

# COMFORT IN SUFFERING

## THE NEED FOR COMFORT IN SUFFERING

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- Scripture promises that one day our suffering will be outweighed by the glory of heaven

**Romans 8:18** ~ For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

**2 Corinthians 4:16-18** ~ Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. 17 For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, 18 while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

- But at times in this life, we are faced with profound adversity, trials, heartaches, difficulties, catastrophe, or some other form of suffering that will test our belief in the hope of future glory
- We at times find ourselves asking questions like:
  - Why do faithful people suffer, especially when evildoers seem to flourish?
  - How can we lay hold of the promises in the Bible when we experience a heavy load of anguish?
  - Why does God seem silent (or altogether absent) when we call out to him for relief?
  - Why does God seem to delay his help when we feel like we are at the very end of our ability to stand up under the pressure?
  - Why this and why now?
- These are common questions that many faithful believers throughout the ages have asked
- How do we find comfort in the midst of those times?
- “One of the most difficult things to do when the road is rough or when the billows are passing over us is to feel that God still loves us. It is the last thing we can accept. But we are not called to feel; we are called to believe... We are to measure God’s love not by his providence but by his promise... When providences are dark it is difficult to read them. It is the Word that tells us how to view them... By faith we have to trace it all to the hand of our Father. The ‘crook in the lot’ is all of God’s making.”<sup>1</sup>
- “When we cannot trace God’s hands we can trust God’s heart.”<sup>2</sup>
- “The thought of God should be the Christian’s panacea. It should cure all his ills at a stroke. And what an infinity there is in the thought of God! Nothing can approach in beauty to the idea of the true and living God. That there exists a Being who is infinite in power, knowledge, and goodness, that the Being cares for me with a perfect love as though I were the only man in existence, that he loved me before I was born and created me to enjoy him eternally and that he sent his Son to suffer the agony of the cross to secure my eternal happiness—that, surely, must be a thought to end all sorrow. It ought to be and often is.”<sup>3</sup>
- “Our perceptions of God suffer more than our perceptions of natural things because we are depraved and do not make it our life’s work daily to entice our idea of God from the fountainhead of Scripture. It is our folly that we allow ourselves to look at life’s problems as if they were somehow isolated from God. As soon as we see our problems in the light of God’s Being and perfection, we are emancipated from alarm and terror.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John Murray, *Behind a Frowning Providence*, 21.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Spurgeon

<sup>3</sup> Maurice Roberts, *The Thought of God*, 5.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

- “It must follow from what has been said that the degree of a Christian’s peace of mind depends upon his spiritual ability to interpose the thought of God between himself and his anxiety. When the dark cloud of trouble first looms up on the horizon of our thought, then is the time to apply our theology in downright earnest.”<sup>5</sup>
- In other words, there is always a purpose of love behind the trials that we face...and we must learn to leave our cause in the hand of God
- This is what Habakkuk learned in his dialogue with God on the subject of human suffering
- The book is about his personal struggle to believe that God is good when there is so much tragedy and evil in the world
- We can learn much about rejoicing in the Lord in turbulent times from a man who came to understand, through his own suffering, that God is our strength and will bring us through whatever storm we encounter in the troubles of this life

## BACKGROUND ON HABAKKUK

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### The Setting

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- Although the only thing known about Habakkuk is what can be gleaned from his book, he was likely a prophet in Judah around the same time as Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel
- For a time, Judah enjoyed a revival under the reign of the godly king Josiah who “did right in the sight of the LORD and walked in all the way of his father David, nor did he turn aside to the right or to the left.” (2 Kings 22:2)
- When the book of the law was found in the house of the Lord, Josiah tore his clothes in grief over the fact that the people had not been following it
- He read the book in the hearing of the people and “made a covenant before the LORD, to walk after the LORD, and to keep His commandments and His testimonies and His statutes with all his heart and all his soul, to carry out the words of this covenant that were written in this book” (2 Kings 23:3)
- He tore down their idols, did away with all their false gods, destroyed all the high places, and reinstated the Passover (2 Kings 23:4-24)
- “Before him there was no king like him who turned to the LORD with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; nor did any like him arise after him.” (2 Kings 23:25)
- Despite these reforms, however, “the LORD did not turn from the fierceness of His great wrath with which His anger burned against Judah, because of all the provocations with which Manasseh had provoked Him. The LORD said, ‘I will remove Judah also from My sight, as I have removed Israel. And I will cast off Jerusalem, this city which I have chosen, and the temple of which I said, “My name shall be there.”’” (2 Kings 23:26-27)
- Upon his death, though, the nation quickly reverted to her wicked ways (Jer 22:13-19) such that sin and evil were rampant in Judah once again
- He was succeeded by his son, Jehoahaz, who was wicked...who was succeeded by another of his sons, Jehoiakim, who was also very wicked

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 7.

