea and the horse/chariots. Why these facets of Israel's redemption?

It has to do with the gods of the Canaanites/Babylonians and Egypt. In regard to the former religion, Baal confronts Yam (the god of the sea), alternatively called Judge River (and hence the emphasis on "the rivers.") Furthermore there is clear allusion to the Egyptian army who perished atop "their horses and chariots" in the waters of which God here will triumph! And so the idea is that the God whom Israel served is greater than any and all the gods of Canaan, Babylon, or Egypt. And was NOT that a major point of the Exodus?

Exodus 12:12, "For I will go through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike down all

the first-born in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments- I am the Lord.”

Recall that each of the plagues of the Exodus was directed against one of the primary deities of Egypt. With each plague came a statement of the supremacy of God over any and all false gods!

It was this that Habakkuk wanted God’s people to remember as they faced the dissolution of their nation and the trial and difficulty of exile! It wasn’t that Israel was subject to the reign of a foreign king. No! They ever and always remained subject to the reign and rule of God! And so with the Exodus in mind, Habakkuk gave a threefold example of God’s Regency and so His work.

God’s Rule over Nature

Habakkuk 3:9b-10, “Thou didst cleave the earth with rivers. The mountains saw Thee *and* quaked; the downpour of waters swept by. The deep uttered forth its voice, it lifted high its hands.”

Habakkuk is describing the weaponry of God who is no ordinary warrior! With absolute control over creation, no one in no place can oppose Him. Notice some of the details.

Habakkuk 3:9b, “Thou didst cleave the earth with rivers.”

This suggests a sudden and awesome flood. But it is NOT an ordinary storm that is being depicted. These waters are from the deep and gush forth with such power that the earth is scarred (the idea here is the Flood)!

Habakkuk 3:10, “The mountains saw Thee *and* quaked.”

Think of geology and the destructive force of water. Now think of the Flood and its impact on the earth as in the Grand Canyon. No doubt the mountains quake when they see the Lord!

Habakkuk 3:10, “the downpour of waters swept by. The deep uttered forth its voice, it lifted high its hands.”

The metaphor has changed. We once again are gazing upon the Exodus and how the deep engulfed Pharaoh’s army. The idea from these allusions is that NO army can stand before the Lord and this watery weaponry!

Habakkuk 3:11, “Sun *and* moon stood in their places; they went away at the light of Thine arrows, at the radiance of Thy gleaming spear.”

This alludes to Joshua and God’s prolonging of the day by having the sun stand still in the heavens (Josh. 10:12)! Imagine going against a warrior with the ability to control nature as

does the Lord!! No army or people could stand against Him! Pharaoh couldn't... and neither could the Amorites! Truly the God we serve is awesome! In light of this, we are not surprised by the fact that, furthermore...

God's Rule over Nations

Habakkuk 3:12, "In indignation Thou didst march through the earth; in anger Thou didst trample the nations."

In verse 8, Habakkuk rhetorically asked, "Did the Lord rage against the rivers... *was* Thy wrath against the sea?" Here he gives the answer. The seismic disturbances of this earth along with every natural disaster are NOT because God is venting His anger against the world. It rather is in response to the wickedness of the nations!

From the fall on, mankind has attempted again and again to overthrow the yoke of the Lord's reign. But all their efforts are in vain. For when the Lord acts, it immediately becomes apparent that the earth can hardly bear His presence, trembling under the weight of His footsteps. Truly, the nations are but "a speck of dust on a scale" (Isaiah 40:15), unnoticed and inconsequential!

So to a nation and people about to be overturned, Habakkuk reminds them of God's absolute control and sovereignty over any and all world powers! Ought they to be discouraged and depressed as though somehow God had been defeated? Absolutely not!

Now with all of this in mind, Habakkuk turned to God's treatment of His people. Knowing that ill has been foreordained for any and all nations in rebellion against God, we can pretty much guess that God's righteous rule likewise would translate to hardship and great suffering when it came to His rebellious people.

God Rules over His People

Habakkuk 3:13a, "Thou didst go forth for the salvation of Thy people, for the salvation of Thine anointed..."

Talk about a shocking statement which in the context sticks out like a sore thumb! Again, a large portion of this Psalm has depicted "God's coming" as an awesome and so brutal moment for both nature and man (vv. 9-12). When the Lord comes, the earth is reduced to dust and the nations are trampled underfoot! So when it comes to God's rebellious people, we would expect nothing less than bad news!

But what a shock! In the richest possible way, "God's coming/going forth" as He leads His

people through the valley of the shadow of death will NOT result in their judgment, BUT their salvation and ultimate good! In other words, the awesome power and glorious nature of God (as presented here) will always result in the blessing, encouragement, growth, maturation... salvation of God's people no matter where in God's providence they may find themselves!

In this regard, notice the name God gives to His people, "Thine anointed." This is a Messianic title which obviously and ultimately has "Christ"- the anointed of the Lord- in mind. Accordingly, all in Christ have become "Thine anointed." Did you get that? If you are in Christ, you are "the anointed of the Lord" which means you are special to Him regardless of what your outward circumstances might indicate!

