

## Habakkuk Chapters 2b-3 – John Karmelich

1. Why does God allow horrid people to get away with stuff? Why does He allow horrid people to harm those who trust in Him? If God revealed to us our future, and it was full of horrible things, would we still praise Him in spite of that suffering? Would we still worship God and honor Him as God if He told us our future would be that bad? Habakkuk is the prophet who gets told he's going to see that type of future, and still honors God as God in spite of all of that. The lesson of this book is essentially, no matter what the future holds, we're to honor God as God. Why? As I like to remind all of us, if this life is all there is, it's a very unfair place to live. Therefore I'm calling this lesson, "Learning to appreciate God even during the worst of times!"
  - a) Habakkuk is a short three chapter book that essentially says, "Here's how My people are living, here's the punishment for it, here's what'll happen to the nonbelievers who allowed them to suffer in the place, and why we should praise God in spite of all that suffering. If you get that, you get this three-chapter book. So why is there so much suffering?"
  - b) For starters, it's a reminder of the ultimate fate of those who do and don't trust in God and what'll become of them. It's a not-so subtle reminder that this life is not all there is and we should use our lives to make a difference for Jesus as that's what'll matter for eternity. For example, much of Chapter 2 essentially says to those who harm His chosen people, here's what you're doing wrong and here's how you'll suffer for acting like that. Chapter 3 is a reminder that even though living for God can be painful and we'll suffer a lot of rejection for it, it's worth the effort as eternity is immeasurably longer than this life!
  - c) Let's be honest, if there is no next life, this book and believing the bible is a waste of time. Paul himself said that if Jesus didn't rise from the dead, we're wasting our lives and we're to be pitied more than all men. (1st Corinthians 15:19, paraphrased). So how do we know the bible is the word of God? That's why 30% of the bible is predictions so we can realize it is history written in advance. That's the reason archeology evidence supporting what is written. That's why I'm convinced every aspect of Jesus life is predicted somewhere in the Old Testament centuries before Jesus came on the scene to prove what is THE truth!
2. OK John, you're preaching to a bunch of devout Christians. Why don't you tell us something we don't already know. I accept that challenge and I'll keep my focus on Habakkuk. The stories here are repeated through history and will continue to be repeated until Jesus returns to "Set up shop" as I like to call it. Let me put it this way: There are mistakes to be avoided by studying the faults of those condemned to hell for eternity. There are lessons to apply to our lives if we're interesting in not only going to heaven, but living as God wants us to live. Habakkuk is divided into three separate sections: 1) The problem of sin 2) The solution for those who won't let God be in charge of their lives, and those who do and 3) gratitude to God for revealing this information to us.
  - a) In other words, if you can't think of a reason to praise God, Habakkuk gives us some.
  - b) If you're not sure how God wants us to live, Habakkuk gives us examples.
  - c) If you doubt the eternal fate of nonbelievers, Habakkuk reminds us of that reality.
  - d) For a fairly short three chapter book, Habakkuk "packs a punch" on just how God expects us to live and understand the world from His perspective.
  - e) Realize that the destruction coming to Israel soon after Habakkuk wrote this, would mean the death of Habakkuk or if he's spared, the death of everyone he knew. For Habakkuk to praise God at the end of this book after realizing all that destruction is facts written before it occurred is an ability to see human history from God's perspective.
  - f) It'd be like us telling God, despite all the tough and horrid things I have to witness in this world, I'm going to praise You because the world is still moving according to Your plan. I will praise You because You are God, You are in control and the eternal rewards awaiting us are far greater than whatever we have to deal with in this lifetime.
  - g) That's Habakkuk in a nutshell. The rest is details. Speaking of which, let's look at them.

3. Since we're starting in the middle of a chapter, let me back up to discuss where we left off in the early part of Chapter 2. Chapter 1 is essentially a complaint by Habakkuk's to God. Chapter 2 is mostly God's answer about what's going to happen to everyone which includes all of those who hurt His people. Chapter 3 is Habakkuk expressing his gratitude to God for executing this plan, despite the fact Habakkuk himself will be killed by it. Anyway, that is a summary of this lesson as well as the second half of this book in a short paragraph.
  - a) Bottom line, we're in the middle of Chapter 2, and God's describing the fall of that empire who's going to destroy what's left of Israel at that point in history.
  - b) In the last lesson, we left off on Verse 5. Verse 4 of that chapter was God starting a lecture on what'll cause the fall of Babylon. God "interrupts" Himself in the second half of Verse 5 to give us the famous "The just shall live by faith" phrase to remind us that despite all the damage that's going to happen around here, here is how we Christians shall live. It is the reminder to us that no matter what's going on in our lives, God desires that we do live by faith that He's in charge, He's got a plan for our lives and we're to glorify Him in all we do because we trust in His plan for our lives and for the world.
  - c) Believe it or not, that little speech leads us perfectly to Verse 6. Here God's saying, "Since you now know how I want you as believers to live, let me get back to what will happen to all those people who don't trust in Me." The underlying point of this section is, "Hey since you're so concerned about the fate of non-believers, I'll use the Babylonians as an example of the fate of those who refuse to trust Me with their lives."
  - d) On that not to happy note, I can focus on the rest of this book, beginning in Verse 6.
4. Habakkuk Chapter 2, Verse 6: "Will not all of them taunt him with ridicule and scorn, saying, "Woe to him who piles up stolen goods and makes himself wealthy by extortion! How long must this go on?"
