

Study Guide

# Habbakuk



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# Habakkuk

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### Chapter 1

#### Part 1: Habakkuk 1:1-9

Other than what he recorded, we know very little about Habakkuk. We know his name and that he was a prophet of the L-rd. We can also surmise that he lived before the Babylonian captivity. Prior to the time of the fulfilment of this prophecy, the great enemy of Israel was the Assyrians. When the Assyrian rule weakened, the Babylonians (also called Chaldeans) conquered them, and rose to the position of world superpower. The Babylonian empire neither feared nor served G-d (although He used them, and their evil, for His purposes – as an instrument of punishment). They were responsible for bringing about oppression and exile to the people they conquered. G-d was not pleased with the Babylonians. He is not going to reward them for the punishment and suffering that they inflicted upon those in Judea. Ultimately, G-d is going to punish them for their disobedience, wickedness, and evil desires.

**Verse 1:** *“The burden which Habakkuk the prophet (saw).”*

*Burden* (אֲבִיָּדָה): No burden is pleasant. Habakkuk’s prophecy, like so many other prophecies G-d gave to His prophets, was not pleasing to the people. Words of judgement and of discipline are difficult to hear. Never-the-less, they are words that need to sometimes be spoken. Habakkuk was faithful to speak these difficult words to the people. This reveals to us that he was a man who was willing to speak the truth without compromise, regardless of the consequences. We can also surmise that Habakkuk had a relationship with G-d - he heard from G-d.

*Saw* (רָאָה): Received, gazed upon. This is a difficult word to translate, but its meaning is not difficult to understand. It is a word that means ‘vision’ but is written in a verbal form (a doing word). Habakkuk was allowed to gaze upon, perceive, contemplate what was going to take place. He saw it, and therefore he spoke it to the people.

**Verse 2:** *“Until when, O L-rd, shall I cry out, but You do not hear? I cry out unto You: ‘Violence!’ but You do not save.”*

**Note:** The first thing that Habakkuk did was to help the people understand why G-d had given him the vision of judgement. He wanted the people to know why G-d was displeased with them. What was the foundational reason for G-d bringing judgment upon His covenant people? i.e. Why did He bring the Babylonians (the Chaldeans) to the land of Israel?

*Until when...shall I cry out:* A plea. Habakkuk was rightly able to discern that the people were living rebelliously, unrighteously, and in conflict with the commands/instructions of G-d. He was therefore beseeching G-d for assistance. He wanted to know how long he needed to cry out before G-d responded and did something to bring about a change – perhaps Habakkuk was hoping that G-d would move in such a way that the people would repent, amend their ways and embrace the Word of G-d without the need for judgement.

We know from history, however, that this was not the case. G-d did eventually end His patient long suffering, but His response was to move in judgement against His people. *Cry out*: The word used here could be translated 'yelling' or 'shrieking'. It is a very loud cry; one that demands attention. Habakkuk wanted G-d's attention. He was desperate for G-d to bring about a positive (G-dly) change in the behaviour of the children of Judah. Habakkuk was grieved, as he knew that if there was no change the people would go into exile.

**Note:** The Judeans (those who were in the Southern kingdom of Israel – Israel, the Northern kingdom, had already been dissolved at this time) were going to experience the same fate that their Northern counterpart had experienced. They were simply going to have a different punisher - instead of the Assyrians they were going to be punished by the Babylonians.

*Violence*: [ חַמָּס (ḥā·mās)]. People who carry out this kind of violence do it on purpose, as they delight in inflicting pain and suffering on others. The first time we see this word mentioned in the Bible is at the time of the flood (Genesis 6:11). This violence was one of the reasons which caused G-d to send the flood. The use of this word here indicates to us where the people of Judah were at spiritually at the time of Habakkuk. They were not only practising disobedient things but, more than that, they were delighting in doing them. Rather than reflecting the character of G-d, the people were reflecting the character of satan.

*You do not hear...You do not save*: Up to this point there has been no response from G-d. He is patient and longsuffering, restraining Himself and thereby giving people the time and opportunity to repent – even though righteousness would demand that He respond immediately (2 Peter 3:9). However, there comes a time when G-d's relenting comes to an end (Jeremiah 15:6) and G-d says 'Enough!' Judgment on the horizon was now the vision that Habakkuk saw.

**Verse 3:** *"Why do you show me wickedness and cause me to see trouble? Destruction and violence are before me. Conflict and strife will be lifted up."*

*Show me...and cause me to see*: This vision would have been unsettling for Habakkuk. He had been made to intentionally look or gaze upon the wickedness and trouble taking place in Judah. He would not have enjoyed looking at how Israel had gone in the wrong direction. The people of G-d were out of position. They had wilfully placed themselves into an unrighteous state.

*Wickedness*: ( רַע ): The people were intentionally behaving in a wicked way. They practiced wickedness, sought it out, and desired it. They were not acting in ignorance, but were wilfully rebelling against G-d.

*Trouble*: When someone does something that is incorrect (against the proper order of things) the result/outcome/consequence is going to be trouble.

*Conflict*: A contention. The people in Judah strongly disagreed with G-d and His ways.

*Conflict and strife will be lifted up*: This means that there was going to be an escalating prevalence of this type of behaviour. People were not practicing love for one another. As each pursued their own desires, the desires of others became a hinderance and a point of contention between people (James 4:1-2).

**Verse 4:** “Therefore the law has ceased, and judgement will not go out. For wickedness crowns the righteous, therefore “justice” is bent.”

*Therefore:* Because of wickedness and wrong behaviour (strife, lack of love between people, no one understanding their responsibilities to G-d and to their fellow man) something happened.

*The law has ceased* (גִּפְּוּת - a ‘ceasefire’ in modern Hebrew). The Torah was no longer practiced. It was no longer taught and no longer revered. The people had no interest in the law of G-d.

**Note:** When we become saved (through faith in Messiah Yeshua) the Holy Spirit begins to move in our lives. We become new creations (2 Corinthians 5:17). As we submit to His leadership and guidance, He leads us into all truth (John 16:13). The Spirit of G-d will create in us a desire to obey and fulfil the commandments of G-d - not according to the oldness of the letter, but according to the newness that the Spirit brings (Romans 7:6).

*Judgement:* Prophecy is, by and large, poetic in nature. Here we see a relationship between the Torah (law) and judgement (or justice – a putting of things into order). It is through the Torah that we are given the framework, the understanding, to know what G-dly justice is and how it can be achieved. In the past, the elders would sit at the gate of the city and would render judgment (according to G-d’s terms of justice – what must be done, how the situation needed to be handled, etc) according to what they heard (Ruth 4, Proverbs 31:23). In the New Testament nothing has changed. The standard of justice remains the same and it is this standard that should be taught and adhered to. We are supposed to demonstrate the commandments in the newness and fullness of the Spirit – whole heartedly fulfilling the purposes of G-d, not simply skidding through and doing the letter of the law (the bare minimum).

*Wickedness:* (רָשָׁע): The intentional conduct of the people. Their behaviour was wilfully in conflict with the instructions of G-d. They were not ignorant, but were flagrantly rebellious and disobedient, choosing to do evil rather than good.

*Crowns* (מִכְתִּיר): Most Bibles will translate this as ‘Wickedness will surround the righteous ones’. However, this word also means ‘crowns’ which would give this sentence a somewhat different slant: ‘Wickedness has crowned the righteous ones’. The implication is that either the righteous ones have been defeated or conquered and so are unable to function correctly due to a corrupt environment (going with the first translation of the word), or the righteous ones have themselves become corrupted (crowned with wickedness). Either way, there is a moral and spiritual decay among the people.

*“Justice”:* The decisions of the leadership (the elders) and what the priests were teaching was not true justice – they altered justice to suit their own desires and to suit the desires of the people. In the books of some of the other prophets, we read that the judges, elders, priests often made their decisions based on bribes.

*Bent* (מִעֲקָל): Distorted. Perverted. Judah was thoroughly corrupt and did not have any desire to change.

**Verse 5:** *“Look among the nations, gaze intently - you shall be utterly astonished! In your days I am going to utterly work. Even if it was told, they would not believe it.”*

*Look:* This is a commandment. G-d commanded them to pay great attention to what He was going to do.