And so, as Judah was overturned and God's people brutally treated and taken into exile, they must keep in mind that in and through all things they remain special to the Lord! In fact, in the warning God gave His people when they were newly organized as a nation, listen to what the Lord said this:

Leviticus 26:44-45, "Yet in spite of this [because the nation would not prove faithful to their covenant responsibilities and so would suffer exile- yes God promised the exile from the very start], when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them, nor will I so abhor them as to destroy them, breaking My covenant with them; for I am the Lord their God. But I will remember for them the covenant with their ancestors [that is, the Abrahamic Covenant], whom I brought out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations [prior to when they had become a nation], that I might be their God. I am the Lord."

It was this rich and glorious promise of which Habakkuk here reminds God's people! Yes, you are going to suffer in this world! Truly, we have never left the wilderness! Yet don't allow the bitterness of this life to cause you to forget your special status before the Lord. You are His anointed in Christ! And because of this notice what God here promises regarding any and all oppressors:

Habakkuk 3:13b, "...Thou didst strike the head of the house of the evil to lay him open from thigh to neck. [Selah]"

Once again to "pause and wonder" at this moment is quite appropriate. Habakkuk here is speaking of the "commander/leader of evil"²- with the implication that if it is true of the leader, it will be true for any and all under his command. This "head" today looks so formidable, powerful, and awesome. It most certainly looked that way when Israel was led to exile in chains; and at times it most certainly looks that way today. Truly as the day draws near it seems as though the wicked seem to prosper more and more and God's people seem to suffer more and more. Speaking of the arrogance of wicked and evil men Habakkuk continues:

Habakkuk 3:14b, "They stormed in to scatter us; their exultation *was* like those who devour the oppressed in secret."

The language is vivid. As a wild animal lurks and then drags away his prey to be devoured in secret, so this ruthless oppressor assaults his victims. He coldly inflicts pain and suffering! That has been the experience of God's people throughout Redemptive History! Our fate seems to lie in the hands of evil and wicked people and nations! Yet appearances are deceiving! Notice God's plan for "the head of the house of evil" and so all wicked and evil men/women/nations.

Habakkuk 3:13b, "...Thou didst strike the head of the house of the evil to lay him open from thigh to neck."

The expression "to lay him open from thigh to neck" refers to a person being unclothed and so totally humiliated! This is the fate of any and all who would wield power unjustly!

Habakkuk 3:14a, "Thou didst pierce with his own spears the head of his throngs...."

In other words, the symbol of their power, that over which they boast- will be their undoing. They will be slain with their very own weaponry! Talk about a turn-around! Habakkuk's Psalm ends with the same element which turned Asaph around, "...then I perceived their end" (Psalms 73:14)! Listen to the words of O. Palmer Robertson:

Often God's people find themselves severely disturbed because they see no visible power as strong as their enemies. But the prophecy of Habakkuk encourages the faithful to assume a strange perspective. They must look at the strength of the enemy as the very source of their own protection. The stronger the enemy, the more sure its own self-destruction. For as God sovereignly raises up powers and brings them down again, he turns the strength of the enemy against itself. Haman hangs on his own gallows (Esther 7:10). Daniel's adversaries perish in the very den of lions into which they had cast him (Daniel 6:25 [Eng. 24]). He who digs a pit to entrap the righteous falls into the same ditch that he has made (Psalms 7:6 [Eng. 5]). Abimelech and Shechem, conspiring rebels in the days of the Judges, are cursed with the curse of self-destruction (Judges 9:19–20). Facing a mighty coalition of enemy nations, Judah under Jehoshaphat must stand still and see the salvation of the Lord (2 Chronicles 20:17). When God's people look across the wilderness, they see a vast array of the corpses of their enemies, for the Lord had set them against one another (2 Chronicles 20:24). Characteristic of the last great conflict will be a warfare in which each of the Lord's enemies shall eat the flesh of his own arm (Isaiah 9:19 [Eng. 20]; cf. Ezekiel 38:21; Zechariah 14:13). Rather than being terrified at the strength of their enemies, God's people ought to rest confidently in the assurance that the strength of the enemies' power only displays their capacity to destroy themselves. (Robertson, 1990, p. 240)

Family of God, so what is your favorite song? What do you find yourself humming as you do your work and go about your business? More than 2,600 years ago Habakkuk wrote a song which he intended to be sung by God's faithful as they live in this wilderness. I hope after today, this song becomes your favorite, the song you find yourself humming and singing throughout your days!

And what is the song? It proclaims the Person and Work of our Lord who reigns supremely over the nations and leads His people to glory in and through all things! And so today in this state of sin and misery, evil and wicked men seem to have the upper hand; and we, God's people, seem always to be the ones who foot the bill! *Stand for righteousness today and you will be persecuted.* Yet

- Isn't it great to know that Our God Reigns!
- That no power or foe can stand against Him?
- That where we are today is where He wants us to be?
- That we can lose nothing in this life which won't be repaid a thousand fold in glory?
- That someday our lives, which are hidden with Christ, will be revealed, and we shall forever be with the Lord!

Learn this Song my dear brothers and sisters! May it become the theme of our lives!

Bibliography

Robertson, O. P. (1990). *The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah (New International Commentary on the Old Testament)*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company.

End Notes

¹ This ultimately is Christ, cf. Acts 3:14!

² The phrase occurs rather frequently in reference to the head of a family (Exodus 6:14; Numbers 7:2; 17; 18; Joshua 22:14; 1 Chronicles 5:24; 7:7, 9). Further support for this interpretation is found in the very next verse in Habakkuk 3, which uses the same term (רֹ'שׁ) to refer to the chief or leader of the wicked.

VISIT US WHEN IN Broomfield, COLORADO

Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10th Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

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About the Preacher

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