  - a) As I said, Verse 6 is the "middle of a rant" by God saying what'll become of those who will not turn their lives over to Him. The Babylonians are the literal reference here, but they're being used as a metaphor of people who reject God. Keep in mind the reason people are sent to hell is for rejecting God's free gift of salvation, or before Jesus, simply ignoring the fact that a creator of the world exists and He demands we live as He desires. Since we do not know what people are thinking, all we can do is look at the evidence of their lives as a pile of evidence of how people have rejected God. It's like saying, "I don't know what you do think of the God who created everything, but the evidence of your life shows us it's not a significant issue for you."
  - b) OK then if those of us reading this are saved, why tell us all of this? So people won't have any excuses when they are judged. It's to teach us what to share with the nonbeliever, that if you continue to live like this, here are the eternal consequences of the choices you made in life. The rest are the details. Speaking of which, we're describing them since Verse 5 of the last chapter. Therefore, with that background said, time to discuss Verse 6 itself.
  - c) Verse 6 effectively says that those who become rich by extorting people will be scorned in the end. The verse ends with the question, "how long will this go on?"
    - i) Stop and consider people who've gotten rich not by hard work of selling a product people want, but by "strong arming" people to give them money. What is being asked here is in effect, "How long will people like that get away with doing that?" The answer we all know is, "At the most, for one lifetime".
    - ii) Speaking of being punished for hurting the innocent, let's look at Verse 7.
5. Verse 7: Will not your debtors suddenly arise? Will they not wake up and make you tremble? Then you will become their victim.
  - a) To explain this, I need to talk a little about the Babylonian Empire, or any empire for that matter. In order to conquer and control a large area, one has to sign up a lot of people and not just those from one's "hometown". In that sense, a lot of wages have to be paid to lots of people. Traditionally soldiers were paid by keeping part of what they captured.

- b) It's sort of like the mobsters requirement to "kick some of the proceeds upstairs". This is a pyramid scandal to get rich by stealing from others. The truth is the Babylonians were as guilty of this as any other mobsters in history.
  - c) The problem of course is that if the "big boys upstairs" got too greedy, the ones who do all the dirty work will say, "where's our wages"? That is the essential point of Verse 7. What this verse is saying is the people who got rich in the capital city of Babylonian owe a debt to all the front line "soldiers" who stole all that stuff. The greed of the bosses to have more stuff will cause the downfall of that empire.
  - d) If you've ever studied the book of Daniel, he describes the Babylonian Empire's fall as he gives us a few clues about what actually happened. They got conquered by an army that consisted of the Medes and Persians. To make it simple, think about the fact the Iranians and the Iraqi's have been fighting for centuries. Babylon is in Iraq. The Persians are what we call the Iranians today. Anyway the Persians were famous for conquering Babylon and no battle was fought. Some Persian soldiers broke in under a city gate, killed the leaders and that was that. History records that most of the people living in Babylon didn't realize they were "under new management" for days or even weeks.
    - i) The reason I'm getting into all this history, is Verse 7 talks about Babylon's fall as it failed to pay the people that helped them get rich. That just means a lot of soldiers who helped make Babylon rich now turned on them because they saw the greed of those in charge.
    - ii) The problem with greed is there is never enough. If all one cares about is growing wealthy, what one learns is there is never enough. I suspect that's the underlying point here as the "street level" people who made Babylon rich were looking at the life of the "top dogs", which made the poor. That led to the fall of the bosses.
    - iii) While I explained all of that, realize God's still making His point in Verse 8.
6. Verse 8: Because you have plundered many nations, the peoples who are left will plunder you. For you have shed man's blood; you have destroyed lands and cities and everyone in them.
- a) Let me put it this way: The people who survived all of the attacks and destruction caused by the growth of the Babylonian Empire were happy to see them fall. Babylon got rich by destroying cities, killing people and keeping their stuff. Like the Assyrians, they'd capture the survivors, separate them and relocate them all over their empire.
  - b) The short version is "Payback's a bitch" to steal a commonly used movie line.
  - c) OK John, we know about the world's greed and that no one gets away with stuff forever. Why does Habakkuk go into all these details here about such greed? One reason was that he was writing to the Jewish people of his day that "Those who conquer you will get their own day of judgment and it'll be much worse for them then it will be for you". That's also a key message for us. Let me explain:
    - i) As we know, none of us as Christians are perfect. We're simply perfectly forgiven as we trust in Jesus as full payment for our sins. Failure to live our lives as a good witness for God means we'll suffer in this lifetime, but that's it. It probably means for eternity, we get less rewards than others who have trusted in His plans for our lives and used our lives accordingly. I've always believed in heavenly rewards. It is not based on say, "How many people we've saved", but whether or not we used our lives to make a difference for Him. It's about using the talents God's given us in some way to make a difference for Him.
    - ii) OK, again John we know all of that. You beat that point over our heads a lot. The point to realize is the only suffering we'll ever receive is in this lifetime. For those who choose to reject God, that punishment is eternal. So why do people suffer for eternity for say living one bad lifetime? How is that fair? How we live is evidence of what we care about. Eternal punishment is about willfully choosing to reject God. How we live now is simply the evidence of that choice.

- d) All of that talk leads us back to Habakkuk. God's telling his people, "Take comfort, yes I (God) know you're suffering now. I'm well aware that the people hurting you don't care about Me. They'll get theirs and it's far greater suffering than everyone who does trust in Me will have to endure as My witnesses to the world."