**Jeremiah 36:1-3** ~ In the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, this word came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, 2 “Take a scroll and write on it all the words which I have spoken to you concerning Israel and concerning Judah, and concerning all the nations, from the day I first spoke to you, from the days of Josiah, even to this day. 3 “Perhaps the house of Judah will hear all the calamity which I plan to bring on them, in order that every man will turn from his evil way; then I will forgive their iniquity and their sin.”

- Notice Jehoiakim’s response to God's invitation to repent through the reading of the scroll

**Jeremiah 36:21-24** ~ Then the king sent Jehudi to get the scroll, and he took it out of the chamber of Elishama the scribe. And Jehudi read it to the king as well as to all the officials who stood beside the king. 22 Now the king was sitting in the winter house in the ninth month, with a fire burning in the brazier before him. 23 When Jehudi had read three or four columns, the king cut it with a scribe’s knife and threw it into the fire that was in the brazier, until all the scroll was consumed in the fire that was in the brazier. 24 Yet the king and all his servants who heard all these words were not afraid, nor did they rend their garments.

- Habakkuk’s ministry likely took place during the reign of Jehoiakim...a time when Judah had essentially turned away from God and forgotten him...they had committed spiritual adultery by giving themselves to false gods...they had rejected the commandments of the Lord and had fallen into great wickedness and disobedience
- Justice had disappeared from the land...violence and wickedness were pervasive and unchecked
- “What a terrible picture! Sin, immorality, and vice were rampant, while those who were in authority and entrusted with government were slack and indolent. They did not apply the law equitably and honestly. There was lawlessness everywhere; and whenever anyone ventured to remonstrate with the people as the prophet did, those in authority rose up with strife and contention. Serious religious falling away had been followed, as invariably happens, by a general moral and political decline. Such were the alarming conditions which confronted the prophet.”<sup>6</sup>
- Habakkuk ministered before and during this time...he really struggled to understand why God allowed it all
- This caused Habakkuk to question God's silence and apparent lack of action to discipline his covenant people
- Why didn't God purge his people? Why didn't he restore their righteousness?
- Under Jeremiah, God warned that he would raise up Babylon to be an instrument of his judgment on his rebellious people

**Jeremiah 25:8-9** ~ Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts, ‘Because you have not obeyed My words, 9 behold, I will send and take all the families of the north,’ declares the LORD, ‘and I will send to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, My servant, and will bring them against this land and against its inhabitants and against all these nations round about; and I will utterly destroy them and make them a horror and a hissing, and an everlasting desolation.

- That’s exactly what happened...it was during the reign of Jehoiakim that Nebuchadnezzar came to power, overthrowing Nineveh in 612 BC, defeating Assyria and Egypt at the Battle of Carchemish in 605 BC, and conquering Judah and destroying Jerusalem in 605 BC
- This set up the three deportations of Jews from Israel to Babylon:
  - First deportation (605 BC) – Nebuchadnezzar took the finest youth to train them in his court, possibly to prepare them for positions of administrative leadership there if Nebuchadnezzar should have to return to subjugate Judah
  - Second deportation (597 BC) – Jehoiakim was followed on the throne by his son, Jehoiachin (cf. 2 Kings 24:6-20) whom Nebuchadnezzar deported along with another 10,000 Jewish people, including leaders, skilled laborers, and soldiers, and the prophet Ezekiel
  - Third deportation (586 BC) – Nebuchadnezzar chose Jehoiachin’s uncle, Zedekiah, to serve as Judah’s vassal king but his 11-year reign (597-586 BC) was marred by spiritual decline and political instability. Rather than learning from the mistakes of the past, Zedekiah repeated them and tried to rebel against

<sup>6</sup> D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *From Fear to Faith*, 11.

Babylon's control. Nebuchadnezzar's response was swift. The army of Babylon surrounded Jerusalem and began a 2-year long siege. In August 586 BC, the city fell and was totally destroyed, along with Solomon's temple (cf. 2 Kings 25:1-17).

