

READ The BIBLE Together



Haggai, Obadiah, Habakkuk

21st July – 28th September 2013

**SHALOM CHURCH, SINGAPORE
(Upholding the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith)**

Introductory Notes -- HAGGAI

Background

In 586 B.C., the Babylonian army under Nebuchadnezzar invaded and conquered Jerusalem. Tragically, the Temple built by King Solomon in 967 B.C. was totally destroyed. From that day onwards, the Jews had no place to worship God for the first time since Moses built the tabernacle, the forerunner of Solomon's temple. The temple lay in ruins while most of Judah's population was forced into exile in Babylon.

In 539 B.C., the Babylonian Empire was replaced by the Persian Empire. The new Persian king named Cyrus the Great issued a decree in 538 B.C. allowing the exiles to return to their homeland. Under the governor Zerubbabel and the high priest Joshua, almost 50,000 Jews (a rather disappointingly small percentage of the exiles living in Babylon) returned to Jerusalem and Judah.

Immediately upon their return, the Jews were united "as one man" (**Ezra 3:1**) in their resolve and direction. They built an altar of God in order to sacrifice burnt offerings to the Lord (**Ezra 3:2**). The next thing they did was to begin rebuilding the temple in the second month of the second year after their return (**Ezra 3:8**). Quickly the foundations were completed for what would later be referred to as the "Second Temple".

Then trouble began. The Samaritans who lived there wanted to be part of the rebuilding work, but Zerubbabel declined their offer on religious grounds: "*You may do nothing with us to build a house for our God; but we alone will build to the Lord God of Israel, as King Cyrus the king of Persia has commanded us*" (**Ezra 4:3**). The reaction of the Samaritans was to oppose and discourage the Jews in this rebuilding work, going so far as to write to the Persian king and getting an injunction against any further work on the house of God. Thus the work on the temple came to a grinding halt, and all work stopped for the next 16 years!

In 520 B.C., God stirred up Haggai and Zechariah, two prophets who had been part of the first group of returnees, to exhort and call the people to re-start the temple rebuilding project. The book of **HAGGAI** is a record of Haggai's message to the Jews back in Jerusalem then.

Prophet

Haggai's name means "festival", suggesting that he may have been born on one of the Jewish feast days. In Latin, that name would be Festus and in Greek, it would be Hilary. Haggai's father's name is not given in this book, nor is any other pertinent piece of biographical information. The only other references to Haggai in the Bible are in **Ezra 5:1** and **6:14**.

Haggai's message to the Jews was quite different from the other prophets we meet in the Old Testament. His complaints against the nation of Judah did not focus on the usual flagrant sins of idolatry, unrighteousness and injustice. Instead, his concerns were over the people's apathy in their worship and service of God. He called them to re-examine

their priorities. His message concerned the heart-motivation of the Jews. Their conduct was merely symptoms of the deeper problems that must be addressed, if any real change was to take place. As Joyce Baldwin puts it, *“What worth did they set on their God when they left His Temple in ruins?”*

Haggai preached his sermons during the second year of Darius (521-486 B.C.) They were preached within a 15-weeks period from 29 August to 18 December 520 B.C. This can be determined from the dates given in the book of **HAGGAI**, cross-reference to the Julian calendar dates:

Reference	Year of Darius	Month	Day	Equivalent date, BC
1:1	2 nd	6 th	1 st	29 August 520
1:15	2 nd	6 th	24 th	21 September 520
2:1	2 nd	7 th	21 st	17 October 520
2:10, 20	2 nd	9 th	24 th	18 December 520

These sermons of Haggai are very significant because it was the first time God had spoken in the post-exilic era. It was the first time God’s voice had been heard in the land since the days of Jeremiah!

It is unknown what happened to Haggai after his last message on 18 December 520 B.C. Joyce Baldwin writes, *“Once Temple building began in earnest he had fulfilled his mission, and, having in Zechariah a successor to continue the work, he withdrew from the scene.”*

We should note that the rebuilding of the temple was completed in 515 B.C. and this was the temple mentioned in the four Gospels and the book of Acts in the New Testament. In other words, Jesus and His apostles walked in this temple! The Romans finally destroyed it in AD 70.

Week 1

[21st - 27th July 2013]

Day 1 Read **Introductory Notes – HAGGAI** above

After reading **Introductory Notes – HAGGAI**, write down any questions you might have in the space below:

Then ponder and answer:

(a) What do you think is the purpose of the book of **HAGGAI** for the Jews?

(b) What do you think is the purpose of the book of **HAGGAI** for us today?

Day 2 Read **HAGGAI 1:1-11**

This is Haggai's first message, preached on the 1st day of the 6th month in the 2nd year of Darius. In our Julian calendar, this would be 29th August 520 B.C.

1. In his message, Haggai addressed two persons.

(a) Who are they?

➤ _____ the son of _____,
of Judah

➤ _____ the son of _____, the _____

(b) Do you think this message was only meant for these two persons? Explain your answer.

2. Why do you think God called the Jews "*this people*" (**verse 2**) instead of "*My people*"?

3. **Verses 2 & 4** tell us what the complaint God had against these people.

(a) Copy these verses in the space below:

This people says, " _____
_____ " (Verse 2)

“Is it time _____
_____” (Verse 4)

(b) Using your own words, write down God’s complaint against these people:

Note: Zerubbabel appears in the genealogies of our Lord in **Matthew 1:12-13** and **Luke 3:37** where he is described as the son of Shealtiel and grandson of Neri. However, if you read **1 Chronicles 3:19**, he is said to be the son of Pedaiiah (brother of Shealtiel) and grandson of King Jehoiachin. How can we explain this apparent contradiction?

“Zerubbabel was probably the natural son of Pedaiiah and the legal son of Shealtiel. Similarly, Neri was most likely his natural grandfather, but childless King Jehoiachin enters the picture by adoption” is the explanation of Michael Bentley in his commentary **“Building For God’s Glory”** (Welwyn Commentaries).

Day 3 Read **HAGGAI 1:1-11**

Having listed His complaint in **verses 2 & 4**, the LORD now says to the Jews twice: *“Consider your ways!”* (**Verses 5 & 7**) We shall look at the first *“consider your ways”* today in **verses 5-6**.

1. According to **verse 6**, what was happening to the life of the Jews then?

2. God has done similar things to His Old Testament people previously – **Amos 4:6-10, Hosea 4:10, Micah 6:15**
 - (a) Take time to read **Amos 4:6-10**. What did God do and why did He do it?

 - (b) Coming back to **HAGGAI 1:6**, why do you think the LORD was doing this to them?

3. Do you think God will do similar things to His New Testament people today? Explain your answers and discuss it with your RTBT group members.

Day 4 Read **HAGGAI 1:1-11**

We are looking at the second “*consider your ways*” today in **verses 7-11**.

1. (a) What did the LORD command the Jews to do? (**Verse 8a**)

(b) What would their obedience achieve? (**Verse 8b**)
2. **Verses 9-11** are further elaboration of what was stated in **verse 6**. The immediate reason why the LORD would do this is stated in last part of **verse 9**. What’s the immediate reason given?
3. Take some time to read **Deuteronomy 28:23-24, 38-40**. Note that what was said in those few verses in **Deuteronomy 28** is exactly what took place in **Haggai 1:6 & 9-11**. What is the significance of this?

Day 5 Summary Notes (I) for **HAGGAI 1:1-11**

16 years ago in 536 B.C., due to the opposition of the Samaritans that resulted in a royal injunction to stop work, the Jews have left off the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem. If anyone were to raise this matter of rebuilding the temple, the common answer from the Jews would be, “*The time has not come to do this!*”

The meaning of this saying could be that the royal injunction has not been lifted, and hence it is not the time to re-start the project. In addition, reading **HAGGAI 1:1-11**, the Jews would also be pleading their economic hardship then as the reason why it wasn’t the time to rebuild the temple! Their harvests had been poor for a number of years, and so they really couldn’t afford to re-start this huge project of rebuilding the temple. Perhaps the unsaid message was, “*If God wanted us to do it, then surely He should be blessing us with better harvests! Only then can we give attention to the temple!*”

Through His servant Haggai, the LORD wasn't only going to address the inaction of the Jews! He wanted to put His finger on their heart-attitudes towards Him as well: *"If indeed times are so hard, how could your houses be paneled?"* Walter Kaiser said, *"We are not exactly sure how we should translate the Hebrew word. Some translations render it 'wainscoted' houses; others suggest 'vault-roofed' (LXX), 'panelceiled' (Vulgate), or 'covered with cedar boards' (Chaldee). Regardless of how the word is rendered, the point is fairly clear. The people's position that they were too poor to rebuild the temple due to the bad economy, inflation, and the poor value of the shekel was untenable. Their lavish spending on themselves exposed their hypocrisy and lies."*

Applying this self-centered attitude of the Jews to our day and age, Walter Kaiser said this in his commentary (**The Preacher's Commentary**): *"All too often we have placed other goals, interests, and joys ahead of the place we should have reserved for the Living God: our children's educations, our children's little league games, our advancement in the company, our leisure time on the weekends. The priorities we set in our day-to-day lives testify to our concurrence with modern advertisements that we should 'have it our way,' or that 'we are the one' around which everything ought to revolve. However, God calls us to make a radical break with all of that type of thinking and planning and to place His ways, His cause, His goals in the first place, ahead of every other earthly desire. Doing anything less is simply a modern form of ancient idolatry. We may as well name our earthly distractions Baal, Anat, Asherah or any other gods or goddesses of Canaan, for our idols are no better than those of ancient Israel."*

1. What have you learnt from the Summary Notes (I) above?

2. Do you agree with Walter Kaiser (last paragraph above)? Is he describing you? If yes, what do you intend to do next?

Day 6 Summary Notes (II) for **HAGGAI 1:1-11**

God does act in His providence to bring matters to our attention! An example of this can be seen in **Amos 4:6-10**. God brought drought and famine and diseases into the life of the nation of Israel in order to call their attention to the sins in their life! Through these troubles, God was shouting into their ears to "wake up"! But sadly, they didn't hear, and hence those tragic words: *"Yet you have not returned to Me"* (**Amos 4:6, 8, 9, 10**).

Here in **HAGGAI 1:6 & 9-11**, we find the same frowning providence of God, but with a difference! Besides the troubles (drought, poor harvest and a general dissatisfaction), God gave the interpretation! These troubles came to the Jews in order to call their attention to their indifferent and selfish attitudes towards God! In other words, they

were God's chastisement upon His Old Testament people for putting their things and themselves above God's Temple and God Himself!

In addition, from **Deuteronomy 28**, we know that such frowning providences of God are actually proofs of God's faithfulness to His covenant people! In **Deuteronomy 28**, God has already told Israel long ago that if they were unfaithful to Him, He would remain faithful to them by sending these troubles to them! Some of us may read them as God's punishment and vengeance upon these sinning Jews, but it is actually God's faithful love to them.