- i) Think of Habakkuk as one big reminder that "it's all worth it". The bible gives us enough of human history written in advance to remind us that it's worth sticking it out for God as opposing to living like "Babylonians" who only care about their own lives and "what's in it for me".
7. Verse 9: "Woe to him who builds his realm by unjust gain to set his nest on high, to escape the clutches of ruin! <sup>10</sup> You have plotted the ruin of many peoples, shaming your own house and forfeiting your life.
- a) I admit I have this bad habit of interrupting God when He's on a role! I'm explaining how all of this affects our lives and God's still chewing out those people who harm His people!
- b) Consider this question: If God specifically raised up the Babylonians (or used them) to punish His people for disobedience, how can He turn around and "blame them" for doing what He wanted them to do? Part of the answer is to show the world that the God of the Israelites is the God of the world. Part of the answer is to show the world that despite all of that destruction God's still going to work through those who trust in Him. Part of the answer is to show that "crime doesn't pay".
- c) It's the "crime doesn't pay" that's the focus of Verses 9-10. At that time in history, Babylon thought they were an unconquerable city. The city was huge. A river running through it. While it wasn't as large as the nearby city of Nineveh that was destroyed as part of the rise of the Babylonian Empire, it was still considered an unconquerable city given it's high and thick walls. The way it was conquered was the river that run through it got diverted up stream. That allowed some soldiers to enter under the city gate and kill the leaders. In Daniel 6, one gets the impression God revealed all of this to Daniel. At that time, Daniel was a retired top official in the Babylonian Empire. When the final king was drunk and needed someone to interpret a sign from God, Daniel did that, which described Babylon's destruction. I always picture the attacking soldiers running into Daniel in a hallway. Daniel probably said, "The king? He's inside the last door on the left, can't miss him!"
- d) Believe it or not, that leads us right back to these verses. Habakkuk wrote all of this before the Babylonians ever destroyed Israel. Daniel wrote close to 100 years later. Anyway, we are reading here that "crime doesn't pay". Habakkuk is warning the Israelites yes they are going to suffer because they've collectively and individually ignored God for a long time, but the fate of the Babylonians is much worse. That empire was the ruin of many nations and they will "pay the piper" for what they did.
- e) Let's put it this way: When we see people get away with stuff, we can realize God exists and there's a price to be paid for what they appear to be getting away with in this lifetime. Habakkuk is here to remind us that crime doesn't pay, and a god exists who judges fairly based on how we've used the time God's given us to live right now.
- f) Before I jump back in the text, what if I'm wrong? What if this life is all there is? Shouldn't we get "all we should get" like the Babylonians if this is all there is? For starters, one will have far more joy in this life living as God desires than just living for stuff. Next, a reason why 30% of the bible is predictions about the future (most of which have come true) is for our assurance that this life is not all there is and living the Christian life is "worth it".
- g) Meanwhile, Verse 11.
8. Verse 11: The stones of the wall will cry out, and the beams of the woodwork will echo it.
- a) Speaking of reassurance that God's well aware of much people suffer due to those who're stealing to get rich, I present Verse 11. To state the obvious, wood and stone don't literally cry. It's a metaphor to show that God's well aware of those who steal in order to get rich. It is a metaphor to say that crime doesn't pay as God's well aware of all things.

- b) So why use wood beams and walls as a metaphor? It's what the people use for protection through most of human history. It's as if God is saying, "I know what you did to get rich. I know how you got the slave labor to build your fortified cities. I know who has suffered in order to make you rich. Again, "It's payback time!"
9. Verse 12: "Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed and establishes a town by crime!
- a) Speaking of "crime doesn't pay", Verse 12 echoes that point. Yes, the Babylonians got rich by stealing from others as opposed to trade or offering a good and service people want. It is a big reminder here that such crime doesn't pay forever. This story has been repeated all through history. I keep thinking about the t-shirt I saw in Israel that listed all the empires that have come and gone while Israel still stands. It's a subtle reminder that people do not get away with stuff forever. There is a God and He is to be feared. That's the lesson here.
10. Verse 13: Has not the LORD Almighty determined that the people's labor is only fuel for the fire, that the nations exhaust themselves for nothing?
- a) There was a horrid view among some Jewish scholars for many years, that the reason God created Gentiles (Non-Jews) was to fuel the fires of hell. They use this verse as a support. This is the danger of thinking "God's so impressed with how we're living that He owes us for eternity based on how we're living and those who ignore Him will suffer". They're half right. They're right that those who ignore God will suffer forever. They're wrong thinking we have to earn God's love based on how we live. It leads us back to "The just shall live by faith" statement. We are to do good works out of gratitude to God, not to earn His favor.
- b) There's a famous line in Christian theology that "God picks who God picks and there's not a thing we can do to change that". The way I always view it is, if God knows all things, He knows who will be with Him in heaven and who won't. We don't get that knowledge so He calls us to be a witness to all people. The reason God doesn't share that knowledge with us, is so we can be a good witness to all people and not just those we think are saved.
- c) That bit of theology leads me back to Verse 13. People's labor as "Fuel for the fire" refers to both people who want to prove their worth to God as well as labor only to live for their own desires and ignore Him. Remember Habakkuk's underlying reason for giving us this speech in the first place. It's not just to remind us that "crime doesn't pay" and remind us to have faith in God, but also that those who hurt us, will suffer far more than how we do suffer in this lifetime.
