

The Cry of Habakkuk

The oracle that Habakkuk the prophet received. (NIV)	The burden which Habakkuk the prophet did see. (KJV)	The burden that Habakkuk the prophet hath seen: (Young's Literal Translation)
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HABAKKUK — called a prophet, unusual in the book headings, only here and Zech 1:1. Neither in the scriptures nor outside sources provide any solid information as to the life of Habakkuk. Jerome and Luther trace the root of his name to a term meaning ‘to embrace.’ Martin Luther is quoted as saying, “Habakkuk signifies an embracer, or one who embraces another, takes him into his arms. He embraces His people, and takes them to his arms, i.e. He comforts them and holds them up, as one embraces a weeping child, to quiet it with the assurance that if God wills it shall soon be better.” Some relate his name to an Akkadian name of a plant or fruit tree. Habakkuk is also mentioned in the apocryphal “Bel and the Dragon” as appearing to Daniel in the lion’s den.

BURDEN — *“Habakkuk’s prophecy possesses a burdensome dimension from start to finish. The book begins with a plaintive cry, ‘How long....?’ It ends with the prophet’s resolve to endure the severe judgement of God that is sure to come. This message is appropriately designated the burden of Habakkuk....* It is quite clear that the term maššā’ may apply to a literal ‘burden’ that must be borne (cf. Exod 23:5; 2 K. 5:17; 8:9). It is not so clear that the term also may mean simply ‘utterance,’ despite the opinion of most modern and some ancient interpreters. The term introduces a message of judgment or doom in almost every case in which it precedes a prophetic pronouncement. Particularly in the case of Habakkuk’s message, it seems appropriate to translate the term as ‘burden’ rather than merely at ‘utterance.’” [Robertson, O. Palmer, NICOT *The Books of Nahum, Habukkuk, and Zephaniah*, pg 135]

SUMMATION — *“A matured faith trusts humbly but persistently in God’s design for establishing righteousness in the earth.”* [Robertson, *Habukkuk*, pg 135]

DATE — Uncertain but from the text it was given not too long prior to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians; note 1:5, *“for I will work a work in your days which ye will not believe”*, so the destruction of Jerusalem would occur in the lifetime of the recipients of this oracle. Contrast that with God’s statements concerning the destruction of Babylon happening in the near future but not in this generation: *“And the LORD answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it. For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry.”* (2:2,3) Probably written during the reign of Josiah or shortly thereafter, making Habakkuk a contemporary of Jeremiah, Nahum and Zephaniah.

OVERVIEW — consists of question / answer, question / answer, then praise in the form of a song for the Lord’s response. “The book opens in gloom and closes in glory; begins with an interrogation mark and closes with an exclamation point.”

Habakkuk’s Complaint (1:2~4)

<i>How long, O LORD, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, “Violence!” but you do not save? Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict abounds. Therefore the law is paralyzed, and justice never prevails. The wicked hem in the righteous, so that justice is perverted.</i> (NIV)	<i>O LORD, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear! even cry out unto thee of violence, and thou wilt not save! Why dost thou shew me iniquity, and cause me to behold grievance? for spoiling and violence are before me: and there are that raise up strife and contention. Therefore the law is slacked, and judgment doth never go forth: for the wicked doth compass about the righteous; therefore wrong judgment proceedeth.</i> (KJV)	<i>Till when, O Jehovah, have I cried, And Thou dost not hear? I cry unto Thee — ‘Violence,’ and Thou dost not save. Why dost Thou shew me iniquity, And perversity dost cause to behold? And spoiling and violence [are] before me, And there is strife, and contention doth lift [itself] up, Therefore doth law cease, And judgment doth not go forth for ever, For the wicked is compassing the righteous, Therefore wrong judgment goeth forth.</i> (Young’s Literal Translation)
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*“Two expressions introduce the complaint of the prophet: **How long** and **Why**. The first implies that the prophet had spent some time already in petition to God out of his deep concern for the prevailing circumstances of his day. Many times over he had returned with heart broken to pray over the awful situation. Finally he has come to the point of utter puzzlement over the silence of God. He cannot understand how the Almighty can allow the situation to continue any longer....* The substance of the prophet’s complaint centers on unanswered prayer. He has cried for relief from injustice; he has not been answered. A previous historical situation explains in part the perplexities of this circumstance. At the time of Israel’s insistence on the establishment of the monarchy, the Lord warned them through his servant: ‘You will cry out for relief from the king you have chosen, and the Lord *will not answer you in that day*’ (1 Sam 8:18).” [Robertson, *Habukkuk*, pg 138] “The prophet’s theological understanding of God as just and righteous is not matched by his experience of God, a problem similar to that known by Job (see Job 6:28-30).” [Baker, *Habakkuk*, pg 51]

THE OPPRESSORS — Habakkuk cannot be talking about the Chaldeans because they will be the ones used by God as an instrument

of judgment (v6). They cannot be the Assyrians because they could not convincingly be characterized as “more righteous” than the Chaldeans (v13). **The abuse of the Torah points to God’s own people oppressing one another.** The law was supposed to be the basis of order in the society but it no longer functioned that way. **Not only does injustice go unchecked but the forces of righteousness are thwarted. This is a temptation to the godly, for “we have cleansed our hearts in vain” - Ps 73:1-3,13, while it hardens the hearts of the lost - Eccl 8:11!**

SEVERE OPPRESSION — the severity of the oppression is indicated by piling up of synonyms: injustice, trouble / wrong, destruction, violence, strife, conflict.