Will God do the same to His New Testament people today? We know the answer by asking if God would faithfully love His New Covenant people today! As **James 4:5** puts it, the Spirit who dwells in us yearns for us jealously! In other words, God yearns to have our full and undivided love. If it is missing, then He is going to use pain as a loudspeaker to shout into our ears in order to draw our attention to our sins! He does this because He loves us, a love that would not let us go!!

Is **HAGGAI 1:6 & 9-11** happening in your life right now? Again, borrowing the words of Walter Kaiser:

Are you sowing more and harvesting less?
Are you eating and drinking more, and enjoying it less?
Are you wearing more and feeling less warmth?
Are you earning more and able to buy less?

Coming back to our text, we note that God has only one command for these Jews. It is found in **verse 8**. It is a call to repentance, not by using the word 'repent' but by calling them to go in a different direction – go up to the mountain, bring wood and build the temple!

When they do this, they will then have the smile of God. Obedience to the Lord brings the smile of God! This has never changed! In addition, obedience to the Lord glorifies Him!

1. What have you learnt from the Summary Notes (II) above?
2. Ponder the four questions posed by Walter Kaiser in the Summary Notes (II) above. What are your answers to these questions? If you had answered "Yes", then what should you be doing next?

Day 7 Read **HAGGAI 1:12-15**

These 4 verses record the response of the Jews to the first message of Haggai.

1. These 4 verses took place on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month, in the second year of King Darius (**verse 15**). What is the date on our Julian calendar?

2. Write down the response of the Jews:

Verse 12:

Verse 14e:

3. Who were involved in making the response as outlined in **verses 12 & 14**?

4. How can we account for this response from the Jews?

5. In response to the obedience of the Jews, what did the LORD promise?

Week 2

[28th July – 3rd August 2013]

Day 1 Summary Notes for **HAGGAI 1:12-15**

These 4 verses are most encouraging! The Jews who had been indifferent to the idea of rebuilding the temple, giving excuses why the convenient time hasn't arrived, now all responded as one man to commence the rebuilding project! How can we account for this?

First of all, Haggai the prophet stood up to preach! It took courage to tell the Jews what's wrong and to get them to reverse a course of indifference and resistance that had lasted for the past 16 years! God does often bless faithful ministers and their ministry!

Next, the Spirit was working! All the faithful preaching of God's courageous servants would avail nothing, if the Spirit of the LORD did not stir up the hearts of Zerubbabel, Joshua and the remnant. While the working of the Spirit is sovereign --- we do not

dictate to Him when and how to operate --- yet this does not stop us praying and asking Him to work!

From the phrase "*the people feared the presence of the LORD*", we know that the obedience of the Jews were inwardly motivated and not just an outward conformity. This is what we must always aim for – obedience to the Lord driven by an inward fear (reverence) of the Lord!

So the Jews started rebuilding the temple. But what happened to that royal injunction barring them from doing this?

Ezra 5:3-17 tell us that the moment they started the work of the Lord, they faced opposition once more! As a result of this opposition, letters were again sent to Darius the Persian King. **Ezra 6:1-18** inform us that a more thorough search was done this time, and Darius discovered the initial decree of Cyrus allowing the temple to be built. Hence, the earlier injunction to stop work was overturned, and those who opposed the work were now told to do whatever they can to assist! Hence with great joy, we read in **Ezra 6:15** that '*the temple was finished on the third day of the month of Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of King Darius*'!

So as the Jews obeyed God, one by one the obstacles evaporated! This is the concrete demonstration of **Haggai 1:13** ~ *I am with you*.

What have you learnt from the Summary Notes above? Write it down and share it with your RTBT group members.

Day 2 Read **HAGGAI 2:1-9**

These 9 verses contain Haggai's second message to the Jews.

1. (a) When was this message given?
- (b) What is the time gap between this message and the people's response to the first message?
- (c) What is the significance of this observation?

Note: On the 7th month the Jews celebrate the *Feast of Trumpets* on the 1st day, then observe the *Day of Atonement* on the 10th day and finally keep the *Feast of Tabernacles* from the 15th day for the next 8 days. In view of this, the 7th month would hardly be a month where much work can be done.

2. To whom was this message given?

-
-
-

3. What was the message?

Verse 4: *Be* _____ *and* _____, *for* _____.

Verse 5: *According* _____,
so My _____, *do not* _____.

4. Why did the LORD give them this message? (**Verse 3**)

Day 3 Read **HAGGAI 2:6-9**

These 4 verses are part of Haggai's second message to the Jews. The Jews were discouraged by the apparent inferiority of the temple they were rebuilding in contrast to the temple built by Solomon years ago. So here in these 4 verses, the Lord is addressing their discouragement

1. In **verse 6-7a**, we hear the LORD saying, "*Once more -- it is a little while, I will shake heaven and earth, the sea and dry land; and I will shake all nations . . .*"

What do you think this refers to?

2. A good principle in interpreting the Bible is to let the Bible interpret itself. This means we look up other passages of the Bible that may help to shed light on the particular passage we are reading.

Hebrews 12:25-27 is a New Testament passage that made reference to **Haggai 2:6-7a**. Take some time to read **Hebrews 12:25-27**.

(a) What event, do you think, 'Him who speaks from heaven, whose voice then shook the earth' (**verses 25d-26a**) refers to?

(b) What is so special about that event?

(c) This event (**verses 25d-26a**) is contrasted to the event mentioned in **verse 26b-c**, and the latter event is the one mentioned in **Haggai 2:6-7a**.

So what do you think this event in **Haggai 2:6-7a** is referring to?

Day 4 Read **HAGGAI 2:6-9**

1. When God shakes the world and all the nations, what will take place?

Verse 7b:

Verse 7c:

What do you think the above refer to?

2. The LORD said that the glory of this second temple would be greater than the temple built by Solomon (**verse 9**). How would this come to pass?

Day 5 Summary Notes (I) for **HAGGAI 2:1-9**

The people have responded to Haggai's first message and started to rebuild the temple. Almost immediately, God responded by assuring them of His presence. **1:15** tells us that this took place on the 24th day of the 6th month.

Less than a month later, on the 21st day of the 7th month, the LORD again spoke to the Jews through Haggai. "*Be strong and work, do not fear!*" was the message and the basis for this exhortation was God's will to keep His covenant promise to Israel – He will be

with them, His Spirit will remain among them. Since the LORD will be with them, this is why they should not fear, but be strong and work!

Why is there a need for this message and exhortation? The answer is found in **verse 3**. Hear Walter Kaiser as he explained: *“Human hands could never construct a building, no matter how magnificent, deserving of God or in any way equal to His glory. Even Solomon had to acknowledge in his prayer that, if the highest heaven could not contain the Living God, neither could any house built by any mortal—even his temple, in all its cedar, cypress, and gold carvings and appointments—since a house built by a mortal cannot begin to rival the splendor of the heavens (1 Kings 8:27). Isaiah made the same point in Isaiah 66:1: if heaven is God’s throne and the earth is His footstool, where is the house that would be adequate to match His person or to serve as His resting place? There is none; therefore, one should be hesitant in complaining about whether this present structure was as beautiful as a previous one or comparable to any other such structure.*

Invidious comparisons are not always all that helpful. However, since the people had started this little game some sixteen years earlier (see Ezra 3), it was now best to face the problem and recognize it for what it was (v. 3). The Bible never covers up matters—especially where sin might be involved. Instead, it invites us to face up to the matter and declare what is troubling our souls.

The question in verse 3, then, has a rhetorical note to it: ‘In comparison with it, is this not in your eyes as nothing?’ (v3). Here was an invitation to confess that what was being built was thought to be small and worthless by many in the returned community. But how could any work done for God and connected with His great triumph in that final day ever be judged to be small or worthless?”

In other words, the Jews were feeling discouraged about what they were building, less than one month after they started! And we need to remember that they started work on the 24th of the 6th month, and the 7th month was full of religious festivals (Feast of Trumpets, Day of Atonement and Feast of Tabernacles). So on the 21st day of the 7th month, it is fair to say that the rebuilding work has hardly started! Yet they were very discouraged, looking at what was achieved thus far!!

We see the tender graciousness of the LORD here! He did not come and rebuke them, saying they were silly to have such feelings. Rather, we see the LORD coming to encourage them, to remind them of His promises --- He has promised to be with them and He is, and will be, with them. Hence, don't fear! Be strong and work!

What have you learnt from the Summary Notes (I) above? Write them down and share them with your RTBT group members.

Verses 6-9 were part of Haggai's second message to the Jews, to fear not, be strong and work. At the moment, viewed from human eyes, this temple that they were rebuilding indeed looked so inferior to Solomon's temple. But the truth is the glory of this second temple shall be greater than the first temple, says the LORD in **verse 9a**! How would this be so?

The LORD promised to do something earth-shaking! He has done an earth shaking-event previously when He brought Israel out of Egypt and gave them His laws at Mount Sinai:

When Israel went out of Egypt, the house of Jacob from a people of strange language . . . The sea saw it and fled; Jordan turned back . . . Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob . . . (Psalm 114:1, 3, 7)

Now Mount Sinai was completely in smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire. Its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked greatly. (Exodus 19:18)

The earth was shaking physically! Yet this literal shaking has symbolic significance as well – God was doing something never done before, something great and very significant. He was rescuing Israel from slavery and making them His very own people!

Quoting **Haggai 2**, the book of **Hebrews** contrasts this Exodus-Sinai event with the coming of Christ! Christ coming into this world is earthshaking on the cosmic scale! It changes everything permanently and forever! Staying with the context, the shaking of this world and of the nations must be referring to Christ's first coming, and Him coming into the very temple that the Jews were rebuilding in 520 B.C. He is the 'Desire of all nations' and He is the reason why the second temple shall be more glorious than the first!

What is the LORD doing here? He is giving them a glimpse into the future. He is showing them the role they play in His eternal plans. If they only fix their eyes on what is seen and what is visible before them, then there is every reason to be discouraged. But if they lift their eyes to see what is to come, to see what God is doing, and how they are part of God's plan, then there is every reason to be strong and not fear!

Once again, hear Walter Kaiser as he applies this section of Scripture to our day and age: *"God has planned, and has already inaugurated, a kingdom that will never be destroyed (Dan. 2:44). He is the only One that the nations and the people of the earth should really be desiring. If only men and women knew that what they hungered for and sought in a thousand other distractions was really the Living God!*

So the word for discouraged people who feel they may be off in the hinterlands of God's service is this: God's work done in God's way will never lack in splendor, eternal

significance, or the personal presence of our Lord. For that Sunday School class, that rural pastorate, that little-known unheralded ministry and all other works for good are directly linked to the final manifestation of the Kingdom of God in the last day.

The kingdom, the glory, and the person of our Lord will remain when everything else has given way. They are unshakeable. Let us, therefore, forsake all negative attitudes about the work of God; His name, His cause, and His kingdom will most certainly triumph over everything."

What have you learnt from the Summary Notes (II) above? Write them down and share them with your RTBT group members.

Day 7 Read **HAGGAI 2:10-19**

This is the 3rd message of Haggai.

