

HABAKKUK CHAPTER 3(a)

For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope. (Romans 15:4).

The Scriptures are written for our use and benefit, as much as for those to whom they were first given. Those are most learned who are most mighty in the Scriptures. That comfort which springs from the word of God, is the surest and sweetest, and the greatest stay to hope. (Matthew Henry).

1 A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet upon Shigionoth.

Friendly reminder from the ending of my last sermon, as it relates to this Chapter 3:

Now while all this false idol worship permeates the world, the true World-Ruler abides and his presence is in his temple. To this Almighty Potentate Habakkuk's eyes are now turned. He ceases his castigations of the invaders and finds solace in contemplating the Almighty Creator, of whom much of the third chapter of this book is concerned.

The “prayer” mentioned in this verse signifies an act or exercise of devotion, including adoration, praise and thanksgiving.

“Upon Shigionoth” suggests a metric or musical presentation. This is a mixed hymn, a piece of poetry, sung to the accompaniment of a musical instrument of great

compass or range. Think Handel's Messiah. Many different truths of God presented with a wide array and stylings of great music.

Psalm 7 begins this way: **O Lord my God, in thee do I put my trust: save me from all them that persecute me, and deliver me: Lest he tear my soul like a lion, rending it in pieces, while there is none to deliver.** (Psalm 7:1, 2).

Why do I mention Psalm 7 here? Well, take a look at the introductory title to that Psalm. It's the only other time a form of that hard-to-pronounce word appears in the Bible. Here it is: **Shiggaion of David, which he sang unto the Lord, concerning the words of Cush the Benjamite.**

Barnes says the word probably means *a psalm with music expressive of strong emotion*. All of Chapter 3 makes up this piece of music, and it features a unique meter. Most of the hymns we sing can be sung to a specific meter, and songs are listed in our hymn books with their meter. But there are a few hymns we have run across where we simply can't find a standard metered tune. That seems to be what we have going on here in chapter 3.

Let's hear Gill's remarks about Shigionoth before moving on to verse 2. He says that word is to be translated "with a song", or "after the manner of a song", referring both to the tune and the instrument to be used in the singing of the "erratic" and "wandering" song.

²O LORD, I have heard thy speech, and was afraid: O LORD, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy.

Habakkuk tells us he has heard the Lord's words, especially as it relates to his judgments to be executed. The terribleness of those coming judgments fills him with reverential awe and dread.

In the midst of that frame of mind and overall state, he cries out for revival and preservation of God's people. While all this destruction and suffering is ongoing, remember your compassion and mercy for your chosen lambs, prays Habakkuk. Remember that wonderful work of salvation, and preserve and take care of that work.

The nature of Habakkuk's angst is captured in Psalm 77: **Will the Lord cast off forever? And will he be favorable no more? Is his mercy clean gone forever? Doth his promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies? (Psalm 77:7-9).**

Now remember, though this language was written in the time of great calamity to ancient Israel, it forcefully applies to us today. In the midst of God's astounding earth judgments, we should very much pray for revival, or as Matthew Poole says in commenting on this verse, *revive; not only keep alive, but somewhat refresh, renew, give some new strength to thy church and people, who wait for thee.*

³God came from Teman, and the Holy One from mount Paran. Selah. His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise.

We continue with this ode to God, who came, comes and will come, at all times, and in and from all places. Some specific places and events are mentioned, and that's all good. **And he said, the Lord came from Sinai, and rose up from Seir unto them; he shined forth from mount Paran, and he came with ten thousands of saints: from his right hand went a fiery law for them.** (Deuteronomy 33:2). Teman is mentioned in Jeremiah 49:7 (**Concerning Edom, thus saith the Lord of hosts; Is wisdom no more in Teman?**). But those specific mentions are representative.

Poole says it this way: *God, the God of our fathers, our God, came; appeared, discovered himself, for that is his coming, who, since he fills all places at all times, cannot be said to come by any change of place.*

The places cited take the mind to the great exodus from Egypt and the Lord's mercies on his people in the wilderness. But it has universal application. God is omnipresent; he is forever on the move. He is here, he is there, and he is everywhere. And his glory fills the earth, then, now and in times to come. In old Sinai, that excessive splendor filled the air when God descended on that craggy mountain, in flames of fire, lightnings, and thunders to give the law to his people.

And so it is today. **[T]he whole earth is full of his glory.** (Isaiah 6:3). **[U]pon whom doth not his light arise?** (Job 25:3). **O Lord our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! Who hast set thy glory above the heavens.** (Psalm 8:1). Present tense, all!

⁴And his brightness was as the light; he had horns coming out of his hand: and there was the hiding of his power.

