

**Shalom Church
Read-The-Bible-Together (RTBT)**

Some Minor Prophets of the Old Testament:

**JONAH
OBADIAH
HABAKKUK
HAGGAI**



1st – 30th October 2020

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1st October 2020

Jonah, Son of Amittai

“Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly,
and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows”
(Jonah 1:16)

Jonah 1

The Lord’s promise to bless all the families of the earth in Abram (Gen. 12:3) provides the backdrop for our study of Jonah. While Israel failed to extend God’s kingdom to the whole earth before the coming of the Messiah, God always intended to adopt Gentiles into His family. In fact, one reason our Father redeemed Israel from slavery was to make her a witness to the nations (Deut. 4:1–8; 28:1–14; 33:18–19). The Lord’s mission for Jonah represents perhaps His most direct outreach to foreign nations before the coming of Christ.

In today’s passage, God calls Jonah, who lived during the eighth century BC, to announce judgment against Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian empire that would conquer the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 BC. However, Jonah disobeys the Lord and flees for Tarshish (1:1–3), a city likely situated on the southwestern coast of Spain and in the opposite direction from Nineveh (northern Iraq). But he cannot escape; Yahweh hurls a storm into the sea, prompting the sailors with Jonah onboard the ship to implore their gods for aid (vv. 4–5).

Just as the Lord previously ordered Jonah to “arise,” so too does the captain call the prophet to “arise” (v. 6) from his slumber. Ironically, God continues to speak to Jonah, only this time it is through the mouth of a pagan! Moreover, the sailors prove themselves to be more righteous than the prophet throughout the narrative. Jonah claims to worship the Lord reverently (v. 9), but he runs from Him (vv. 1–3), while the sailors fear God greatly, as seen in their attempt to save Jonah rather than cast him overboard (vv. 10–13).

Yet in the end, the sailors do cast Jonah into the sea just as the prophet directed, and the sea immediately becomes calm (vv. 14–15). They then do what those rescued by the Lord must do — they worship Him for His redemption and make vows to serve Him (v. 16).

Coram Deo

The story makes clear that the sailors onboard Jonah’s vessel are more concerned to obey God than Jonah was. A non-believer’s good deeds can never save his soul, but we should be ashamed anytime non-Christians are more concerned with living properly than we are. It is a scandal whenever we do not defend the poor or call for justice and righteousness by our words and deeds. Help serve a Christian organization that does these things in your community.

2nd October 2020

God Rescues Jonah

“I called out to the Lord, out of my distress,
and he answered me; out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and you heard my voice”
(Jonah 2:2)

Jonah 2

Having calmed the storm after the sailors cast the prophet into the sea, Jonah 1:17 tells us God then appointed a “great fish” to swallow him. However, we must be careful not to regard this fish as evidence of the Lord’s judgment. Instead, this sea creature is the instrument of our Father’s salvation.

The prayer Jonah utters to God from the belly of this fish makes this clear. In today’s passage, Jonah cries out to the Lord, thanking Him for rescuing him from the belly of Sheol (2:1–2). In the Old Testament, Sheol can designate several different things, including the abode of the wicked dead, but most often it refers to death in general (1 Sam. 2:6; Ps. 6:5). Jonah uses the term Sheol in this sense, and thus he praises the Lord for rescuing Him from the belly of death.

This belly of death, this Sheol, is found not in the stomach of the great fish but in the depths of the sea itself. Modern westerners often view the ocean as a place of rest and recreation, but for ancient Israel, the watery deep represented chaos. The sea was to be feared if the presence of God was absent (Isa. 43:2), for He alone is able to guide His people safely through the waves (v. 16). As an instrument of divine judgment in the days of Noah (Gen. 6–9), the power of the waters to take life was greatly respected, and to be subject to the raging ocean, as Jonah was, meant that death was certain (Ps. 69). As the prophet makes clear in his prayer, to descend into the tumultuous sea was to descend to the pit — to Sheol (Jonah 2:5–6). The sea creature that swallowed Jonah was thus used by the Lord to rescue Him from His judgment. John Calvin writes: “To save is the prerogative of God alone.”

God could have justly let Jonah die, but in His merciful sovereignty He chooses to do what we may not have done in His place — He spares Jonah’s life and grants him repentance. The Lord “appointed” the fish to save His prophet (1:17), and the ocean dweller releases Jonah immediately when commanded to do so (2:10). Our Father’s sovereign freedom to do what He wills is an important theme in this book, and we will see it reappear over the next two days.

Coram Deo

In His mercy, the Lord may discipline His people for sin in order that we may not fall further away. And as the example of Jonah indicates, He will also provide the rescue from this discipline by preserving us and moving us to repentance. If you are experiencing the corrective hand of the Lord today, turn from your sin that you might be restored. But do not delay, for while God will rescue His people, we can never use this as an excuse to remain disobedient.

3rd October 2020

God Relented

“When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way,
God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them,
and he did not do it” (Jonah 3:10)

Jonah 3

Remarkably, God does not remove Jonah from his prophetic office, even though he refused to heed the Lord’s call when it was first given (Jonah 1:3). Instead, He rescues His messenger from falling into Sheol (v. 17) and delivers the prophet back onto the dry land so that he may finish his appointed task (2:10).

In today’s passage, God again commands Jonah to preach judgment to Nineveh, and this time he obeys (3:1–3). Verse 3 describes Nineveh as “exceedingly great,” referring to its size and importance as the capital of Assyria. Given His concern for the city (4:11), the phrasing of 3:3 may also reveal our Father’s love for the Ninevites.

Jonah’s message is simple, in forty days the city will be “overthrown” (v. 4). In short, Nineveh faces extinction, as the Hebrew for overthrown is also used in the story of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19:21). The Almighty is about to repay the city for its evil. Hearing of their impending doom, the Ninevites show their repentance with sackcloth and fasting (Jonah 3:5; see also 1 Kings 21:27–29). Moreover, when Jonah’s sermon reaches the king, he extends the fast, revealing the city’s contrition (Jonah 3:6–7). He even calls for the animals to wear sackcloth (v. 8), revealing that the effects of man’s sins are so great, even the earth needs renewal (see Rom. 8:20–22).