The Lord’s First Response (1:5~11)

<p>“Look at the nations and watch — and be utterly amazed. For I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe, even if you were told. I am raising up the Babylonians, that ruthless and impetuous people, who sweep across the whole earth to seize dwelling places not their own. They are a feared and dreaded people; they are a law to themselves and promote their own honor. Their horses are swifter than leopards, fiercer than wolves at dusk. Their cavalry gallops headlong; their horsemen come from afar. They fly like a vulture swooping to devour; they all come bent on violence. Their hordes advance like a desert wind and gather prisoners like sand. They deride kings and scoff at rulers. They laugh at all fortified cities; they build earthen ramps and capture them. Then they sweep past like the wind and go on — guilty men, whose own strength is their god.” (NIV)</p>	<p>Behold ye among the heathen, and regard, and wonder marvelously: for I will work a work in your days which ye will not believe, though it be told you. For, lo, I raise up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, which shall march through the breadth of the land, to possess the dwellingplaces that are not their’s. They are terrible and dreadful: their judgment and their dignity shall proceed of themselves. Their horses also are swifter than the leopards, and are more fierce than the evening wolves: and their horsemen shall spread themselves, and their horsemen shall come from far; they shall fly as the eagle that hasteth to eat. They shall come all for violence: their faces shall sup up as the east wind, and they shall gather the captivity as the sand. And they shall scoff at the kings, and the princes shall be a scorn unto them: they shall deride every strong hold; for they shall heap dust, and take it. Then shall his mind change, and he shall pass over, and offend, imputing this his power unto his God. (KJV)</p>	<p>Look ye on nations, and behold and marvel greatly. For a work He is working in your days, Ye do not believe though it is declared. For, lo, I am raising up the Chaldeans, The bitter and hasty nation, That is going to the broad places of earth, To occupy tabernacles not its own. Terrible and fearful it [is], From itself its judgment and its excellency go forth. Swifter than leopards have been its horses, And sharper than evening wolves, And increased have its horsemen, Even its horsemen from afar come in, They fly as an eagle, hasting to consume. Wholly for violence it doth come in, Their faces swallowing up the east wind, And it doth gather as the sand a captivity. And at kings it doth scoff, And princes [are] a laughter to it, At every fenced place it doth laugh, And it heapeth up dust, and captureth it. Then passed on hath the spirit, Yea, he doth transgress, And doth ascribe this his power to his god. (Young’s Literal Translation)</p>
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The speaker is not identified but the Lord speaks using the first person, stating what He was about to do.

NOTE THE CHANGE FROM SINGULAR TO PLURAL — Note Habakkuk asks his question personally to God but God answers in the plural, addressing all the remnant of Judah. “The prophet speaks as an individual addressing God. But the Lord returns answer to a plurality of people rather than to the prophet himself. This divergence of addressees is appropriate to the perspective of both God and the prophet. Habakkuk suffers with a sense of aloneness as a consequence of the estrangement created by the violence God’s people have experienced at the hands of one another. **He addresses God as an isolated voice, although he speaks on behalf of others in his position as prophetic mediator. So the Lord returns answer, not in a way that bypasses his agonizing prophet, but only by including him among those others scattered throughout Israel that remain steadfast in faith despite their perplexity.**” [Robertson, *Habukkuk*, pg 136]

GOD SYMPATHIZES WITH THE HURTING — “The total absence of rebuke to the complainer also should be appreciated for its disarming effect. The Lord himself is fully in sympathy with the prophet’s agony over the suffering righteous ones. Although having larger concerns as well, the Lord knows and sympathizes with these who have been surrounded by the wicked.” [Robertson, *Habukkuk*, pg 141]

AN INCREDIBLE EVENT ABOUT THE HAPPEN — “God is no alarmist. Yet he assembles no less than four words of alert to awaken the recipients of this message: *Look! See! Be astonished! Wonder!* The prophet had presented a perplexing problem. The divine response is of such an overwhelming nature that even this kind of alarm is not excessive in preparing the people for its reception.” [Robertson, *Habukkuk*, pg 142]

THIS “WONDROUS EVENT” WAS THE WORK OF GOD — Israel is told to be astonished not at the human brutality that was about to take place but rather at the awesome work of God. The Lord Himself affirms His initiative in bringing forth the Chaldeans:

- “I am doing a work” (v5)

- “I am raising up the Babylonians...” (v6)

WHAT PRECISELY MAKES THIS DIVINE WORK SO INCREDIBLE? — “Many facets could be noted, including the rapidity of the rise of power of God’s instrument for judgment, the intensity of the judgement that is to come, and the fact that God himself is to be involved in this action. But most incredible is the fact that God’s own people could be cast off, and at the hands of Gentiles more wicked than they. Such deep mystery veils this aspect of the design of God that it cannot be permeated by the human mind. The prophet Habakkuk had prayed, hoping for some form of purging of the wicked element of the nation. But the divine response speaks of such an utter devastation that even greater puzzlement will grip the mind of the pious prophet.” [Robertson, *Habukkuk*, pg 146]

QUOTED BY PAUL — note this very statement concerning the unbelievable character of the coming judgement of God was used by Paul to forewarn the Jews that they were hardening themselves against his proclamation of the saving acts of God found in the death and resurrection of Jesus the Messiah:

“Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses. Take care that what the prophets have said does not happen to you: ‘Look, you scoffers, wonder and perish, for I am going to do something in your days that you would never believe, even if someone told you.’” (Acts 13:38~41)

GOD’S HAND IN RAISING UP THE CHALDEANS — “It is rather remarkable to note the rapid ascendancy to power of this nation, the extent of their domain, and their equally rapid decline in prominence. This whole international escapade underscores the prominence of the divine hand in raising them up and also bringing them down. Who would believe that a virtually nonexistent entity could conquer the old capital of Assyria in 614, Ninevah in 612, Harran in 610, and rout the armies of Pharaoh Neco at Carchemish in 605? They became the world rulers over Babylonia, Assyria, Syria, Palestine, and Egypt, when twenty years previously they hardly were known to exist. Yet their energy dissipated almost as rapidly, so that they were easily overcome by Cyrus king of Persia in 539, just in time to fulfill the prophecy of Jeremiah concerning Israel’s return in seventy years (Jer 29:10). Astounding indeed are the ways of God among the nations. ‘Not by their own instinct, but by the hidden impulse of God’ [Calvin] do the nations rise and fall.” [Robertson, *Habukkuk*, pg 148f]

CHARACTERISTICS OF GOD’S INSTRUMENT OF JUDGMENT — as many as twenty different features are noted about the coming barbarians, a number of them in couplets (relying heavily upon Robertson, *Habukkuk*).