*Astonished (תִּמְרָה):* This word is repeated twice and therefore is usually translated ‘utterly amazed or astonished’. Usually we are astounded by G-d's goodness. We are amazed by His mercy and grace. Here it is talking about a completely different kind of astonishment. The people were going to be shocked by what G-d's wrath and judgement were going to bring about. They were going to have trouble believing that G-d would do what He did to His people. We need to remember that G-d does not tolerate sin. He will not continuously be patient and unresponsive to the rebellion of His people. There comes a point when G-d suddenly moves to act and He places a heavy hand on His people.

*I am going to utterly work (פִּעַל):* Again, we have the doubling of a word. This is a word for activity/work. By doubling this word, the writer is revealing to us that G-d is going to utterly and completely perform (do) something. G-d is committed to bringing this about.

G-d's original intent (Deuteronomy 30:15-20) was not to judge these people. G-d loves His covenant people, and His desire was to bless them (provide for them, defend them, help them, change them into a glorious people). However, when people are rebellious and choose sin, when they are defiant against the instructions of G-d, instead of blessing His people He has to discipline them. Instead of showing His loving kindness, He shows judgment, wrath, punishment. In this case the people were going to experience death and destruction - being taken into exile for a significant period of time (70 years – Jeremiah 25:8-11)

**Verse 6:** *“For behold I am raising up the Chaldeans; a bitter nation who, with speed, walk across the breadth of the earth, to possess dwelling places (that are) not theirs.”*

*Behold (הִנְבִּי):* This is a word that means to pay attention, to listen carefully, to watch. Something significant was going to happen. G-d was about to reveal what He was going to do – His plan.

*Chaldeans:* The Babylonians.

*Bitter:* The Babylonians were a ruthless nation who did not show mercy to their enemies. They left a bitter taste, so to speak, in the mouths of those who encountered them.

*With speed, walk:* When this happened, it was going to happen quickly. This is very similar to what Yeshua tells us in Revelation 22:12. At the end of this age, things are going to happen very quickly. When Yeshua comes, He is going to suddenly come. If we wait to be ready, wait until things “start”, we will not be able to respond quickly enough. We will not have the discernment, or the ability, to behave properly, to behave in a way that demonstrates faith. We need to be ready now. Things are going to happen quickly – already we can see this world rapidly changing.

*Walk across the breadth of the earth:* The Babylonians were going to move speedily to take over a large part of the land/earth.

*To possess:* The Babylonians moved with purpose – to take possession of. Many times, in the Torah, G-d had commanded the children of Israel to take possession of the land (e.g. Numbers 33:53.).

The word for taking possession of the land/inheriting the land (לָקַח) is the same word used here in regard to the Babylonians taking possession of this same promised land – even though it was going to be for a **limited** period of time (Jeremiah 25:11-12). The use of this word was a kind of dig at the people of Israel, and it would have been painful for them to hear it proclaimed.

**Verse 7:** *“Threatening and terrible is he; from himself is his judgment, his pride is going to go forth.”*

*Threatening:* The Babylonian empire was dreadful and terrifying to its enemies.

*Terrible (אָרָא):* This word can also mean ‘awesome’. Sometimes it can mean awesome in a good or glorious way, and sometimes it can mean abundantly awful, terrible, unbelievable. Context tells us whether it is to be used for the good meaning or for the bad. In this verse what we see is this: Babylon liked to threaten people, and to carry out their threats in an awesomely horrible manner.

*From himself is his judgment:* He did not rely on G-d for G-d’s judgement. He was not someone who practiced justice with mercy and kindness (based upon the concept of G-d’s grace). All of his judgements came from his own mind and thoughts.

*Pride (אָהַב):* This word means ‘to lift (oneself) up’. It is a word of pride and haughtiness. He does what he does because of the inflated, exalted image he has of himself. Those who are proud are easily manipulated and used by the enemy. G-d, in this instance, used the Babylonian’s pride for His own purposes.

**Verse 8:** *“Swifter than leopards are his horses. Fiercer than wolves of the night. Their cavalry charge ahead. Their cavalry comes from afar. They fly like an eagle. Hurrying to eat.”*

*Horses (פָּרוֹס):* Strong’s Concordance, through Bible Hub, incorrectly relates this word to birds. The basic meaning of this word is ‘horses’ and not ‘birds’.

*Fiercer (דָּרָא):* This word means ‘sharp’, probably referring to the teeth of the wolves - which would relate to them being fierce.

*Hurrying (עָזָז):* This word relates to hurrying/hastening something, speeding something up. The Babylonians delighted in what they were doing. The hunt was exciting for them, but so was the devouring – the destruction and death that followed them added to their delight.

**Verse 9:** *“They all come for violence. Their faces are toward the East. They gather captives like sand.”*

*Violence (עָוָרָא):* This word confirms verse 8 for us – the Babylonians enjoyed the violence that they were partaking in. Their violence was intentional. They delighted in inflicting pain on others; they loved to see others suffer.

*East:* A word that reminds us of judgement. Judgement is often depicted as coming from the East (Exodus 10:13, Jonah 4:8)

*Gather captives like sand:* Sand had little to no value to the Babylonians. They trampled on it and would have given little thought to it. G-d, on the other hand, in Genesis 22:17, promised to make the descendants of Abraham like the sand on the seashore – from G-d’s perspective they had value, from G-d’s perspective they were going to be numerous.

**Note:** It was not G-d's will, or desire, for Judah to be evil so that He could bring punishment upon them. G-d's nature, from the beginning, was to bless and love all people. However, after Judah had been thoroughly wicked (causing the Torah to cease, their strife, contention, injustice etc), nothing, except judgement, was going to change them. G-d's nature never changes (He always desires to bless and love people), but when people are rebellious and defiant toward Him, rejecting His purposes for their lives, His behaviour towards them changes. G-d acts in a way to punish – not bringing blessing into their lives but bringing curse (Deuteronomy 30:19). G-d always desires for us to choose life, but if we reject it then G-d, whose nature is forever righteous and perfect, will move to bring death and curse upon His people. He never changes. He blesses good, and He curses evil.

## Chapter 1

### **Part 2: Habakkuk 1:10 -17**

**Verse 10:** *“He (they) will scoff at kings; princes are a game to him. Every fortress he will play. He has heaped up soil to seize them.”*

*He* (הוא): The subject of this verse is the Babylonians/Chaldeans (plural). However, when the writer writes about them (and this reveals to us the uniqueness of the Biblical language), he uses the third person singular (“he” referring to ‘they’ or ‘them’). Many people acted like one person – like minded, alike in thoughts, and unified in action.

*Scoff at kings:* Babylon had become a very wealthy and powerful empire. That money had allowed them to become well-equipped and very strong militarily. For this reason, they could scoff at kings, and at all other nations, as they considered them inferior to themselves in every way.

*Princes:* Rulers or noblemen – i.e. Regional leaders within the empire who had authority, power and control within their jurisdiction.

*A game to him:* What this text is revealing to us is that the Chaldeans saw these rulers as objects of derision or scorn. They held them in low esteem, confident that they would quickly and easily defeat them.

*Fortress:* A military stronghold that had both soldiers and weapons stationed there.

*He will play:* Babylon was so powerful that all other militaries were weak and could be toyed with – played with. War was like a game to the Chaldeans -they were neither threatened by nor concerned about their enemies.

*Heaped up soil:* The purpose of this mound of soil was so that the Babylonians were able to use it to build a ramp up onto the city walls.

*Seize them:* These ramps allowed them to scale the city walls and therefore conquer the city.

**Verse 11:** *“At that time, like the wind, he will pass – guilty are they. This is his power of his god.”*

*Wind:* (רוח) This word can be translated either ‘spirit’ or ‘wind’. When it is used in reference to an individual it is referring to the state his spirit is in (i.e. What his attitude is – how he is feeling emotionally, mentally etc).

Like the wind, which can change abruptly and without warning, this word can be used to speak about a change in a person's thoughts, purpose, or objectives. This is what the writer is conveying to us regarding Babylon. Something happened to abruptly change the thought process or mindset of the Babylonians.

*He:* Referring to the Babylonians or Chaldeans

*Will pass:* This sudden change in Babylon's mindset caused him to act differently – it caused him to move to a new location, to pass through the land of the people of Judah for the purpose of attacking them.