1. When was this message given?

Note (1): This was exactly three months since the people had resumed rebuilding the temple with new resolve (**1:15**)

Note (2): *"The early rains would have begun in the middle of October, and shortly after that there would be a period of intense agricultural activity. Seed would be scattered over the newly moistened soil, and then ploughed in. The winter months of December to February were much colder, and little farming could be done. That left the people with more time for other things, such as the temple rebuilding project."* John L. Mackay

2. (a) Write down your first impressions after reading these 10 verses:

(b) What do you think is the theme of this 3rd message of Haggai?

Week 3

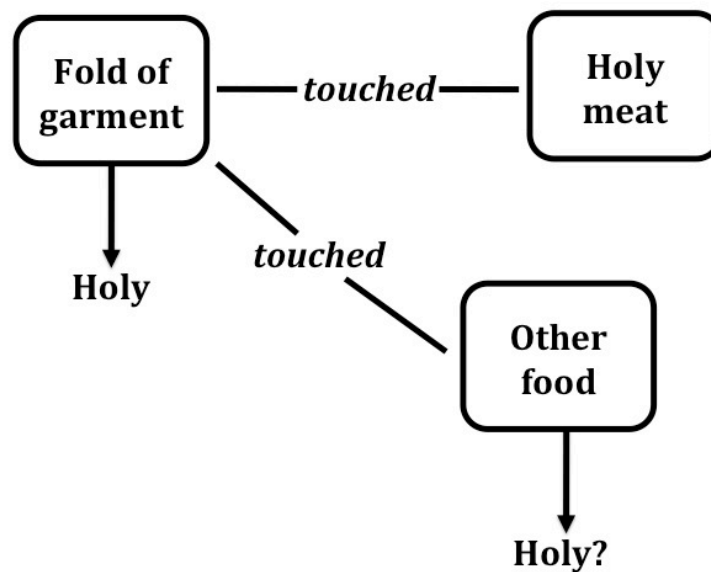
[4th – 10th August 2013]

Day 1 Read **HAGGAI 2:10-14**

The LORD through Haggai posed two questions for the priest to reply. The first question is found in **verse 12** while the second question is found in **verse 13**. The relevant passages that form the basis of these two questions are **Leviticus 6:27; 22:4-6** and **Numbers 19:11**.

1. Copy the first question (**verse 12**) in the space below:

2. Pictorially, the first question looks like this:



To the question “*Is the other food holy?*” what was the priests’ answer?

Day 2 Read **HAGGAI 2:10-14**

1. Copy the second question (**verse 13**) in the space below and then depict it pictorially (like the first question):

Verse 13:

Pictorially:

2. What was the priests' answer to the second question?

Day 3 Read **HAGGAI 2:10-14**

1. Review the two questions posed by Haggai and the answers given by the priest. What is the principle that Haggai wanted to establish clearly in the minds of the Jews?
2. In **verse 14**, Haggai stated the LORD's application of this principle to the Jews. What do you think is the message here?

Day 4 Summary Notes for **HAGGAI 2:10-14**

The first question established the principle that *secondary transmission of holiness is not possible*. In other words, the holy meat will make the fold of the garment holy (ritually) but it will not make the other food that came into contact with the garment holy.

The second question established the principle that *evil is "contagious"*. Evil and defilement are much more easily transmitted, and can be transmitted more extensively, than holiness. A dead body will defile a person, and what that person touched will be defiled too!

Once the people have these principles stated clearly before them, the LORD next applied the principles to the Jews then:

The Jews may have obeyed the voice of the Lord in rebuilding the temple. But they must not have the wrong idea that just because they have obeyed the Lord in this one area, all others areas of their life will be acceptable to the LORD. No, holiness is not "contagious"!

*On the other hand, they have disobeyed the Lord and as a result, they have become a defiled people. Everything they have touched, including whatever offerings they have given, had become defiled. This is stated in clear, unmistakable terms in **verse 14**. Evil is "contagious".*

So, don't get the wrong idea that just because you have started rebuilding the temple, the Lord will just accept this obedience of yours and ignore all the other areas of

disobedience in your life. In fact, your disobedience in other areas, even your half-hearted rebuilding of the temple, will only serve to defile whatever outward obedience you have given to the LORD!

The mistaken idea of the Jews in 502 B.C. is very much alive in us today. We often think that just because we have done something for the Lord, He will close His eyes to our other sins! For example, just because I am giving my offering to the Lord regularly, in obedience to His command, the Lord will not be too bothered by my sexual unfaithfulness! Yet the reverse is true: *My offering, though good in itself because it is an act of obedience to the Lord, is actually defiled by my sexual sins!*

Note that in **verse 14**, God calls the Jews “*this people*” and “*this nation*”, instead of “*My people*”. This indicates that there was a rift in the relationship between the Jews and God, even during this time when they were rebuilding the temple.

Could the same message be applicable to you in your walk with God right now? Take time to ponder your relationship with God, before giving the answer.

What have you learnt from the Summary Notes above? Write them down and share them with your RTBT group members.

Day 5 Read **HAGGAI 2:15-19**

1. In **verses 15-17**, Haggai called the Jews to think back to the days before the foundation of the temple was laid.
 - (a) What providences of God were cited?
 - (b) What was the purpose of these providences?
 - (c) How did the Jews respond to these providences?
2. **Verses 18-19** contain a promise of God to the Jews.

(a) What was the promise?

(b) Why did God make this promise to the Jews?

3. What lessons can we learn from these 5 verses?

Day 6 Summary Notes for **HAGGAI 2:15-19**

We ended the Summary Notes on Day 4 noting that even during this time when the Jews were rebuilding the temple, there remains a rift in their relationship with God. We expect the LORD to go on and pronounce some severe sentences upon them.

This expectation appears founded when we hear the LORD calling them to think back to those days of indifference and disobedience. They have left the house of the Lord in ruins. The Lord has sent various frowning providences into their lives. These providences were sent to call them to repentance, but sadly they didn't get the message and hence they did not turn back to the Lord!

In the mercy of God, He sent Haggai to preach to them, and owned the preaching of Haggai by sending His Spirit to stir them to obey! The result was that the Jews finally re-started their temple building project after 16 years!

Now, who should get the credit for this act of obedience? The Jews who obeyed? Haggai who preached? Or the Lord who sent Haggai to preach and the Spirit to stir?

Ultimately, all glory must go to God!

It is in the light of this that God's promise to bless the Jews in **verses 18-19** is so amazing! They are now in the month of December. The sowing has been done. Hence, there isn't any more seed in the barn! What they can now do is to wait for the harvest!

In their helpless state, and totally undeserved of blessings, God declared that He will bless them! The poor harvest will no longer be a feature in their lives! No, what awaits them will be a bountiful harvest, and this bountiful harvest is the result of God's grace!

“Despite your slowness, despite your lack of faith, despite your weariness in the work, despite your stubbornness to trust me, despite your half-heartedness, I, the Lord Almighty am going to bless you abundantly.

At the moment, you can’t see what is happening. You can’t see the seed in the soil; but it is beginning to sprout. Are you thinking it will be another meager harvest? Well, you are wrong. There will be an abundant ingathering of produce.

Haggai is so sure of God’s word that he ‘sticks his neck out’ and says, ‘From this day on,’ says God, ‘I will bless you.’ This is a promise wholly unmerited. The people for a long period of years absolutely refused to obey God’s command to build the temple, and even now they were not too willing to carry on.

And yet the God of infinite grace and mercy (Exodus 34:6) is ready to pour out his blessings on them. Who, indeed, is a God like unto the Lord? (Micah 7:18-19)”

Michael Bentley

What have you learnt from the Summary Notes above? Write them down and share them with your RTBT group members.

Day 7 Read **HAGGAI 2:20-23**

This is the 4th message of Haggai.

1. When was this message given?

2. (a) To whom was this message given?

- (b) How was this person addressed?

Verse 21:

Verse 23:

- (c) Do you think there is any significance in how he was addressed in **verse 23**? If so, what is it?

Day 1 Read **HAGGAI 2:20-23**

1. God said in **verse 21** that He will shake heaven and earth.

(a) What do you think this refers to?

(b) Do you think this is the same event as mentioned in **2:6-7**? Elaborate.

2. This is what God will do, as He shakes heaven and earth (**verse 22**):

* He will overthrow _____

* He will destroy _____

* He will overthrow _____

* The horses and their riders shall come down, every one _____

3. On the day God shakes the heaven and earth, He will make Zerubbabel as a signet ring.

(a) What does this mean?

(b) Why would God do this?

Day 2 Read **HAGGAI 2:20-23**

Review the 4th message of Haggai. What lessons can you learn from it?

Day 3 Summary Notes for **HAGGAI 2:20-23**

This 4th message of Haggai was given on the same day as the 3rd message -- 24th day of the 9th month (18 Dec 560 B.C.). Can you remember what the 3rd message was about?

In this 4th message, God promised to shake heaven and earth. **Verse 22** tells us that this is not the shaking of the physical framework of the universe, but the political and social structures of the nations around that were oppressive to God's people. The three "*I will*" points clearly to the fact that this is going to be the act of God.

The 'shaking' is described using words that will remind the Jews of what God has already done in the past:

- He will *overthrow* the throne of kingdoms, like how He *overthrew* Sodom and Gomorrah
- He will *overthrow* the chariots and those who ride on them, like how He *overthrew* Pharaoh and his army in the Red Sea
- He will cause the enemy to fall, *every one by the sword of his brother*, just like what happened when Gideon fought the Midianites – the Midianites killed each other (**Judges 7:22**)

When God shakes up these nations, on that day, He will make Zerubbabel as His signet ring. What is a signet ring? Let's hear Michael Bentley:

"A signet ring is very important to ancient kings. It was the representation of its owner. It was used for sealing official documents and was worn either on the finger, like a ring (Jeremiah 22:24), or on a chain around the neck in the form of a cylinder with a raised impression upon it (Genesis 38:18). A signet ring was very precious. It was never to leave the body of the person to whom it was entrusted. Usually the king or ruler wore it himself."

What is the significance of God making Zerubbabel as His signet ring?

About a decade ago, God through Jeremiah spoke to the king of Judah Jehoiachin these words: "*As I live, says the Lord, though Coniah (Jehoiachin) the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, were the signet on My right hand, yet I would pluck you off.*" God has rejected Jehoiachin, king of Judah.

Now, God is saying to Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, that He will make him as His signet ring. The simple message is that the rejection has been reversed! God has accepted Zerubbabel! Zerubbabel will continue to take the place of the sons of David, not just as the ruler over God's people, but as the line from which the promised Saviour will come! This is why Zerubbabel is not only addressed as son of Shealtiel, but also as "*My servant*". Why was Zerubbabel so honoured?

It was certainly not because he had earned this distinction, for he had to be cajoled into resuming the work on the temple. The sole reason for this honour bestowed on him was because God has chosen him. And God chose him because God is pleased to choose him – the reasons are not found in Zerubbabel but in God and God alone!