Though the king would have had little first-hand knowledge of the one, true God prior to Jonah’s visit, the monarch decides to throw himself and his citizens on the mercy of the Creator (Jonah 3:9). In saying, “Who knows?” the ruler admits that the Lord’s judgment is right; thus, he demonstrates true contrition. And in His mercy, the one, true God of Israel relents from destroying the city (v. 10).

God is free to alter His announced judgments when we repent (Jer. 18:1–10). Despite His knowing whether we will trust Him before we do so, He still condescends to respond to our trust, and thus our actions are significant. Though we must not take this truth for granted, our Father will always freely forgive those who turn to Him. His lordship does not abolish the real impact of our choices; instead, it establishes them as part of His overall decree (WCF 3.1).

Coram Deo

The window of forty days in Jonah 3:4 is the first indication the announced judgment on Nineveh may not be absolute. God is free to hide His secret will from us and warn of judgments He knows will never come to pass. The warnings in Scripture must not make us inactive; rather, we should be moved to change our ways by our knowledge that God is

merciful. Today, let His mercy and justice motivate you to follow Him in a way you have not done so before.

4th October 2020

Jonah's Anger

“And the Lord said, ‘Do you do well to be angry?’”

(Jonah 4:4)

Jonah 4

En route to Orlando, a Christian man arrived at the Chicago airport early and had to wait an hour for permission to board the aircraft. He soon noticed a woman sitting nearby, clothed head to toe in the distinctive garb of a devout Muslim. Immediately, anger welled up inside of him due to the violence perpetrated against his country in the name of Islam. Secretly he hoped she would not be traveling on his plane, but to his dismay, she sat next to him on his flight.

How often do we adopt a similar attitude toward the non-believers around us, imagining that we are somehow inherently worthy of Christ's forgiveness? We know we are to make disciples of even the worst sinners (Matt. 28:18–20), but do we eagerly live out the Gospel for our unconverted friends and family? Do we really believe the Lord takes no pleasure in the destruction of the wicked (Ezek. 33:11), so that we pray for their regeneration long before we pray for judgment?

As today's passage indicates, such an attitude is not new among God's people. Jonah 4:2 reveals that the prophet did not obey the command to warn Nineveh because he feared her citizens might repent, thereby moving our Father to forgive them. He falsely believed divine mercy was somehow the exclusive right of Israel and did not want to see the heathen of the nations converted. Today, we are likewise foolish when we allow the church to become a country club that, in word or deed, rejects sinners seeking restoration. Moreover, any anger we feel when God is merciful to repentant men or any action we perform that prevents the free spread of the Gospel is not only foolish, it is also evil. The Hebrew word for Jonah's displeasure in 4:1 is the same one used for Nineveh's evil in 1:2. Plainly, the Lord wants us to see that we are sinning when we are upset by His great grace toward the most heinous transgressors.

When God asks Jonah if it is right for him to be angry for His mercy on Nineveh (4:4), the expected answer is no. Jonah erred in pitying a plant more than he did men in slavery to wickedness (vv. 9–11), but may we never become so callous to those outside the church that we cease to preach the Gospel to them with compassion.

Coram Deo

Our attitudes toward non-believers can prevent us from spreading the good news. Our Father has His elect among every race and class (Rev. 5:9–10), and there is no sinner He cannot redeem, no matter his evil. How do you regard the non-believers around you? Do

you think they cannot be saved? What are you doing to extend the Gospel to those on the margins of society? Consider helping an organization that ministers to “outcasts,” such as a prison ministry.

5th October 2020

The Sign of Jonah

“He answered them,
‘An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign,
but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah’”
(v. 39)

Matthew 12:38–42

A Christian and his friend, who did not know Christ, were discussing Jesus and His claim to be the only way to the Father (John 14:6). The believer humbly shared the Gospel with his friend to no avail. “If only I could see Jesus do a miracle,” the non-Christian said, “then I would believe Him.”

Such conversations have occurred repeatedly throughout history, beginning with Jesus and the scribes and the Pharisees. In today’s passage, these scholars, no doubt enraged at His harsh words about them (Matt. 12:1–37), ask Jesus for “a sign” (v. 38)—a miracle that unambiguously demonstrates the messianic anointing of Jesus. Apparently, what He has done so far is not enough to convince these men. In their minds the Redeemer’s works of deliverance could be attributed to Satan (v. 24). Even if this is not true, they do not think the exorcism of demons is so special since their disciples can also deliver people (v. 27).

The request is not necessarily wrong in itself; God gave Abraham a sign to confirm his faith (Gen. 15). But Jesus knows nothing can convince the scribes and Pharisees. They only seek more ammunition to use against Him. Besides, Jesus will not “bark on command,” nor will He satisfy their whims (Matt. 12:39). Matthew Henry comments, “Christ is always ready to hear and answer holy desires and prayers, yet he will not gratify corrupt lusts and humors.”

Jesus does, however, promise the “sign of the prophet Jonah” (v. 39). Many first-century Jews believed the Ninevites repented when Jonah preached because they knew God spoke through him, and they knew this because they knew God saved him from drowning (Jonah 1:17–3:10). Similarly, Jesus’ resurrection, which is like Jonah’s rescue (Matt. 12:40), also signifies God’s vindication of Him and affirms the truth of His words (Rom. 1:1–4). Yet even this miracle will not be enough to make Jesus’ hard-hearted contemporaries believe (Luke 16:31).

On judgment day, the generation that rejects God’s Son will be condemned by the Ninevites and the “Queen of the South” (1 Kings 10:1–13; Matt. 12:41–42). Ironically, these pagans turned to the true God, but most Israelites, who will see the greater sign of their Lord’s resurrection, will not believe.