- Not only did God seemingly not deal with the problems in his covenant people, he raised up an even more ungodly people to judge them
- This caused Habakkuk to ask: How could God use the Chaldeans to judge a people more righteous than they?
- “Habakkuk ministered during the simultaneous spiritual decline of Judah and the military rise of Babylon. Inwardly, he struggled because, from his perspective, God did not seem concerned about the evil among His own people. Habakkuk's prayers for God's intervention were going unanswered. Indeed, the situation was getting worse. It was a disturbing case of divine silence. The book of Habakkuk is the inspired account of how God brought Habakkuk from a place of discouragement to a place of joy - without changing anything about the existing circumstances. In fact, Habakkuk would actually learn that the future would be bleaker than the present. But because he learned better how to trust God, the book ends in joy, not discouragement.”<sup>7</sup>
- “Habakkuk, already perplexed at the fact that God permitted iniquity in His own nation, is now told that God intends to raise up an utterly pagan, godless people to conquer the land and to punish His people. The prophet was almost overwhelmed.”<sup>8</sup>

## The Structure

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- The book is framed as a dialogue between Habakkuk and God
  1. Habakkuk's first complaint (1:1-4) – he prays to God to intervene, claiming that God has not heard his prayers about dealing with the sinfulness of the nation
    - 1a. God responds (1:5-11) – he discloses that he is raising up the Chaldeans to judge Judah
  2. Habakkuk's second complaint (1:12-2:1) – he asks how God could possibly allow a wicked nation to judge his own people since he cannot reconcile God's character with this plan
    - 2a. God responds (2:2-20) – he reveals that he will only allow the Chaldeans to judge his people for a time and, after they have been used of the Lord, they will be judged for their own wickedness
  3. Habakkuk speaks a third time (3:1-19) – he expresses his trust and joy in the Lord despite knowing the situation will be severe
- “As that dialogue unfolds, Habakkuk's faith matures as God reveals His ways to the prophet...Habakkuk was able to move from discouragement to hope because he learned how to trust God – even though nothing changed in the circumstances.”<sup>9</sup>
- “In Habakkuk's mind, the issue crying for resolution is no longer God's righteous response toward evil (or lack thereof), but the vindication of God's character and covenant with His people (1:13). Like Job, the prophet argued with God, and through that experience he achieved a deeper understanding of God's sovereign character and a firmer faith in Him (cf. Job 42:5, 6; Is. 55:8, 9). Ultimately, Habakkuk realized that God was not to be worshiped merely because of the temporal blessings He bestowed, but for His own sake (3:17–19).”<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Don Green, *Trusting God in Trying Times*, 49-50.

<sup>8</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *From Fear to Faith*, 12.

<sup>9</sup> Green, *Trusting God*, 51.

<sup>10</sup> John MacArthur Jr., ed., *The MacArthur Study Bible*, electronic ed. (Nashville, TN: Word Pub., 1997), 1316.

- Habakkuk means “one who embraces”...by the end of the book his name becomes appropriate as he clings to God in spite of his confusion about God's plans for his people
- For Habakkuk, he had to learn that “the righteous will live by his faith” (Hab 2:4)

## LESSONS ON SUFFERING FROM HABAKKUK

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### God's Ways are Mysterious

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**Habakkuk 1:1-4** ~ The oracle which Habakkuk the prophet saw. 2 How long, O LORD, will I call for help, And You will not hear? I cry out to You, “Violence!” Yet You do not save. 3 Why do You make me see iniquity, And cause me to look on wickedness? Yes, destruction and violence are before me; Strife exists and contention arises. 4 Therefore the law is ignored And justice is never upheld. For the wicked surround the righteous; Therefore justice comes out perverted.

- Habakkuk saw the violence, sin, and injustice all around him...he saw idolatry and wickedness and an utter disregard for God's law on the part of the people
- They sinned repeatedly without any apparent desire to change and pursue righteousness
- As a result, he wondered why God hadn't intervened...why he seemed to let the problem go unchecked
- This was his great dilemma...the apparent lack of concern on God's part about the sinful state of his people
- He couldn't understand why God was doing something about the serious state of his people
- He had been praying and asking the Lord to get involved...but it appeared to him that God was not hearing him
- “Habakkuk has been praying long enough to believe that God should have done something by now. Doesn't the effective prayer of a righteous man accomplish much (James 5:16)? Why did this evil continue? God was not meeting his spiritual expectations. He said in effect, ‘I've been praying about this problem. The situation is obviously wrong. You're a holy God who loves righteousness. Why aren't you responding? Habakkuk thought God should intervene and change the people, so he prayed to that end. But God let the situation worsen. He wasn't doing it Habakkuk's way.’”<sup>11</sup>
- This is a reminder to us that God's ways are mysterious

**Deuteronomy 29:29** ~ The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law.

**Isaiah 55:8-9** ~ For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,” declares the LORD. 9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts.

- This means that he has the right to do things differently than we think he should
- William Cowper's hymn captures this:

God moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform.  
He plants his footsteps in the sea And rides upon the storm.  
Deep in the dark and hidden mines, With never-failing skill,  
He fashions all his bright designs And works his sov'reign will.

Oh, fearful saints, new courage take: The clouds that you now dread  
Are big with mercy and will break In blessings on your head.  
Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, But trust him for his grace.  
Behind a frowning providence, He hides a smiling face.

