

THE WATCHMAN'S PRAYER: FROM FEAR TO FAITH (HABAKKUK 3:1-19)

THE WATCHMAN'S PLEA AND RECOLLECTION: SEEKING MERCY AND RECALLING PAST DELIVERANCES (HABAKKUK 3:1-15)

Verses 1-4, see session 5

 VERSE 5 -

In this verse, Habakkuk speaks in more general terms, referring to the "pestilence" and "burning coals" of judgment. While less specific, these symbols echo the catastrophic events depicted in the tribulation. They serve as stark reminders of the severity of God's judgment, and the dire consequences that befall those who defy His will.

In the context of Habakkuk 3:5, the Hebrew word translated as "before" is לְפָנָיו (l'fanav), which can carry both spatial and temporal connotations:

- **Spatially**, it could be understood as indicating that pestilence and burning coals are proceeding or moving in front of God, as in a procession or as heralds of His approach. This interpretation highlights the manifestation of God's power and judgment in a tangible, visible form as God Himself moves or manifests in a particular direction or location.
- **Temporally**, it could suggest that these elements of judgment (pestilence and burning coals) come or occur prior to God's arrival, serving as precursors or forewarnings of His imminent presence. This interpretation emphasizes the sequence of events leading up to God's direct involvement.

Like many prophetic Psalms, this one is written in the past tense, although it almost certainly refers to a future event. Regardless of whether you accept the eschatological interpretation, the events that Habakkuk celebrates concern God's impending judgment on Judah.

 VERSE 6 -

Verse 6, if taken literally to any extent whatsoever, must lead to an eschatological interpretation. If the eschatological sense is rejected, the question then arises: can this be linked to God's judgment through the Chaldeans? It would be highly unlikely. Phrases like "measure the earth," "defeat the nations," "scatter the mountains," and "bow the hills" are clearly metaphorical. If they are intended to depict the eventual downfall of the Chaldean/Babylonian empire, it would be such an extreme exaggeration, potentially earning the top spot in the hyperbole category of biblical interpretations. Even attempting to link this to the great flood of Noah's day or the scattering of nations during the Babel era requires an imagination that exceeds acceptable limits in biblical interpretation. To me, it's almost undeniable that this Psalm, at least in its opening verses, depicts the future Second Coming

 VERSE 7 -

Some might interpret the trembling of the tents and curtains in Verse 7 as a reflection of God's past actions. However, in line with the futurist interpretation that has been discussed so far, it seems more plausible to view this as a symbolic representation of God's impending judgment. As God arises and rushes

into action, even distant enemies are thrown into affliction, signifying the far-reaching impact of His judgment.

Upon God taking a stand (v. 6), the very fabric of the nations trembles in anticipation of His judgement (v. 7). The tents of the distant lands are afflicted, as if in expectation of a storm, and the curtains - perhaps a metaphor for their defenses or their false sense of security -- tremble.

In the book of Acts, Stephen claims to see the Son of God standing at the right hand of God (Acts 7:55-56). These words incite the Jewish audience to stone him. The significance of this is likely tied to the concept of God standing, as mentioned in Habakkuk 3:6. In biblical imagery, God standing often signifies His readiness to execute judgment. Therefore, Stephen's proclamation indirectly suggested imminent divine judgment, an idea that was offensive to his audience considering their current opposition to Christ.

VERSE 8 -

Habakkuk asks a question that personifies the rivers and the sea. This rhetorical question implies that the Lord's judgment extends well beyond the nations, like Cushan and Midian, reaching even the natural world. The personification of the rivers and the sea depicts them as entities that God interacts with directly, a representation that underscores the all-encompassing nature of God's authority and judgment.

Another interpretation of this verse takes the Hebrew word for rivers, "Naharim," and sea, "Yam," as proper nouns. This interpretation suggests a reference to ancient Near Eastern mythological views. Within this context, Yam and Naharim are seen as mythological creatures or entities that God defeats, an event often associated with cosmic battles or divine conflict. This theme is not exclusive to Habakkuk; indeed, it appears in various forms throughout the Old Testament. For instance, in Psalm 74:13, it is written: "Thou didst divide the sea by thy strength: thou brakest the heads of the dragons in the waters." Similarly, Job 7:12 poses the question: "Am I a sea, or a whale, that thou settest a watch over me?" Here again, we see the sea portrayed as a monster that God controls or defeats. In Habakkuk 3:8, this mythological view is utilized to highlight God's supreme power and dominion, not only over nations and peoples but also over all cosmic powers.

VERSES 9-10 -

Habakkuk interrupts his personification of the rivers and the sea with a parenthetical statement, "Thy bow was made quite naked, according to the oaths of the tribes, even thy word." This striking visual of God's "naked" bow is a metaphorical way to talk about God coming out in judgment, taking the bow out of its case. The phrase "the oaths of the tribes" is defined by Habakkuk as "the word of God," signaling God's covenants and promises made to His people.

He then uses the term "Selah," a musical notation possibly indicating a pause or reflection, suggesting a thematic connection between this statement and what follows. After the parenthetical comment, Habakkuk returns to his personification of the rivers: "Thou didst cleave the earth with rivers."