*Guilty:* Babylon suddenly saw the people of Judah (the Jewish people of the Southern kingdom) as guilty. In his mind he began to think of them as violating what he thought was right. As a result, he moved to attack them.

*His god:* The Babylonians worshipped, but their worship was idolatrous – they did not worship the G-d of Israel. They thought, however, that their power came from their gods.

**Note:** If we worship G-d to get something out of Him (wealth, power, the fulfilment of our own desires etc) then we too are in idolatry. Idolatrous faith is not true faith. Just because we call G-d by the right name does not mean that we are behaving or thinking rightly (Matthew 7:21-23).

**Verse 12:** *“Surely You are from before, O L-rd, my G-d, my Holy One. We will not die. O L-rd, You have set him for judgment. O Rock, You have established them for correction.”*

**Note:** In this verse there is a change. Babylon's false gods (idols) are contrasted with the One True G-d – the G-d of Israel.

*You are from before:* There was never a time when G-d did not exist. He is forever - forever in the past, forever in the future. His Presence and nature are eternal. He existed long before the ancient times.

*My Holy One:* This is a pledge of allegiance. Holiness is always connected to the purposes of G-d. The writer is affirming that because he sees G-d as holy, he will submit to the purposes of G-d. This is what G-d wants from His people.

*We will not die:* When we affirm G-d as Holy and as True, and when we desire and embrace His purpose for our lives, we are given life (eternal life).

*Set him for judgment:* The message from the prophet is this: Although Jerusalem and the temple are going to be destroyed by the Babylonians it is not going to be the end of the people of Israel. The people would go into exile, and they would suffer, but after seventy years G-d was going to restore them back to the land of Israel and was going to reaffirm His covenant purposes with them.

*Rock (צור):* Most of the time when this word is parallel to G-d, we are talking about the Rock of our salvation - Messiah Yeshua.

*Correction:* Rebuke. They have been seen to be out of order and, through discipline, are going to be put back into the correct position.

**Verse 13:** *“Pure are the eyes of the L-rd from seeing evil, or to look at the workings of wickedness. Why do You look upon the treacherous ones, and why are You silent when the wicked swallow up those more righteous than he?”*

*Pure:* The fear of the L-rd, which is synonymous with His will, produces purity in our lives.



*Pure...from seeing evil:* G-d is pure and does not like His eyes to gaze upon evil. He likes to see pure, holy, and righteous things.

*Workings of wickedness:* Foolish toil, the work of evil. Activity that is against the will of G-d.

*Treacherous ones:* The Chaldeans or Babylonians.

*Why do You look upon the treacherous ones:* The writer wants to know why G-d has cast His eyes upon the Babylonians in order to use them as instruments for His purposes (Jeremiah 25:9, Jeremiah 27:6, Jeremiah 43:10). G-d did watch over the Babylonians to carry out His purposes, but they did not carry them out in obedience and in faithfulness to G-d.

Nebuchadnezzar was not G-d's servant intentionally. Nebuchadnezzar did what he wanted to do, but G-d used what Nebuchadnezzar did to fulfil His own purposes.

*Silent:* G-d did not do anything when the wicked destroyed those more righteous than themselves. Although G-d did not cause it to happen He allowed it in order to show His displeasure toward Judah, as they were not behaving according to the Word, call or purposes of G-d. G-d disciplined them.

*Swallow up:* Destroy.

**Verse 14:** *"You make man as the fish of the sea, as the creeping things without any ruler."*

*Make man as the fish of the sea:* He is primarily speaking of Judah. Judah were going to be like fish captured in a net. Fish do not think about or recognise the threat or danger of the fishnet and so they swim right into it and are trapped.

*Without any ruler:* They had no ruler, and this put them in a very dangerous position - they were going to be captured.

**Verse 15:** *"All of him are going to be lifted up with a hook, they are going to be captured into a net, they are going to be gathered into the dragnet. Therefore, he will be glad, and he will rejoice."*

*All:* The people of G-d.

*Him:* This is written in the singular, although many Bibles translate it in the plural (i.e. them).

*Hook:* This hook is something barbaric and brutal (Jeremiah 16:16, Ezekiel 38:4).

*They are going to be captured:* Judah, the people of G-d, were going to be captured by the Babylonians – like fish caught by hooks and by nets.

*He:* Although this is written in the singular, we can understand it to mean 'they' (speaking of the Babylonians).

*Be glad... rejoice:* The gladness and rejoicing of the Babylonians was going to be temporary. In the end G-d quickly put down the Babylonian empire through the Medes and Persians (Daniel 5:30-31).

**Verse 16:** *"Therefore he sacrifices to his net and will burn incense for his dragnet. For by these his portion is fat, and his food is healthy."*

*Therefore (because of this joy and gladness) ... he sacrifices to his net:* Those who do not operate in the fear of the L-rd do not exemplify wisdom and they follow after sin. They are not concerned about truth and nor are they concerned with righteousness (living according to G-d's definition of righteousness).

When we follow the way of sin, we may experience momentary joy or gladness. This gratification of the flesh, however, does not usually last for very long.

*Sacrifices...burn incense:* He (Babylon) is worshiping, giving praise, and burning incense to his false, pagan idols.

*His portion is fat:* They live in abundant richness; they have plenty. However, they are going to find out that this is going to be temporary.

**Verse 17:** *“Shall he, therefore, empty out his nets, and continuously kill the nations without pity?”*

*Shall he...?:* Based upon the grammar of this verse we can gather that the answer to this question is: No, they will not.

*Empty out his nets, and continuously kill:* Babylon will not always have this spoil (great “catch”), this seemingly great reward. A change is going to come to them. This abundance is going to be stopped by the Medes and the Persians - even before the people of Israel are restored to their land. Those who function in defiance to the will of G-d are not going to endure abundance for a long period of time.

## Chapter 2

### **Part 1: Habakkuk 2:1-8**

Habakkuk knew that G-d was displeased with His people. He also knew that judgement was coming upon them. Habakkuk was, however, not at peace with this. He was not confused by what G-d had said, but he was confused as to why G-d had said it. He was hoping (as was so frequently the case with the prophets) that this travesty (hardship and suffering) would not fall on his people. He also knew, however, that G-d is righteous, and His ways are right and proper. As this chapter opens, we see Habakkuk standing before G-d wanting clarification – wanting to better understand the vision that he had received. He knows that G-d raised up the Babylonians to act as an instrument of punishment [not because they were a righteous people (in fact, they were very unrighteous)]. This was confusing to Habakkuk – why would G-d pick an unrighteous people to punish a disobedient people? From our perspective we would assume that righteous people would be chosen to punish the unrighteous.

**Verse 1:** *“Upon my watch place I will stand; I have taken a stand upon the fortress. I will look to see what He will speak to me, and what I will return concerning my argument.”*

*Watch:* This is a word for ‘guarding’.

*Watch place:* Most commentators see this as a place where the prophet would go to pray - a place where he would communicate with G-d. Habakkuk was wanting, and waiting for, a response from G-d.

*Taken a stand:* Positioned himself. This word speaks of stability. He was expectant that G-d would make clear to him what he had seen.

*Fortress (מִצְדָּה):* Usually this refers to a ramp that was erected to overcome the city walls when a city was put under siege. Most of the Rabbinical commentators say that this Babylonian siege had not taken place yet so no ramp would have been in place. For this reason, the commentators say that this word should be understood as a fortress - referring perhaps to the mighty and glorious walls that were around Jerusalem.

*Look:* We could also translate this: “I will expect”. It is a word of expectation and anticipation.

*See what He will speak to me:* Habakkuk wants a response from G-d. He was expecting G-d to speak to him and give him clarification concerning the vision of severe judgment that he had seen upon his people.

*Argument (תוֹכַחְתִּי):* Many translate this word as ‘reproach’. It is a word of contention, and could simply be referring to Habakkuk’s argument or contention with G-d. He was not happy about what G-d had said was coming, about what he had seen and heard. He was wanting to know if this catastrophe could somehow be avoided. His desire was for the wonderful, forgiving nature of G-d to be extended, once more, so that the vision would not become a reality.

**Verse 2:** *“And the L-rd answered me and He said: ‘Write the vision and make it clear upon the tablets: on account that he that will run can read it.’”*

*The L-rd answered:* Habakkuk got a response. G-d answered him, but it was not the answer that Habakkuk wanted to hear.