So the message ends with our eyes fixed firmly on God's amazing grace! Judah does not deserve God's blessings of abundance (3rd message) and Zerubbabel does not deserve to be honoured by God to be His signet ring (4th message). They received this blessing and honour because God was pleased to bestow it upon them. And this has always been how God deals with His people – grace, amazing grace!

1. What have you learnt about God from the Summary Notes above?

2. What have you learnt about man from the Summary Notes above?

3. What have you learnt about the Christian Life from the Summary Notes above?

Day 4 Final Review of **HAGGAI**

1. After going through the entire book of **HAGGAI**, revisit the two questions in Day 1 of Week 1. Are your answers still the same?
 - (a) What do you think is the purpose of the book of **HAGGAI** for the Jews?

 - (b) What do you think is the purpose of the book of **HAGGAI** for us today?

2. Where can you see Jesus in the book of **HAGGAI**?

Day 5 **Introductory Notes -- OBADIAH**

Book and Author

OBADIAH is the shortest Old Testament book, tucked between **AMOS** and **JONAH**. The book takes the name of the author – the prophet *Obadiah*. The name *Obadiah* means servant or worshipper of the LORD (YAHWEH). There are a number of people in the Old Testament who were called *Obadiah* (**1 King 18:3, 1 Chronicles 3:21, 7:3, 8:38, 9:16, 12:9, 27:19, 2 Chronicles 17:7, 34:12, Ezra 8:9, Nehemiah 10:5, 12:25**). We do not know if any of them is the prophet *Obadiah*, since neither the prophet's father nor place of birth was given in this book.

Date And Place

There are two possibilities concerning *when* the book **OBADIAH** was written. *Obadiah's* prophecy could be talking about:

- The rebellion of Edom, followed by the invasion of Jerusalem by the Philistines and Arabs during the reign of Jehoram (**2 Kings 8:20-22, 2 Chronicles 21:8-20**). This would take place sometime between 853-841 B.C.

OR

- The defeat of Judah by the Babylonians whereby the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed (**2 Chronicles 36:15-19, Psalm 137:7**). This would take place in 586 B.C.

While one cannot be dogmatic on this matter, this study will assume that *Obadiah* was talking about the despicable conduct of Edom during the defeat of Judah by the Babylonians in 586 B.C.

Unity and Theme

There is no compelling reason to doubt the unity of this brief prophecy. Its theme is that Edom, proud over her own security, has gloated over Israel's devastation by foreign powers. However, Edom's participation in that disaster will bring on God's wrath. She herself will be destroyed, but Mount Zion and Israel will be delivered, and God's kingdom will triumph.

Who is Edom?

The people of Edom were the descendants of Esau, who was the twin brother of Jacob (ancestor of the Israelites). When the boys were in their mother's womb, their struggle began (**Genesis 25:22**). The rivalry between them continued when Esau sold his first-born birthright to Jacob for a bowl of stew (**Genesis 25:27-34**), and when Jacob tricked Esau out of their father's blessing, then fled when he found out that Esau planned revenge (**Genesis 27**).

The two brothers finally made peace years later (**Genesis 33:4-16**), but it appeared

that the descendants of Esau never forgave the people of Israel. They were a constant trouble to the Israelites despite being closely related to them. When Israel left Egypt the house of bondage and headed towards Canaan, they asked for permission to pass through Edom, but were angrily refused (**Numbers 20:14-21**). King Saul (**1 Samuel 14:47**), King David (**2 Samuel 8:11-14**), King Solomon (**1 Kings 11:14-16**) and King Jehoshaphat (**2 Chronicles 20:1-23**) all had to fight against Edom. **Amos 1:11-12** talked about a cruelty carried out by Edom on Israel without giving us the dates.

There was a famous family in the New Testament who was Edomites. Herod the Great who was the king in Israel during the time of the birth of Jesus was an Edomite. He tried to destroy the infant Jesus (**Matthew 2**). His son Herod Antipas beheaded John the Baptist (**Mark 6**). Herod Agrippa I, a grandson of Herod the Great, killed James the son of Zebedee with the sword (**Acts 12**) and finally Herod Agrippa II was the one before whom the apostle Paul had to defend himself (**Acts 25-26**).

Esau was called “Edom” as early as **Genesis 25:30**. The meaning of ‘Edom’ is ‘red’.

1. Read **Introductory Notes - OBADIAH** above and write down any questions you might have in the space below:

2. Read **OBADIAH Verses 1-21**
 - (a) What do you think is the purpose of the book of **OBADIAH** for the Jews?

 - (b) What do you think is the purpose of the book of **OBADIAH** for us today?

Day 6 Read **OBADIAH Verse 1**

1. The prophecy of *Obadiah* is said to be his vision (**verse 1a**). Who gave *Obadiah* his vision?

2. This prophecy concerns Edom. The Edomites do not recognize the Lord God as their god. So how can the Lord God address them?

3. Look at the words in brackets. What do they mean?

Day 7 Read **OBADIAH Verses 2-9**

1. After reading these 8 verses, write down your first impression of them:
2. In **verse 2**, we read that God vowed to make Edom small and greatly despised. **Verses 3-4** give us an answer as to why the Lord would do this. What is it?
3. Look at **verses 3-4** again. Why did the Edomites feel so secure and confident about their situation?

Week 5

[18th – 24th August 2013]

Day 1 Read **OBADIAH Verses 2-9**

1. Edom had many treasures that were secretly stored away (**verse 6**). This was probably another thing that they placed their confidence in.

According to **verse 5**, what would happen to those hidden treasures?

2. What do you think **verse 7** is referring to?

Day 2 Read **OBADIAH Verses 2-9**

Verses 8-9 mentioned two other areas that the Edomites took pride in. What were they?

Verse 8:

Verse 9:

Day 3 Summary Notes for **OBADIAH Verses 1-9**

The source of *Obadiah's* vision is not human but divine, as **verse 1** makes it clear. In fact, the second part of **verse 1** tells us that God Himself is going to bring nations against Edom in battle. The final result of this battle would be that Edom would be small among the nations and greatly despised (**verse 2**).

A glaring problem of Edom is **pride!** It is more than a problem. It is sin! **James 4:6** states it explicitly: *God resists the proud!* **Pride** is sin and God resists those who are proud. The pride of Edom can be seen in them taking confidence in these things:

- [a] Their supposedly impenetrable city (**verses 3-4**)
The ancient city of Petra – once capital city of Edom, known as Sela – had amazing defense. It is a city carved into the rock, accessible by a narrow canyon almost a mile long. At the end of the canyon there is a spectacular city carved in stone, and seemingly incapable of being conquered by any army. This is why Edom could boast of flying like an eagle and setting their nest in the stars, meaning no one could reach them and harm them!
- [b] Their hidden treasures (**verse 6**)
Edom was rich! Apparently, they have stored up much riches and hidden them away, ready to take them out to solve any crisis they may face. In today's world, we would talk about having a huge national reserve and being able to set up sovereign funds to loan to others!
- [c] Their peace treaties (**verse 7**)
Edom had entered into many peace treaties with the surrounding nations, ensuring that in times of war, they would come to help them.
- [d] Their wise men (**verse 8**)
Edom was known for many wise men and philosophers. Hence they take great pride in this, and place their confidence in the many wise men they have – whatever problems they may face, they can solve them because they have so many wise men in their midst!
- [e] Their mighty men (**verse 9**)
Edom also had a strong army, with many mighty warriors and generals. Hence, in the event of a war, they have wise men to plan their military strategies and mighty men to wage wars.

From human perspective, one can understand why Edom felt so secure! [a] - [e] above combined to make them feel that no one can ever conquer their city, that they are truly invincible! As a result, they swell up with great pride!

This is truly a picture of every sinner! We place our confidence in created things – our beauty, our wealth, our health, our intelligence, our friends, our _____ (name it). Our portfolio and resume look so impressive, and we feel that we can conquer anything and every situation. We simply have no need of God!!

Yet that confidence is misplaced! As stated in **verse 5**, when God finally moved to judge Edom, Edom will be plundered and all they have shall evaporate into thin air. In other words, what they have trusted in will fail them badly on that day. The same shall be true for every sinner who put their trust in anything and everything other than the true and living God!

Are you living your life right now like Edom? Frankly, in what/who do you put your trust?

Psalm 2:12b says, *“Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him (Christ).”* Is your trust in Christ and Christ alone?

Day 4 Read **OBADIAH Verses 10-14**

1. After reading these 5 verses, write down your first impression of them:

2. What do you think is the connection between these 5 verses here, with the previous section of **verses 1-9**?

Day 5 Read **OBADIAH Verses 10-14**

In **verse 10**, God said to Edom that because of their violence against Jacob their brother, shame shall cover them and they shall be cut off forever.

What violence did they do to Jacob (Israel)?

Verse 11:

Verse 12:

Verse 13:

Verse 14:

Can you see any progression in their violence?

Is it more heinous for Edom to do these acts against Israel than against some other nations? Explain your answers.

Day 6 Review **OBADIAH Verses 10-14**

1. What have you learnt about God from these 5 verses?
2. What have you learnt about man from these 5 verses?
3. What have you learnt about the Christian Life from these 5 verses?

Day 7 Read **OBADIAH Verses 15-21**

1. **Verse 15a** says, *“For the day of the Lord upon all the nations is near.”* What does this mean and what is the relevance of this for Edom?

2. **Verse 15b-c** state the principle God will use to judge Edom. What is it?

3. How will this principle be applied to Edom as God moved to judge Edom? (**Verse 16**)

Week 6

[25th – 31st August 2013]

Day 1 Read **OBADIAH Verses 15-21**

We can understand what God is saying to Edom in **verses 15-16** as this: *All the nations are subject to My judgment, and you Edom will not escape. Just as you were drunk with wine in My holy temple, so you and all ungodly nations will one day drink my wrath to the full!*

In contrast to the destiny of Edom, the destiny of God's people Israel is outlined in **verses 17-21**.

After reading these 5 verses, write down your *first* impression of them:

Day 2 Read **OBADIAH Verses 17-21**

1. According to **verse 17**, what will happen to the people of Israel?

2. **Verse 18** uses metaphors to describe Israel and Edom.
 - (a) What are the metaphors used?

 - (b) What is the message?

3. What is the message of **verses 19-20**?

4. What is the message of **verse 21**?

Day 3 Summary Notes for **OBADIAH Verses 15-21**

These 7 verses set out the contrasting destiny of Edom and Israel.

Concerning Edom, God tells the Edomites that all nations are subject to His judgment, never mind if they recognize Him as God or otherwise. The fact is that He is the Creator and the only true and living God! God's judgment of Edom would be just and fair – *as they have done, so it shall be done to them*. They have drunk wine in Jerusalem, even in the temple. It was probably to celebrate the fact that they have finally avenged themselves on the Israelites. God assured them that the day would come when they will drink – not wine, but His wrath, and that to the full!

In contrast, God will pour out His blessings on His people Israel. Mount Zion (Jerusalem) will be restored to its former glory and the house of Jacob (Israel) will be restored to their land (**verse 17**). This came to pass as we saw in the book of **HAGGAI**.