Coram Deo

No miracle will ever be sufficient to engender faith within those who love their sin and refuse to turn to God. People are being insincere when they say they will believe if they see a miracle, for there is plenty of evidence of the truth of Jesus in the accounts of His resurrection, the spread of the Gospel, and the lives and societies changed by obedience to His message. Pray that you would always be able to see these proofs for the truth of our Lord's words.

6th October 2020

The Prophet to Assyria

“Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying,
‘Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it,
for their evil has come up before me.’”
Jonah 1:1-2

Read: Jonah 1:1-2

The eighth century BC was a tumultuous time for the people of Israel. Despite the relative peace and prosperity during the reign of Jeroboam II (793–753 BC), all was not well in the northern kingdom. Prevalent, impenitent sin was stoking the fires of the Lord's wrath, prompting Him to send prophets such as Amos to warn Israel that without repentance, exile would be its end. The few Israelites who actually listened to Amos and the other prophets knew that Assyria would be their enslaver (Hos. 11:5; Amos 4:2).

Pagan Assyria was one of the most significant empires of the ancient Near East, and there was no love lost between it and Israel. Those who later read the inscripturated oracles of Hosea, Amos, and the other eighth-century prophets had lived through the empire's invasions of Israel and Judah that culminated finally in Assyria's conquest of Israel in 722 BC (2 Kings 15:17–22; 17). They also read that the Lord would judge Assyria for its arrogance even though He used the empire to discipline His people (Isa. 10:5–19).

Yet did God's promise to judge Assyria and the fact that He would allow the empire to visit horrors upon His covenant people mean the Lord had no love or compassion for the Assyrian people? The book of Jonah answers in the negative, recounting Jonah's ministry in Assyria's capital city of Nineveh during the eighth century BC. We cannot be sure of the date of Jonah's work aside from noting that it records events that likely occurred during the reign of Jeroboam II, as 2 Kings 14:25 places Jonah in that era. A date between 773 and 756 BC is perhaps as specific we can get. During those years, Assyria was racked by famine, popular uprisings, and an earthquake—all of which, scholars note, would have made the people willing to take Jonah's threat of divine judgment more seriously than if no troubles or potential omens had been present.

Liberals often criticize the book of Jonah as ahistorical, mostly due to their antsupernatural bias. Yes, a man's preservation in the belly of a great fish and the

widespread repentance of a pagan city are incredible — but not impossible given what the Bible says about God. Furthermore, the author of Jonah does not paint the prophet as an idealized hero like a fiction author might. Instead, as it does with other figures, the Bible presents Jonah to uswarts and all. This prophet learned that God will have mercy on whom He will have mercy, a lesson we must remember in every generation.

Coram Deo

Despite God's promise to Abraham that His descendants would bring blessing to the world (Gen. 12:1–3), the old covenant community, as a whole, tried to keep the Lord's blessings for themselves and did not reach out to the nations. Christians, of course, are just as susceptible to this error of hiding our light under a bushel. May we not do this but be willing to pray, give, and do whatever is necessary to reach all nations with the gospel.

7th October 2020

Running Away from God

“Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.

He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish.

So he paid the fare and went down into it, t

to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord”

(v. 3)

Read: Jonah 1:3-16

Prophets were set apart to God, but they were not sinless. Jonah illustrates this point perfectly, as his first response to the Lord's mission to Nineveh was to flee by boat to Tarshish (Jonah 1:3). Nineveh was located at present-day Mosul, Iraq, and Tarshish could be another name for the port of Tarsseus in Spain or a name for any land on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea that is distant from Israel. Either way, the point is clear: God had commanded Jonah to go one way, and Jonah headed in the opposite direction. He wanted nothing to do with Nineveh. Jonah 1:3 also says that the prophet was going “away from the presence of the LORD.” This prophet thought he could get away from His Creator, betraying his need for a refresher course in God's omnipresence (Ps. 139:7–12).

The Lord was not going to let the man He called get away so easily, and He sent a great wind and mighty storm on the sea (Jonah 1:4). The sailors on the ship responded by crying out to their gods for deliverance (v. 5), which was ironic considering the difference between their response to God and Jonah's. While the fleeing prophet of the one true God ignored the reality of the Lord's omnipresence and, thus, His providence, the sailors remained convinced of the reality of the supernatural and its involvement in the affairs of men, even if they were confused about the identity of the Sovereign of the universe.

When their cries went unheard, the captain roused Jonah, and the crew cast lots to discover who was responsible for the deadly storm (vv. 6–7). Jonah was identified and, to his credit, admitted that he was disobeying the Lord (vv. 8–10). The sailors found

themselves between a rock and a hard place. Since Jonah caused their trouble, getting rid of him could possibly save them. Nevertheless, since Jonah served the one true God of all, they did not want to make the Lord angrier by killing His prophet.

Jonah told the men to cast him into the sea, but their initial response was to fervently try to save him. Again the sailors showed themselves better theologians than the prophet, erring on the side of mercy before they consented and threw Jonah overboard. As a result, the sea calmed at once, and the sailors worshiped God (vv. 11–16).

Coram Deo

We might be tempted to look down on Jonah for fleeing to Tarshish. However, when we remember how many times we ignore God's call, we realize that we are no better than the prophet. When Jesus commands us to do something, we need to heed His words immediately or to repent when we fail to do so. Are you putting off or ignoring the call of Christ? Repent of that today, and begin to fulfil what the Lord wants you to do.