God's purposes will ripen fast, Unfolding every hour.  
The bud may have a bitter taste, But sweet will be the flower.  
Blind unbelief is sure to err And scan his work in vain.  
God is his own interpreter, And he will make it plain.

Refrain:  
So God we trust in you. O God, we trust in you.  
When tears are great and comforts few, We hope in mercies  
ever new, We trust in you.

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<sup>11</sup> Green, *Trusting God*, 55.

- This is a reminder to us when things don't go the way we planned...when we don't get what we expected or had our hearts set on...when God doesn't seem to deliver
- Perhaps he has something better for us...and/or more glorifying to him...in the future than we can see now
- God owes us no explanation...but we owe him implicit trust and obedience
- This is central to being a solid, mature believer...we must remember that God sits on his throne and we must trust and yield to him fully
- This is also a reminder that God is still at work even when our prayers seem to go unanswered
- Yes, we must pray and bring our requests to the Lord...but the answer to our prayers may not be what we expect...sometimes he gives unexpected answers to our prayers in order to accomplish other purposes in us
- "We all tend to prescribe the answers to our prayers. We think that God can come in only one way. But Scripture teaches us that God sometimes answers our prayers by allowing things to become much worse before they become better. He may sometimes do the opposite of what we anticipate. He may overwhelm us by confronting us with a Chaldean army. Yet it is a fundamental principle in life and walk of faith that we must always be prepared for the unexpected when we are dealing with God."<sup>12</sup>
- "[T]he painful edge of unanswered prayer is softened when you remember that God's ways are not your ways. That helps you persevere. God's seeming silence in your life does not mean He has abandoned you. He would never do that...You can still trust God. He has His ways and His ways are always good – even when they hurt."<sup>13</sup>
- Habakkuk's "prayer of complaint" (1:2-4) raises the question of whether it's appropriate to offer these kind of brutally honest prayers
- Is this sinful? Inappropriate? A lack of faith? → No!
- "It was precisely because Habakkuk *did* have faith that he was disturbed in the first place. He believed in God's Word, practiced prayer, expected answers to his prayer, and hated sin. He longed for the holiness of God and the holiness of His people. When his experience did not square with his theology, it troubled Habakkuk deeply. Yet, in the midst of his confusion, he did not quit. Instead, he wrestled with God on the issue, holding Him to His Word until He answered him. That is not a lack of faith. That is extraordinary faith...Habakkuk teaches us that we can come honestly and freely to God in a time of great need, expressing even complaints about His perceived dealings with us. Importantly, this invitation to bold openness is no license to irreverent prayer any more than grace is a license to sin (Rom. 6:1-2)."<sup>14</sup>

## God's Ways are Sometimes Misunderstood

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**Habakkuk 1:5-11** ~ Look among the nations! Observe! Be astonished! Wonder! Because I am doing something in your days— You would not believe if you were told. 6 For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans, That fierce and impetuous people Who march throughout the earth To seize dwelling places which are not theirs. 7 They are dreaded and feared; Their justice and authority originate with themselves. 8 Their horses are swifter than leopards And keener than wolves in the evening. Their horsemen come galloping, Their horsemen come from afar; They fly like an eagle swooping down to devour. 9 All of them come for violence. Their horde of faces moves forward. They collect captives like sand. 10 They mock at kings And rulers are a laughing matter to them. They laugh at every fortress And heap up rubble to capture it. 11 Then they will sweep through like the wind and pass on. But they will be held guilty, They whose strength is their god."

- The Lord responds to Habakkuk's complaint by revealing his future plans for Judah
- God responds that he is actively accomplishing his purposes...by raising up the ungodly, wicked, idolatrous Babylonians to discipline rebellious Judah, by conquering them and bringing them into exile

<sup>12</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *From Fear to Faith*, 15.

<sup>13</sup> Green, *Trusting God*, 57-58.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