*Write the vision:* G-d did not respond to and answer Habakkuk's contention or argument. He did not explain Himself to Habakkuk. G-d made it very clear to Habakkuk that what he had seen in his vision was going to happen.

*Make it clear:* In other words - make it easy to read. Clarify it.

*Tablets (הַלְחֹת):* This is the same word used for the tablets that the law was written on. Some scholars have suggested that this could be hinting to the fact that the people were going to receive this punishment because they had not followed the laws written on the tablets of the law.

Most scholars see this word as having to do with something that had a greater permanence than something written on a scroll or parchment. G-d wanted Habakkuk to write on tablets, as what was going to happen had long-term consequences. G-d wanted the seventy-year Babylonian captivity and exile to be something that the people would remember – in the same way that they were called to remember the Torah (the law). This exile left a large scar upon the people – not only physically but also emotionally. Babylon carries a great deal of significance in its meaning. Students of prophecy know that Babylon is held up as a picture regarding the judgement that is going to take place in the last days.

*He that will run:* This is referring to him that was going to read this prophecy even as he was running. When a person is running (moving up and down) it is harder to focus. That is part of the reason why Habakkuk's vision needed to be presented in a clear or enunciated fashion.

**Verse 3:** *“For this vision is yet for an appointed time; it will be breathed to the end and will not be false. If it should be delayed wait for it, for it will surely come. It will not be late.”*

*This vision is yet:* This vision was designated for a future, appointed time. G-d had set aside, marked out, a day on which this was going to take place. It was going to become a reality.

*Appointed time (מוֹעֵד):* These appointed times refer to the festivals of the L-rd. The L-rd entrusted these festivals to Israel, so that they would share them with the world.

*Breathed (נִפְּחָה):* This is a word of great significance and is not frequently used in the Scripture. It is the same word used in Genesis 2:7. When G-d formed man He breathed life into him. Most translators translate this word as ‘to speak’. When we speak we breathe.

*Breathed to the end:* It has a designated outcome. G-d breathing on it (His Word) will make it a reality.

*Will not be false:* It will never be thought of as something that is untrue or a lie. G-d only speaks reality. Over and over He confirmed to Habakkuk that it was going to happen.

*Come (בָּא):* This word is repeated twice so can be translated ‘utterly come’ or ‘surely come’.

*It will not be late:* This punishment was going to come at exactly the right time - the time designated by G-d.

**Verse 4:** *“Behold the prideful one! His soul is not upright within him. A righteous one with his faith he will live.”*

*Prideful:* The Babylonians were not a nation moved by righteousness. Their foundation was one of self-exaltation. They focussed on themselves rather than on the only True G-d.

*His soul is not upright:* The outcome of pride is moral and spiritual decay. The Babylonians had a spiritual problem. Everything about them was wicked. They were idolaters, took advantage of people and their kingdom was based on injustice without pity/mercy.

*Upright: Straight*

*A righteous one:* In Scripture, G-d frequently contrasts good and evil, light and darkness, right and wrong. Here we see a contrast between those who are righteous and those who are full of pride. When we are proud, we place ourselves in a position whereby we cannot demonstrate righteousness. Righteousness is brought about through humility, submission and obedience.

*Faith:* The word 'faith' in Hebrew (אֱמוּנָה) has the same root as the word 'truth' (אֱמֶת). Faith is **always** rooted in truth. A righteous person applies truth to his life and behaves according to what he considers and knows to be true – ie The Word of G-d.

**Verse 5:** *"For wine betrays, and a prideful man will not be fitting. He broadens his soul as Sheol; for he, as death, is never satisfied. He will gather unto him all the nations, and all the peoples will be gathered unto him."*

*Wine:* Instead of being influenced by truth this unrighteous one is influenced by wine. To a large degree, wine was used in pagan worship. Alcoholics usually drink in order to escape inner turmoil. They do not have inner peace.

*Betrays:* Does that which is treacherous. The Word and purposes of G-d are betrayed.

*Fitting (נִיחָה):* A word search of this word reveals that it is a word that refers to something beautiful (like an oasis). What this verse is simply revealing to us is that pride does not make someone beautiful. Nothing good comes from pride. It produces an ugliness in our behaviour and attitude. Pride brings about destruction.

*Sheol:* An abyss or pit (Isaiah 38:18). A place of punishment. Satan rejoices when hell is broadened (Matthew 7:13).

*Death is never satisfied:* Spiritual death has a permanence to it – it literally never ends. Once a person dies no more changes can take place. Those who have not accepted the gospel, who have rejected the covenant that G-d put in place, are going to be in a state of eternal death.

*Gather...all the nations:* This is what Babylon wanted to do. Their goal was to have control over every nation. Those who have a spirit of pride or self-exaltation are never satisfied. They always want more, and when they do not get it they become frustrated. If they do get what they want, they are never content with it for long. Before long they start desiring the next thing. This is what happened with Babylon. Not satisfied with few nations under their authority they sought to add more and more.

*Peoples:* All the ethnic groups.

**Verse 6:** *"Surely all of them will lift up this proverb, a taunting riddle, unto him. They will say: 'Woe to the one who acquires much that is not his - until when? Being weighed down with clay.'"*

*Lift up: Say*

*Taunting: Mocking*

*They will say:* They say this because of Babylon's objectives - the way that he thinks and behaves.

*Woe to the one who acquires much that is not his:* Babylon was taking things that did not rightfully belong to them.

Based upon a pride in their power and resources, Babylon attacked Judah. They wanted to take control of it. It was not, however, theirs to take, and for that reason this proverb or parable is lifted up against them.

**Note:** When we take things that G-d never intended for us to take, it lines us up, like a bullseye, for the judgement of G-d. That is why it is so important to be submissive to G-d.

*Until when:* How long will it take them to realise that what they are acquiring is not satisfying them? How long until they realize that what they are doing is not related to the purposes of G-d? These people are deceived and in bondage. For this reason, they go on doing the same thing over and over again. They never find peace, joy, or contentment.

*Weighed down:* Heavy

*Clay*(טִיט): Thick mud with heavy material in it. It was used as a plaster for buildings. Wrong behaviour can bring a heaviness upon us. It can weigh us down (stress, anxiety, pressure).

**Verse 7:** *“Surely, suddenly, the one who bites you will rise up. And you will wake up in a shocking way. You will be plundered by them.”*

*Suddenly:* Some see this as a prophetic message concerning the sudden demise of Babylon. It did not continue in its power for as long as people thought it would. Babylon became so wealthy and powerful in such a short space of time (compared to other empires) that others thought Babylon was there to stay for a long time. Because of their wickedness, however, that was not the case (Daniel 5).

*The one who bites you* (נִשְׁכָּיִךְ): Some say this is a word that has to do with creditors. They interpret this as G-d having kind of bankrolled the Babylonians - allowing them to become very wealthy and powerful. G-d did not force them, encourage them or call them to use their wealth and power in a prideful way. That was part of their nature. What their pride produced G-d used for His own purposes. A time was coming when those who had lent to the Babylonians were going to suddenly call for a payback day.

*They will wake up:* They were going to be dealt with. Their wealth and power was going to wear out (Matthew 7:2).

*Shocking:* Terrifying.

*You will be plundered:* Those who had plundered were themselves going to be plundered.

**Verse 8:** *“For you who plundered many nations: all the rest of the peoples will plunder you, because of the bloodshed of man, and violence of the land and of the city and all the ones that dwell in it.”*

*Plundered many nations:* Their goal was to increase their wealth. They would look to see which nation had what they desired and to see if they could defeat them. They would then make a move to plunder that nation.

*The rest of the peoples:* Those who had not been conquered by the Babylonians.

*Will plunder you:* This is a prophecy that was going to be visited back on Babylon because of what they had done. A specific judgement day had been reserved for Babylon.

*Violence* (חַמַּדָּה): Violence for the sake (and love) of violence. For some people violence is like an addiction. They enjoy inflicting pain and suffering on others. It brings them pleasure to cause misery to others.

**Note:** In the last days the world is going to be characterized by this lawless Babylonian spirit. People will not want to love or bless their neighbours. Instead, they will look for ways to take from them, ways to harm them.