- d) This leads to another big question: Why does He allow all that suffering in the first place? If God knows all things, why doesn't He stop it before it starts? Part of the answer is free will. He allows suffering to show us our need for Him to rule over this world. He allows it to show us our need for Him in the first place. If there is no next life, as Paul stated, this world is a very unfair place to live and we're wasting our time preaching Jesus. That's in effect, the reference to 1st Corinthians 15:19 that I used in my introduction.
- e) Speaking of God "righting the wrongs of this world", I present Verse 14.
11. Verse 14: For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.
- a) We get an interruption with the "what's the fate of Babylon" (A literal illustration to tell us of people who only live for their self-interest will eternally suffer for it). It's God's way to remind us that He will literally rule over the world one day. The illustration is "just as it's obvious that the seas are full of water, so it'll be that sure the world will one day be filled with the knowledge of His existence."
- b) There's two aspects to proof of God's existence. Think of how the knowledge of the God of the Jewish people has spread mainly by Christians over the entire world. In that sense, part of the mission has already been accomplished. Still the whole world is not submitting to Him yet, which calls for another future day when Jesus as the Promised Messiah will be literally ruling over the world one day. That's an unfulfilled promise made in both the Old and New Testaments. However, we're back to "crime won't pay part" forever here.

12. Verse 15: "Woe to him who gives drink to his neighbors, pouring it from the wineskin till they are drunk, so that he can gaze on their naked bodies.
- a) Verse 15 is a condemnation about getting someone drunk to take advantage of them. Yes, it can refer to a sexual advance, or it can also refer to robbery or murder. No matter what is the specific's underlying point is God will judge people for their actions. Until we face God, we must deal with injustice on this earth.
  - b) In this case, can't we blame the drunkard for accepting the liquor in the first place? Yes we can place some of the blame that way, but the person offering the drink had the intention of hurting them and that makes it the greater sin.
  - c) This reminds me about a principal most Christians don't think about: Does God consider all sins to be equally bad? As I stated in the last lesson, I can't see murder being equally as bad as a parking ticket. To repeat the key point, all sins make us fall short of God's glory. At the same time it's not logical to consider murder to be equal to a parking ticket to state my favorite illustration on this again. Does that mean different levels of hell exist based on what people did? Don't know and truthfully, I don't want to get close enough to look. I just figure I'm 100% forgiven based on what Jesus did and let God worry about that. All I know for sure is there is a God, and He has standards for us to live by.
    - i) Think about it this way: In the Old Testament law, not every sin was the same. In some cases the penalty was to repay who one hurt. Murder called for killing who's guilty. Since God doesn't expect us to treat all crimes the same, I can't see a fair God treating punishment all the same.
  - d) OK, I went off on a strange tangent there, but I wanted everyone to understand that there is eternal punishment based on committing sins and Verse 15 implies lots of them. To see how this particular sin is punished, let's look at Verse 16.
13. Verse 16: You will be filled with shame instead of glory. Now it is your turn! Drink and be exposed! The cup from the LORD's right hand is coming around to you, and disgrace will cover your glory.
- a) The short version here is the "punishment will fit the crime". In focus here was the great Babylonian Empire. They got rich by stealing to make their empire grow. Remember that Habakkuk was written before this empire conquered Israel. Here Habakkuk is predicting their fall will reflect how they took advantage of others.
  - b) I can't resist coming back to Daniel Chapter 6. Remember Daniel was roughly 100 years in the future. The fall of the Babylonian Empire came on a night where the emperor had a big drinking party. Their leaders were killed that same night an invading army got under the city gate by stopping the river upstream (emptying the moat). The leaders of Babylon were drunk that night, which made it a lot easier to wipe them out.
  - c) A point here is that often the best way to realize how God's working in our world is to see it in hindsight. It's now historically famous how Babylon both rose and fell. In both cases it happened exactly as Habakkuk predicted it would. That's one reason why Habakkuk is accepted as part of God's word.
  - d) That leads me back to the question of God's judgment. It's more than individual judgment after we die. He also judges nations, empires, groups and say, even churches. Those of us who've been around Christianity for awhile have seen the rise and fall of churches and it's often due to the loyalty a group has to doing His will. Anyway, the "taking advantage of people drunk" thing is used here as an example of group judgment in these two verses.
14. Verse 17: The violence you have done to Lebanon will overwhelm you, and your destruction of animals will terrify you. For you have shed man's blood; you have destroyed lands and cities and everyone in them.
- a) Verse 17 gives a specific charge against the Babylon Empire and a general one as well. Lebanon is not singled out as being better or worse than other lands. This is God saying, "You know what they've done to your neighbor (Lebanon) and they'll suffer for it "

- b) The specifics of the charges have to do with the fact Lebanon was traditionally known as a place full of trees (a forest). What the Babylonians did was "rob the forest bare" as to use the wood for weapons as well as warmth. Any animal found there was killed for food.
  - c) This verse is not saying God's a "tree hugger". It's saying this invading army took what is not theirs and used it to harm even more people. Habakkuk is using a local example as so the Israelites can relate to the specifics of the charge.