In this way, Habakkuk suggests that God uses the rivers and the sea in times of judgment to shape the earth as He sees fit. This could be a veiled reference to Revelation 12:15-16, where the earth helps the woman by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that the dragon had spewed out of his mouth. The implication here is that even in times of judgment, God is still in control, shaping events and using His creation to fulfill His purposes.

VERSES 11-12 -

Habakkuk continues his prophetic psalm by using both historical and natural terminology to describe the coming of God in judgment during the last days. His vivid language and imagery depict a God who is sovereign over history, nature, and the future, reinforcing the inevitability and severity of the impending judgment.

VERSES 13-14 -

When the Lord comes in judgment, His motivation is "for the salvation of thy people" (v. 13). This phrase highlights the dual purpose of God's judgment - it brings discipline and correction, but also salvation and deliverance for His people. God's judgment is not merely punitive, but also redemptive.

In the same verse, Habakkuk states that the Lord will "wound the head of the house of the wicked." This appears to be a reference to the Antichrist, a figure of evil and deception who will rise to power in the end times according to biblical prophecy. The act of wounding the head is symbolic of a fatal blow, indicating the defeat and destruction of this wicked entity.

The phrase "by discovering the foundation unto the neck" uses vivid imagery to portray the thoroughness of God's judgment. The word "discovering" here is better understood as "uncovering" or "revealing." It suggests that God's judgment will expose the entirety of the wickedness - from the foundation to the neck, meaning from bottom to top, or in other words, completely. This comprehensive exposure emphasizes the inescapability of God's judgment and the ultimate futility of wickedness.

After detailing the wounding of the head of the house of the wicked, Habakkuk concludes this part of the psalm with another "Selah." As we've noted before, this musical term serves to connect related passages together, inviting readers to reflect on the continuity of the narrative. Here, the use of "Selah" links the judgment of the Antichrist with the judgment of his followers, which Habakkuk goes on to describe in verse 14.

Continuing the imagery of divine judgment, verse 14 states, "Thou didst strike through with his staves the head of his villages." This expression reinforces the complete and utter defeat of the wicked. The "staves" likely refer to the weapons of the wicked, used against them in a poetic twist of divine justice. The term "villages" is a metaphor for the followers or supporters of the Antichrist, who are also subjected to divine judgment.

The verse concludes with a depiction of a swift and chaotic scene, "They came out as a whirlwind to scatter me: their rejoicing was as to devour the poor secretly." This sentence portrays the wicked as attacking swiftly and ruthlessly, seeking to destroy the righteous. Yet, in the face of such hostility, God's judgment prevails, reinforcing the central theme of this psalm: the ultimate triumph of God's justice over wickedness.

VERSE 15 -

In summary, Habakkuk describes the Lord's judgment as Him "walking through the sea." It is interesting to note that the term "sea" can potentially be interpreted as a reference to the nations, echoing the symbolism used in the Book of Revelation. However, this association is not a necessary interpretation and can be viewed as one among many possibilities.

**THE WATCHMAN'S RESOLUTION: TRUSTING IN GOD AMIDST THE COMING JUDGMENT
(HABAKKUK 3:16-19)**

As we transition into the final verses of the chapter, we witness a remarkable shift in Habakkuk's perspective. Despite the impending judgment and the tumultuous events he has been prophesying, Habakkuk finds a deep, unwavering faith within himself. He resolves that, come what may, his trust lies firmly with the Lord. This represents a significant evolution from the beginning of the book, where he questioned God's perceived silence and inaction. Now, he is prepared to wait patiently for the Lord, confident that God will, in His perfect time, lift him up and deliver Israel from the last-days trials.

AN IMPORTANT WORD ABOUT THE POSTSCRIPT

Habakkuk concludes his Psalm with the notation, "To the chief singer on my stringed instruments." This is unmistakably a postscript, a note added after the completion of the letter, song, or book. What is particularly noteworthy about this is that within this independent Psalm (i.e., not connected to another Psalm, as those in the book of Psalms), it is clear that this is a postscript, not an introduction. Psalms, in their original scroll form, run continuously one after the other, making it difficult to discern whether a recurring line like this one is a prescript (an introductory note) or a postscript. However, Habakkuk's usage makes it evident that such lines are intended as postscripts.

This means that when we see it in the Psalms, we should assign it to the words that precede, not the words that follow. Yet, in all our printed editions, it is shown as the first verse of a psalm, not the last. Because of this, interpreters are working to find in one psalm a meaning that is found in another! Who is "the chief musician?" We will find out by seeing that the psalm preceding, not following, should give the clue. So note, for example, that Psalm 31 is "to the chief musician," while that should belong to Psalm 30. The same is true of Psalm 36, where it belongs to 35. I believe that when a thorough study of this is done we will find that the "chief musician" can be none other than the Messiah Himself. There are 55 Psalms with this title.

As an example of this confusion, we can look at Psalm 8, which is often referred to as "To the chief Musician upon Gittith." The term "Gittith" is believed to refer to a winepress, and therefore, it's reasonable to infer that a "Gittith" psalm should depict a sense of turmoil, pressure, or pain. However, if you read Psalm 8, you'll find that it doesn't quite fit this description. It's when we realize that the designation "To the chief Musician upon Gittith" actually belongs to Psalm 7, not Psalm 8, that everything starts to make sense. Psalm 7 indeed carries a theme of turmoil and distress, aligning with what we'd expect from a "Gittith" psalm.