- **bitter and impetuous** — not just a few individuals but the nation as a whole is characterized as irritated and ill-tempered, as a bear robbed of its cubs striking out irrationally in every direction
- **covers the breadth of the earth** — an uncertain army advances cautiously but the Chaldeans march proudly, confidently, unafraid of exposing their flanks to the enemy. Both Napoleon and Hitler destroyed their armies by exposing a limited troop to too broad an area but the Chaldeans had gathered such strength it had no fears.
- **to take possession of dwelling places not their own** — as the Canaanites were driven out by the Israelites because “*their iniquity was full*”, Israel was to be displaced by the Chaldeans
- **fearsome and terrible** — as a noun this word is used to describe terror instilled by the bared teeth of a crocodile, the snort of a warhorse or the presence of God. The second word is used to describe the troublesome terror inspired by a wilderness filled with scorpions, serpents, and drought, by a hostile nation, by the Lord’s deeds or direct confrontation by the Lord.
- **from itself shall come forth its (own) justice and honor** — they are autonomous, totally self-determining, not looking to God for what is right but determining for itself its own standard for truth
- **its horses are swifter than leopards, keener than wolves of the evening** — perhaps Israel could comfort themselves in the distance between the Chaldeans and themselves; certainly the Assyrians would serve as a buffer and they had learned to survive by paying the occasional tribute. Egypt as well could be depended upon to protect their interest in Palestine. But distance and protection from other nations would not stop the speed of the invaders. Flight would be futile, as a leopard leaps on its prey. As ravenous wolves of the evening whose senses are even keener as the night wears on, the nation searches out every fugitive.
- **its horsemen gallop (furiously), yes its horsemen shall come from afar** — horses and chariots would be roughly equivalent to today’s tanks, submarines and jets. When they attack, they overwhelm any opposition in their path.
- **they shall fly as a vulture rushes for food** — speaking of speed of a swooping bird on its prey, grasping and tearing the flesh of its exposed victims
- **every one of them shall come for violence** — Habakkuk had complained of the violence of those in Israel, God now recompenses them with violence.
- **the assembling of their faces is forward / hordes advance like a desert wind** — the Hebrew could be rendered in several manners; the gist seems to be the irresistible, inevitable, uninterrupted horde of warriors moving towards the land of God,

certain to arrive one day to bring total judgment and devastation.

- **they shall gather like sand captives** — Abraham had been promised his seed would be like the sand of the seashore, but now their captors will gather the captives like sand. The captors would possess little or no sympathy for human suffering, the vast number of human souls means no more to them than the innumerable grains of sand on the seashore.
- **so he at kings will mock; sovereigns are a joke to them** — Israel had relied on allies before to absorb the lethal blows of invaders but this adversary makes fun of the most powerful figures on earth
- **he at every fortification will laugh, he will heap up dust, and will take it** — a fortified city represented a great obstacle to be overcome by the invader, but this invader will mock at the resistance of such fortifications.
- **then his spirit changes, and he becomes angry and sins** — this probably is not a reference on God's part of judgment upon the invaders; rather this verse contrasts the mild-mannered mockery of fortifications with the deadly serious attention he turns to his task of murderous mutilation and tormenting of his victims.
- **his strength is his god** — the Chaldeans exalts itself to the level of deity; having deified their own brute force, they regard themselves incapable of doing wrong with that force.

Habakkuk's Second Complaint (1:12~2:1)

<p>O LORD, are you not from everlasting? My God, my Holy One, we will not die. O LORD, you have appointed them to execute judgment; O Rock, you have ordained them to punish. Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong. Why then do you tolerate the treacherous? Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves? You have made men like fish in the sea, like sea creatures that have no ruler. The wicked foe pulls all of them up with hooks, he catches them in his net, he gathers them up in his dragnet; and so he rejoices and is glad. Therefore he sacrifices to his net and burns incense to his dragnet, for by his net he lives in luxury and enjoys the choicest food. Is he to keep on emptying his net, destroying nations without mercy? I will stand at my watch and station myself on the ramparts; I will look to see what he will say to me, and what answer I am to give to this complaint. (NIV)</p>	<p>Art thou not from everlasting, O LORD my God, mine Holy One? we shall not die. O LORD, thou hast ordained them for judgment; and, O mighty God, thou hast established them for correction. Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity: wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he? And makest men as the fishes of the sea, as the creeping things, that have no ruler over them? They take up all of them with the angle, they catch them in their net, and gather them in their drag: therefore they rejoice and are glad. Therefore they sacrifice unto their net, and burn incense unto their drag; because by them their portion is fat, and their meat plenteous. Shall they therefore empty their net, and not spare continually to slay the nations? 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 reprov'd. (KJV)</p>	<p>Art not Thou of old, O Jehovah, my God, my Holy One? We do not die, O Jehovah, For judgment Thou hast appointed it, And, O Rock, for reproof Thou hast founded it. Purer of eyes than to behold evil, To look on perverseness Thou art not able, Why dost Thou behold the treacherous? Thou keepest silent when the wicked doth swallow the more righteous than he, And Thou makest man as fishes of the sea, As a creeping thing — none ruling over him. Each of them with a hook he hath brought up, He doth catch it in his net, and gathereth it in his drag, Therefore he doth joy and rejoice. Therefore he doth sacrifice to his net, And doth make perfume to his drag, For by them [is] his portion fertile, and his food fat. Doth he therefore empty his net, And continually to slay nations spare not? On my charge I stand, and I station myself on a bulwark, and I watch to see what He doth speak against me, and what I do reply to my reproof. (Young's Literal Translation)</p>
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“Although the answers of the Lord dealt precisely with the issues raised by his prophet, they ended up troubling him more than his original questions. In fact, Habakkuk becomes exceedingly bold. He actually challenges the Lord over his intention to punish the wickedness of Judah. Although approaching his subject cautiously by expressing confidence in the nature and purpose of God (v 12), he ends up by questioning God and his program (vv 13~17).” [Robertson, *Habakkuk*, pg 156] Habakkuk is perplexed by two things: the Lord using those more immoral than Israel to judge the nation, and the totality of the judgement. “Yes, Judah deserves chastisement but total destruction? What about your promises, O Lord?” What Habakkuk reveals is not a weak faith but rather a perplexed faith.