- Not only was God not indifferent to Habakkuk’s concern, he told Habakkuk that he was working in ways that far surpassed anything he could have comprehended
- God was raising up a pagan people to deal with the very sin problem that Habakkuk identified in his people
- They would sweep through Judah as an instrument of God’s judgment
- This shows that Habakkuk only saw part of the picture...God was actually working at the very time he voiced his complaint in vv. 1-4...but he couldn’t see it yet
- “Habakkuk had a limited perspective. He had seen only the visible situation going from bad to worse. He did not see – and could not see – that God was adjusting the world order to address the situation Habakkuk was concerned about. God was letting Habakkuk in on His hidden ways – the manner in which He directs all creatures and events to accomplish His will. We call that His providence. In an invisible way, God works out His purpose in everything that happens in the heavens and on the earth (cf. Eph. 1:11).”<sup>15</sup>
- This means that often (usually?) we don’t fully know what God is doing in the midst of our trials and hardships
- We only have a limited perspective and do not know the whole story
- He is doing millions of things at once and we usually are unaware of most of them
- Even when we don’t recognize how God is working in our lives, he is...and don’t know how it will all work out in the end
- His ways are often hidden from our clear view...because we see through a veil darkly
- Therefore, rather than relying on our very finite understanding, we must trust him more than we trust ourselves
- We must be content to let the providence of God unfold in time...and to trust that he will demonstrate his faithfulness in time
- “There are things beyond your comprehension, which, if you knew them, would immediately show that God has perfect control of your situation. The problem is not with God; it’s that you see only part of the picture. Because God works ‘behind the scenes,’ you are not in a position to make the final evaluation about your present circumstances...How can you trust God in your trying times, then? You need to trust God more than you trust your own judgment. He works in astonishing ways that you cannot perceive. His providential dealing may be hidden, but they are certain.”<sup>16</sup>
- “God is too good to be unkind, He is too wise to be mistaken, and when we cannot trace His hand, we must trust His heart.”<sup>17</sup>

## God’s Ways are Always Perfect

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**Habakkuk 1:12-17** ~ Are You not from everlasting, O LORD, my God, my Holy One? We will not die. You, O LORD, have appointed them to judge; And You, O Rock, have established them to correct. 13 Your eyes are too pure to approve evil, And You can not look on wickedness with favor. Why do You look with favor On those who deal treacherously? Why are You silent when the wicked swallow up Those more righteous than they? 14 Why have You made men like the fish of the sea, Like creeping things without a ruler over them? 15 The Chaldeans bring all of them up with a hook, Drag them away with their net, And gather them together in their fishing net. Therefore they rejoice and are glad. 16 Therefore they offer a sacrifice to their net and burn incense to their fishing net; Because through these things their catch is large, And their food is plentiful. 17 Will they therefore empty their net And continually slay nations without sparing?

- Having heard from the Lord, Habakkuk now had to wrestle with how a holy God could use pagan, idolatrous people to accomplish his purposes

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 63

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>17</sup> Charles Spurgeon

- This only adds to Habakkuk’s dilemma...not only do God’s people seem to be getting away with sin, God chooses to employ very ungodly Chaldeans as an instrument of his judgment
- His struggle is exemplified in the series of questions he asks the Lord in vv. 13b-17
- “How could a holy God use a wicked nation to advance His righteous purpose with His people?...It was a theological dilemma. How could God strengthen a nation more wicked than His own people to prevail over them? How is that consistent with His own holiness?”<sup>18</sup>
- Habakkuk knows that the answer to his questions lies in the character of God...so before he even articulates the questions, he preaches to himself about the holy, pure character of God (vv. 12-13a)
- “Habakkuk builds a spiritual framework within which to think. God’s holy and faithful character means He would never abandon His people. So whatever else the coming invasion meant, it would not spell the final and absolute extermination of God’s people. God’s holiness performed a negative function by showing what these new developments could not mean.”<sup>19</sup>
- He recites truth in his heart about the nature of God...and reminds himself that God is:
  - Eternal = “Are You not from everlasting”
  - Self-existent = “O LORD”
  - Holy = “my Holy One...Your eyes are too pure to approve evil”
  - Faithful = “We will not die”
  - Almighty = “You, O LORD, have appointed them to judge; And You, O Rock, have established them to correct.”
- This is what anchors his soul in the crucible of life’s suffering
- The holy and good character of God is what also must steady us amid the storms of life
- When we are in the middle of troubles and trials, we are to call to mind God’s holy and faithful character
- We are to preach truth about who God is to ourselves

**2 Corinthians 10:5** ~ We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ,

**Philippians 4:8** ~ Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.

- “I understand that those truths do not explain or solve your immediate problem. But they do something even more important. They give you a clear context in which to think about your present pain. If you are a Christian, God love you with a faithful love. He will do good to you – you just don’t see it yet. Based on the greater things He has done in Christ at the cross, and based on the greater things He will do in heaven, you can trust Him for the lesser things of this earthly life that occur in between. The cross and heaven are unanswerable arguments for the love of God and His good purpose for your life.”<sup>20</sup>
- “We must first remind ourselves of those things of which we are absolutely certain, things which are entirely beyond doubt. Write them down and say to yourself: ‘In this terrible and perplexing situation in which I find myself, here at last is solid ground.’ When, walking on moorlands, or over a mountain range, you come to bogs, the only way to negotiate them is to find solid places on which you can place your feet. The way to get across the morasses and the places in which you are liable to sink is to search for footholds. So, in spiritual problems, you must return to eternal and absolute principles. The psychology of this is obvious, for the moment you turn to basic principles, you immediately begin to lose your sense of panic. It is a great thing to reassure your soul with those things that are beyond dispute.”<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Green, *Trusting God*, 74.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 70.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>21</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *From Fear to Faith*, 25.



