Thursday Evening Bible Class 24th Oct. 2013

Habakkuk Reading: Habakkuk 3

Dear Brethren and Sisters

Like so many other prophets we know so little about Habakkuk. With prophets like Micah, Nahum, Obadiah, we know little except the words they wrote. With prophets like Ahijah of Shiloh, Shemaiah, Iddo, Hanani the seer, Azariah, son of Oded we know little except the words they spoke. With prophets like A Man of God from Judah" "Old prophet of Bethel" we know not even their names but know only what they did. *It is because God chooses the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence.* The prophet himself is relatively unimportant, just a vessel in God's hand, just as we are. It is the message itself which demands the focus, and more importantly God who has sent the message, and who has preserved the message for centuries to our day. It was relevant firstly to those to whom it would have been delivered. We can establish from the words of the burden itself that the reputation of the Chaldeans were already known, that bitter and hasty nation. God had promised to raise them up. It implies that they had not yet been used against Habakkuk's' compatriots, and so it is likely that Habakkuk prophesied or was given this burden during the reign of King Manasseh, before the king was taken in thorns to Babylon. It seems to fit, as Habakkuk describes a time of social and moral collapse in the nation, and certainly not a hint of national reform as Hezekiah, or Josiah instituted, instead the general demeanour of the nation languishing

under the wicked rule of Manasseh seems appropriate 1:3,4… Others suggest that it was during the reign of Jehoiakim. It is worth noting the annotation both at the beginning and ending of Habakkuk 3.. v1, and 19b... This suggests that Habakkuk's vision here was used in the temple and was sung at times by the priests and singers. 1 Chronicles 25:1 1. *Moreover David and the captains of the host separated to the service of the sons of Asaph, and of Heman, and of Jeduthun, who should prophesy with harps, with psalteries, and with cymbals:* This reference supports the idea that Habakkuk was a Levite. Whoever he was, the prophet was in disarray. Habakkuk cries out to God amidst a time of deep spiritual darkness, and gloom. The chapter opens with Habakkuk wrestling with his understanding of the will of God. His name means wrestler, which reminds us of the exhortation of Paul to the Ephesians where he describes the ever ready soldier of the Lord, but his name can also mean embracer, suggesting an intimacy, a cleaving to the purpose of God. But here he is filled with dismay and consternation. He cries out verse 2… Such a revelation to him from God filled him with deep sorrow, and it was aptly described as a burden. Heb Masa, or heavy load. Same term used in Nahum and Malachi, as well as others, it was a responsibility to deliver a just Divine sentence that would have borne heavily upon the messengers. Here Habakkuk contends that God just doesn't seem to be doing anything about the evil being practiced by his nation. He is full of frustration. We can see echoes fo Jonah's difficulty's , and also the way which Elijah also felt as they all perceived a world where evil triumphs over good, and how it upsets them, as it does all the saints, as they also exclaim Rev 6:10 Jesus himself states Rev 6:10 *And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?* But Jesus responds 13:10 *He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity: he that killeth with*

the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints. It is in this way that God responds to Habakkuk in a unique way amongst the recorded words of the prophets in this conversational kind of way. For as Habakkuk laments of the way the wicked encompass the righteous, or outnumber them, and that it is because God has allowed this that wrong judgement proceeds, God responds in Verse 5 … As we have looked up this class, and as we were reminded recently in a lecture, this passage is quoted by the Apostle Paul in Acts 13:41 when speaking to the unbelieving Jews, he said *Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish: for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you*. The words of Paul agree to the Septuagint rendering of the words of Habakkuk, and we notice the words for behold ye among the nations are replaced with ye despisers. This is significant, for Paul applies to the words of Habakkuk to another generation showing us how the prophecy can apply also to subsequent events as well as the immediate context. God instructs, Look among the nations, look at the signs of the times, you will be amazed by what I am going to do, I raise up the Chaldeans that bitter and hasty nation… Paul to the Jews, said look you despisers, they didn't have to look among the nations, for the oppressing power was already among them, the latter day Babylonian the Roman power, who was being raised up to march through and destroy the land in AD70.. we can see why the Apostle uses this reference of Habakkuk, and appreciate the parallel. Back to Habakkuk's day, God effectively replies to the prophet that he is not just letting the wicked do as they please, but that limitations are placed upon them, in the form of a great punishment, that bitter and hasty nation, God does work in the Kingdoms of men as Daniel was reminded Dan 4:17 *to the intent that the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest*