HOW DOES GOD'S FORTHCOMING JUDGMENT RECONCILE WITH ISRAEL BEING CHOSEN BY GOD? (v. 12) — Habakkuk reminds God of His eternal plan. *“Since the choice of Israel originated in the eternity of God's own nature, how could he now speak in tones threatening annihilation? Corrective justice indeed the prophet desired for Israel. But utter devastation at the hands of the Chaldeans seemed to be far too much.... Yahweh is their God. Therefore it is impossible that they could perish. Instead of serving as an instrument of annihilation, the enemy being raised up by God against Israel must function as the divine tool for justice and for rebuke.”* [Robertson, *Habakkuk*, pg 157]

SOURCE OF THE PROBLEM: GOD IS HOLY (v. 13) — the problem (from Habakkuk’s perspective) is a holy God using the depraved Chaldeans to carry out judgment on His own chosen people. “Long before the hand touches, the eye sees. Even a momentary glance toward iniquity while it still remains at the farthest distance is not possible for God. His holiness cannot abide iniquity.” [Robertson, *Habukkuk*, pg 159]

INTENSIFICATION OF THE PROBLEM: THE INFAMOUS MANNER IN WHICH THE CHALDEANS HAVE TREATED PEOPLE IN THE PAST (vv. 14-17) — the Chaldeans have no more regard for their captives as if they were like the lowest forms of life upon the earth. Some of the language here may be more literal than we could even imagine: “Not just figuratively but literally they carried on the Assyrian tradition of driving a hook through the sensitive lower lip of their captives and stringing them single file.... By a second and related figure, the prophet Habakkuk enforces his depiction of the brutality of the Babylonians. If not led with a hook, the faceless captives are dragged in a net. Again the inscriptions of Babylon enforces the soberness of the prophet’s description. In one relief, the major Babylonian deities Nigirsu, Shamash, Enlil, and Marduk drag a net in which their captured enemies squirm.” [Robertson, *Habukkuk*, pg 162f] “Wresting captives from their own environment, their native land, and exiling or transporting them into a foreign region was a common practice among the Assyrians and the Babylonians.” [Baker, *Habukkuk*, pg 57]

THE CHALDEANS WORSHIP THEIR INSTRUMENTS OF TORMENTS (v. 16) — “That which is dearest to the heart of the Babylonians is the booty of their rapacious aggressions, as seen in their worship practices. Their instruments of human torture and cruelty they worship, because these instruments have given to them an abundance of temporal pleasures.” [Robertson, *Habukkuk*, pg 163]

HABAKKUK STILL RECOGNIZES THE SOVEREIGN HAND OF GOD (v. 14) — while understanding their own culpability in the actions of the Chaldeans, Habakkuk also understood it was the hand of God providentially guiding and overseeing all that happens: “for you have made man as the fish of the sea...” (v 14) “In recognizing the sovereignty of God among the nations, he must conclude that God himself is ultimately behind this massive maltreatment of humanity.” [Robertson, *Habukkuk*, pg 162]

HABAKKUK BRACES FOR THE REBUKE (2:1) — “*Habakkuk is quite aware of the audacity of his most recent remarks. He has challenged the propriety of the purpose of the Lord himself. It is understandable therefore that he braces himself for a straightforward rebuke from the Lord.*” [Robertson, *Habukkuk*, pg 165]

TO HIS PRAISE, HABAKKUK DOES NOT RELY UPON HUMAN WISDOM BUT WAITS UPON GOD — “He will not attempt to reconcile in his own mind the apparent contradiction between the election of Israel by God as the object of his special love and the devastation of Israel at the hands of the rapacious Chaldeans as ordered by the Lord himself. He will not resort to the resources of human wisdom. Instead, he will watch for an answer that can come only from the Lord.... Both the humility and the hope of the prophet provide appropriate direction for the Church through the ages. God’s ways are higher than man’s ways. Only by revelation can the genuine perplexities of God’s dealings with human beings be comprehended.... *The ‘watchman’ who waits for God’s word stands in vivid contrast with those who resort to their own imaginations. The egotistic, humanistic alternative to passive dependence on the divine word merits the pointed rebuke provided by Calvin: ‘All ... who indulge themselves in their own counsels deserve to be forsaken by God, and to be left by him to be driven up and down, and here and there, by Satan; for the only unfailing security for the faithful is to acquiesce in God’s word.’*” [Robertson, *Habukkuk*, pg 165f] This is good lesson for us: *proper questioning of the Lord is not improper, while we remember our place and remember His place, knowing beforehand that He is right and we are wrong* — also note that *he didn’t go around spreading his doubts but rather waited, knowing the Lord had an answer to his problem.*

The Lord’s Second Answer (2:2-20)