  - d) To repeat a key underlying theme of this book, God's not anti-financial success by making a product or service that people want. God's condemnation is against theft and murder in order to grow rich. While Babylon is the specific example, the principal can apply to any moment in time in history. Remember why Habakkuk is doing all of this in the first place to remind us, "Hey God, we may be bad, but those people who hurt us are worse. What is going to happen to them?" That's why Chapter 2 is here in the first place.
    - i) That also leads back to the question of "Is it fair of God to use a pagan nation to be His instrument of judgment against His people?" First, it's God's world and He is free to do what He wants since He created it in the first place. Second, it is a subtle reminder to us that God holds believers to a higher standard. It's the essential idea that if we believe Jesus is God, the important question is what are we doing about it? Failure to be a witness for Him is "deadly" to put it simply.
    - ii) OK then, three more verses to go on this topic.
15. Verse 18: "Of what value is an idol, since a man has carved it? Or an image that teaches lies? For he who makes it trusts in his own creation; he makes idols that cannot speak. <sup>19</sup> Woe to him who says to wood, 'Come to life!' Or to lifeless stone, 'Wake up!' Can it give guidance? It is covered with gold and silver; there is no breath in it.
- a) In these two verses, we get a condemnation of idols. The main reasons why God allowed the Israelites to go into captivity, is collectively they turned to idols. There's an old saying among bible scholars that it took the Assyrian and the Babylonian captivities to rid Israel of idolatry practice once and for all. While both empires were full of idols, the message to the Israelites was, "Hey you want to worship manmade idols, you'll get more than you'll ever be able to handle in order to get that "waste of time" sin out of your system!"
  - b) Time for my "60 second idol speech". People did not believe idols were gods as much as it represented what they worshipped. If they believed in a god that brought good fortune, creating an idol was a physical way to worship what they believed in. It was how most of the world "manifested" their faith in their gods. Think of all the statues made throughout the world to honor one's gods and one gets a flavor of idols. Good luck charms can are of that category too, if people trust in them for good fortune or to prevent bad luck.
  - c) Meanwhile, the final verse of this chapter is here as a contradiction.
16. Verse 20: But the LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him."
- a) I have to admit, I've always struggled with the idea of God being in just one place. I figure if God is God, He is everywhere and knows all things. My point is how can God just be in "His Holy Temple"? It may refer to the temple that existed in Jerusalem when Habakkuk wrote this or the true temple in heaven. Either way, the point of this verse is not that God is only existing one place, it's the idea that if we want to seek Him, we must first realize that He exists, He is in charge and He "manifests" Himself in a time and place He chooses and not based on whatever statues or idols we construct. Habakkuk's saying, "He's above whatever we create trying to please Him." Habakkuk's saying He does what He wants as well as when He wants. We can't please Him based on how we live. That's why we must be silent before Him." It's another not so subtle reminder of the "just shall live by faith".
    - i) Let me expand that a little: If we can't please Him based on how we live, does that mean we're wasting our time doing good works? Of course not. The issue is what is our motivation: If we're trying to earn His love, we're wasting His time and our time. If we do it out of gratitude, then we're living as He desires we live!

17. Chapter 3, Verse 1: A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet. On shigionoth.
- Speaking of gratitude, I present Verse 1 of Chapter 3.
  - The good news is we're all done condemning Babylon and all it represents. Chapter 3 is a prayer to God thanking Him for revealing His plans to Habakkuk. Realize there is a lot learn from this prayer, which is one reason why it's in the bible in its complete form.
  - Verse 1 of this prayer and the final verse both have a "musical reference". Scholars are not positive what "shigionoth" means, but it appears to be some sort of musical reference as if he's saying, "Sing this song in "this" key". Many scholars believe Habakkuk was some sort of priest in Israel who worked in the "singing ministry". It's obviously speculation, and they base it on the fact that that his prayer here starts and ends with a notation that a "priestly musician" would be aware of.
  - OK, enough of that, onto the prayer itself.
18. Verse 2: LORD, I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds, O LORD. Renew them in our day, in our time make them known; in wrath remember mercy.
- Consider that most of this three chapter book so far, is God explaining to Habakkuk all of the destruction that's going to happen to Israel and all that's going to happen to the nation that ordered that destruction. Consider that Habakkuk realized, "God said it, it is going to happen and I (Habakkuk) must deal with it." Stop and consider what if God told you of horrid damage that's going to happen all around you. You accept it as the Gospel truth. Do you then complain or say "God, get me out of here before it starts?" Suppose we know as Habakkuk does that this is necessary because there's nothing else God can do in order to turn His people back to Him. Do you say, "OK God, let's get the show on the road? Do you beg for mercy, or beg to be spared of those hard times?"
  - There's an old joke that the only time we beg for God's mercy is for ourselves. We can see others suffering for their sins and we think, "OK God, hit them hard, they deserve it!" Do we ask for mercy on a society when we know they are guilty? Notice the last word of this verse is Habakkuk asking for mercy during (key word) God's wrath.
  - Stop and consider what prayer is: A request for us to ask God to do something. I've come to realize God won't do for us what we can do for ourselves. However, if something is His will, He can do for us what we can't do for ourselves if we ask. The reason God wants us to ask is to "get us involved in His plans for the world". It's for us to care about others and desire to see others turn to Him. To ask God for mercy here is about asking Him to make it possible for others to realize "God's pulling the strings" so people realize they need to change the way their living in order to please Him. Since we can't stop God from doing what He wants, we can ask Him for mercy so people will realize the errors of their ways.