of men. God reveals to the prophet the battle tactics of the Babylonians, swift, merciless, instant in violence, swifter than the leopards, at a time when leopards were tamed and trained to hunt for sport amongst the wealthy nobility, so were the shock troops of the Chaldeans awesome in their fierceness , horsemen from afar, with seeming unlimited resources, shall sup up as the east wind, or consume as it can be understood in the Hebrew, as the East wind, that driving, hot Tamsin which causes all before it to seek shelter, driving before it burning sand, as the Chaldeans drove captives before them like the sand, sweeping them along, the vision is so descriptive and accurate, and the character of the Babylonian summed up verse 11… or perhaps rendered *Then they sweep by like the wind and go on, guilty men, whose own might is their god.* Marduk, was not their god, Was this not what Nebuchadnezzar uttered, he who was supposed to be the son of Marduk, *Dan 4:30 Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?* Yes this exactly as God predicted to Habukkuk. Thus the prophet is inspired to record his prayerful response to the revelation of God, v12, and he carefully lays out his case, and his contention. Surely God is omnipotent, and all powerful? Art thou not from everlasting, he evokes the memorial name, I will be Mighty Ones, the name bound in covenant in His purpose with His people, He addresses God, my Holy One, Kodesh, he shows his own humility, but perhaps is alluding to the fact that God cannot lie. Or brake his promise, he says we shall not die O Lord, whilst this may be an inference to the reward of everlasting life to those who embrace the Yhwh name, in the original it appears to read who diest not, ie it is God who is immortal, and who cannot change. It appears that this is the correct translation as Paul to Timothy seems to base his description of the Almighty on this and the next verse: 1Tim 6:16 *the blessed and only*

Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of Lords; Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting. In the 13th verse we arrive at the core of Habakkuk's complaint if we can call it that, in words which are famous and oft quoted for their pithy truth Thou art of purer eyes than to behold iniquity. How true this description of the character of God is: Habakkuk's reveals the depth of his understanding, but he asks, if this is the case, then why do you look upon, or tolerate those who deal treacherously, and hold thy tongue, or hold back reproof when the wicked devour those who are more righteous than he? He accepts Israel/ Judah is a bad lot – thou has ordained them for judgement, he accepts that. They deserve it, it is the justice of God, but why then usher in a band of men far worse? Why use someone worse to punish someone not quite so bad. To Habakkuk it seemed that it gave an incentive for the wicked to be even more wicked. Indeed this was the view of the Psalmist at one point, as he similarly voices such reasoning ion Ps 73:1 -16, where he says *3. For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. 4. For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm.12. Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches.* The prophet wrestles with the subject, as he describes the nations as the ocean, with men as aimless fish, and the wicked as predatory fishermen, rejoicing in a fat catch of men, stupidly worshipping their manmade net as a god, and he seeks to encapsulate the utter crass emptiness of the wickedness of man, as they seek to outdo each other in their self-destruction. He arrests his case by stating ch2:1, which should really belong to the former chapter 1*. I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved*. As if knowing he deserves through his

own simplicity the reproof of God, yet he shows his zeal, and determination to know the truth, and feels fortified by this, in my watch he says. He sees it as his duty, his service, as others, watchman what of the night, to be alert and ready. Such was his faith. God was not angry with Habakkuk,. As he was not angry with Jonah or Elijah, *It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning:* said Jeremiah. The Holy One replied: v2…. The Hebrew gives the idea of engraving upon tablets. The message was to be utterly convincing and persuasive that the messenger is certain of its understanding and so can run. The Apostle so describes interaction upon the hearts of the true prophets of the Lord in 2 Cor 3: *the epistle of Christ ministered … written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.* You need to embrace this, Habakkuk is being told, God is in control, he knows what he is doing, He has a master plan, and will not alter from it: verse 3: Appropriate words for us, in the days of Babylon the Great, as the years stretch on past into the seventh day it seems 2013, nearly 2014, and the clock ticks on and ranks fall untold. Verse 3… As Paul explained to the Areopagites God has determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of man's habitation; Though it tarry, Heb mahahh, to be reluctant, uncertain.. It may appear uncertain, but just because we do not know it all, see it all, and see the broad picture all the time we should not be faithless but believing. The Septuagint has a interesting version of this verse: Though he should tarry, wait for him, for he shall surely come and will not tarry. It is this version that Paul quotes in Heb 10:37 36. *For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.37. For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry.* The Apostle referring to none other than the Seed of Promise, the Word made flesh Christ Jesus