The house of Joseph probably refers to northern Israel while the house of Jacob probably refers to southern Judah (the two divided kingdoms after King Solomon). They shall be reunited and together they shall have victory over Edom! Edom shall be like stubble, and the reunited nation of Israel shall be like fire, burning the stubble up easily! There shall be no survivors from the house of Esau – this is certain because the LORD has said it. This does not mean there will be no Edomites left, but the nation shall be wiped out and never restored! This is the message of **verse 18**.

Verses 19-20 paint a most depressing picture for Edom, and the most encouraging picture for Israel. Israel shall occupy the land that once belonged to Edom. Edom shall lose their land forever. They shall never be restored, unlike what we read of concerning Israel/Judah in the book of **Ezra**.

In **verse 21**, God promised that there would always be deliverers (saviours) who will come and rescue Israel from her enemies. Such a blessing would never be the lot of Edom. At the end of the day, God's kingdom shall be established, and shall last forever. This is fulfilled ultimately in the reign of our Lord Jesus Christ, as outlined in **Revelation 11:15** ~ *The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!*"

1. What have you learnt about God from the Summary Notes above?
2. What have you learnt about man from the Summary Notes above?
3. What have you learnt about the Christian Life from the Summary Notes above?

Day 4 Overall Review for **OBADIAH**

Obadiah's prophecy against Edom finally came to pass in AD 70. Rome crushed Edom and Edom was never to be heard of as a people again. Recall that the message of *Obadiah* came from God, we are reminded once more of the truth that God is not a man that He should lie, nor a son of man that He should repent. Has He said and will He not do it? Has He spoken and will He not make good? (**Numbers 23:19**).

The fulfillment of this prophecy should come as a warning to us. When first uttered, many Edomites mocked at the prophecy of *Obadiah*. Will it come true? Yes it did! In the same way, many of us may not take the Bible's teaching about the Second Coming of Christ and the Day of Judgment seriously. **BUT** Christ shall certainly return and we shall all stand before Him on the Day of Judgment! *How will it be like for you on that day?*

Obadiah's prophecy against Edom was a great encouragement to the Jews then. It told them that God remembered His promise to Abraham in **Genesis 12:1-3**, that God will bless those who bless them and curse those who curse them. God saw the cruelties done to them by the Edomites, and God will judge. In the same way, this short prophetic book should greatly encourage us to know that God does see and note what men do, especially to His people (the apple of His eye). He will judge! When He does, it shall be punishment for those who oppose Him and His people, and blessings for His people.

Luke 24:44 tells us that all things written in the Prophets concern Christ ultimately. Do you see Christ in **OBADIAH**? Elaborate.

Day 5 **Introductory Notes -- HABAKKUK**

The man and the time

Other than the fact that Habakkuk was a Jew and his name in Hebrew means “*to embrace*”, we know next to nothing about him. We are given no information about his family background or his upbringing. Habakkuk appeared as a “voice” and nothing more. He must be heard, not because of what he was in himself, but because he was the bearer of God’s message. In simple words, Habakkuk was a prophet.

“Only the gift of the inspiring Spirit of prophecy could make it possible for a person to declare with faithfulness the utter destruction of his own people and land. That solemn office and calling belonged to Habakkuk. Although his call to office is not recorded, he is designated as the prophet. Thus he spoke as the appointed mouthpiece of God.” (O. Palmer Robertson)

From the situation described in the book, Habakkuk must be living between (a) the fall of Nineveh to the Babylonians in 612 B.C. and (b) the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians in 587 B.C. The dreaded Assyrians who have conquered the northern kingdom of Israel are already on the decline, while the Babylonians (also known as Chaldeans) are on the ascendancy.

Recall that the time of **HAGGAI** was after the Jews returned from exile in Babylon. The time of **OBADIAH** was about 80-100 years *earlier* -- soon after the Babylonians had conquered Judah. The time of **HABAKKUK** was *even earlier* -- before the Babylonians started to invade Judah. Pictorially, we can arrange these three prophetic books chronologically as follows:



The structure and the message

The book of **HABAKKUK** can be divided as follows:

1:1	Title
1:2-4	Habakkuk’s first complaint to God
1:5-11	God’s response to Habakkuk’s first complaint
1:12-2:1	Habakkuk’s second complaint to God
2:2-5	God’s response to Habakkuk’s second complaint
2:6-20	God’s five woes pronounced on Babylon
3:1-15	Habakkuk’s prayer to God
3:16-19	Habakkuk’s joy in God

From the structure outlined above, we can see that the first half of the book contains a dialogue between Habakkuk and God. This in itself is very instructive, for it teaches us that God does allow His perplexed children to ask Him questions. He would even welcome them to voice their complaints to Him!

Habakkuk was not the only Old Testament believer who has done that. Many of the psalmists and prophets have done the same in the Old Testament! Most of the time, their dialogue with God comes in the form of *laments*. We recognize *laments* when we encounter words like “*how long*” and “*why*”. Like the call of **Psalm 62:8**, we can and are invited to ‘*pour out our heart before the Lord*’. Yes, we may bring our *laments* to the Lord! Have you done that? Will you do it?

The message of **HABAKKUK** is relevant, not just to the Jews living before the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, but also to people living in the 21st century. When injustice abounds and we suffer as a result, when things familiar are gone forever and all our comforts removed from our lives, it is natural that we want to know the reason(s) why. **HABAKKUK** teaches us that even at such times, God sits on His throne and God rules in this world. While we may not fully understand all the reasons behind the events, this truth remains: *The just shall live by faith (2:4)*. The underlying theme, according to O. Palmer Robertson, is this: *A matured faith trusts humbly but persistently in God’s design for establishing righteousness in the earth.*

HABAKKUK calls us to live by faith in a God who is alive and active in the current affairs of life, distasteful and unappealing those affairs seem at times. “*There is no Old Testament book that is able to do more for the burdened souls of men or to raise them to higher levels of hope and confidence than the brief prophecy of Habakkuk . . . Hardly a book in the Bible is constructed on such simple and majestic lines. These three chapters stand like three august columns, side by side, each complete in itself, unparalleled in their power and appeal . . . Search the Bible through and you will find nothing so matchless in concentrated power as these three chapters of the Book of Habakkuk. Of the outward circumstances of the prophet’s life we know nothing. But here was a man with a soul sensitive to evil, yet firm in his faith in an omnipotent God. And this faith he has uttered with a force, an eloquence, a literary power which has caused his words to become a permanent part of the literature of the soul.*” (Raymond Calkins)

Read **Introductory Notes – HABAKKUK** above and write down any questions you might have in the space below:

Day 6 Read **HABAKKUK 1:1-4**

1. What is the complaint of Habakkuk? (Answer using your own words)

2. The experience of Habakkuk is not unique. Can you think of two other examples of believers in the Bible having similar experience?

(a)

(b)

For each of the example you've cited above, give a brief description of their situation.

3. Have you ever had a similar experience? Would you like to share it?

Day 7 Summary Notes for **HABAKKUK 1:1-4**

Habakkuk lived during Judah's final days. Despite the remarkable revival that took place in 621 B.C. under the reign of Josiah (**2 Kings 22:8-20**), the Jewish society was once again engaging in all sorts of social injustice and violence soon after Josiah's death (**Jeremiah 7:3-6; 22:13-17**). Habakkuk used six different words to describe this despicable situation: "*violence*", "*iniquity*", "*trouble*", "*plundering*", "*strife*" and "*contention*". The situation was very bad! Thus Habakkuk prayed, and continued to pray that God would do something about the unbearable amount of injustices and evil going on in Judah then.

In **Genesis 6:11**, Moses used the same word ('*chamas*' in Hebrew, '*violence*' in English) to describe the situation in Noah's day, a situation which God found necessary to destroy with the flood. The violence was the manifestation of the meaner, corrupt, and more selfish instincts of the haughty persons against the weaker elements of their culture (cf. **Amos 3:10, Jeremiah 6:7**). No human system of justice could handle the situation (**verse 4**). Hence, Habakkuk cried out to God for divine intervention!

Habakkuk's "*how long*" (**verse 2**) points us to the fact that he has probably been praying for God's intervention for quite some time. But up till now, God has not answered his prayer!

This then is his complaint to God! "*How long will You allow evil to continue and increase in Judah, and not do something about it?*" It wasn't just a complaint about evil abounding, but a complaint that God appeared not to do anything about it! However, note that Habakkuk wasn't complaining *about* God but complaining *to* God! In other words, he was bringing his perplexity concerning God's ways to God Himself!!

1. Are you concerned, like Habakkuk, about the presence and the flourishing of evil in your society?

If yes, what are you doing about it? If no, why not?

2. Is there a difference between “*complain about God*” and “*complain to God*”?

Week 7

[1st – 7th September 2013]

Day 1 Special Study on “*How Long?*”

Using either a hardcopy concordance or your electronic Bible, search for all the “*how long?*” found in the Bible.

- (a) How many “*how long?*” are there in the entire Bible?
- (b) Where is the first “*how long?*” located and who is the speaker?
- (c) Where is the last “*how long?*” located and who is the speaker?
- (d) Besides the speaker in (b) and in (c), who else would ask this question?
- (e) Review your answers in (a) – (d). Is there anything significant you can learn from it?
- (f) Take some time to ponder over these insightful words from O. Palmer Robertson on this matter:

“Without doubt the Lord entered sympathetically into the agonies of His prophet. Although His own longsuffering explains His delay in the establishment of justice, He nonetheless agonizes with His people in their grief.

This perspective may provide a proper context for answering the question concerning whether the prophet remained within the bounds of propriety in asking these questions. Since prayer is provided specifically as the framework in which all the burdens of God’s people may be poured out before the Lord, prayers expressing perplexity are appropriate as long as they are offered in a context of trust.

So long as the mystery of iniquity is at work, God's people shall long earnestly for relief from its pain. Even saints in perfection are depicted as longing for the righteous retribution that must fall on the wicked, crying with a loud voice, "How long!" (Rev. 6:10). If a deficiency of His disciples' faith to work miracles provokes the Mediator of the new covenant to ask "how long" He should be patient, it should not be surprising to find a prophet of the old covenant asking "how long" the Lord would tolerate the gross injustices of his contemporaries (cf. Matt. 17:17)"

Day 2 Read **HABAKKUK 1:5-11**

In these 7 verses, God gave His reply to Habakkuk's first complaint.

1. What will God do in response to the evil that has been going on in Judah? (**Verse 6a**)
2. **Verses 6b-11** give us some detailed descriptions of this instrument that God will use. Let's look at each of the descriptions as depicted in the verses, and then write down what you think is being conveyed:

Verse 6b-d:

Verse 7a: *"They are terrible and dreadful" meaning they strike fear in the hearts of the people*

Verse 7b: *"Their judgment and their dignity proceed from themselves" meaning they are a law to themselves, they do as they please, answerable to no one*

Verse 8:

Verse 9:

Verse 10:

Verse 11:

3. Looking over the descriptions (**verses 6b-11**) of the instrument that God will use to judge Judah, if you were a resident of Judah then . . .