<i>Then the LORD replied: “Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it. For the revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay. See, he is puffed up; his desires are not upright — but the righteous will live by his faith — indeed, wine betrays him; he is arrogant and never at rest. Because he is as greedy as the grave and like death is never satisfied, he gathers to himself all the nations and takes captive all the peoples. Will not all of them taunt him with ridicule and</i>	<i>And the LORD answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it. For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry. Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith. Yea also, because he transgresseth by wine, he is a proud man, neither keepeth at home, who enlargeth his desire as hell, and is as death, and cannot be satisfied, but gathereth unto him all nations, and heapeth unto him all people: shall not all these take up a parable against him, and</i>	<i>And Jehovah answereth me and saith: ‘Write a vision, and explain on the tables, That he may run who is reading it. For yet the vision [is] for a season, And it breatheth for the end, and doth not lie, If it tarry, wait for it, For surely it cometh, it is not late. Lo, a presumptuous one! Not upright is his soul within him, And the righteous by his steadfastness liveth. And also, because the wine [is] treacherous, A man is haughty, and remaineth not at home, Who hath enlarged as sheol his soul, And is as death that is not satisfied, And doth gather unto itself all the nations, And doth assemble unto itself all the peoples, Do not these — all</i>
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scorn, saying, 'Woe to him who piles up stolen goods and makes himself wealthy by extortion! How long must this go on?' Will not your debtors suddenly arise? Will they not wake up and make you tremble? Then you will become their victim. Because you have plundered many nations, the peoples who are left will plunder you. For you have shed man's blood; you have destroyed lands and cities and everyone in them. Woe to him who builds his realm by unjust gain to set his nest on high, to escape the clutches of ruin! You have plotted the ruin of many peoples, shaming your own house and forfeiting your life. The stones of the wall will cry out, and the beams of the woodwork will echo it. Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed and establishes a town by crime! Has not the LORD Almighty determined that the people's labor is only fuel for the fire, that the nations exhaust themselves for nothing? For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea. Woe to him who gives drink to his neighbors, pouring it from the wineskin till they are drunk, so that he can gaze on their naked bodies. You will be filled with shame instead of glory. Now it is your turn! Drink and be exposed! The cup from the LORD's right hand is coming around to you, and disgrace will cover your glory. The violence you have done to Lebanon will overwhelm you, and your destruction of animals will terrify you. For you have shed man's blood; you have destroyed lands and cities and everyone in them. Of what value is an idol, since a man has carved it? Or an image that teaches lies? For he who makes it trusts in his own creation; he makes idols that cannot speak. Woe to him who says to wood, 'Come to life!' Or to lifeless stone, 'Wake up!' Can it give guidance? It is covered with gold and silver; there is no breath in it. But the LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him." (NIV)

a taunting proverb against him, and say, Woe to him that increaseth that which is not his! how long? and to him that ladeth himself with thick clay! Shall they not rise up suddenly that shall bite thee, and awake that shall vex thee, and thou shalt be for booties unto them? Because thou hast spoiled many nations, all the remnant of the people shall spoil thee; because of men's blood, and for the violence of the land, of the city, and of all that dwell therein. Woe to him that coveteth an evil covetousness to his house, that he may set his nest on high, that he may be delivered from the power of evil! Thou hast consulted shame to thy house by cutting off many people, and hast sinned against thy soul. For the stone shall cry out of the wall, and the beam out of the timber shall answer it. Woe to him that buildeth a town with blood, and stablisheth a city by iniquity! Behold, is it not of the LORD of hosts that the people shall labor in the very fire, and the people shall weary themselves for very vanity? For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea. Woe unto him that giveth his neighbor drink, that putteth thy bottle to him, and makest him drunken also, that thou mayest look on their nakedness! Thou art filled with shame for glory: drink thou also, and let thy foreskin be uncovered: the cup of the LORD's right hand shall be turned unto thee, and shameful spewing shall be on thy glory. For the violence of Lebanon shall cover thee, and the spoil of beasts, which made them afraid, because of men's blood, and for the violence of the land, of the city, and of all that dwell therein. What profiteth the graven image that the maker thereof hath graven it; the molten image, and a teacher of lies, that the maker of his work trusteth therein, to make dumb idols? Woe unto him that saith to the wood, Awake; to the dumb stone, Arise, it shall teach! Behold, it is laid over with gold and silver, and there is no breath at all in the midst of it. But the LORD is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him. (KJV)

of them — against him a simile taken up, And a moral of acute sayings for him, And say, Wo [to] him who is multiplying [what is] not his? Till when also is he multiplying to himself heavy pledges? Do not thy usurers instantly rise up, And those shaking thee awake up, And thou hast been for a spoil to them? Because thou hast spoiled many nations, Spoil thee do all the remnant of the peoples, Because of man's blood, and of violence [to] the land, [To] the city, and [to] all dwelling in it. Wo [to] him who is gaining evil gain for his house, To set on high his nest, To be delivered from the hand of evil, Thou hast counselled a shameful thing to thy house, To cut off many peoples, and sinful [is] thy soul. For a stone from the wall doth cry out, And a holdfast from the wood answereth it. Wo [to] him who is building a city by blood, And establishing a city by iniquity. Lo, is it not from Jehovah of Hosts And peoples are fatigued for fire, And nations for vanity are weary? For full is the earth of the knowledge of the honour of Jehovah, as waters cover [the bottom of] a sea. Wo [to] him who is giving drink to his neighbour, Pouring out thy bottle, and also making drunk, In order to look on their nakedness. Thou hast been filled — shame without honour, Drink thou also, and be uncircumcised, Turn round unto thee doth the cup of the right hand of Jehovah, And shameful spewing [is] on thine honour. For violence [to] Lebanon doth cover thee, And spoil of beasts doth affright them, Because of man's blood, and of violence [to] the land, [To] the city, and [to] all dwelling in it. What profit hath a graven image given That its former hath graven it? A molten image and teacher of falsehood, That trusted hath the former on his own formation — to make dumb idols? Wo [to] him who is saying to wood, 'Awake,' 'Stir up,' to a dumb stone, It a teacher! lo, it is overlaid — gold and silver, And there is no spirit in its midst. And Jehovah [is] in His holy temple, Be silent before Him, all the earth! (Young's Literal Translation)

“Surprisingly, the Lord’s response to the prophet’s challenge comes in the form of a vision of hope that the prophet must write for future generations. God does not rail against the prophet for his accusations, contrary to Habakkuk’s expectations. First, he gives him a vision which contrasts the righteous by faith with the resolutely proud (2:2-5). Then he offers five proverbial bywords which ridicule the haughty (2:6-20).” [Robertson, Habukkuk, pg 168]