8th October 2020

Salvation is of the LORD

“Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the belly of the fish, saying, ‘I called out to the LORD, out of my distress, and he answered me; out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and you heard my voice’”
(2:1–2)

Read: Jonah 1:17–2:10

Jonah's story is quite familiar to most Christians, as nearly all of us who have grown up in the church heard it more than once during our days in children's Sunday school. Despite our familiarity with Jonah's ministry, however, we must note that there is a common misunderstanding about one major portion of the account. After Jonah was thrown into the sea, God appointed a “great fish” to swallow the prophet, and he remained within the belly of the fish for three days and for three nights (Jonah 1:17). People tend to see the fish as an instrument of the Lord's judgment when, in fact, the fish was the very means by which our Creator saved Jonah from certain death.

Readers likely interpret the fish as God's judgment due to Jonah's words; while in the belly of the fish, he spoke of crying to the Lord “out of the belly of Sheol” (2:1–2). When we read that phrase in context, we see that Jonah spoke not of a fish's stomach but of the bowels of death itself, *Sheol* being a common Old Testament term for the grave. Jonah was cast into the sea to save the lives of the sailors en route to Tarshish (1:11–16), but the churning waters were no safe haven for the prophet. When Jonah prayed to God, he referred to the flood surrounding him, the waters closing in to take his life, and seaweed wrapping around his head (2:3–5). In His grace, the Lord rescued Jonah from the pit—the grave—even though the prophet had disobeyed His command to go to Nineveh (v. 6).

Jonah's song in today's passage is remarkable for two reasons. First, it indicates the authenticity of his repentance. The prophet never claims God owes him salvation, and he never attempts to list mitigating circumstances to try to excuse his disobedience. This is true repentance — an acknowledgment of guilt before God with no attempt to explain it away and a turning to the Lord in His heavenly temple as the only hope of forgiveness. Father Mapple in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* captures this in his sermon: "Sinful as he is, Jonah does not weep and wait for direct deliverance. He feels that his dreadful punishment is just. He leaves all his deliverance to God, contenting himself with this, that in spite of all his pains and pangs, he will still look towards His holy temple."

Second, Jonah's song is notable because of its affirmation that salvation belongs to the Lord alone (Jonah 2:7–9). Jonah was utterly helpless in the sea and unable to save himself. So, too, are we powerless to save ourselves from the wrath of our holy God.

Coram Deo

We bring nothing to the Lord when we come to Him for salvation. Even our faith, the instrument of our justification, is a gift from Him (Eph. 2:8–10). This is a great truth that we must tell ourselves repeatedly, for otherwise we will certainly forget it. One way we can do this is to consciously look for evidence of God's grace in the stories recorded in Scripture. God's grace to Jonah in saving him with the fish reminds us that salvation is all of Him.

9th October 2020

The Lord Spares Nineveh

"When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way,
God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them,
and he did not do it" (v. 10)

Read: Jonah 3

Fortunately, for both Jonah's sake and ours, the Lord is truly the God of second chances. So often we fail to obey our Creator when He first calls us, but in His grace He does not give up on us. David got a second chance after his sin with Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11:1–12:15a). Peter got a second chance after he denied Christ (John 18:15–27; 21:15–19). Jonah got a second chance to preach to Nineveh after he first fled from God's calling (Jonah 3:1–3a). We could list many more (including ourselves) who have received second chances to serve the Lord when they have not been deserved. Every second chance we get, of course, is not what we deserve. God never owes us a second chance, and we have no right to presume upon the Lord's grace. Nevertheless, God does on many occasions give us further opportunities to follow Him when we fail.

Today's passage records what happened the second time the word of the Lord came to Jonah regarding Nineveh. Having been rescued from death in the sea and returned to dry land, (Jonah 2:10), Jonah went straight to the capital of Assyria, the city of Nineveh, the

second time God called him to announce judgment on the Assyrians (3:1–4). And when Jonah preached, something incredible happened—the “people of Nineveh believed God” and they repented (v. 5). This was not mere belief in God’s existence, which means nothing before His judgment seat (James 2:19); rather, the Ninevites affirmed the truth of God’s words and acted accordingly. That is what believing God looks like. Moreover, the repentance of the people was so thorough that even the king himself joined in repentance, calling for all of his citizens—even the animals—to repent as well (Jonah 3:6–9).

When the Lord saw the response of Nineveh to His word, He relented from the disaster He had announced (v. 10). This illustrates the point we made a few weeks ago, namely, that God’s prophecies often have implicit conditions built into them, for He is willing to relent from destruction when people respond in faith (Jer. 18:1–11). Of course, given that the Lord knows all things and has ordained whatsoever comes to pass (Eph. 1:11), the repentance of Nineveh did not take Him by surprise. He knew that Nineveh would believe His word and that its citizens would respond appropriately. In fact, He announced judgment through Jonah in order to put the fear of God in their hearts and lead them to repent so that He would not have to destroy the city.

Coram Deo

God’s Word always achieves the purpose for which it is ultimately intended (Isa. 55:10–11). Sometimes His promise of judgment prompts people to repent, as it did when Jonah preached it to Nineveh. Sometimes it makes people harden their hearts against the Lord, as it did when Moses spoke to Pharaoh (Ex. 8:19). In both cases, however, it did what it was supposed to do. We can likewise be confident that His Word will achieve His purposes when we faithfully preach His gospel.

10th October 2020

Jonah’s Anger

“[Jonah] prayed to the Lord and said,
‘O LORD, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country?
That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish;
for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love,
and relenting from disaster’”
(vv. 2–3)

Read: Jonah 4

We must wait until Jonah 4 for the real reason why the prophet did not want to heed God’s call to preach to Nineveh. Ironically, as we see in the chapter, Jonah’s sin was grounded in a correct view of the Lord, albeit one that was grossly misapplied.

Some people are troubled by the fact that the Lord relented from disaster in the case of Jonah’s ministry to Nineveh because the prophet gave no indication to the Ninevites that God would stay His hand if the people repented. Does this mean the Lord changed His

mind like we do—that He learned some new information that caused Him to rethink His plan of action? Some people would answer in the affirmative, but this betrays their failure to read Scripture carefully. Given that prophecies often include unstated conditions (Jer. 18:5–10) and that the Lord is not a “man, that he should change his mind” (Num. 23:19), the idea that He did not know what Nineveh’s response would be is nonsense. He did know what would happen, for He has ordained all things, including Jonah’s preaching and the Ninevites’ response (Eph. 1:11). The Lord just chose not to reveal explicitly the full scope of the future impact of Jonah’s ministry until it came to pass.