(a) What kind of emotions will be evoked in you?

(b) What kind of questions will you want to ask?

Note: In **verse 5**, God told Habakkuk that He will work, and they will become breathless with amazement at what He is going to do! *“Look! Watch! Be utterly astounded! You will not believe . . .!”* all point to the direction that they will be *“startled out of their skin when they see what God is going to do about the orgies of wickedness in full swing in Judah! They all are going to be mightily taken aback,”* says Walter Kaiser.

Day 3 Read **HABAKKUK 1:12-2:1**

In these 6 verses, we have Habakkuk’s second complaint to God.

1. The prophet starts his second complaint by rehearsing the name and character of God:

Verse 12a:

Verse 12b:

Verse 12d:

Verse 12e:

2. Why do you think Habakkuk did this?

3. In **verse 12c** he said, *“we shall not die.”* Why do you think he said this, in the midst of rehearsing God’s name and character?

Day 4 Read **HABAKKUK 1:12-2:1**

1. What is the complaint of Habakkuk in **verse 13**? (Answer using your own words)
2. What is the reason behind this complaint?

Note: *“The descriptive imagery of the wicked ‘swallowing up’ the righteous (NKJV: devours) portrays an utter annihilation. In the past God has acted on Israel’s behalf in ‘swallowing up’ the wicked. The earth had swallowed up Egypt at the Red Sea (**Exodus 15:12**), and Dothan and Abiram in their rebellion (**Numbers 16:30, 32, 34; Psalm 106:17**). But now God’s own people face the prospect of being ‘swallowed up’ by their enemies, an awesome prospect which actually came to pass in the Exile (**Jeremiah 51:34; Lamentation 2:2, 5, 16**).*

So the puzzlement of Habakkuk arises out of the seeming injustice of the judgment which the Lord has shown him and the utter devastation which the coming of the Chaldeans forces him to envision.”

O. Palmer Robertson

Day 5 Read **HABAKKUK 1:12-2:1**

1. Habakkuk said in **verse 14**: *“Why do You make men like fish of the sea, like creeping things that have no ruler over them?”* What does this mean?
2. In **verses 15-17**, Habakkuk was rehearsing before the Lord the infamous manner in which the Chaldeans (Babylonians) have treated people in the past.

Look at each of them as depicted in these three verses, and then write down what you think is being conveyed:

Verse 15

They take up all of them with a hook, they catch them in their net and gather them in their dragnet; therefore they rejoice and are glad

Meaning

Verse 16

Therefore they sacrifice to their net and burn incense to their dragnet; because by them their share is sumptuous and their food plentiful.

Meaning

Verse 17

Shall they therefore empty their net, and continue to slay nations without pity?

Meaning

3. How did Habakkuk end his complaint? (2:1)

Day 6 Summary Notes for **HABAKKUK 1:5-2:1**

HABAKKUK 1:5-11

These seven verses contain the Lord’s reply to Habakkuk’s first complaint. The Lord will finally act, but His action will shock His people to the core! The instrument He will choose to chastise Israel has the following characteristics:

- Bitter and hasty, they will strike whoever is on their path with irrational cruelty and disruptiveness, like a bear robbed of its cubs. They will not leave any inch of the land untouched by their cruelty, kicking out the inhabitants of the land as they march forward to conquer and devastate (**verse 6**).
- Terrible and dreadful, they look like beasts with their mouth wide open showing their bare teeth, ready to bite and devour! And they don’t come at you slowly, but are like the eagle swooping down to grasp and tear the flesh of its exposed victim. To add to this terrible picture, they are a law to themselves, carrying out the desires of their heart and answerable to no one (**verses 7-8**)!
- No kings can stop them and no fortifications can withstand them. Nations fall before them so easily like a man gathering sand. And they come, not to reform, but to destroy! This invincible, destructive force is blasphemous and idolatrous. They do not recognize YAHWEH the true and living God at all. Instead, they worship their man-made idols and ascribe all their success to these false gods (**verses 9-11**)

Having heard the LORD telling him that this was the instrument He was going to use, it was no surprise that the prophet was shocked! So he was going to question God’s intention to use these cruel, barbarous Babylonians to chastise Israel.

HABAKKUK 1:12-2:1

Although deeply perplexed by the ways of God, Habakkuk did not abandon his faith in God. This is a lesson for us all to learn. Instead, he responded to God's revelation in **1:5-11** by first rehearsing some of the names and attributes of God: *He is the LORD (YAHWEH, I AM), He is the Rock, He is eternal and He is holy.* In addition, he confessed that this God is his God!

Next, he wrestled with God concerning what God intended to do: *How can God intend to use those exceeding evil Babylonians to chastise evil Israelites?* Habakkuk had no doubts in his mind that the Israelites of his day were evil and deserved to be punished. However, he was also very clear that the Babylonians were many-times more evil:

- They treated fellow men with brutality and inhumanity. How? They drove a hook through the lower lip of their captives and strung them in a single file! If the captives were not led with a hook, then they were dragged in a net! And the Babylonians actually enjoyed inflicting these humiliating brutalities on their victims (**verse 15**).
- After dragging their captives to their place of imprisonment, what would the Babylonians do with the nets? They would actually bow down to worship those nets! Whether we are meant to understand this literally or figuratively, the message is clear: *They glory in their brutality, to the point of worshipping their instruments of torture.* And these cruel tortures they inflicted on others were the means of bringing them great riches (**verse 16**).
- Would they ever be satisfied? Would they ever come to a point where they will say, "Enough"? No, but they will continue to fill their nets and then emptied them, they would continue to slay nations and not stop. What a bloodthirsty bunch of invaders! (**Verse 17**)

Habakkuk was able to say these things of the Babylonians, not because he has personally experienced their cruelty, but because the Babylonians have been behaving in this way towards those they have conquered all this time. BUT note that what Habakkuk said in **verses 15-17** were essentially the same as what God has said about the Babylonians in **verses 6-11**. In other words, God was not unaware of how evil the Babylonians were!

That perhaps was the harder thing for Habakkuk to come to terms with! If God knew this was how the Babylonians would behave, then why would God use them to chastise Israel? And why would God allow the Babylonians to do these exceeding evil deeds? Hence, the question in **verse 14**: *Why do You make men like fish of the sea, like creeping things that have no ruler over them?*

The Babylonians treat their victims like the fish of the sea. But God is sovereign over all nations, including the Babylonians! Why did God allow the Babylonians to do this? Or even more bluntly, *"in recognizing the sovereignty of God among the nations, he*

(Habakkuk) must conclude that God Himself is ultimately behind this massive maltreatment of humanity” (O Palmer Robertson).

How can this be reconciled with a God who is of purer eyes than to behold evil? Habakkuk couldn't do the reconciliation. So what did he do? **2:1!** He put the matter before the Lord and sought an answer from Him!

“The prophet is right in the position he takes with respect to his own role in the resolution of this perplexing issue. 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. Habakkuk knows that, in accordance with the nature of the prophetic office in Israel, revelation from God alone can answer his perplexity.

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.”

O Palmer Robertson

What have you learnt from the **Summary Notes** above?

Day 7 Read **HABAKKUK 2:2-5**

These four verses contain God's answer to Habakkuk's complaint. The answer came via a vision.

1. (a) What was Habakkuk told to do with the vision?

(b) Habakkuk must do this so that '*he may run who reads it.*' What does this phrase mean?
2. What is the certainty that this vision will come to pass? (**Verse 3**)

3. What is the substance of this vision? (Verse 4-5)

Week 8

[8th – 14th September 2013]

Day 1 Summary Notes for **HABAKKUK 2:2-5**

The Lord answered Habakkuk's question with a vision. The prophet was told to write the vision down on tablets, recalling the event of the giving of the Ten Commandments where Moses was told to write the Law on tablets!

Prophets were frequently presented in Scripture as "running" with their announcement. For example, we read in **Jeremiah 23:21** ~ *I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran. I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied.* "Running" (with a message) is equivalent to "prophesying", according to Jeremiah.

In other words, this vision must be inscribed on tablets so that prophets (not just Habakkuk) may read clearly what is written and then run to proclaim it! The implication is that this message is to be proclaimed in Habakkuk's days and beyond!

After stating the importance of this vision, the Lord then proceeded to underline the certainty of it using these words: "*an appointed time*", "*at the end it will speak*", "*it will not lie*" and "*it will surely come*". Using different words to convey the certainty of the vision, God wanted Habakkuk (and through him to all of us) to know that this vision was guaranteed to come to pass. From human's perspective, it may tarry but from God's perspective, it shall not tarry! What is the vision?

- [1] The proud cannot be upright (**verse 4a-b**)
- [2] The just (righteous) shall live by faith (**verse 4c**)
- [3] The wicked will continue in his pride (**verse 5**)

Concerning [1], there are men who are proud – puffed up, bloated, with SELF! Such people cannot be upright. As a consequence, they shall not live! To Habakkuk, this is directly applicable to the Chaldeans. The boastful Chaldeans may continue to prosper. Yet the fact that their soul is not upright in them (because they are proud) is an adequate indicator of their ultimate judgment – they shall die!

Concerning [2], standing in contrast to the proud are the just (righteous). Since the righteous is contrasted with the proud (those not upright), the righteous must be humble. His humility is expressed by this mode of living: *he lives by faith!* In simple words, the righteous trusts in God and orders his life by His word. In such steadfast and continual trust in God, he lives. But how do the just become just? Our text does not say, but a cross-reference to **Genesis 15:6** tell us that they are just (declared righteous) by faith (believing in God).

Therefore, what we are seeing in [2] is this: There are people who believe in God, and these are people declared righteous by God. These righteous people will continue to believe in God, and hence continue to live. *“The principle of the sinner’s ongoing life is identical with the principle of the sinner’s righteousness. Steadfastness in faith is the way of receiving the gift of life. Continuation in trust alone can assure continued possession of the gift of life.”* (O Palmer Robertson)

Concerning [3], the proud (wicked) will continue their rapacious ways. Using wine as an agent by which latent human pride comes forth in all its ugliness, the wicked will be blinded to his true state and will continue to do evil, believing that all shall be well. So the Chaldeans will continue to devour nations by their brutality, and ironically the day the Babylonian Empire fell was the day the Babylonian king and leaders were having a drinking party! See **Daniel 5**.

So what is the vision about? The wicked will be proud and continue to do evil. They will have their day. But a day will come when they will perish. They will die because the proud cannot be upright! In contrast, the just shall continue to live by trusting in God. Would Habakkuk and the faithful Israelites continue to trust in God and His Word, and so live?

Ponder: What is the relevance of this vision for Christians today?

Day 2 Read **HABAKKUK 2:6-20**

1. Take some time to read and ponder O Palmer Robertson’s introduction to these 15 verses:

“Having unveiled the essence of His resolution of Habakkuk’s problem, the Lord now turns to elaborate on the certain fate of the haughty, who stand in contrast with the humble who believe. Receiving nothing more (and nothing less) than they deserve, the boastful Chaldeans are made the subjects of wise sayings calculated to humble them. A series of five mocking statements expresses the righteous recompense that is sure to come.