## Chapter 2

### **Part 2: Habakkuk 2:9-20**

G-d is a G-d who accepts repentance. When we repent, He repositions us back in His will so that we can serve Him and be the instruments that He has called and enabled us to be. Are we interested in G-d's will, and are we committed to the things that are pleasing to Him?

**Verse 9:** *“Woe to him who secures profit, through evil, into his house; who puts his nest up high to be rescued from the inside of the hand.”*

*Woe:* This is a term of future punishment. G-d was going to bring destruction on the Babylonians because of their sinfulness. G-d is never a part of that which is sinful. He does not cause sin, and nor does He encourage it. A person chooses, of their own free will, to sin. G-d, however, can and will use all things (even sin) and turn them into something that can be an instrument of His glory. The sinfulness of the Babylonians was going to be used as an instrument to manifest the righteousness of G-d, and to bring about a glorious change in His people.

*Secures profit, through evil:* Most commentators see this as ill-gotten gains. They profited, but in an unrighteous and unjust way. They profited by utilising evil schemes - believing that, in the end, this was going to be a good thing for their household.

*Nest:* His habitation

*The inside of the hand:* This could be an idiom for power.

**Note:** The Babylonians used evil, but they tried to escape from the consequences of evil. They did not want the evil to be visited on themselves – i.e. they did not want the consequences of the evil they applied to others to be applied to themselves. They deceived themselves into thinking that their ill-gotten profits would protect them and their families from the experience/consequences of evil in this world.

**Verse 10:** *“For you have counselled shame for your house, cutting off many people, and sinned against your soul.”*

*Counselled shame:* They did evil, but they believed (and counselled) that evil would not find them out. In the end, their counsel brought shame into their homes.

*Cutting off many people:* They believed that by doing this they would become strong and secure in their wealth (in their physical or earthly possessions).

*Sinned against your soul:* Babylon had a sin tendency that was spiritual in nature. They damaged themselves to their very core.

**Verse 11:** *“For a stone from the wall will cry out, and a rafter from wood will answer it.”*

*For a stone from the wall will cry out:* Judgment will visit them – even in their high and lofty habitations that they had presumed would be untouchable.

This is poetic language, describing how even their habitations would cry out because of G-d's judgement and destruction.

*A rafter from wood will answer it:* There is (even) unity between these building materials. At that time, the walls of the houses were built from stone, and roofs were made of wood. Using poetic language, the writer is revealing to us that even the wood and stone cried out a warning to the people. These inanimate objects realized that the sinfulness of the people was going to be ultimately judged by G-d. The Babylonians were not smarter than the stone and the wood of their homes. Those who lived in these houses paid no attention to what their future truly held.

**Verse 12:** *“Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed and establishes a town by injustice.”*

*Builds a city with bloodshed:* This was the foundation of the Babylonian mindset. They built up their cities, their empire, by shedding the blood of others. They incorrectly thought that this activity was going to ultimately make them strong and secure. This was not the case.

*Builds...with bloodshed and establishes...by injustice:* The Babylonians were doing two things that G-d hates. G-d is a G-d of justice and righteousness. The Babylonians were not concerned with either. They were doing those things which were against the will of G-d.

**Verse 13:** *“Surely it is not, behold, from the L-rd of Hosts that people labour in the abundance of a fire, nor keep wearying the nations in the abundance of emptiness?”*

**Note:** This verse is a question. The grammar here always implies a negative answer.

*Surely not...from the L-rd:* The (two) things mentioned in this verse are not from G-d.

*L-rd of Hosts:* L-rd of the Armies.

*Labour:* They work to the point of exhaustion.

*Keep wearying the nations:* Working them to the point of exhaustion. G-d never wanted His people to engage in activities or behaviour that would take them into a state of exhaustion. Many people are workaholics. This behaviour places them in bondage and leads to their physical and spiritual harm.

*Abundance of a fire... abundance of emptiness:* The Babylonians were in bondage to sin and therefore began to labour abundantly – “burnt the candle at both ends” so to speak. In the end this profited them nothing and, in fact, was to their detriment.

**Verse 14:** *“For all the earth is going to be full of the knowledge of the glory of the L-rd, as the waters cover the sea.”*

**Note:** This verse is a verse of contrast. The other verses have dealt with the Babylonians. In this verse we see that G-d shows a contrast between the Babylonians and their idols and Himself – the only true G-d, the G-d of Israel.

*All the earth is going to be...:* This is G-d's promise!

*Earth:* World (all of the land that makes up this planet)

*As the waters cover the sea:* For the sea to be a sea there must be water. For G-d's creation to become what G-d has created it to be, the knowledge of the L-rd must cover every aspect of it (Isaiah 6:3). When Yeshua returns, this world is going to be transformed into the Kingdom of G-d.



The only way that this Kingdom can become a reality is through judgement - when that final antichrist/evil empire is judged (of which Babylon was a picture – See also Revelation 18).

**Verse 15:** *“Woe to the one who gives drink to his neighbour, attaching him to your wine skin, even to make him drunk, so that you can gaze upon his nakedness.”*

**Note:** This verse goes back to speaking about the Babylonian spirit. What is being revealed here is very similar to the antichrist spirit – both empires think and act in the same way.

*Woe:* ‘How awful it is going to be...’

*Gives drink to his neighbour:* The implication is: to get him drunk.

*Make him drunk:* They did not give drink to others to quench thirst, but with the goal to get them addicted to alcohol so that they could be easily exploited and defeated.

*Nakedness:* Used as an idiom for shamefulness. Shame exposes a person’s failure. This is opposite to the spirit which seeks to edify, build up or bless others (1 Thessalonians 5:11).

**Verse 16:** *“You will be made full of shame rather than glory. You, too, will drink and be exposed as uncircumcised. The cup of the right hand of the L-rd shall return unto you, and shame will be upon that which was intended for your glory.”*

*You will be made full of shame:* This is the outcome of those who have the type of behaviour or mentality mentioned in verse 15 – the outcome for those who want to tear others down rather than build them up.

*You, too, will drink:* Babylon was also going to be led astray.

*Exposed as uncircumcised:* ‘Uncircumcised’ is also an idiom for shame. Another aspect of it is that their behaviour manifested that they had no faith in, or covenant with, G-d.

*The cup of the right hand of the L-rd shall return unto you:* The measure that they used against others was going to be used against them.

*Shame will be upon that which was intended for your glory:* G-d wants to bless. He wants to move in order to bring glory (ie lift up people). The Babylonian’s behaviour, however, caused G-d to move to allow them to receive shame and to be exposed in a most displeasing manner.

**Verse 17:** *“The violence done to Lebanon shall cover you, and the plundering of the animals, is going to bring terror, because of the shedding of man’s blood and the violence in the earth, and upon the city and all the dwellers therein.”*

*Lebanon:* Context determines how ‘Lebanon’ should be understood. It can be understood as the nation of Lebanon, but it can also be understood as ‘white’ (לָבָן) – synonymous with purity. Sometimes when the Bible speaks about the mountains of Lebanon it is really speaking about the mountains of Jerusalem (ie a reference to the Temple Mount where the temple stood – ‘the white mountain’).

Context tells us that the mention of Lebanon here is a reference to the Temple Mount and the first temple on it. This verse is referring to how the Babylonians were going to violently destroy the first temple.

*Cover you:* G-d is going to punish them greatly because of what they did to Jerusalem.

*Animals:* These were the animals that were supposed to be sacrificed to G-d. The Babylonians took them and butchered them for their own purposes and for their own gods.

*Bring terror:* G-d was going to render retribution because of what they had done.

*The city:* A reference to the city of Jerusalem.

**Verse 18:** *“What is the profit of a statue, for its maker carves it? Or a molten image which teaches falsehood? The one who creates it trusts in mute idols.”*

*Statue (לְפָסֵל):* The Babylonians behaved the way they did because they were influenced by idolatry rather than by spiritual truth.

*Its maker carves it:* There is nothing spiritual about an idol. It is the work of man and not the work of G-d. What is its profit? It has no value.

*Molten image (מִטְּבֵלָה)...teaches falsehood:* The goal of idolatry (rooted in satan) is to teach that which is false (see John 8:44).

*The one who creates it trusts in (it):* They do not trust in G-d but in the work of their own hands (what they are able to accomplish).