Jonah could not see the future with certainty, but he could know what would happen if the Ninevites were to repent in response to his preaching. So could anyone else who knew God’s character. The Lord is holy, yes, but He is also slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, and eager to forgive iniquity (Ex. 34:6–7; Micah 7:18). Jonah never wanted to go to Nineveh in the first place because he did not want to see the Ninevites turn from their sin. He ran not because he was afraid of preaching in a foreign land but because he was afraid God’s Word might change the hearts and minds of Israel’s hated enemies. So, when the people did rend their hearts and garments, Jonah grew angry at the Lord for being merciful and acting according to what He had revealed about His character (Jonah 4:1–3). Jonah’s anger was irrational—he was mad at God for being God.

Lest we are quick to judge Jonah and not ourselves, let us consider how often we expect the Lord to forgive us but then do not want to see our enemies pardoned. We are too much like Jonah, hoping God will crush our enemies instead of saving them. But as the Lord takes no delight in the death of the wicked (Ezek. 18:32), neither may we. May our longing always be for the repentance and restoration of God’s foes and ours.

Coram Deo

Jonah’s depression over the death of a plant (Jonah 4:5–9), Dr. R.C. Sproul tells us, means that the prophet cared more about plants than about people. Jonah forgot that no sinner deserves God’s forgiveness—even a prophet of God Almighty—and wanted to withhold the possibility of pardon from those he deemed unfit for the kingdom. But we are all unfit for the kingdom, so we should long for the Lord to save others just as He has saved us.

11th October 2020

The Word of the Lord to Edom

“Thus says the LORD GOD concerning Edom:
We have heard a report from the LORD,
and a messenger has been sent among the nations:
‘Rise up! Let us rise against her for battle!’
Behold, I will make you small among the nations;
you shall be utterly despised”
(vv. 1–2)

Quarrels between family members certainly rank among the most divisive and intense of arguments. When passions go unchecked, even minor issues can become reasons for brothers and sisters, parents and children, and other family members never to speak to one another again. An ancient family quarrel forms the background for the next prophet in our year-long study of the Old Testament prophetic literature — Obadiah.

Obadiah's prophecy against Edom for its treatment of Judah must be seen in the context of the traditional rivalry between the two nations. This rivalry goes all the way back to the patriarchal period and the Lord's word that Rebekah's two sons would be at odds with one another (Gen. 25:19–28). Indeed, Jacob and Esau routinely battled: the younger, scheming brother regularly took advantage of the older brother, whose passions were controlled by his appetite and not the fear of the Lord (vv. 29–34; 27:1–45). Although Jacob and Esau eventually reached a reconciliation of sorts (chap. 33), their descendants never fully got along. Edom, made up of Esau's offspring, was particularly embittered toward Israel and Judah, the people descended from Jacob. The Edomites even refused the wandering Israelites the right to pass through their country after the exodus (Num. 20:14–21). Sadly, two nations that were supposed to be brothers hated one another.

God's judgment on Edom's maltreatment of Judah is the theme of the book of Obadiah. In a culture that prized hospitality, Edom's refusal to show empathy or to assist its brother Judah during an invasion of Jerusalem was particularly heinous (Obad. 10–11). The precise invasion that prompted Obadiah to write is hard to identify. A variety of different dates have been suggested, but it is impossible to be certain regarding when Obadiah ministered. All we know about the prophet is that his name means "the Lord's servant," and the book itself does not identify its historical circumstances precisely. Since Obadiah describes the calamity of Jerusalem (v. 13), we are dating the book at the time of the exile of Judah into Babylon, which would have provided Judah's hateful older brother a good opportunity to rejoice in his misfortune (2 Kings 25:1–21).

Although Obadiah is the shortest book in the Old Testament, its prophecy of Edom's fall is a great comfort. It reminds God's people that the Lord will not long tolerate their enemies. All who stand against the saints impenitently will be "utterly despised" (Obad. 2).

Coram Deo

The conflict between Edom and Judah that continued centuries after Esau and Jacob died reminds us how unsettled arguments can have ramifications that extend far beyond ourselves. When we fight with family members, the negative impact can extend for generations and wreak havoc that we may never see with our own eyes. Practically speaking, it is wise to seek resolution of our conflicts insofar as we are able to do so without being forced to compromise truth. It is also pleasing to God.

12th October 2020

God Charges Edom

“Because of the violence done to your brother Jacob,
shame shall cover you, and you shall be cut off forever”
(v. 10)

Read: Obadiah 10-14

Located on the borders of Judah in a region to the southeast of the Dead Sea, Edom was in an ideal position to help the Judahites when Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem in 586 BC. Even if the Edomites did not give military assistance to their Judahite brothers in the fight against Babylon, they still could have sheltered the Judahites who were fleeing Jerusalem and Judah in order to escape the Babylonian onslaught. As we read in today's passage, however, Edom could not be troubled to offer Judah even the slightest assistance in the day of its great need.

Obadiah 10–14 speaks of the violence that Edom committed against Judah at the time of the fall of Jerusalem. We see in these verses a progress from Edom standing as an aloof, disinterested observer of Judah's fate to one who gloated over Judah's trouble, to an invader of Jerusalem, and finally to an enemy that plucked off desperate fugitives as they tried to escape certain death. The picture is one of Edom hovering about like a vulture, waiting for Babylon to do its worst to Judah so that it can swoop in and pick through the leftovers. How far Edom actually went is not crystal clear from the text of Obadiah itself, although it is notable that some later Jewish traditions indicate that Edom helped the Babylonians burn the temple in Jerusalem to the ground. In any case, the text plainly indicates that the Edomites profited in many ways from the collapse of Judah, and for that God held them accountable.