*Israel itself had been warned that if it did not keep the commandments of God, it would become the object of taunts among the nations of the earth (**Deuteronomy 28:37, 1 Kings 9:7**). Now the Lord declares that the day shall come when all those nations whom the Chaldeans have bullied shall mock their conqueror. Nothing stings more permanently than being made the brunt of an obscure taunt. The enigmatic character of the jibe establishes the permanence of the hurt.*

It might appear beneath the dignity of God to embarrass the proud before the watching world. But a part of His reality as the God of history includes His public

vindication of the righteous and His public shaming of the wicked. His glory before all His creation is magnified by the establishment of honor for the humble and disgrace for the arrogant. In this case, the shame of Babylon shall be as extensive as its conquests, all of them, all those nations conquered by Babylon, shall join the mockery. Even the tiniest of the nations shall rehearse these sayings without the fear of reprisal.”

2. In these 15 verses, we have five ‘*hōy*’ (translated as ‘*woe*’ in the NKJV). Can you locate all of them?

(a) Verse _____:

(b) Verse 9: *Woe to him who covets evil gain . . .*

(c) Verse _____:

(d) Verse _____:

(e) Verse _____:

3. What is the meaning of this word “*woe*”?

Day 3 Read **HABAKKUK 2:6-8**

These 3 verses contain the *first* woe. What is it? Summarize it using your own words.

Day 4 Read **HABAKKUK 2:9-11**

These 3 verses contain the *second* woe. What is it? Summarize it using your own words.

Day 5 Summary Notes for **HABAKKUK 2:6-11**

First woe (V6-8)

The first woe can be summarized as “*let the pillager be pillaged!*” It is poetic justice, or reciprocity --- reaping what they have sown.

The Babylonians have unjustly multiplied that which is not theirs (**v6b**). So the day will come when they will be booty to their awakened destroyers (**v7b**). Those who turn out to be their creditors will mercilessly exact payment from them (**v7**). They have driven their armies through many nations, leaving a trail of blood, looting and burning (**v8**). The day will come when the scattered survivors from the many nations will rise up and devastate Babylon (**v8**). In simple words, how they have treated others in times past shall be how they will be treated in the coming days!

This is not applicable to the Babylonians alone. God does use the same principle in His government of all of us – believers or unbelievers. Take some time to read **Psalm 18:25-27, Luke 6:37-38** and **Galatians 6:7-8**

Second woe (V9-11)

The second woe can be summarized as “*let the covetous be empty!*” The picture is of the Babylonians building up their house (dynasty) and securing their future via covetousness. Whether by legal or illegal means, they want to establish their dynasty as unassailable. But the consequences of covetousness are just the opposite of what the greedy desire. Their schemes will only bring shame to their house, and their sin of illegally amassing wealth will inevitably destroy the entire clan.

Two proverbs from the book of **Proverbs** underline the principle conveyed in this woe:

*He who is greedy for gain troubles his own house,
But he who hates bribes will live.*
Proverbs 15:27

*But they lie in wait for their own blood,
They lurk secretly for their own lives.
So are the ways of everyone who is greedy for gain;
It takes away the life of its owners.*
Proverbs 1:18-19

What have you learnt from the two woes?

How have what you've learnt changed your life?

Day 6 Read **HABAKKUK 2:12-14**

These 3 verses contain the *third* woe.

1. What is the message of **verses 12 & 13**?

Note: **Verse 13** is repeated in **Jeremiah 51:58**. Read it. **Jeremiah 51** is talking about the utter destruction of Babylon.

2. **Verse 14** is a conflation of **Numbers 14:21** and **Isaiah 11:9**.

Numbers 14:21 says, “*but truly, as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord.*” **Numbers 14** records the rebellion of Israel in the wilderness, refusing to enter the Promised Land. God swore that, as punishment, the rebels would not enter the Promised Land. And it is in that context that the statement is made, that all the earth shall be filled with His glory.

Isaiah 11:9 says, “*They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.*” **Isaiah 11** talks about the offspring of Jesse, and how he will vindicate the poor and meek, and punish the wicked. And it is in this context that the statement is made that the earth shall be full of God’s knowledge, as the waters cover the sea.

In view of the above explanation, ponder and answer:

(a) What is the meaning of **verse 14**?

(b) What does **verse 14** have to do with this *third* woe?

4. What relevance does this *third* woe have for you?

Day 7 Read **HABAKKUK 2:15-17**

These 3 verses contain the *fourth* woe.

1. What does **verse 15** mean?
2. **Verse 16** states the punishment God will mete out to Babylon for what they have done in **verse 15**. What is the punishment?
3. **Verse 17** is a further elaboration of what Babylon did, as they carried out their evil deed outlined in **verse 15**. What did Babylon do?

Week 9

[15th – 21st September 2013]

Day 1 Summary Notes for **HABAKKUK 2:12-17**

Third woe (V12-14)

The Babylonians were building their cities and expanding their kingdom via violence (**verse 12**). God announced to them that all their efforts to build and expand would end in vanity. 'Fire' could mean judgment from the Lord, or as the NKJV puts it, it is '*fire that does not satisfy*', a parallel description for '*vanity*'. In simple words, never mind how the Babylonians labor to build their cities and expand their kingdom, it shall all come to nothing (as an act of God's judgment). Why? Because they did it via violence!

This is the *third* woe pronounced on Babylon. In contrast to what the Babylonians have done, God will finally send the Son of Jesse and He will destroy all the wicked on earth. When this is done, God's glory (by implication, God's kingdom) will cover the whole earth!

What is the relevance of this *third* woe for you living in the 21st century?

Fourth woe (V15-17)

Drunkenness in the Scriptures is often associated with sexual impurity. To see someone's nakedness is more than just a mere viewing of naked body. It is a way of speech to convey sexual relations. Hence, it appears that **verse 15** is saying that the Babylonians were engaged in sexual sins, forcing others to be drunk so that they could commit sexual impurity with them, whether rape or homosexual acts!

Or it could mean that they were leading and forcing others to commit the same kind of sexual impurity like them. The purpose they did this, as **verse 17** has outlined, was to do violence to others and take over their land.

God's judgment upon Babylon for this sin is stated in **verse 16**. The punishment will fit the crime. As they forced others to drink, God would make them drink from His cup of wrath. As they have engaged in shameful acts, God would fill them with shame!

What is the relevance of this *fourth* woe for you living in the 21st century?

Day 2 Read **HABAKKUK 2:18-20**

These 3 verses contain the *fifth* woe. What is it? Summarize it using your own words.

Day 3 Summary Notes for **HABAKKUK 2:18-20**

Fifth woe (V18-20)

This last woe concerns the idolatry of the Babylonians. Perhaps it was put as the last woe because all the sins mentioned in the previous four woes flowed from this sin of idolatry. When man turned away from God, man turned away from what is good!

The folly of idolatry is made very clear in **verses 18-19**. Despite the glamorous appearance (covered with gold and silver), it has no life and hence no use! The danger is that those who worship idols become like them! As their idols are dumb, so they are dumb! As their idols have no life, so they too are dead, neither seeing nor understanding!

In contrast, the living God is in His holy temple. In contrast, He speaks and He acts. Hence, all the earth should keep silent before Him.

Read **Ephesians 5:5**. How can someone living in the 21st century today be guilty of idolatry and hence be the subject of this woe?

Day 4 Read (a) Introductory Notes **HABAKKUK 3** and (b) **HABAKKUK 3:1-2**

Introductory Notes for **HABAKKUK 3**

“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 had 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 perspectives on the ways of God with mankind.

The overarching theme of this chapter may be seen as a poetic elaboration of 2:4. Despite all the cataclysmic calamities and judgments that shall come of the land 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.”

O Palmer Robertson

HABAKKUK 3:1-2

1. According to **verse 1**, what is Habakkuk doing here?
2. Habakkuk said in **verse 2a** that he has heard the speech of the LORD.
 - (a) What does ‘the speech’ refer to?
 - (b) What was Habakkuk’s response to ‘the speech’?
 - (c) Do you think it was right for Habakkuk to have this response? Elaborate.

Day 5 Read **HABAKKUK 3:1-2**

1. Habakkuk mentioned ‘*in the midst of the years*’ two times in **verse 2**. What do you think this is referring to?
2. Habakkuk asked for three things in his prayer to the Lord. What are they and what do they mean?

What are they?

What do they mean?

(a)

(b)

(c)

What lessons can we learn from Habakkuk's petitions?

Day 6 Summary Notes for **HABAKKUK 3:1-2**

These two verses can be re-formatted in this way:

*O Lord,
I have heard
Your speech
and was afraid;
O Lord,
revive Your work in the midst of the years!
In the midst of the years make it known;
In wrath remember mercy.*

The 'speech' refers to what God has revealed to Habakkuk concerning Judah's punishment (**1:5-11**) as well as Babylon's (**2:6-20**). Having heard what God said He would do, Habakkuk's response was one of fear. Was it right for Habakkuk to have such a response?

Let's hear Palmer Robertson again as he gives an answer: "*If fear is a natural reaction on the occasion of personal tragedy, how much more is it understandable that the prophet should react with a sense of awe and fear when he is informed that the favored nation of the Lord shall be utterly devastated? Even though he is assured that the righteous by faith shall live, he cannot but be awestruck at the judgment to come. As a matter of fact, the prophet's response of fear at hearing of the Lord's activity indicates that he accepts as true the message that he has received. In this case, fear is a significant indicator of the faith of the prophet.*"

"*In the midst of the years*" probably refers to the period of time between the devastation of Judah (God's people) and the destruction of Babylon (God's enemy). One can easily

imagine how terrible life must be during this period of time. As such, the prophet petitioned the LORD for three things:

- (i) Revive Your work
- (ii) Make it (Your work) known
- (iii) Remember mercy

Basically, Habakkuk has come to accept what God intends to do. He accepts that Judah must be punished, and punished in the way God has said! With that as the implied starting point, he then petitioned the Lord not to utterly forsake His work, but revive it and make it known. What does God's work refer to? It must certainly include God's people, and their redemption. Hence, the last petition: *Remember mercy!* As You carry out Your judgment on Judah, as You purge the dross away from Your people, remember mercy!

This prayer of Habakkuk can be applied to our day and age. Today, God is purging the dross from His people (the church). As Peter had said, judgment must begin with the house of God (**1 Peter 4:17**), culminating in the judgment of the world (God's enemies). We live between these two events. What do we do? We pray the same petitions as Habakkuk!

Day 7 Read **HABAKKUK 3:3-15**

This is still part of Habakkuk's prayer. Here, he turns his attention to the fact that the LORD has come and the LORD is coming. In view of the LORD's two coming, all who wait patiently for Him shall live.

These 13 verses can be divided into two sections:

- [i] The glory of the Lord in His coming (**verses 3-7**)
- [ii] Dialogue with the Lord at His coming (**verses 8-15**).

We shall focus on [i] today and tomorrow.