FOR A TIME APPOINTED — “Habakkuk is told to *write down* the ‘vision’ clearly so that it might be preserved and transmitted, since its message will not take immediate effect. It would happen in its *appointed time*, one chosen by God, and not before.” [Baker, *Habakkuk*, pg58f] It’s certainty of fulfillment, despite all appearances, is emphasized in the latter part of v. 3, “*it will certainly come and not delay.*”

THE PROUD AND FAITHFUL CONTRASTED (v. 4) — The proud cannot be upright (v. 4a) but the justified (by faith) shall live by his steadfast trust (v. 4b). “*This condition of self-exaltation and personal esteem brings with it certain consequences. Such an individual cannot be upright in himself. His own pride of person condemns him. This position of pride and self-reliance also excludes from the proud the possibility of finding a righteousness outside himself. For he has presumed to define himself as the source of his own goodness.... So by these words of Habakkuk Scripture makes it plain that the proud cannot be upright. As a consequence, neither can they live. They must experience condemnation and judgment. To Habakkuk it may seem that the boisterous, boastful Chaldeans shall continue to prosper. Yet the fact that their soul is not upright in them should be an adequate indicator of their ultimate judgment.... In Hab 2:4b, the term for ‘the justified’ or ‘the righteous’ contrasts with the reference to the soul of the proud, which is not ‘upright’ in the immediately preceding phrase. The soul of the proud is not morally upright in him; but the one who is legally righteous shall live.*” [Robertson, *Habukkuk*, pg 174ff] “While potentially ambiguous in Habakkuk, the concept of the necessity of faith, a heart attitude rather than outward actions, is not foreign to the Old Testament (cf. Gen 15:6; Am 5:21-24). Therefore the gospel so diligently preached by Paul is as much a part of the old covenant as it is of the new. The false dichotomy of ‘Old Testament = Law; New Testament = Grace’ is seen in reality to be illusory.” [Baker, *Habakkuk*, pg 61]

FIVE MOCKING STATEMENTS RIDICULING THE HAUGHTY (vv. 6~20) —

The Pillager Pillaged! (vv. 6b~8)	<i>Woe to him who piles up stolen goods and makes himself wealthy by extortion! How long must this go on? Will not your debtors suddenly arise? Will they not wake up and make you tremble? Then you will become their victim. Because you have plundered many nations, the peoples who are left will plunder you. For you have shed man’s blood; you have destroyed lands and cities and everyone in them.</i>
The Fortified Dismantled! (vv. 9~11)	<i>Woe to him who builds his realm by unjust gain to set his nest on high, to escape the clutches of ruin! You have plotted the ruin of many peoples, shaming your own house and forfeiting your life. The stones of the wall will cry out, and the beams of the woodwork will echo it.</i>
The Civilized Demoralized! (vv. 12~14)	<i>Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed and establishes a town by crime! Has not the LORD Almighty determined that the people’s labor is only fuel for the fire, that the nations exhaust themselves for nothing? For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.</i>
The Shameless Defamed! (vv. 15~17)	<i>Woe to him who gives drink to his neighbors, pouring it from the wineskin till they are drunk, so that he can gaze on their naked bodies. You will be filled with shame instead of glory. Now it is your turn! Drink and be exposed! The cup from the LORD’s right hand is coming around to you, and disgrace will cover your glory. The violence you have done to Lebanon will overwhelm you, and your destruction of animals will terrify you. For you have shed man’s blood; you have destroyed lands and cities and everyone in them.</i>
The Idolatrous Powerless! (vv. 18~20)	<i>Of what value is an idol, since a man has carved it? Or an image that teaches lies? For he who makes it trusts in his own creation; he makes idols that cannot speak. Woe to him who says to wood, Come to life! Or to lifeless stone, Wake up! Can it give guidance? It is covered with gold and silver; there is no breath in it. But the LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him.</i>

THE LIVING GOD AND DEAD IDOLS CONTRASTED (v. 20) — let all the earth be silent (clasp their hands over their mouth), cp Zeph 1:7a; Zech 2:13. “Although a specifically adversative conjunction is lacking, this last verse contrasts the vitality of the one true God with the deadness and silence of the idols.... *Habakkuk had begun his dialogue in an effort to understand the mysterious ways of a holy God with sinful people. Now he stands in the presence of the Lord’s holy temple, hushed in reverential awe. He may not have grasped fully all the implications of the divine answer to his query. Yet he stands assured of the abiding lordship of his God, of his justice in prosecuting all violators of his holy law, and of his infinite mercy in granting life to all who will trust in him and in the provisions he has promised for the sinner.*” [Robertson, *Habukkuk*, pg 211] “*This contrasts with the frenetic activity of man to create ‘speaking’ gods, and the tumultuous cries of worshippers to make dumb idols respond. Lifeless idols approached in clamour are silent, while the living God, approached in silence and reverence, speaks.*” [Baker, *Habakkuk*, pg68] *God often uses the unsaved to accomplish His purposes, then punishes the ungodly. “The LORD hath made all things for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil.” (Prov 16:4) Come election time, we don’t pray “put the man in of Your choice”, meaning if the Lord*

had his way, only godly men would ascend to leadership; rather we pray “have mercy on us O Lord”

Habakkuk’s Prayer: Superscription (3:1)

A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet. On shigionoth. (NIV)	A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet upon Shigionoth. (KJV)	A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet concerning erring ones: (Young’s Literal Translation)
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“Now at last the struggles of Habakkuk come round for a final resolution. *As often happens when finite human beings venture to dialogue with infinite God, the solution to Habakkuk’s problem does not come in the manner in which he might have expected.* Instead of God’s announcing a controlled and modest chastening of the disobedient in Israel, Habakkuk had heard with alarm the word of utter devastation. Instead of stern rebuke for his personal audacity in complaint, Habakkuk had received a word of comfort, consolation, and reassurance. So the prophet has been forced to readjust radically what he might expect from the Lord. It is not that the God of the covenant has proven himself capricious or inconsistent. But the prophet must alter his perspective on the ways of God with mankind... *This prayer indicates that the prophet now has no further case to make. He has pleaded his cause, he has concluded his dialogue with the Almighty. Now he leads God’s people to an acceptance of the just and merciful orderings which the Lord has revealed to him. He reflects the wisdom that has arisen out of confrontation with the will of God.*” [Robertson, *Habakkuk*, pg 212ff]