Today's passage is important for our hamartiology (theology of sin), particularly the sin of omission. Answer 14 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism tells us that “sin is any want of conformity to, or transgression of, the law of God.” This comprehensive definition of sin indicates that we have not kept the Lord's commands if all we have done is not actively break them. That is to say, it is not enough simply to refrain from acts of evil; rather, we must also do good whenever we see that good needs to be done and it is in our power to do it. Scripture teaches this in many places, including James 4:17: “Whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.” Edom knew that Judah needed help, but refused to give it; thus, the Edomites were guilty of great sin. The same is true of us when we fail to do what is right. Matthew Henry comments, “Those have a great deal to answer for who are idle spectators, when they are capable of being their active helpers.”

Coram Deo

God's law covers every aspect of life, telling us that we sin both in breaking God's commands willfully and in showing apathy when we see that there is something good and holy to be done. In ourselves, we cannot hope to meet this high standard of serving the Lord unwaveringly—and so we trust in Christ and His righteousness alone for our

justification. But having trusted Christ, He empowers us by His Spirit to do His will. What good must you do this day in order to obey our Creator?

13th October 2020

Edom's Fall and Israel's Rise

“The exiles of . . . the people of Israel shall possess
the land of the Canaanites as far as Zarephath
and the exiles of Jerusalem who are in Sepharad
shall possess the cities of the Negeb.
Saviors shall go up to Mount Zion to rule Mount Esau,
and the kingdom shall be the LORD's”
(vv. 20–21)

Read: Obadiah 15-21

Our brief study of Obadiah concludes today as we consider the last seven verses of this short book. In its original context, this passage gave hope for the exiles of Israel that their dispossession would not be the final word from the Lord regarding His people. As with the Old Testament as a whole, Obadiah foresaw a glorious restoration for the faithful descendants of Jacob (Deut. 30:1–10; Ezek. 36:22–38).

Restoration of the faithful remnant, however, has on its flip side the defeat and destruction of the remnant's enemies. Therefore, Obadiah speaks of “the day of the Lord . . . upon all the nations” (v. 15). As we have seen in other studies, the phrase *day of the Lord* is God's intervention to save His people and crush their enemies. It can refer to specific instances of the Lord's judgment in history — such as Babylon's fall (Isa. 13) — but it can also stand for the final judgment, when God will set all things right forever (Mal. 4:5). In any case, a specific day of the Lord within history always prefigures the final judgment to come. Obadiah may have in view the specific day of the Lord that brings about the end of Edom in history or the final day of judgment. In fact, it seems that he combines the two, for he speaks of the worldwide recognition of God's reign: “the kingdom shall be the LORD's” (Obad. 21). Either way, Obadiah reveals that God will not leave His people to suffer forever but will intervene decisively to save Abraham's faithful children.

Moving into the New Testament, we see a clearer presentation that even the faithful must undergo the day of judgment. Those who serve the Lord in faith do not do so because they possess a righteous status in themselves before God. Instead, as with those who remain outside of the kingdom, we who love the one, true Creator are children of wrath apart from our Father's sovereign initiative (Eph. 2:1–3). But God sent His Son to endure the day of the Lord in our behalf, to bear the punishment we deserve as the enemies of God, thereby showing Himself to be just and the Justifier (Acts 2:14–41; Rom. 3:21–26). Christ's work on Calvary manifested the day of the Lord for His elect, which was granted by our holy God in His grace that His people would not have to be counted as His enemies on the day when Jesus returns to consummate His kingdom. Because God has judged us in

Christ and imputed His righteousness to us, the final day of the Lord for us will not be the day of wrath it will be for those who do not know Jesus (1 Thess. 1:10).

Coram Deo

By His grace, God in Christ intervened in history before the final day of the Lord to save us from the Lord's wrath to come (1 Thess. 1:10). Thus, we do not yet experience certain aspects of what Obadiah saw regarding the day of judgment. God's people do not yet possess their full inheritance in the new heaven and earth, so we don't possess the land of the Canaanites. But the work of Jesus has guaranteed it for us. One day, we shall rule over the whole earth, the Holy Land included.

14th October 2020

Habakkuk's Oracle

"The oracle that the prophet Habakkuk saw"
(v. 1)

Read: Habakkuk 1:1–11

Of all the prophets of the old covenant, perhaps none today suffers from more neglect in relation to his importance for the New Testament than Habakkuk. Though his prophecy is one of the briefest in the Old Testament, Habakkuk gives essential revelation regarding our righteous standing before God. Habakkuk 2:4—"the righteous shall live by his faith"—is key to the Apostolic view of justification by faith alone (Rom. 1:16–17; Gal. 3:11), and also vital for Hebrews' teaching on perseverance (Heb. 10:32–39).

Habakkuk spoke about justification in a historical context that must be understood if he is to be interpreted rightly. He prophesied during the last quarter of the seventh century BC, as seen in his reference to the Chaldeans' rise (Hab. 1:6). During that century and earlier, control of the city of Babylon alternated between the Assyrians and tribes that lived near the metropolis. In 626 BC, however, the Chaldean prince Nabopolassar became ruler of Babylon and broke from Assyria. From then until 539 BC, when the Persians conquered the city, Babylon was the major Near Eastern power.

Scripture uses *Chaldeans* and *Babylonians* interchangeably, as the Chaldeans were a tribe based in the region near Babylon between northern Arabia and the Persian Gulf, and they were the Babylonian Empire's best-known rulers during the prophetic era. We know little about Habakkuk, though his use of the title *prophet* may indicate he was a professional prophet who served in Jerusalem's temple (v. 1; see 2 Chron. 18). Yet unlike many of the professional "prophets," Habakkuk served God, noting clearly when His law was broken and His justice perverted (Hab. 1:2–4). He apparently ministered during the reign of King Jehoiakim, King Josiah's son, whom the Egyptians had established in Jerusalem (2 Chron. 36:1–4). Jehoiakim was wicked, and Jerusalem suffered the incursions of Babylon during his reign (vv. 5–8). Jeremiah also prophesied at this time, and he records Jehoiakim's bloodthirstiness and dishonesty (Jer. 22:11–30; 26).