## God's Ways Require Patient Faith

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**Habakkuk 2:1** ~ I will stand on my guard post And station myself on the rampart; And I will keep watch to see what He will speak to me, And how I may reply when I am reproved.

- In the face of his trials, Habakkuk likened himself to a watchman keeping watch from the city walls for any movement on the horizon, expecting it could come at any moment
- Even though he understood God's trustworthy nature and character, he still had questions...but he believed God could and would answer
- So, he kept looking expectantly for how God would work this situation out to their good and his glory
- He realizes that the one thing to do is to wait upon the Lord
- "...knowing that an all-wise God has an answer, Habakkuk commits his problem to God and simply waits for a reply. His questions are finished. Now it's simply time to wait."<sup>22</sup>
- Waiting for an answer is no easy task since our flesh craves immediate resolution of painful situations
- But waiting is often part of the process
- "Biblical waiting is not passive resignation to the inevitable. 'God's going to do what He's going to do, so I might as well sit down and wait for Him to do it.' No, waiting is an expectant looking to God. It is not merely waiting to see what happens, but by faith, having confidence that God will answer and show His faithfulness to you...Faith looks to God and patiently waits for Him to act on His timetable. Faith says reverently, 'God, You're in charge here. I don't understand, but I'll wait. I know You'll bless that persistent faith in the end.' You trust God with patient endurance in the confident hope that He will eventually act decisively to deliver you."<sup>23</sup>

**Psalms 27:11-14** ~ Teach me Your way, O LORD, And lead me in a level path Because of my foes. 12 Do not deliver me over to the desire of my adversaries, For false witnesses have risen against me, And such as breathe out violence. 13 I would have despaired unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the LORD In the land of the living. 14 Wait for the LORD; Be strong and let your heart take courage; Yes, wait for the LORD.

**Isaiah 40:31** ~ Yet those who wait for the LORD Will gain new strength; They will mount up with wings like eagles, They will run and not get tired, They will walk and not become weary.

- Often waiting involves years or even decades...or perhaps we wait until we get to heaven
- Regardless of the length of time, eventually God will fulfill his promise of faithfulness to us...so we don't demand answers on our timetable...but instead we watch and wait on him for the answer
- "We must believe that God is always true to His word, and that His promises never fail. So, having committed myself and my problem to God, I must persist in looking with an eagerness which knows that God is certain to answer. It is dishonouring to God not to do so. If I believe God is my Father, and that the very hairs of my head are all numbered, and that God is much more concerned about my welfare and my well-being than I am myself; if I believe that God is much more concerned about the honour of His great and holy name than I am, then it is surely dishonouring to God not to look for an answer after I have prayed to Him. It is indicative of a serious lack of faith. Nothing so shows the character of our faith as our conduct and attitude after we have prayed. The men of faith not only prayed, but they expected answers. Sometimes, in a panic, we pray to God; then, after the panic is over, we forget all about it. The test of our faith is whether we expect an answer."<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Green, *Trusting God*, 79.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>24</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *From Fear to Faith*, 39.

## God's Ways are Often Revealed in the Future

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**Habakkuk 2:2-20** ~ Then the LORD answered me and said, “Record the vision And inscribe it on tablets, That the one who reads it may run. 3 For the vision is yet for the appointed time; It hastens toward the goal and it will not fail. Though it tarries, wait for it; For it will certainly come, it will not delay. 4 Behold, as for the proud one, His soul is not right within him; But the righteous will live by his faith. 5 Furthermore, wine betrays the haughty man, So that he does not stay at home. He enlarges his appetite like Sheol, And he is like death, never satisfied. He also gathers to himself all nations And collects to himself all peoples. 6 Will not all of these take up a taunt-song against him, Even mockery and insinuations against him And say, ‘Woe to him who increases what is not his— For how long— And makes himself rich with loans?’ 7 Will not your creditors rise up suddenly, And those who collect from you awaken? Indeed, you will become plunder for them. 8 Because you have looted many nations, All the remainder of the peoples will loot you— Because of human bloodshed and violence done to the land, To the town and all its inhabitants. 9 Woe to him who gets evil gain for his house To put his nest on high, To be delivered from the hand of calamity! 10 You have devised a shameful thing for your house By cutting off many peoples; So you are sinning against yourself. 11 Surely the stone will cry out from the wall, And the rafter will answer it from the framework. 12 Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed And finds a town with violence! 13 Is it not indeed from the LORD of hosts That peoples toil for fire, And nations grow weary for nothing? 14 For the earth will be filled With the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, As the waters cover the sea. 15 Woe to you who make your neighbors drink, Who mix in your venom even to make them drunk So as to look on their nakedness! 16 You will be filled with disgrace rather than honor. Now you yourself drink and expose your own nakedness. The cup in the LORD’S right hand will come around to you, And utter disgrace will come upon your glory. 17 For the violence done to Lebanon will overwhelm you, And the devastation of its beasts by which you terrified them, Because of human bloodshed and violence done to the land, To the town and all its inhabitants. 18 What profit is the idol when its maker has carved it, Or an image, a teacher of falsehood? For its maker trusts in his own handiwork When he fashions speechless idols. 19 Woe to him who says to a piece of wood, ‘Awake!’ To a mute stone, ‘Arise!’ And that is your teacher? Behold, it is overlaid with gold and silver, And there is no breath at all inside it. 20 But the LORD is in His holy temple. Let all the earth be silent before Him.”