*Mute idols:* Idols cannot speak or bring about any revelation. They are empty and have no purpose whatsoever from a Kingdom perspective.

**Verse 19:** *“Woe to the one who says to wood: ‘Wake up!’ or ‘Rise up and speak!’ to the stone that is silent. Behold, he is the one that overlays it with gold and silver – there is no spirit within them.”*

*The one:* The creator or maker of the idol.

*Wake up!’ or ‘Rise up!’:* This one is trying to command wood and stone. They are not alive and cannot respond to commands. We see a contrast here: wood and stone cannot serve G-d, but humans can - if we respond to G-d's revelation.

*Speak:* Wood and stone cannot speak. They cannot receive revelation and nor can they give revelation.

*He is the one that overlays it:* This man works to make these idols look splendid.

*No spirit:* There is no life in these idols/images.

**Verse 20:** *“But the L-rd is in His Holy Sanctuary, silent before Him is all the earth.”*

*But:* In contrast to idolatry (idols that are inanimate objects with no life in them) we find that the L-rd G-d is very much alive.

*Holy Sanctuary:* The Holy of Holies – the place of divine habitation. This place was found in the temple in Jerusalem.

*Silent before Him:* We need to be quiet, focusing upon what G-d is revealing to us (His will, instructions, and commandments). The Babylonians were greatly involved in idolatry. They were not interested in true revelation. They wanted to pursue their own desires and create their own reality. This is not true spirituality. True spirituality is when we submit to that which G-d has created for us. He has a will for our lives. We do not try to get G-d to do our will – that is idolatrous. When we are still before G-d, listening to Him and submitting to Him, He will reveal His will to us. When we submit to G-d's word we find ourselves becoming a recipient of His revelation.

Are we individuals who truly want to hear from G-d so that we can submit to Him?

## Chapter 3

### **Part 1: Habakkuk 3:1-7**

Up to this point in the prophecy Habakkuk has heard the Word of G-d – G-d is not pleased with His people and, as a result, they are going to go into exile. Habakkuk has accepted it and now begins to pray, in light of it, that in the midst of this exile G-d would not ultimately and totally cast off His people. Although they were going to be disciplined severely, having to endure great pain and suffering, G-d did not end His covenantal relationship with them. He remained faithful to the Word that He gave the patriarchs (Genesis 12:1-3, Isaiah 54:10). G-d desired that, in the midst of exile, the people would experience spiritual restoration and renewal in their lives so that they would be ready to return to the land of Judah, restore the nation of Israel and carry out the purposes of G-d.

**Verse 1:** *“A prayer of Habakkuk, the prophet, on Shigionoth.”*

*Prayer:* When Habakkuk understood the prophetic truth that G-d had revealed to him it led him to pray. As we study the prophetic Scriptures, and as we listen and sense correctly what G-d is communicating to us through the prophets, it is going to bring us to our knees. We will be men and women of prayer. Prophecy is humbling. It reveals to us how G-d sees us. Not only do we need to humble ourselves, but we also need to repent. There is an inherent connection between prophecy and repentance. Through repentance a G-dly and glorious change can happen. Habakkuk prays for this glorious change to take place within his people. *Shigionoth* (שִׁיגִיּוֹת): This unique phrase, written here in the plural, appears only a couple of times in the Scripture (see also Psalm 7 where it is written in the singular - שִׁיגִיּוֹת). Some Rabbinical commentators say that it might be an instrument, or it might be a very bold way of expressing the presence of G-d in one's life. The commentator Rashi suggested that this word, unable to be translated, was derived from error – something that was not according to the will of G-d. The use of this word by Habakkuk could suggest that Habakkuk was acknowledging the error of the people (i.e. their sinfulness – they had gone along a path that was against the purposes of G-d). Habakkuk did not deny that the people had sinned. He acknowledged their sin. Acknowledging our sins and confessing them is the beginning of restoration and renewal in our lives (1 John 1:9). The people of Judah suffered as a result of their disobedience.

**Verse 2:** *“O L-rd, I have heard your report and I have feared; O L-rd, Your action, in the midst of years, revive it! In the midst of years make it known. In shaking remember mercy.”*

*I have heard* (שָׁמַעְתִּי): This is a word that demands a response. Habakkuk is going to respond in a proper way. When G-d speaks to us (through His Word, through prayer etc) and He convicts us of something we need to give it priority and respond appropriately.

*I have feared:* It was scary for Habakkuk to think about the destruction of Jerusalem, the destruction of the temple and for the suffering that his people were going to have to endure. Nevertheless, we see that in the midst of this bad news Habakkuk did not ignore it. He did not say that he did not accept it, and therefore he would declare and believe the opposite. If people demand, believe and declare things that are contrary to the Word of G-d they cannot make those things happen. Only G-d can declare things and make them happen.

*Action:* G-d's activity or work. Habakkuk is acknowledging that G-d is moving – moving to bring judgment upon His people. The people need discipline. They needed to realise that there were things in their lives that were not pleasing to G-d and that those things needed to be dealt with. The problem is that, often, we only begin to listen to G-d when we are suffering, when we are in a position in our lives that we are not pleased with. We need to be wise and learn to daily go before G-d so that we can pray as David did: "See if there is any wicked way in me and lead me in the way everlasting!" (Psalm 139:24)

*Action in the midst of years:* Habakkuk is acknowledging exile (The children of Judah were going to be in exile, in Babylon, for 70 years)

*Revive...make it known:* Habakkuk was asking G-d to not stop working in the lives of His people during the exile. He did not want them to be set on a shelf, so to speak, and left alone. Habakkuk wanted G-d to be active in their existence. The prophet prayed that during exile G-dly change would take place. He wanted G-d to make it into a learning, growing and maturing time spiritually for the people. He wanted the people to experience G-d's revelation so that they could know G-d's mind, truth, will and purposes.

*Shaking (בָּרָדָה):* This word refers to G-d's anger or wrath.

*Remember mercy:* We need to be those who sincerely seek G-d's mercy. Biblically, those who went before G-d seeking mercy were never rejected or turned away. When we seek mercy, for the sake of repenting and turning to the will and purposes of G-d, G-d is usually very quick to extend it. G-d enjoys showing mercy. He enjoys forgiving and being gracious toward us. Likewise, when someone seeks forgiveness, we need to sincerely forgive them. Even if they do not seek forgiveness, it is still good for us to forgive them - not to hold on to that malice, feelings of anger, contempt and hurt.

**Verse 3:** "G-d from Teman will come, the Holy One from Mount Paran. Selah. His glory covers the heavens, and His praise will fill the earth."

*Teman:* Teman has two meanings in Hebrew. It is the Hebrew name for Yemen – a country south of Israel. It is also a word that can simply mean 'south'. This verse speaks of G-d coming from the South (see also Deuteronomy 33:2 – when G-d and the heavenly hosts approached the people at Mt Sinai they came from the South, also called 'the right hand' - תְּיַמִּינֵנו).

*Mount Paran:* Found in the south of Israel. It is often associated with Mount Sinai (the place where the law was given). It is the place where G-d showed Himself to be generous, loving, faithful, merciful etc. It is the place where He did many of the mighty miracles during those 40 years in the wilderness when the children of Israel were south of the promised land (ie Canaan).

*Selah:* We pause to notice something – there is a connection between seeking mercy and the revelation of G-d. When we seek mercy (verse 2) we get revelation (G-d reveals Himself – this verse).

*His glory:* There is also a connection between the law and the glory of G-d. (Teman -south- and Mount Paran are both hermeneutical clues that remind us of the law). We, who are IN Messiah, are not under the judgement of the law (ie. we do not experience the consequence of breaking it - death) but that does not make the law irrelevant for us (Matthew 5:17-19- whoever does the law and teaches the law are going to be great in the Kingdom of G-d). The Holy Spirit has been given to us who believe.

He leads us into all truth, into righteousness and not into unrighteousness (John 16:7- 15). He will help us to fulfil, and not cause us to violate, the spirit of the law.

*Glory:* That which is spectacular, marvellous, wonderful.

*The heavens:* The heavens are above the earth. This verse is saying that G-d's glory, although it also fills the earth, is so much higher than the earth.