Habakkuk complains about Jehoiakim's evil and the complicity of Judah's ruling class in today's passage. His complaints are heart-wrenching, flowing from the lips of one who saw the wicked prospering and wondered if perhaps the Lord had forgotten His righteous servants (Hab. 1:2-4). As we will see in the days ahead, God knew of Judah's injustice quite well, but His answer to it was not what Habakkuk expected.

Coram Deo

When we see the wicked prospering and God's people suffering, we may think the Lord is too slow in responding to the evil we are enduring. Yet God always works in His time, and He sometimes works in ways we do not expect. We can be sure that God has not forgotten us when He seems slow to respond, and we can know that even if He does the unexpected, it is for His glory and our good (Rom. 8:28). All this is true because He is sovereign in His goodness and holiness.

15th October 2020

The Reality of Our Sin

“Are you not from everlasting, O Lord my God, my Holy One? ...
You who are of purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong”
(Hab. 1:12-13)

Read: Habakkuk 1:12-13

When it became apparent near the end of the seventh century BC that the wicked Babylonian empire would soon be used of the Lord to bring judgment upon His people, the prophet Habakkuk became deeply distressed. How could God, Habakkuk wondered, use unrighteous individuals to chasten Judah? While the Lord did not explain His ways fully to the prophet, He reminded Habakkuk of His divine sovereignty and inscrutability (2:20). The Lord is still holy when He uses rebellious souls to achieve His purposes, even if this truth is not fully understandable. In fact, as Habakkuk says in today's passage, God is so pure that He cannot even look at wrong. This does not suggest the Lord is unable to see the thoughts and deeds of sinners; rather, His absolute purity precludes any possibility that He could tolerate evil.

Mankind, on the other hand, is not so pure. In fact, we so miserably fail to imitate the character of God that we assume sin is essential to the very nature of man. The old saying “to err is human, to forgive divine,” implies man is not really man without sin. Moreover, this quote suggests God automatically grants forgiveness to all men.

However, as the apostle Paul tells us, forgiveness is something God does not have to offer. He will have mercy upon whom He chooses (Rom. 9:15). Salvation from beginning to end is of the Lord, and He does not bestow His saving grace indiscriminately.

We must also understand that sin is not essential to being human. True, it pervades absolutely every single aspect of our being since the fall, and no one in Adam is sinless.

But since man was not originally designed as a sinner, Adam was truly human before he sinned, and Jesus remains truly man even though He never sinned. Likewise, we will still be human when we are glorified (Dan. 12:2; 1 Cor. 15:35–58).

To be human, it is true, is to be finite. Nevertheless, finitude does not necessitate sin. It is not a sin to have limitations, but it is wicked to transgress God's law. We were not designed with sin as part of our nature, but all of us have violated the Lord's will. We cannot blame Him for evil just because man is presently in bondage to sin.

Coram Deo

All of us understand that there is something fundamentally wrong with us. Even the best of our deeds often result from the worst of intentions. Wickedness is indeed presently all-pervasive. Yet it will not always be this way. Those who are in Christ have the power of sin broken in them and will one day have its presence removed as well. Seek an accountability partner to help you fight against sin and look forward to the day of your glorification.

16th October 2020

Habakkuk Questions the Lord

“Are you not from everlasting, O LORD my God, my Holy One?

We shall not die...

You who are of purer eyes than to see evil ...

why do you idly look at traitors and remain silent

when the wicked swallows up the man

more righteous than he?”

(vv. 12–13)

Read: Habakkuk 1:12–2:1

Questioning God is tricky business. On the one hand, we know that many of the questions people have for the Lord are actually veiled demands that the Creator justify His ways to His creatures. This type of questioning is usually disingenuous, coming from people who have already decided that there is no acceptable answer. Such questioning is also arrogant, making the response of faith contingent upon whether or not the questioner finds the answer satisfactory. Paul's opponent who questions God's righteousness in election is one who questions the Lord sinfully (Rom. 9:19–24).

On the other hand, it is possible to ask questions of the Lord in a manner that is not sinful. The psalmists and Habakkuk exemplify this manner of questioning the Lord. (Still, let us be careful when asking questions of God, for we can easily fall into questioning Him sinfully.) They ask their question, “How long, O LORD?” (Pss. 35:17; 94:3; Hab. 1:2), in faith. They know His righteous judgment is coming because they trust His holy character, but they are curious as to why His wrath is, from their viewpoint, delayed.

Habakkuk received a most unexpected answer to his question. Indeed, God had not been blind to King Jehoiakim's evil and the ways in which the wicked Judahites mistreated their righteous countrymen. He would raise up the Chaldeans, who would fiercely and rapidly invade Judah (Hab. 1:5–11). The fact that Habakkuk foresaw this and it came to pass when Babylon conquered Judah confirms the divine origin of the prophet's vision. The Chaldeans had to defeat the Egyptians to become the region's leading power. From a human perspective, this looked impossible in Habakkuk's lifetime.

God's answer was more perplexing than His apparent delay. Habakkuk accepted that the Lord had chosen the Chaldeans to judge His people and affirmed that Judah's holy remnant would not die (v. 12). Yet in the prophet's view, F. F. Bruce comments, the cure was worse than the disease (Theodore Edward McComiskey, ed., *The Minor Prophets*, p. 853; hereafter MP). Babylon was brutal and persecuted righteous Judahites alongside the wicked (v. 13). Just as the fisherman brings in a full catch of fish with his net, the Chaldeans would capture all the nations (vv. 14–17). Habakkuk could not understand how this was possible, for He knew that God never tolerates evil (v. 13). How, asked Habakkuk, could the holy Lord use such a wicked instrument to judge His own?