the son of God. Paul the Apostle perhaps referring his readers to the coming vengeance of Christ in the form of the Roman legions, that bitter and hasty nation, or/and the Coming of Christ in the latter days to destroy and drive asunder the nations. It will not tarry. This second use is different to the first, this time the Heb is hachar, meaning to loiter. It will not tarry, there will be nop delay. The time is ordained. It is set. God answers Habakkuk's issue head on. Verse 4… Again Paul quotes this verse, and shows us the correct rendering: Heb 10: 38: *Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.* This is God's message to the prophet. Don't be discouraged by what you do not know, accept I am in control, and all will be well, concentrate on what you can change, and don't fret about the rest. The Psalmist says Ps 37: *7 Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him: fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass.* He arrives at the same conclusion as explained to Habakkuk*: 17. Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end. For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be: yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be. But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.* As Paul points out but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. If the faithful lose faith, loosen their embrace on the hope, they would be no better than the wicked which they despise so much. The Just shall live by their faith. This is such a powerful statement is reply to Habakkuk's question that Paul quotes it at least three times, and alludes to probably more. References such as Romans 1:7, Gal 3 :11, and Heb10:38 we have already referred to. The points the Apostle raises in these references can be looked at later perhaps. It is the active faith which must be alive, faith which stimulates, invigorates, one that is vibrant, real and passionate, all embracing. In the next verses, the next

section of the booklet shall we say, from verse 5 – 19, the Lord God describes to the prophet the nature and character of the Chaldean avenger, and how he in his turn will be humbled and broken, and ultimately be destroyed. He is not talking about Judah as the context makes clear, and as we note in verse 5 it is only the Chaldean candidate in the time of Habakkuk, who could be described as gathering unto him all nations, and heaping unto him all people. Whilst the descriptions aptly describe the Babylonian fury, so too does the prophetic language contain allusions to Babylon the Great, he transgresseth by wine, Rev 18:3 *For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, verse 5 of this chapter who enlargeth his desire as sheol, and is as death,* Rev death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. Verse 6 how the nations overcome by the Babylonians will rejoice to see her downfall, a taunting proverb, so too Babylon the Great *Rev 17: 16. And the ten horns which thou sawest upon the beast, these shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire.* We can see surely the same sentiment between the Old Babylon, and Babylon the great, as we read verse 7…it was the Persian power, under Cyrus that arose suddenly and with quiet efficiency that overthrew the oppressor, and plundered them. So in type it will be the saints who will rise up, from the resurrection to suddenly fall upon the great whore. Five times God thunders woe to evil oppressor. v6 *Woe to him that increaseth that which is not his*! ver9 *Woe to him that coveteth an evil covetousness to his house*, verse 12. *Woe to him that buildeth a town with blood, and stablisheth a city by iniquity*! Verse 15 *Woe unto him that giveth his neighbour drink*, 19. *Woe unto him that saith to the wood, Awake; to the dumb stone, Arise*, Thus in this fivefold condemnation God systematically exposes the wicked dictator for what it is, woe to pride and avarice, woe to covetousness and evil desire, woe to

violence and ruthless politics, woe to superstition and deception, woe to idolatry and false religion, verse 18,19, who trust in dumb idols, surely fulfilled by the Roman church for centuries more consistently than any other empire for so long ever the gods of silver and gold to cast to the moles and the bats, the exposure of the great deception. Yet in the midst of this historical summary of the Babylonian influence over not only Judah, but over all nations subsequently, God in answering Habakkuk's query, proves that he is in control of the nations, His justice will be done, the wicked will be overthrown in his good appointed time, and v14. *For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.* This is God's stated purpose, as it was to Israel as the wandered the wilderness, No.s 14:21 21. But as truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord. The conclusion of David's words Ps 7219: 19. And blessed be his glorious name for ever: and let the whole earth be filled with his glory; Amen, and Amen. The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended. Habakkuk's version, as the waters cover the sea, referring to the clouds, has symbolic spiritual allusions, of the nations being covered, ruled by the clouds of witnesses to bring about God's glory. This is the core of the vision of hope tucked in the middle of the vision of destruction to be meted out upon Judah's chastiser, and oppressor. It was a complete answer to Habakkuk misgivings. Chapter 3, the last section of Habakkuk's work, provides us with a remarkable song, annotated with the instruction Shigionoth, to be sung with great enthusiasm! The prophet admits his earlier doubts, but in his own revival pleads the cause for others, revive, make alive thy work in the midst of the years. Because of the faithlessness of Israel, God's work was dishonoured, but in the midst of the years, the work was revived, as fulfilled by later prophets, as Paul described to the Jews: *It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you:*