**Verse 4:** *"His brightness was like an exceedingly bright light, the rays of His hand belong to Him, and there His power was hidden."*

*Exceedingly bright light:* The manifestation of the will of G-d, the purposes of G-d, the law of G-d, the revelation of G-d, the knowledge of G-d etc. are all like a glorious and bright light that is going to cover up the heavens and fill this earth.

*Hand:* A hand speaks of power and authority. This power and authority belong to G-d.

*His power was hidden:* The power of G-d is not always in that which is visible. G-d's power, His authority and work oftentimes take place in those things that are hidden from the sight of men and women, but G-d, nevertheless, brings it about.

**Verse 5:** *"Before Him will go forth pestilence, and fire will go forth at His feet."*

**Note:** The Kingdom of G-d will not come until the remnant of Israel is restored to G-d and the land is brought once more under the authority of the Jewish people (who will obviously also be under G-d's authority at that time). According to the prophetic Scriptures, Israel is going to have a position of leadership in the millennial kingdom.

*Before Him will go forth pestilence:* The time for judging the enemies of G-d (a.k.a. the enemies of Israel – those who inflicted pain and suffering on the Jewish people) will come. Babylon etc did not discipline Judah out of obedience to G-d. They did not do it because they desired to play a role in the purpose or plan of G-d. They did it out of their own sinfulness.

*Pestilence:* These can be seen through what the book of Revelation reveals will take place before Yeshua returns.

*Fire:* Heat. We could understand it as a plague. Here we have parallelism between the word pestilence and the word fire. This verse is simply saying that G-d is bringing judgement (damage) to His creation as a way of bringing it back into order. As G-d goes out, flames of fire on His feet (this plague) also go forth and bring about destruction.

**Verse 6:** *"He stood and measured the earth; He sees the nations leap. The ancient mountains will be scattered, and the eternal hills are going to bow. For eternal are His ways."*

*Stood:* Biblically, this concept of 'standing' is related to victory. G-d stands in order to bring victory.

*Measured:* Measuring is for the purpose of setting something in order. Usually, a person building a house measures to make sure that everything being built is in its proper order.

*Leap:* This can be leaping in a sense of joy, or it can be leaping in a sense of fear - both are possible. There are going to be those in the nations who are going to be thrilled with the changes that G-d is going to bring about, but there are going to be even more from the nations that are against the things of G-d – they are going to be moving in fear and in dismay.

*Scattered* (אֶצְרֹף): This word can also mean ‘exploded’ or ‘blow up’. G-d is going to scatter these mountains that, from a human perspective, we thought would always be there and would never be moved. G-d, based in His absolute power, is going to bring a spectacular change to this earth as we now know it (see also Zechariah 14:4). The imagery used here is imagery associated with the last days.

*Bow*: They are going to acknowledge G-d. Creation is going to be humbled, brought down before Him.

*Eternal*: All of time, all of space, the entire universe or cosmos (past, present and future) belong to G-d.

*Ways*: G-d is going to act or behave in a way that brings about His Kingdom.

**Verse 7:** “*Under wickedness I have seen the tents of Cushan; and will shake the tents of the land of Midian.*”

*Under* (תַּחַת): This word speaks of something being predominant, the main characteristic of (e.g. ‘under the sun’...Ecclesiastes 1:3,9,14 etc)

*Wickedness* (רָעָה): This was the predominant behaviour of the Cushites and those in the land of Midian. Although they were mighty and strong, they were under the influence of wickedness.

*Cushan* (Cush): Cush, Biblically, is Ethiopia of today (Numbers 12:1). The Cushites lived in the land of Midian (Zipporah, a Cushite, came from Midian – Exodus 2:15-21). This may be speaking about Africa in a general sense.

*Shake*: They are probably responding to the wrath of G-d that is approaching them by shaking and trembling out of fear.

*Midian*: This could be referring to another people group or it could be a synonym for the Cushite people.

**Note:** Because Cush and Midian are under the influence of wickedness G-d is going to bring about a change. They are going to shake because of the changes G-d is going to bring about.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Part 2: Habakkuk 3:8-19**

This entire third chapter is a prayer prayed by the prophet. In this second half of the prayer, we are going to see that G-d will use difficult circumstances to set things in order. G-d judges for the purpose of getting rid of that which is unredeemable, rebellious, full of pride and because of an unwillingness to humble ourselves. A remnant will humble themselves and will turn to G-d by seeking mercy, confessing their sin and affirming a new desire - to be submissive to the purposes of G-d.

Water is also spoken of frequently in this second half. When we think of water, within the context of judgment and prophecy, the flood comes to mind. During the days of Noah, the flood brought about great destruction - killing all humanity except eight people. The purpose of the flood was purification - to have a new beginning, a renewal of humanity. There was a re-establishment of G-d’s original purposes with the flood.

**Verse 8:** *“Was the L-rd angry with the river? Was His fierce anger against the rivers? Was His wrath against the sea? For You rode upon Your horses, Your chariots of salvation.”*

*Angry with the rivers:* The L-rd’s judgement did not fall because He was angry with water. He used water for a saving purpose – to bring about a change. Through water, G-d saved creation and restored it back to His purposes. This restoration is known as salvation.

*Angry...fierce anger...wrath:* These are all words that refer to G-d’s judgment.

**Note:** This verse is important because it tells us what G-d's ultimate objective is: to bring about salvation, victory. There is an inherent relationship between salvation and righteousness. When we are unrighteous we do not experience victory - things are not brought to a glorious conclusion.

**Verse 9:** *“Her nakedness, Your bow to awaken to our eyes. Sworn arrows spoken. Selah. You will split the earth with rivers.”*

*Her:* Referring to the earth.

*Nakedness (עֲרִיָה):* There are two ways to understand nakedness in the Bible:

1. It can be used to inform us that something is being revealed, a discovery or a disclosing
2. For the purpose of shame.

In this verse the earth’s shame or wickedness is being revealed. This wickedness is going to cause G-d’s bow (His judgement) to – in poetic language – come to life. G-d is going to rise up in order to move against the shameful things in the world.

*Your bow to awaken to our eyes:* This is a description, in poetic language, to warn us to get ready because G-d's judgment is coming. We need to praise G-d for His judgement. It is a righteous judgement and sets things in order so that His Kingdom can be established.

*Sworn:* We can think of this as a promise. G-d has sworn that His large arrows are going to come. The outpouring of His wrath is going to happen.

*Arrows (מִקְוֹת):* This is not literally the word for arrow but, because of context (speaking of a bow in the previous phrase), ‘arrows’ is the implication of this word. The word used here is a word for a pole or a beam – something significantly larger and more destructive than an arrow.

*Selah:* A word of emphasis and affirmation.

*Split the earth with rivers:* Rivers (like in the great flood) are used prophetically to speak about G-d’s judgement. The earth is going to change. G-d's wrath is coming because of the shame on earth (sin, iniquity and injustice).

**Verse 10:** *“Mountains will see You and tremble. The flowing of the water will pass, and the abyss will give its voice. And He will lift up His hands upon high.”*

*Mountains:* Biblically, mountains have to do with governments or seats of authority. We could understand this as nations in their totality – the governments of the world.

*Tremble:* Shake – due to pain and suffering. A painful judgment is going to come upon the nations.

*He (G-d) will lift up His hands:* G-d is going to raise up His hand in pronouncing this judgment. We could think of it as G-d taking an oath.

**Verse 11:** *“Sun and moon stood in their habitation. The light of Your arrows they shall go, an exceedingly bright light like lightening is Your spear.”*

*Sun and moon:* One of the purposes of light is revelation. Something is being revealed.

*Stood:* This is written in the singular. This brings a single mindedness into the text. Although revealed by many prophets, there is only one revelation about what G-d is going to do.

*In their habitation:* In their place.

*Light:* There is an emphasis on revelation.

*Arrows they shall go:* Again, a revealing of G-d's judgment.

*Exceedingly bright light (הַגִּיז):* G-d is going to reveal His judgment and He is going to do it in a very clear manner – there is not going to be any confusion. It is going to be obvious to all.

*Lightening is Your spear:* G-d's spear is going to be like lightening in its brilliance, but also in its speed. It is going to move quickly and will be unpredictable.