A POEM DESIGNED FOR WORSHIP IN ISRAEL — “The inclusion of a superscription and subscription together with a threefold use of the term *selah* (vv. 3, 9, 13) should be noted. These notations indicate that the poem was designed for use in the worship of Israel.” [Robertson, *Habakkuk*, pg 213] “The psalm is also said to be on shigionoth, a rare term (Ps 7:1) used only in cases of complete reliance on God’s faithfulness.” [Baker, *Habakkuk*, pg 68]

SUMMATION: A POETIC ELABORATION OF 2:4 — “The overarching theme of this chapter may be seen as a poetic elaboration of 2:4. Despite all the cataclysmic calamities of judgments that shall come from the hand of God himself, ‘the justified (by faith) shall live by his steadfast trust.’ *This permeating theme of the book now finds explicit elaboration in terms of the necessity of God’s intervention for faith to be victorious. Faith triumphs in life by the intervening power of God may serve as a theme for this chapter.*” [Robertson, *Habakkuk*, pg 214]

Habakkuk’s Prayer: Prayer for Mercy (3:2)

LORD, I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds, O LORD. Renew them in our day, in our time make them known; in wrath remember mercy. (NIV)	O 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. (KJV)	O Jehovah, I heard thy report, I have been afraid, O Jehovah, Thy work! in midst of years revive it, In the midst of years Thou makest known In anger Thou dost remember mercy. (Young’s Literal Translation)
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REVIVE THY WORK? — Some consider “thy work” as a prayer of revival, e.g., NIV “renew them in our day”, KJV “revive thy work in the midst of the years.” While possible, it begs the question “what work?” The “work” spoken of throughout the book of Habakkuk is the judgment of God (cp. 1:5); hardly would the prophet pray for the Lord to enlarge and intensify the coming judgment. Quite a few sermons have been preached as a plea for revival which, while possible, appears to be lifting the verse out of context without recognizing how “God’s work” has been used in Habakkuk. Robertson argues that the poetic parallelism as well as grammar demands “work” be considered with the first part of the verse, not the second (see Young’s Literal Translation above). *“The prophet has heard the report about the Lord, and has feared his work. Under this construction, it is quite natural to see the reference to the work of the Lord as referring to the announcement given earlier to Habakkuk: ‘I am working a work in your days which you would not believe if told’ (Hab 1:5). Now the prophet has come to understand just how awesome is that work which the Lord shall perform, and he fears.*” [Robertson, *Habakkuk*, pg 216f]

IN (THE) MIDST OF (THE) YEARS — This phrase is used twice here in this prayer, and it is the only place it is used in the Old Testament. Several suggestions have been given as to the meaning. “Most likely the midst of (the) years refers to the time between the two acts of judgment revealed to Habakkuk in the process of his earlier dialogue. In the time between the purging judgment that must fall on the house of God itself and the consuming judgment that must avenge God’s elect — in that crucial period before the destruction of God’s enemies — may the Lord be sure to preserve life. Habakkuk’s prayer that the Lord would make him live may represent a deliberate reflection on the vision for the eschaton which he had received earlier. *The proud will not stand; but the just — he shall live! (Hab 2:4). In other words, Habakkuk provides a prime example of one who is pleading the promises. Having received the word of reassurance that the justified (by faith) shall live by his steadfast trust, the prophet now makes this promise the focal point of his petition.*” [Robertson, *Habakkuk*, pg 217f]

A THREEFOLD PETITION FOR LIFE, UNDERSTANDING AND MERCY — *“It is a time of disturbance and agitation, a time when foundations shall be shaken. God’s own people shall go into exile. Trembling shall characterize even the most stable of human institutions. In such a circumstances, the prophet prays that the Lord will remember to be merciful. For nothing but the undeserved mercy of God will prove sufficient to sustain people under such stress.* So the petitions of the prophet are threefold: that

the Lord will preserve life, that the Lord will provide understanding, and that the Lord will remember mercy. Only the initiative of divine grace will prove sufficient under the calamitous circumstances which the believing shall face.” [Robertson, *Habukkuk*, pg 218]

Habukkuk’s Prayer: The Glory of the Lord in His Coming (3:3~7)

<p><i>God came from Teman, the Holy One from Mount Paran. Selah His glory covered the heavens and his praise filled the earth. His splendor was like the sunrise; rays flashed from his hand, where his power was hidden. Plague went before him; pestilence followed his steps. He stood, and shook the earth; he looked, and made the nations tremble. The ancient mountains crumbled and the age-old hills collapsed. His ways are eternal. I saw the tents of Cushan in distress, the dwellings of Midian in anguish. (NIV)</i></p>	<p><i>God came from Teman, and the Holy One from mount Paran. Selah. His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise. And his brightness was as the light; he had horns coming out of his hand: and there was the hiding of his power. Before him went the pestilence, and burning coals went forth at his feet. He 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. I saw the tents of Cushan in affliction: and the curtains of the land of Midian did tremble. (KJV)</i></p>	<p><i>God from Teman doth come, The Holy One from mount Paran. Pause! Covered the heavens hath His majesty, And His praise hath filled the earth. And the brightness is as the light, He hath rays out of His hand, And there — the hiding of His strength. Before Him goeth pestilence, And a burning flame goeth forth at His feet. He hath stood, and He measureth earth, He hath seen, and He shaketh off nations, And scatter themselves do mountains of antiquity, Bowed have the hills of old, The ways of old [are] His. Under sorrow I have seen tents of Cushan, Tremble do curtains of the land of Midian. (Young’s Literal Translation)</i></p>
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Habukkuk’s Prayer: Dialogue With the Lord at His Coming (3:8~15)