but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. In wrath remember mercy adds Habakkuk, again summed up by Paul: *blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.. And so all Israel shall be saved:* In the previous vision Habakkuk was shown how the oppressor would be broken in pieces, how the tyrant who would subjugate God's people would be in turn also subjugated and destroyed. Now in this vision he sees the little stone power filling the whole earth. Thus we embark on a triumphant campaign described by the prophet. The Revised version puts this prose in the future tense, Bro. Thomas in Eureka agrees and translates this verse as Eloah shall come in from the south, and the Holy One from Mount Paran. This is in contrast to Deut33:2 a parallel passage, where the campaign is described in the past, summing up Israel as the saints under the leadership of God coming to the land of promise, with allusions to the future. Habakkuk's vision is a vision of the future with allusions to the past. Although Eloah is singular, the Mighty One, it is not just the Messiah on his own, for parallel passages such as Deut 33 and Psalm 68 speak of thousands of saints, or changed ones, Zechariah 14 speaks of the same victory campaign, and says *and the Lord my God shall come, and all the saints with thee.* The apocalypse of this glory is so described also in Ezekiel ch 1 and Revelation ch 10 speaking of Christ at the head of a mighty army of glorified saints, men and women like Habakkuk who have embraced the hope of Israel , and no longer wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. The seemingly permanent mountains and hills overthrown, the powers that be, alliances, leagues, military powers broken, commonwealths, unions, and agencies annulled, empires and confederacies smashed by the Israel of God. Beginning from the

regional territory, the Arabs the old enemy feel their displeasure first. Those associated with the ancient territories of Cushan and Midian, spreading from north west Arabia, including Paran and Botzrah even to Ethiopia, and the Sudan, the old enemy, Arabs. In tandem with other prophecies such as Ps 72, these will first feel the heat, but will first capitulate to the chariots of salvation, as Habakkuk so describes, the chariot of Israel and horsemen thereof. All will be swept before them. Analogous to Joshua cleansing the land of promise and leading the nation to victory, but this time for the final time, Habakkuk sees v11….not just as they did in the valley of Aijalon, but across the world the symbolic sun and moon, will be paralysed political and ecclesiastical power, the source of the evil sought out, just as David smote Goliath, just as the image of Nebuchadnezzar was ground to powder starting with the head of gold, so too Gog the dictator, and the horn with eyes speaking great things are mortified, the head, Rosh cut offv13… and further described Thou didst strike though with his staves the head of his villages or warriors as it can rather be rendered, the confederacy of nations described by Ezekiel 38 will be pulverised. Here in this verse we see the hints of continued resistance , as verse 15… through the heap of waters, heap Heb chomer, to boil up ferment, we can picture the range of the nations casting up mire and dirt as a raging sea, but the sea shall be calmed, he shall rebuke strong nations afar off, the campaign will continue from the Middle East, into Europe and across the continents, nation shall beat their swords into ploughshares, lest they be dashed into pieces like a potters vessel. Verse 16 the scene changes, once more the conversation shifts, Habakkuk gratefully answers the Lord's revelation. The effect of the vision was completely stunning, it was deeper longer, further more terrible than anything he imagined. The effects upon Habakkuk are similar to that described by Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and John, as they too came to

terms with their increased knowledge, which overpowered them, and knew for certain that God chooses the base things of the world to confound the wise. The revelation was as if he was given new life. As John was lifted up from the earth, and given new life, so Habakkuk's spirit is given new life. The just shall live by faith, is seen is the prophets poetic and moving summary, v17… all will fail, Israel will fall, but now he understands, now he knows. God will not forget his Holy Covenant. He is in control. He rules in the Kingdom of men, he will revive his work, as he revived his prophet, in this intimate embrace, as if speaking face to face as a man doth his friend. V18… The prophet concludes in a shout of triumph. Yahweh Adonai is my strength, He who will be rulers, is my strength. This was all his hope and all his desire, no doubt drawing upon previous scriptures, he uses the expression of the Psalmist who depicts the Messiah in 2 Sam 22:34 *God is my strength and power: and he maketh my way perfect. He maketh my feet like hinds' feet: and setteth me upon my high places.* Habakkuk started his words as uncertain, and unsure, in despair, and unhappy. He finishes the little book with faith restored. Because of the Word of God he is transformed into a new man. He inspires hope for all of us.