1. (a) How is God described? (**Verse 3b**)

(b) What did God do? (**Verse 3a**)

2. The rest of **verse 3** to the end of **verse 7** depicts the coming of the glorious Lord and its effect on nature and nations.

(a) What is the picture being conveyed in **verses 3c-5**?

(b) What is the picture being conveyed in **verses 6-7**?

3. While these verses have immediate relevance to Habakkuk and the faithful of his day, as the Word of God, they must also have relevance to us today.

Ponder: What is the relevance and application of these 5 verses to us today?

Week 10

[22nd – 28th September 2013]

Day 1 Summary Notes for **HABAKKUK 3:3-7**

God is described as the coming Holy One in **verse 3**. While this may evoke fear in the hearts of unbelievers, it actually brings comfort to God's people. God is not indifferent to the evils happening on earth. He will come, though not at the time and with the speed we expect. And because He is holy, when He comes, He will deal with sin and sinners!

Habakkuk actually frames the coming of the Holy God in terms of His previous comings to judge sinners and save His people. In other words, Habakkuk and the faithful of his days were living between God's previous comings and His promised coming. In the same way, Christians today live in the time bounded by (i) Christ has come and (ii) Christ shall come.

The coming of the Holy One shall fill the earth with glory – *"His glory covered the heavens"* is how it is put in **verse 3**. God is further depicted as light, with rays flashing forth (**verse 4**). This reminds us of the clear doctrinal statement of the apostle John in **1 John 1:5** (*God is light*) as well as the words of Paul in **1 Timothy 6:16** (*dwelling in unapproachable light*). ***When was the last time you thought of God in this way?***

As the Holy One comes and is personified as light, He brings with Him penetrating, destructive force of divine judgment. Hence the *"pestilence"* and *"fever"* of **verse 5**, echoing the curses of the covenant as threatened earlier in **Leviticus 26:25** and **Deuteronomy 28:21-22**. The *"pestilence"* and *"fever"* could also echo what came upon Egypt (Israel's oppressor) during the ten plagues.

In simple words, as the Holy God comes, He cannot be indifferent to sin when He finds it, either in the lives of His people or His enemies. He will judge. The “*pestilence*” and “*fever*” are His judgment. ***Have you ever thought of God in this way? (Give more than a “Yes” or “No” answer)***

The terrifying presence of the glorious and holy God continues to be depicted in **verses 6 & 7**. The everlasting mountains and the perpetual hills could not stand in His presence. The nations trembled and quaked. Cushan and Midian were mentioned. It is very likely that this is actually a reference to Cushan-Rishathaim king of Mesopotamia (**Judges 3**) and the Midianites that Gideon had to fight (**Judges 6-7**). These enemies oppressed Israel because the Lord gave Israel into their hands. The Lord did that because of the sins of Israel. It was punishment, and also deliverance, for the Lord did finally stretch out His hands to deliver Israel when they cried out to Him in their miseries.

Hence, there is acceptance of what God is going to do in the coming days – *Punishment of Judah via the Babylonians, because Judah has sinned*, as well as hope that God will remember mercy when He sees their misery, will move with compassion and save them!

The acceptance of punishment/chastisement from the Lord, and at the same time, holding on to the hope of mercy from the Lord, is a very important matter in the Christian Life. It is the very nature of true repentance: “*Lord, I have sinned and I deserve hell*” and saving faith: “*Lord, save me or I’ll die! I cast myself fully upon You and You alone!*”

Does the immediate paragraph above truly describe you right now? Elaborate.

Day 2 Read **HABAKKUK 3:8-15**

Recall that we are still in the prayer of Habakkuk. He has talked about the glory of the LORD in His coming in **verses 3-7**. Now in **verses 8-15**, we have a dialogue with the LORD at His coming.

1. We read of rivers and sea in these 8 verses, and God was doing something to them. What event(s) do you think Habakkuk was referring to?

2. The sun and moon were mentioned in **verse 11**. What event do you think Habakkuk was referring to?

3. Re-read **verses 8d-9 & 12**.
 - (a) How was God portrayed in these verses?

 - (b) What is the significance of this picture of God as given here?

 - (c) Have you ever thought of God in this way? Explain.

Day 3 Read **HABAKKUK 3:8-15**

1. Review your answers in Day 2. What was the Lord aiming to accomplish in doing all the things mentioned in these 8 verses?

Verse 12:

Verse 13a-b:

2. In **verse 13b**, we read of "*Your Anointed*". Who is he?

Day 4 Summary Notes for **HABAKKUK 3:8-15**

Habakkuk mentioned rivers, seas, waters and the deep numerous times in these 8 verses, asking specifically if God was angry with them. This question implies that God has done something drastic to the rivers, seas, waters and the deep. What can they be? We can only think of the parting of the Red Sea, the parting of the River Jordan as well as the part played by River Kishon when Barak and Deborah defeated Sisera and his army (**Judges 4:13-15, 5:4-5, 21**). In them, God went forth to defeat His enemies and

deliver His people. In the same way, the sun and moon mentioned in **verse 11** was probably a reference to the incident in **Joshua 10**.

The events cited above portrayed God as a warrior. He went forth to war! This is confirmed by **verses 8d-9** and **verse 12**. This picture of God as Warrior is not unique to **Habakkuk 3**. In many other parts of the Bible, God is portrayed as a Warrior. He goes forth into battle. Sometimes, He would even turn and fight against Israel! This underlines the truth that *God is a Warrior who ultimately wars against sin!*

We may not be familiar or comfortable with this concept of God as Warrior, but it can truly bring real comfort to God's people. God is not a softie, as many wrongly think of Him. Yes, He is gracious and compassionate, but He is also a Warrior. He will fight for His people, and He will fight sin in His people! ***If God is a Warrior, then what is the implication of this for God's people?***

The ultimate aim God has, in marching forth into war, is the salvation of His people (**verse 12**). And God will accomplish the salvation of His people with His Anointed. Who is the Anointed?

The Anointed was an idealized David-figure in the Old Testament. After the Exile, this figure was fulfilled in Cyrus the Persian. However, the Anointed is ultimately fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Viewed from the New Covenant perspective that God's Anointed is Jesus Christ, we are given another view of the cross. At the cross, it was war! At the cross, we do not see a weakling hanging there in defeat! At the cross, we see our Warrior – Jesus Christ fighting for us, defeating Satan and delivering us. **Colossians 2:14b-15** confirms this understanding: *And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.*

After reading the Summary Notes above, what have you learnt? Write it down in the space below and share it with someone.

Day 5 Read **HABAKKUK 3:16-19**

“Having heard the Lord's response to his complaint (2:2-20), and having seen a vision of the Lord drawing closer and closer in His approach to intervene by the destruction of the wicked and the salvation of the righteous (3:3-15), the prophet now records his reaction

to this awesome interchange (**3:16-19b**). His reaction includes three elements: (1) a response of stunned awe (**v16**); (2) a recognition of coming loss (**v17**); and (3) a resolution of joyous entrustment (**vv18-19b**).”

O Palmer Robertson

1. Previously, in response to God’s reply, Habakkuk was afraid (**3:2a**). Then he opened his mouth to pray (**3:2**).
 - (a) What is his response now? (**Verse 16**)
 - ❖ His body _____
 - ❖ His lips _____
 - ❖ His bones _____
 - (b) Use a word to describe Habakkuk’s response.
 - (c) Do you think it was right for Habakkuk to have such a response? Elaborate.

2. (a) What was Habakkuk saying in **verse 17**?
 - (b) Why would the situation described in **verse 17** come to pass?
(Let **Leviticus 26:18, 20** and **Deuteronomy 11:17** help you with your answer)

Day 6 Summary Notes for **HABAKKUK 3:16-17**

As Habakkuk’s dialogue came to an end, his response was somewhat similar to Job’s. His mouth was utterly silent (**verse 16b**); no longer the stance adopted in **2:1**. In fact, he was filled with dread, as evidenced by his body trembling and rottenness entering his bones. Is it right for a child of God, even a prophet, to be so fearful of God?

We need to remember that this was Job's response (**Job 42:5-6**), Isaiah's response (**Isaiah 6:5**), Daniel's response (**Daniel 10:8-9, 15-17**), Peter's response (**Luke 5:8**) and John's response (**Revelation 1:17**) when they found themselves in the holy, glorious presence of God!

Palmer Robertson said that "*the more godly the person, the greater his fear of the Lord*", and this comment is spot on. ***Take time to ponder: Is such fear of God present in you?***

In **verse 17**, we see Habakkuk coming to accept the impending loss and hardship. The series of facts that shall transpire, those dreadful things that shall happen – they are not the result of famine or locust invasion. They are the result of the ravages of war, waged by the Babylonians on Judah, leaving the land desolate.

The fig tree, vine and olive represent the choicest products of the land. The yield of the field, the flock and cattle encompass the necessities of bread, milk and meat. The absence of these items means no fig cakes, no wine, no anointing oil, no cereal, no vegetables, no milk, no mutton, no wool! How horrible life must be then!!

He accepts them. No murmur and no complaint, unlike the conduct of the Israelites in the wilderness. Why? Because he has recognized that these disasters will come to pass as part of the covenant curses (**Leviticus 26:18,20; Deuteronomy 11:17**). And the covenant curses will come to pass because they have sinned! In short, they deserve the punishment. When God metes out the punishment, the only thing Habakkuk will say in response is, "*You are just!*" ***Try putting yourself in Habakkuk's shoes then. Do you think you can accept God's punishment and say what he said?***

Day 7 Read **HABAKKUK 3:18-19**

1. Despite the terrible conditions described in **verse 17**, Habakkuk is determined to do something.

What was it? (**Verse 18**)

2. How is it that Habakkuk was able to do this? (**Verse 19**)

Note #1: The transition from the complaining prophet to the rejoicing prophet surely must be seen as a work of God's sovereign grace. Nothing else could explain how a person could be happy and contented in face of the calamities Habakkuk had to undergo.

Note #2: *"He will make my feet like deer's feet, and He will make me walk on my high hills"* is an echo of **Psalm 18:33**. The picture is that of the Lord's people surefooted, untiring, abounding with energy and ascending the height of victory despite their many severe setbacks. The New Testament version of this would be **Romans 8:35-39**.

Note 3: *"So before our very eyes the message of **Habakkuk 2:4** finds fulfillment. Habakkuk lives – by faith. He keeps on trusting God, despite the utter chaos and absolute calamity of the Exile. As a consequence, he lives.*

Throughout the ages all who set their trust on the Prophet par excellence shall live. They may fall asleep in death – but they shall not "die" in the ultimate sense. The sting of death has been removed by the power of the Resurrected One. Joyfully we live by faith in Him."

O Palmer Robertson.

Write down the most important lesson you've learnt from **HABAKKUK**:

Acknowledgement

Whatever the weaknesses of this Read-The-Bible-Together guide, they would have been far greater without the kind help of sisters Jyue Theng, Andriana and Swi Tjhing in giving their time and energy to review the entire guide, asking questions all the way and giving many valuable suggestions.

Thank you, sisters!

Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another! (Proverbs 27:17, ESV)