**Verse 12:** *“With wrath You will march upon the earth, with anger You will trample nations.”*

*Trample nations:* G-d's wrath will not only impact here and there. The entire creation, all of the nations, are going to experience His judgement.

**Verse 13:** *“You shall go forth for the salvation of Your people, for salvation with Your Messiah. You struck the head from the house of wickedness, by laying bare from the foundation unto the neck. Selah.”*

*Salvation (יְשׁוּעָה):* The same word that the name Yeshua (Jesus) is derived from.

*The salvation of Your people:* Without G-d's wrath the victory or salvation of G-d's people would not come.

*Messiah:* Anointed One. Christ.

*Struck:* To strike and destroy in a very harsh manner.

*Struck the head from the house of wickedness:* G-d is going to deal a death blow to the head of the house of wickedness (see Genesis 3:15). He is going to completely punish the wicked.

*Bare (עָרָה):* The same word for nakedness (shame) that we saw in 3:9, except now written in the plural. Something is being very powerfully and significantly revealed.

*Selah:* A word of emphasis and affirmation.

**Verse 14:** *“With Your arrows You will pierce the head of his villages. They will storm and they will cast me out. Their rejoicing is like the eating of a poor one in secret.”*

*Pierce the head:* An image of destruction.

*Head:* The leader

*Villages:* Unwalled cities. These places of wickedness are vulnerable and will not be able to defend themselves. They will not be able to survive the death blow of G-d's judgment. They will not have any ability to endure, because wickedness brings about weakness and instability.

*Cast me out:* G-d allowed Israel to go into exile – to be cast out. However, there was a purpose for this exile. It was not for their ultimate destruction but to bring about repentance and renewal. The people went back to Israel after the Babylonian exile for the purpose of Messiah – for His first coming.



In the last days Israel is going to suffer greatly. This suffering is going to prepare them for Messiah's second coming.

*Their rejoicing:* This is the response of the nations to the exile of Judah (Judah being outside of G-d's will). When the people of Israel are not where G-d wants them to be, when they are not in the land, the purposes of G-d will be delayed.

*Poor:* When the destitute get food and are afraid that someone is going to take it from them, they flee with it and hide in a secret place. Once they are in that secret place, they take great pleasure in devouring their food. They know that they are in a position where they can safely enjoy their food, and no one can take it from them.

This verse likens the rejoicing of the wicked nations (rejoicing because Israel was cast into exile) to that poor person enjoying his food in secret. They had great (in retrospect: short lived) joy because they did not want G-d's will to be fulfilled. Exile (from their perspective) appeared to be accomplishing just that.

**Verse 15:** *"You will tread in the sea with Your horses, through the heap of many waters."*

*You:* The prophet is speaking about G-d.

*You will tread:* G-d, in light of the nation's joy over the suffering of the Jewish people in exile, is going to move to act.

*Your horses:* Referring to the power and might of the L-rd.

*Heap of many waters:* This is reminiscent of the crossing of the Red Sea (Exodus 14:21-29). At the Red Sea, G-d heaped up the waters. When Pharaoh's army tried to pass through, the waters came upon them and destroyed them. This is what this verse is alluding to – G-d is going to destroy the enemies of Israel.

**Verse 16:** *"I heard this and my stomach shook; and my lips, at the sound of His voice, quivered. Rottenness came into my bones; my midsection shook. I will rest for the day of trouble, when shall go forth, to the people, his battalion."*

*I heard:* This was very personal for Habakkuk ("close to home").

*Stomach:* When we feel anxious or stressed (or if we hear bad news) it can often make us feel sick to our stomachs. Habakkuk felt sick to his stomach concerning the Babylonian captivity.

*The sound of His voice:* G-d's proclamation of the coming exile.

*Rottenness came into my bones:* All these images reveal to us how distressed Habakkuk was over what G-d had promised.

*Midsection:* His very foundation or core. He felt shaken to the very core of his being.

*I will rest:* Habakkuk reached a conclusion. He was now aware that difficult times were on the horizon. He knew that the wise thing to do was to position himself for that day of trouble. Rest does not always mean taking a nap or lying down. It can mean to position oneself by submitting to the will and purposes of G-d. When we do that, we have peace and are at rest.

*Shall go forth, to the people, his battalion:* The people of Judah are going to be invaded by the enemy. G-d is behind this. He is using this invasion, this day of trouble, to bring change to His people.

**Verse 17:** *“For the fig tree does not blossom. There is no yield on the vines. The work of the olive (tree) has failed, and the fields do not produce food. The flock will not be in its fold, and there are no cattle in the stalls –”*

**Note:** The prophet is speaking about Israel’s spiritual condition. This is the reason why they had to go into exile.

*Fig tree:* A reference to Israel. In the book of Hosea G-d likens Israel to a fig tree (Hosea 9:10). Messiah also did this in Matthew 24:32.

*No yield:* No produce.

*Failed:* The olive tree is not doing what an olive tree should do - it is not producing oil. Punishment is coming because of a lack of measurable outcomes or results (Matthew 3:8).

*Fields do not produce food:* Israel is not doing what she is supposed to be doing – she is empty of fruit (good works).

*The flock:* Symbolically speaking of the people of Israel - the sheep of G-d's pasture (Psalm 100:3).

*Not be in its fold:* They were not going to remain in the land of Israel. They were going to be scattered. Many of the people were captured and exiled to Babylon.

*Fold:* A place of safety.

*No cattle in the stalls:* In the evening the cattle usually go back into the stalls – these are places of safety and provision. This was not going to be the case with Israel. They were going to be outside of the land of Israel – in exile.

**Note:** Habakkuk realised that the people of Israel, because of their sin and lack of repentance, were going to go through a very difficult time. This Babylonian exile – a limited period of time, but with very intense suffering – foreshadows what is going to happen in the last days. In the last days, Israel is going to go through an intense time of suffering just before the second coming of Messiah and the establishment of His Kingdom. This is a time of trouble called “Jacob’s trouble” (Jeremiah 30:7).

**Verse 18:** *“I will in the L-rd rejoice, I will exalt in the G-d of my salvation.”*

*I will in the L-rd rejoice:* Habakkuk chooses to rejoice in the L-rd despite these judgments. He knew hard times were coming, but he also knew that the way to stay strong was through rejoicing (Nehemiah 8:10).

*I will exalt in the G-d of my salvation:* Why? Because G-d is doing these things! It is only through the righteous judgements of the L-rd that salvation, victory, and that last day redemption will be experienced. G-d’s judgement has a wonderful outcome. Many people are brought to faith through it.

**Verse 19:** *“G-d, the L-rd, my wealth. He will set my feet as the deer, and upon the high places He will lead me. To the Chief Musician. In my melodies.”*

*Wealth:* (תְּהִלָּה) This is a play on words. This word can mean suffering - like a woman suffering in labour. It is also, however, a word that can speak of an army, or as wealth. What Habakkuk is saying here is that there is going to be great suffering – pain like a woman in labour (see Jeremiah 30:6-7). BUT...at the end of labour there is an incredible reward – G-d our “wealth”.

*High places:* Habakkuk had a Kingdom hope.

*To the Chief Musician. In my melodies:* When we think of prayers in the Bible, the book of Psalms come to mind. Many Psalms have inscriptions at the beginning of the Psalm. These are words of instruction (what melody to sing it to, how to chant it etc) or words of revelation (the circumstances that caused the author to write the Psalm etc) concerning the Psalm about to be read. Here we have an inscription not at the beginning, but at the end of Habakkuk's prayer.

*Chief Musician:* The leader of the choir. He was the one who led the chanting and the singing.

*Melodies* (בְּגִינוֹתַי): Tune. Music. We all need to sing the same melody or tune. We all need to understand that G-d's judgment will bring about a wonderful outcome (Revelation 19:1-7) Habakkuk knew the dire situation that the people were about to encounter. He also knew, though, that G-d would never abandon His people. He knew that G-d's righteous judgement was the only way to bring about a righteous change in the people – a way to prepare them to be used by Him for His Kingdom purposes.

Prophecy provides us with wisdom and knowledge, which we need to hold on to as we go through times of persecution and suffering. As we go through hardships may we suffer for the sake of righteousness (1 Peter 3:14) and not out of a need for discipline (Hebrews 12:5-11). Count it all joy when you suffer for the sake of righteousness (James 1:2-4).