The Hebrew word translated “light” in this verse is “sun”, such as is found at Job 31:26: **If I beheld the sun when it shined, or the moon walking in brightness[.]** That rendering improves the sense of what is said here. In human experience, it is hard to imagine much of anything that is brighter than the sun. You cannot look at it with the naked eye, unless you want to destroy that eye. You certainly get a strong sense of the sun’s brightness just being outside on a sunny day, but looking directly at the sun is virtually impossible. That’s bright! Here we find another verse likening God’s image to the sun: **And they saw the God of Israel: and there was under his feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone, and as it were the body of heaven in his clearness.** (Exodus 24:10).

The original language for “horns” in this text means to shine or emit rays of light; “horns” would better be rendered rays or splendours. So Benson writes: *In this illustrious passage, then, we see the brightness, or splendour, poetically represented as streaming from the hand of God, that awful hand which is mighty in operation, and which has so often manifested the divine power to a wondering world.* So we see this concept in Psalm 104, verses 1 and 2: **Bless the Lord, O my soul. O Lord my God, thou art very great; thou art clothed with honour and majesty. Who coverest thyself with light as with a garment: who stretchest out the heavens like a curtain[.]** Humanity grasps this concept. Google action characters with the power of fire coming out of their hands and you find a long list, including Prince Zuko, Human Torch, Charazard (Pokemon), Scorpion, Ghost Rider, Natsu Dragneel, Portgas D. Ace, Pyro, El Diablo and Azula, just for starters.

As to the last clause of this verse, consider Poole's analysis: *One would think his brightness should have discovered, not hid his power; it did both, it discovered much of it, but hid much more; it was light inaccessible, and therefore a hiding light.*

⁵ Before him went the pestilence, and burning coals went forth at his feet.

In this era of the pandemic, or Covid-19 scourge, this verse is particularly helpful and supportive of this church's message. God sent Covid-19 as judgment; it's that simple. He sent it, and it went before him. He was and is the author of it, in all of the minute details and respects, and though we keep a watchful eye on it, we only know the tithe of its glorious impact. Remember, this is part of The Ode!

Some believe this pestilence, or plague, is what accomplished the remarkable feat described in 2 Kings 19:35: **And it came to pass that night, that the angel of the Lord went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses.** Now you may say, no way can a pestilence kill that quickly. To which I say, you need to read up on the flu of 1918 where thousands who woke up in the morning perfectly healthy were dead by nightfall.

And what of the "burning coals" that "went forth at his feet?" Likely they're a burning fever of jealousy, such as we read of in Song of Solomon 8:6: **Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm: for love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave: the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame.**

Those hot coals could also fairly be said to represent a burning fever or other distempers of a fiery and destructive nature, such as typhoid and the like, diseases that once killed Americans by the tens of thousands, from the White House (Lincoln's son) to the back alleys of major cities. **They shall be burnt with hunger, and devoured with burning heat, and with bitter destruction[.]** Deuteronomy 32:24. My advice? Don't mess with the God of burning coals!

⁶He stood, and measured the earth: he beheld, and drove asunder the nations; and the everlasting mountains were scattered, the perpetual hills did bow: his ways are everlasting.

God measures or parcels out the earth putting the usurping invader to confusion. You probably thought Thomas Jefferson was the one who added the Louisiana Purchase to America's land mass. Wrong! Did you think James Polk was the one who annexed (stole?) most of the southwest (Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, Nevada, California, and parts of other states in that area) to the United States? If so, once again you're wrong! The creator of this world did all that, and much more similarly over the millennia.

And what do we say of the scattered mountains? **The mountains quake at him, and the hills melt, and the earth is burned at his presence, yea, the world, and all that dwell therein. Who can stand before his indignation? And who can abide in the fierceness of his anger? His fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by him.** (Nahum 1:5, 6). **The mountains skipped like rams, and the little hills like lambs. What ailed thee, O thou sea, that thou fleddest? Thou Jordan, that thou wast driven back? Ye mountains, that ye skipped like rams; and ye little hills, like lambs? Tremble, thou earth, at the presence of the**

Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob; which turned the rock into a standing water, the flint into a fountain of waters. (Psalm 114:4-8).

All power, great or small, gave way before an angry God. All which withstood was scattered. All which in pride lifted itself up was brought low. Such is the symbolism of these everlasting mountains and perpetual hills.

There they stood before man was on the earth; they are so solid, man so slight; they have survived so many generations of man; they will long survive us; they seem as if they would stand forever; nothing could stand before the might of God. What symbol could be more apt? To the greater pride the heavier lot is assigned; the mountains lifted on high above the earth and, as it were, looking down upon it, are scattered or dispersed, as when a stone flieth in pieces under the stroke of the hammer. (Barnes).

“His ways are everlasting” closes out this interesting verse. His purposes and plans, foreknown from all eternity, will infallibly be carried out in their appointed time. His wisdom, justice, goodness, holiness, and power, exerted and manifested in governing his people, are immutable and eternal.

Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him. (Acts 28:31).