  - Anyway, this prayer opens with a realization of who God is, what is His power and what He is capable of doing to both His people who've turned from Him as well as to people who are doing harm to His people. In the midst of all this planned destruction, Habakkuk asks God to have mercy as hopefully some will change based on these plans.
  - OK, if you think Verse 2 is tough to digest, wait until we get a look at Verse 3.
19. Verse 3: God came from Teman, the Holy One from Mount Paran. *Selah* His glory covered the heavens and his praise filled the earth.
- One of the things we're going to see in this prayer is historical examples of God working in some large scale way. This is Habakkuk saying, "I believe the bible today is literal and since it's God's Word, here are examples (given over the next several verses) of when He worked on a grand scale to make His presence known in the world.
  - Before I get into the specific examples mentioned in Verse 3, ask why recite all this stuff? It isn't that God doesn't know this stuff. It's to remind ourselves of what God's capable of doing and the fact He's willing to work on a grand scale both in terms of tragedies as well as great moments. For example, if God is God, He's well aware of every detail of World War 1&2. I'm just saying God's "grand scale" events didn't end millenniums ago.

- c) OK, onto specifics: Habakkuk appears to be comparing the Israelites coming out of Egypt to what's going to happen in their dealings with Babylon. It's like saying, God did a great work in the past rescuing us from Egypt and I (Habakkuk) trust He'll do it again when He rescues us from Babylon. The specific references to "Teman" (a city in Edom, just east of Israel) and Paran (near Egypt) are both references to points in history from the Egyptian Exodus. It's a little like saying, it "sort of began" when we left Egypt and was in the Sinai peninsula and our journey came to an end just outside of Israel in the land of Edom.
  - d) This is Habakkuk reminding himself and the Israelite readers, "God got us from "point A to point Z" in a miraculous grand scale form and He can do it again. We who are "God's chosen" have to deal with others who desire to wipe us out as an entity. It is a reminder that to be God's chosen means terrible suffering as He holds us to a higher standard for knowing who He is. At the same time, we can have assurances that this is not "the" end as God made unconditional promises to Israel that a coming Messiah will rule over the world one day from Israel. For that to happen, Israel must exist in that day so God has to show some mercy to His people in spite of all that destruction.
  - e) OK, I warned you Verse 3 is "tough sledding". It gets a little easier from here.
20. Verse 4: His splendor was like the sunrise; rays flashed from his hand, where his power was hidden. <sup>5</sup> Plague went before him; pestilence followed his steps.
- a) These two verses make an effort to try to describe God's power. It's like saying His power is so great it's like a sunbeam was disbursed from His hand. When we see the sunlight on a bright day, we tend to forget that God created that. Verse 4 is using a metaphor of God's power being as "bright" as the sun's first light of the day. While God's power can't be described in human terms, Habakkuk is using the sun's power as we see it as a model of how great His power is over our world.
  - b) From the "positive power" of Verse 4 we get the negative side of that power in Verse 5. It is a reminder that just as God allows great things to occur in our world, He also allows the horrid things such as plagues and pestilence. OK, time for the big "why" question: If God is God why does He allow horrid things like disease to occur? First, keep in mind we live in a world cursed by sin and the effects of that sin kills all of us over time. I have learned that the reason God doesn't step in to stop all horrors from occurring isn't that He doesn't love us. It's for us to be reminded of the sin curse that's on this world. We are required to live with the consequences of sin. As I love to state, if this life is all there is, it is a very sad place to exist. If there is a next life, then there is a purpose for living: to give glory to God by how we live out our lives in spite of the damage done in this world.
  - c) Yes we can ask God to stop or delay such things, and sometimes it's His will for us to seek Him to ask His help in dealing with pain. We're welcome to ask all we want, it's only His choice how to help us when He wants to. We must accept that as well, and we are being reminded of that here.
  - d) Meanwhile, Habakkuk is getting on a role, and I'm interrupting him!
21. Verse 6: He stood, and shook the earth; he looked, and made the nations tremble. The ancient mountains crumbled and the age-old hills collapsed. His ways are eternal.
- a) Habakkuk is describing God's creative powers here. He's responsible for the mountains and the hills in the first place. All the world will also collapse one day at His command as easily for Him as the fact He created it. The purpose of having verses like this in a prayer is to remind us that He's far more powerful than we can ever imagine.
  - b) When I pray, I try to keep in balance the fact that God is "above" all things and created all things, yet He loves me personally and wants a relationship with me. I realize I can't earn His love, I must just accept it, embrace it and in turn use my life for His glory strictly out of gratitude for what He's done for me. The point here is having verses that remind us of His power helps to keep in perspective that God is not only personal, but that His power is beyond our ability to grasp or comprehend. Yet He still loves us even with that power!

- c) Notice this verse is "paired". This is a Hebrew style of poetry. It's saying God created all things and the pair is He's going to destroy all things. It's a way to remind us that as great as this world is, it's "temporary" in the sense we'll live forever, and that's eternally longer than even our world will exist! That fact alone should put the earth's age in perspective.
22. Verse 7: I saw the tents of Cushan in distress, the dwellings of Midian in anguish.
- a) Habakkuk is going to move from the "general" to the "specific". Realize that the big theme of this section of this prayer is to realize how powerful God is. Remember that Habakkuk is well aware that God said He's going to destroy the world Habakkuk knew (that gets us back to the whole Babylonian invasion thing). By praying about focusing on God's power is for us to realize how powerful God really is and the big picture is bigger than whatever suffering we must face in this lifetime.