- Because of present trials, often believers have little hope for the future, thinking it will be just like the present
- But we look ahead, confident that the Lord is working to accomplish his good purposes which will be evident in the future
- This is what Habakkuk had to learn...that God would doing things that would be realized fully in the future
- This is the point of vv. 2-3
- As a result, he needed to “live by his faith” (v. 4)
- Specifically, Habakkuk needed to know that God would bring judgment on the Chaldeans in the future, a judgment that is outlined clearly in five “woes” pronounced on them (2:6b, 9, 12, 15, 19)
- Their sin would eventually be punished and they would be judged for their wickedness
- God teaches Habakkuk to look beyond his present circumstances to the future when he would judge Babylon
- God says that the very Chaldeans whom he raised up to punish Israel will themselves be destroyed
- They would be humbled as a result of their pride and arrogance
- “My friend, this is how you trust God in trying times. You believe His Word and commit yourself to Christ even when everything on earth seems to contradict your confidence in Him. He will do good in the future even if it does not seem possible in the present...The object of our hope lies outside of us, not inside us...The surpassing future greatness of seeing Christ face-to-face will make past earthly matters fade into utter significance...We must take the long view in adversity. There is more to life than what is happening today. God will unfold His purpose in the future. As He does, He will show that His manifold wisdom and love were always at work. He never once abandoned us – even if we couldn’t see His hand at the time...You trust God by having confidence in the plans of God, knowing that one day God will prevail, He will do good to you in the end, He will defeat wickedness permanently, and Jesus Christ will abolish death. All that distracts and

discourages us in this life will be abolished forever. That is what we're waiting for. The ups and downs of this life can come and go as they may."<sup>25</sup>

- This is what a life of faith looks like, knowing the best is yet to come...faith in God's future promises must characterize us!
- "Faith means taking the bare Word of God and acting upon it because it is the Word of God...living by faith...means basing the whole of our life upon faith in God...Is my life based upon the faith principle? Am I submitting myself to the fact that what I read in the Bible is the Word of God and is true? And am I willing to stake everything, my life included, upon this fact?"<sup>26</sup>

## God's Ways are to be Humbly and Prayerfully Embraced

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**Habakkuk 3:1-2** ~ A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, according to Shigionoth. O LORD, I have heard the report about You and I fear. O LORD, revive Your work in the midst of the years, In the midst of the years make it known; In wrath remember mercy.

- God's promise to judge the Chaldeans in chapter two prompted Habakkuk to pray in chapter 3
- Significantly, nothing has changed since chapter one regarding the actual circumstances: Judah is still sinful and the Chaldeans are still coming to judge Judah
- What has changed is Habakkuk's perspective on God and his sovereign purposes
- This is reflected in his prayer here and his utter submission to what was doing: "I have heard the report about You and I fear" (v. 1)
- This is a prayer of submission, reflecting his confidence that God's ways are right and holy
- He doesn't try to change God's mind or recant his plans...instead, he willingly accepts God's will and merely asks that God would "revive his work" with his people and that he would be "merciful"
- This is how we are to respond to trials and suffering as well
- "This is our pattern for trusting God. We acknowledge the rightness of God's way, even if they are difficult, and simply ask for grace to live in the midst of our trials. When we see things clearly, we know that we do not need an external change to bring internal contentment. It is enough to be in Christ and have His grace to live in what He has appointed for us...This is a key point that God wants us to come to as we deal with difficult trials. Eventually, you and I need to move beyond complaining prayer to a point where we acknowledge the rightness of God's ways – even if they are difficult – and simply ask Him for grace to live under the trial...My friend, this all means that your circumstances do not need to change in order for you to have peace...You submit trustingly to His wisdom even if he has ordered your circumstances in a way that you would not have initially chosen...From that position of spiritual strength, your prayers cease being an exercise in trying to get God to do what you want. Rather, you find joy in praying (as Jesus taught us), 'Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven' (Matt 6:10)."<sup>27</sup>
- "When things are apparently going against us, the thing to do is not to look at the situation and ask questions, but look at ourselves and say: 'What of my soul? What is God saying to me and doing to me? What is it in me that is meriting all this?' After examining ourselves, and humbling ourselves, we should place ourselves in the hands of God and say 'Thy way, not mine, O Lord, however hard it be. My one concern is that my soul should be right. I ask only that in wrath Thou shouldst remember mercy. But, above all, go on with Thy work that my soul may be revived, and that I may become well-pleasing in Thy sight.'<sup>28</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Green, *Trusting God*, 87, 89, 91.