<p><i>Were you angry with the rivers, O LORD ? Was your wrath against the streams? Did you rage against the sea when you rode with your horses and your victorious chariots? You uncovered your bow, you called for many arrows. Selah You split the earth with rivers; the mountains saw you and writhed. Torrents of water swept by; the deep roared and lifted its waves on high. Sun and moon stood still in the heavens at the glint of your flying arrows, at the lightning of your flashing spear. In wrath you strode through the earth and in anger you threshed the nations. You came out to deliver your people, to save your anointed one. You crushed the leader of the land of wickedness, you stripped him from head to foot. Selah With his own spear you pierced his head when his warriors stormed out to scatter us, gloating as though about to devour the wretched who were in hiding. You trampled the sea with your horses, churning the great waters. (NIV)</i></p>	<p><i>Was the LORD displeased against the rivers? was thine anger against the rivers? was thy wrath against the sea, that thou didst ride upon thine horses and thy chariots of salvation? Thy bow was made quite naked, according to the oaths of the tribes, even thy word. Selah. Thou didst cleave the earth with rivers. The mountains saw thee, and they trembled: the overflowing of the water passed by: the deep uttered his voice, and lifted up his hands on high. The sun and moon stood still in their habitation: at the light of thine arrows they went, and at the shining of thy glittering spear. Thou didst march through the land in indignation, thou didst thresh the heathen in anger. Thou wentest forth for the salvation of thy people, even for salvation with thine anointed; thou woundedst the head out of the house of the wicked, by discovering the foundation unto the neck. Selah. Thou didst strike through with his staves the head of his villages: they came out as a whirlwind to scatter me: their rejoicing was as to devour the poor secretly. Thou didst walk through the sea with thine horses, through the heap of great waters. (KJV)</i></p>	<p><i>Against rivers hath Jehovah been wroth? Against rivers [is] Thine anger? Against the sea [is] Thy wrath? For Thou dost ride on Thy horses — Thy chariots of salvation? Utterly naked Thou dost make Thy bow, Sworn are the tribes — saying, ‘Pause!’ [With] rivers Thou dost cleave the earth. Seen thee — pained are mountains, An inundation of waters hath passed over, Given forth hath the deep its voice, High its hands it hath lifted up. Sun — moon — hath stood — a habitation, At the light thine arrows go on, At the brightness, the glittering of thy spear. In indignation Thou dost tread earth, In anger Thou dost thresh nations. Thou hast gone forth for the salvation of Thy people, For salvation with Thine anointed, Thou hast smitten the head of the house of the wicked, Laying bare the foundation unto the neck. Pause! Thou hast pierced with his staves the head of his leaders, They are tempestuous to scatter me, Their exultation [is] as to consume the poor in secret. Thou hast proceeded through the sea with Thy horses — the clay of many waters. (Young’s Literal Translation)</i></p>
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Habukkuk’s Prayer: Habakkuk’s Struggle Resolved by Triumphant Trust (3:16~18)

<p><i>I heard and my heart pounded, my lips quivered at the sound; decay crept into my bones, and my legs trembled. Yet I will wait patiently for the day of calamity to come on the nation invading us. Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior. The Sovereign LORD is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights. (NIV)</i></p>	<p><i>When I heard, my belly trembled; my lips quivered at the voice: rottenness entered into my bones, and I trembled in myself, that I might rest in the day of trouble: when he cometh up unto the people, he will invade them with his troops. Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labor of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The LORD God is my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds' feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places. (KJV)</i></p>	<p><i>I have heard, and my belly trembleth, At the noise have my lips quivered, Rottenness doth come into my bones, And in my place I do tremble, That I rest for a day of distress, At the coming up of the people, he overcometh it. Though the fig-tree doth not flourish, And there is no produce among vines, Failed hath the work of the olive, And fields have not yielded food, Cut off from the fold hath been the flock, And there is no herd in the stalls. Yet I, in Jehovah I exult, I do joy in the God of my salvation. Jehovah the Lord [is] my strength, And He doth make my feet like hinds, And on my high-places causeth me to tread. (Young's Literal Translation)</i></p>
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*“By this time the prophet is speechless. He finds himself totally unable to respond. By a patient rebuttal that never swerved from his point, the Lord has shut up his servant to a position of passive acknowledgment of the rightness of his ways. Habakkuk earlier had set himself to ‘answer his rebuke’ (Hab 2:1). But now his speech is paralyzed. The expression of the prophet concerning the effect of the Lord’s speech on him ought not to be taken merely as a dramatizing literary device. He describes instead an actual physical experience which he underwent as the full weight of the significance of his vision dawned on him. His solar plexus convulses. His feeble effort to maintain a dialogue with the Almighty results in an uncontrollable buzzing of the lips. His bones give the sensation of suddenly rotting away. His legs quake beneath him. Rather than despising the prophet for an excessive emotionalism, the reader should honor him for his sensitivity to the import of the message he has received. **The more godly the person, the greater his fear of the Lord.**”* [Robertson, *Habukkuk*, pg 242f]

PEACE IN GOD — *“Finally a resolution of the conflict that began the book appears. The prophet now understands through divine revelation the justice of the ways of God with men, and the inevitable judgment that must come even upon the faithful remnant of Judah. Even the prophet himself shall suffer the deprivation of all things necessary for the sustaining of life. Yet he shall live! He shall rejoice! He shall mount to the highest peaks of the earth! ... Notice that it is in the person of Yahweh himself that the prophet rejoices. He now has learned that he may be deprived of all material benefits, comforts, and blessings — yet he can rejoice because of his faith in Yahweh.”* [Robertson, *Habukkuk*, pg 246]

Habukkuk’s Prayer: Subscription (3:19)

<p><i>For the director of music. On my stringed instruments. (NIV)</i></p>	<p><i>To the chief singer on my stringed instruments. (KJV)</i></p>	<p><i>To the overseer with my stringed instruments! (Young's Literal Translation)</i></p>
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