- b) Speaking of realizing what's going on in the big picture, Habakkuk mentions two nations that are near Israel. It's sort of like saying when God set in motion the Exodus out of Egypt, it not only affected the Israelites and the Egyptians, but the "neighbors" as well. It is a way of saying, the world is "watching" God work, whether they realize it or not.
- c) Mentioning these two nations is like realizing, "If their God is powerful enough to put all of those plagues on Egypt and get that multitude of Israelites out of there, then we should pay attention to what this God is doing as He's not to be "messed with".
- d) The point for you and me is we tend to forget how powerful God is and forget that He's just as willing to work on a grand scale today as He did back then. Even if you didn't like the World War's as an example, realize the bible spends a lot of space describing a "grand scale" ending to the world as we know it one day. The same God who can work on a big scale can also do wonders in our live if we let Him. My point is the greatest purpose we can have for living is to make a difference for Him, if we're willing to let Him guide us.
23. Verse 8: Were you angry with the rivers, O LORD? Was your wrath against the streams? Did you rage against the sea when you rode with your horses and your victorious chariots? <sup>9</sup> You uncovered your bow, you called for many arrows. *Selah* You split the earth with rivers; <sup>10</sup> the mountains saw you and writhed. Torrents of water swept by; the deep roared and lifted its waves on high.
- a) Speaking of specific's, Habakkuk is making reference to two of the most famous events in Israel's history: The crossing of the Red Sea and the crossing of the Jordan River. In both of those cases, the waters miraculously stopped so the Israelites could cross on dry land.
- b) Habakkuk is almost sarcastically saying, "Hey, God were You angry at those water bodies that you "froze in their tracks"? Of course not. It's just Habakkuk's colorful way of saying God's in control of all things and He can move bodies of water as needed.
- c) Even the second reference to "horses and chariots" is Habakkuk's way of saying God lead the Israelites to victory as He got them out of Egypt and through the wilderness.
- d) He's giving us this colorful history to remind us when life is at it's worse, God's still there, He's still in control and He still has the power to do mighty things. It's Habakkuk's way to remind us that despite whatever we're facing, God's still in charge, the world will go as He intends it to go. We can complain about the way things are, or we can remember who is really in charge and honor Him as God in spite of whatever we're dealing with. That is why we're getting this prayerful reminder of who God is in these verses.
- e) Now that you get the idea that Habakkuk is trying to paint "broad pictures" to remind us of the fact God's still in control of things, I can finish the rest of the metaphors here.
- f) Verse 9 describes God as if He's a powerful warrior with a bow and a bunch of arrows on Him at the moment. God's using "those powerful arrows" to split waters, move mountains and rearrange the world as He desires.
- g) For those of you familiar with the Psalms, the untranslated word "Selah" appears often. It is a musical term that essentially means, "Stop and think about what is being said here". It is Habakkuk's way of saying, "This is poetry to get us to realize the power God has!"

- h) Before I move on, let me try to relate this to our lives. We may not be facing a grand scale disaster like our country being wiped out, but all of us can relate to pain and hardship for sometime in our lives. A reminder of how powerful God is, is designed to keep our focus on what is really important, that God is in charge of this world, it moves at His pace and we are here to do His will, by using our lives to make a difference for Him in spite of what we must face at any given moment in time. In a strange way, these verses are designed to encourage us through whatever we're facing at any given moment.
- i) OK enough theological background. Let's get back to "poetry":
24. Verse 11: Sun and moon stood still in the heavens at the glint of your flying arrows, at the lightning of your flashing spear.
- a) While I can't read Habakkuk's mind, most likely this verse refers to Joshua Chapter 10. It was a battle between Israelites and people living in Israel at that time. Joshua asked God to make the day longer so the Israelites could continue to fight and win. That same battle tells of hailstones killing more people than the Israelites did. I mention that as I suspect the "flying arrows" might be a reference to the hailstones.
- b) Again, I'm not positive Habakkuk's thinking of this famous Israelite victory. It just makes sense that the only biblical reference to the sun and moon standing still would be what is in view here.
- c) I can just hear a lot of you thinking, "How can God make the sun stand still?" If He made it in the first place, He can control its movements". I've heard theories that a close "fly by" of Mars could make it seem like an extra long day. It would also be a long night on the other side of the world if that were true. Even a hailstorm that only hits God's enemies is another miracle as those hailstones would be set in motion long before that battle occurs.
- i) All I'm saying is if we can accept the premise that God exists and can do all things then we should have no problem accepting the fact that if He created everything, then He has the power to change things we consider unchangeable.
- ii) Habakkuk is reminding us of that fact as well here. Realizing God can do what He wants when He wants is a reminder to us that no matter how impossible it seems to us to fix a situation, God's in charge and our trust in Him can lead us to having a joyful life no matter what the situation is in front of us.
- iii) As I was taught, "pain is inevitable, happiness or joy is a choice we make!"
- iv) Meanwhile, it's time to get back to Habakkuk's "big picture" show:
25. Verse 12: In wrath you strode through the earth and in anger you threshed the nations. <sup>13</sup> You came out to deliver your people, to save your anointed one. You crushed the leader of the land of wickedness, you stripped him from head to foot. *Selah*
- a) As I've mentioned on several occasions now, I still love the shirt that shows all the nations and empires that have come and gone while Israel still stands today. That alone is a great proof of the existence of the God of the bible. Yes I can give specific examples, but just the fact that the great empires of the ancient world and modern world have come and gone is a reminder that God's still in control of all things and allows those places to rise and fall in effect to honor Him.