<sup>26</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *From Fear to Faith*, 50-51.

<sup>27</sup> Green, *Trusting God*, 95-97.

<sup>28</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *From Fear to Faith*, 64-65.

## God's Ways are Always Seen by Keeping His Past Faithfulness in View

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**Habakkuk 3:3-15** ~ God comes from Teman, And the Holy One from Mount Paran. His splendor covers the heavens, And the earth is full of His praise. 4 His radiance is like the sunlight; He has rays flashing from His hand, And there is the hiding of His power. 5 Before Him goes pestilence, And plague comes after Him. 6 He stood and surveyed the earth; He looked and startled the nations. Yes, the perpetual mountains were shattered, The ancient hills collapsed. His ways are everlasting. 7 I saw the tents of Cushan under distress, The tent curtains of the land of Midian were trembling. 8 Did the LORD rage against the rivers, Or was Your anger against the rivers, Or was Your wrath against the sea, That You rode on Your horses, On Your chariots of salvation? 9 Your bow was made bare, The rods of chastisement were sworn. You cleaved the earth with rivers. 10 The mountains saw You and quaked; The downpour of waters swept by. The deep uttered forth its voice, It lifted high its hands. 11 Sun and moon stood in their places; They went away at the light of Your arrows, At the radiance of Your gleaming spear. 12 In indignation You marched through the earth; In anger You trampled the nations. 13 You went forth for the salvation of Your people, For the salvation of Your anointed. You struck the head of the house of the evil To lay him open from thigh to neck. 14 You pierced with his own spears The head of his throngs. They stormed in to scatter us; Their exultation was like those Who devour the oppressed in secret. 15 You trampled on the sea with Your horses, On the surge of many waters.

- In his prayer, Habakkuk reflects on God's faithfulness in the past, specifically on Israel's salvation history
- In v. 8, he reflects on God's deliverance of his people by: 1) turning the Nile into blood; 2) parting the Red Sea; 3) parting the Jordan River
- In v. 11, he remembers when God made the sun and moon stand still
- This glance back at God's faithfulness enables Habakkuk to look ahead in confidence knowing that God would act in the future to deliver his people
- "Habakkuk and his contemporary audience needed these reminders as they anticipated a foreign invasion. Judgment was just ahead. They found encouragement to persevere through their collective memory of the great work of God in the past. It helped them understand what he would eventually do in the future."<sup>29</sup>
- This is how we also must handle our present trials...by remembering the track record of God's faithfulness to us in the past and knowing that his same faithfulness will sustain us in the future

## God's Ways Result in Joy

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**Habakkuk 3:16-19** ~ I heard and my inward parts trembled, At the sound my lips quivered. Decay enters my bones, And in my place I tremble. Because I must wait quietly for the day of distress, For the people to arise who will invade us. 17 Though the fig tree should not blossom And there be no fruit on the vines, Though the yield of the olive should fail And the fields produce no food, Though the flock should be cut off from the fold And there be no cattle in the stalls, 18 Yet I will exult in the LORD, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation. 19 The Lord GOD is my strength, And He has made my feet like hinds' feet, And makes me walk on my high places. For the choir director, on my stringed instruments.

- Despite all the trials and suffering that awaited Habakkuk and the people of God (3:16-17), he could truly rejoice in the Lord (3:18) even though his outward circumstances hadn't changed
- And the reason for this is God's strength that would sustain him in the midst of the hardships (3:19)
- He was content to simply know God and the joy that came from that
- All of this demonstrates that biblical joy is completely independent of our circumstances
- And this joy is available to every believer no matter how difficult their trials
- "Trusting God does not mean that you do not feel your weakness. It does not mean that you never feel fear in the midst of an uncertain future. Those things are not inconsistent with faith. Habakkuk teaches us not to deny obvious reality. He teaches us to rely on Christ and then know joy, nonetheless."<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Green, *Trusting God*, 102.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.