- b) The point for you and me is we may not be facing a problem on that grand a scale, but the same God who protects His people "then", is the same God who protects those who still call on Him today. This is not a promise of long life and prosperity. It's a promise that He will be glorified through us if we choose to use our lives for His glory. If we choose to be a part of His plan for the world, He'll use us if we're willing to make that choice.
- c) Before I move on, a few words on the "anointed one". This refers to the Messiah or Jesus as we Christians call Him. It's saying that God's preserving Israel for the sake of bringing the Messiah into the world. I'm positive Israelites will never be completely wiped out as it is God's plan to have Him rule over the world one day and He will rule the world from Israel when that occurs. Therefore, wickedness will be destroyed when that occurs!

26. Verse 14: With his own spear you pierced his head when his warriors stormed out to scatter us, gloating as though about to devour the wretched who were in hiding. <sup>15</sup> You trampled the sea with your horses, churning the great waters. <sup>16</sup> I heard and my heart pounded, my lips quivered at the sound; decay crept into my bones, and my legs trembled. Yet I will wait patiently for the day of calamity to come on the nation invading us.
- a) Meanwhile, we've got a few more verses of poetry to finish up before Habakkuk gives his concluding thoughts in the final few verses.
  - b) The essential idea is to remind the Israelites that God's gone to great efforts to rescue them in the past and we should trust that He can and will work that way in the future. He's not saying the Babylonian invasion won't happen (as told to Habakkuk in the first 2 chapters.) It is saying that despite all the upcoming destruction, God's plans to literally rule over the world one day from Israel will still happen despite the circumstances of the moment.
  - c) The obvious reminder to us is despite our circumstances or whatever will occur in our life today or tomorrow, God's still in charge and His plans are still going forward. That means we can either work to stop or prevent that plan or we can join the "winning team" and use our lives to make a difference for Him.
  - d) Therefore we have had a bunch of verses that describe in colorful ways His power as He works in our world to guide it for His glory. That was most of Chapter 3 to this moment.
  - e) All of that comes to an end in the last part of Verse 16, where Habakkuk essentially tells us he's patiently waiting for this calamity to begin.
    - i) Now there's a prayer you rarely here, "Hey God, bring it on! Do your worse so we can suffer through it". That's essentially Habakkuk's prayer here.
    - ii) So why pray for the worst? Personally, I can't do that. God told Habakkuk what was His plans in the first two chapters. That "bring it on" prayer is Habakkuk's way of saying, "OK, God, if that's Your plan, help me to deal with it, and give me the strength to do Your will through Your plans for the world around me!" That's how we get joy in life, not by asking for perfect circumstances, but by a having a good attitude through whatever we must face in life. That's Habakkuk's message in a nutshell. Meanwhile, we have the great three-verse conclusion of the book.
27. Verse 17: Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, <sup>18</sup> yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior. <sup>19</sup> The Sovereign LORD is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights.
- a) The food references in Verse 17 are "staple crops of Israel". The bible has a lot of references to those particular fruits (figs, grapes and olives). It'd be like saying, "Even if everything I know in life around me is failing, I'll still honor God as God and I'll still be joyful as I use my life for His glory in spite of everything falling apart around me."
  - b) If you or I can have that type of joy in spite of whatever we're facing, we can live the type of joyful life God wants us to live. It is by His power that we can have joy because we are trusting in the world going along with His plan on His timing, and not whatever we must face in our lives. That's how we have joy in both the best and worst times in our life. It is about realizing God's in charge, He's still working on His timing, and He wants to get us involved in His plan to redeem those who want to spend their eternity glorifying the One who created us in the first place.
  - c) Believe it or not, that cute little speech leads me perfectly to Verse 19. There is a reference to deer's feet. Deer have an ability to run and climb well over many tough terrains. It's a colorful way of saying God can and will guide us through the toughest of circumstances if we're willing to let Him guide us through His power that way.
  - d) Let me end on a practical note: Suppose we believe all of that, now what? It starts when we ask ourselves, what do we enjoy doing and how can we combine that joy in a way that makes a difference for God? It means doing what's necessary with joy out of love for Him.

28. Verse 19b: For the director of music. On my stringed instruments.
- a) Technically, this prayer ends how it started, with a "technical" reference to the fact that the final chapter of this book is a musical prayer. Hebrew poetry doesn't rhyme like the songs we know well. It's about connecting common thoughts and making us think about images and how it relates to our relationship with God. Habakkuk ends with a long prayer in the form of a song (the original music is long gone) to remind us that despite whatever we've got to deal with in life, God's there guiding us and wants to use us for His glory. If we do get that, we get what living the Christian life is all about.
  - b) With that said, let me end by giving my own closing prayer of gratitude.
29. Let's pray: Heavenly Father, we don't know what the future holds. All we know is You created us and called us out of the world to be a living witness for You. Help us to accept whatever the future holds for us. Help us to be a good witness for You despite whatever circumstances we have to face in our future. May we realize You know all things and know our future. Since we don't know that future, help us to rely upon Your power to use our lives to make a difference for You in all that we do. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.