Coram Deo

To ask questions of God in faith means asking Him with the willingness to be content with His answer or even if He never appears to give us an answer at all. To ask questions of the Lord in a faithless manner is to demand an answer or to find certain answers unacceptable. As we wrestle with God in prayer, let us take care that we always come before Him in faith, trusting in His goodness and willing to be content with whatever He gives us.

17th October 2020

The Lord Answers Habakkuk

"The LORD answered me: ...

'Still the vision awaits its appointed time; it hastens to the end—it will not lie.

If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come; it will not delay.

Behold his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him,

but the righteous shall live by his faith"

(vv. 2–4)

Read: Habakkuk 2:2–5

Habakkuk questioned the Lord when he saw that the vicious Babylonians would be the instrument God would use to bring about His just judgment on wicked seventh-century BC Judah (Hab. 1:12–17). We have seen that the prophet questioned God in faith, as he acknowledged that Babylon was indeed the Lord's chosen rod of discipline (1:12). Moreover, it is evident that Habakkuk asked his questions only because he knew and trusted the Lord's righteous character. John Calvin paraphrases Habakkuk 1:13, explaining that when the prophet spoke to his Creator, he meant this: "It is not consistent

with thy nature to pass by the vices of men, for every iniquity is hateful to thee.” Habakkuk’s knowledge of God’s purity and majestic holiness made it inconceivable to him that the Lord would use a wicked empire to punish His sinful people.

Nevertheless, Habakkuk knew there had to be an explanation, and so he resolved to wait as long as it would take for God to make it known. Thus, he pictured himself as a watchman, a lookout on a tower who waits expectantly for news or a message. In this case, however, the news would come from God Himself (2:1). The prophet’s faith was vindicated, for the Lord answered with a promise that He would explain all in a vision that He would give in its appointed time. But this vision was yet to come, so Habakkuk, along with the other righteous people in Judah, was to wait patiently and know that what might seem to be slow in coming was not delayed at all (vv. 2–3).

Such waiting, such perseverance until the Lord shows Himself, is the very essence of faith, and it is by this faith that the righteous find life (v. 4). Those whom God regards as righteous do not find life by doing the right things, although doing the right things is important. Instead, they find life by trusting wholly in the Lord to act according to His character and keep His promises to His people. The Apostle Paul fleshes this out in his epistles, telling us that fallen human beings are not regarded as righteous in God’s courtroom except by faith alone, and that it is this faith that leads to the imputation of a righteousness that is not our own, which in turn leads to eternal life (Rom. 1:16–17; Gal. 3:11). We will look at this idea more closely over the next two days. At this point, however, we will note that as Habakkuk tells us, the mark of the one who is truly righteous is a faith that rests completely in our Lord and His holy Word.

Coram Deo

Just as God’s vision to Habakkuk appeared from his perspective to be delayed, the Lord’s consummation of history may from our vantage point seem to be delayed. However, as we have seen, our Creator always brings His plan to pass at His appointed time, not before. It takes persevering faith, which is ultimately the gift of God (Eph. 2:8–9), to believe this. This kind of faith characterizes the person whom the Lord regards as righteous in His sight (Rom. 4:13–25).

18th October 2020

Faith and justification

Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him,
but the righteous shall live by his faith.

Read: Habakkuk 2:4

Scripture tells us again and again that none of us has kept God’s law sufficiently enough to be declared righteous based on our own obedience. The Preacher, who authored Ecclesiastes, tells us, “Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins” (Eccl. 7:20). Genesis 8:21 asserts, “The intention of man’s heart is evil from his

youth.” And Paul, after surveying Scripture and the evidence in the world around him, concludes, “All, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, as it is written: ‘None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God’” (Rom. 3:9–11).

Consequently, the only way we will stand in the day of judgment is if God gives us a perfect righteousness that another has achieved for us. This righteousness is the righteousness of Christ, by which many are reckoned or declared righteous (Rom. 5:19). At the final judgment, only Christ’s righteousness will preserve us unto eternal life.

Our Creator will accept the righteousness of Christ in place of our own, but a key question remains: How do we appropriate His righteousness? Only by faith. The sacraments and our good works of true but imperfect obedience are important, but they are not the means by which we receive the righteousness of Christ. Scripture is clear: justification is based only on the righteousness of Christ, which is received only when we renounce all claims to having met God’s standard and trust only in Christ for salvation (Luke 18:9–14; Rom. 4). Faith is the only instrument by which we receive the righteousness of Christ.

The Apostles were not the first to teach that we can survive God’s judgment and inherit eternal life only through faith. Paul, in fact, turns to the Old Testament for this teaching, arguing his point from Habakkuk 2:4: “The righteous shall live by his faith” (see Rom. 1:17). Habakkuk lived in the late seventh century BC and despaired that God had not brought judgment on the people of Judah, who were guilty of flagrant sin (Hab. 1:1–4). The Lord responded to Habakkuk, telling the prophet that He was going to judge Judah by sending Babylon against His people, but this confused Habakkuk because Babylon was terribly wicked and needed to be judged herself (1:5–2:1). In light of this, it would have been tempting to believe that one would survive the judgment on Judah and on Babylon by one’s own righteousness. But God told Habakkuk that life would be found only through faith (Hab. 2:4). Those who are righteous in the day of judgment are not righteous through their own works but only through faith.

Coram Deo

It is easy to look at the wickedness in the world and believe that since we are comparatively more righteous, God approves of us based on our works. In reality, however, none of us has met the perfect standard, so trying to stand on our own works is foolish. We must rest in Christ alone, continually rejecting any claim to a righteousness of our own that will avail before our Creator.

19th October 2020

The Lord’s Answer to Habakkuk

“The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD
as the waters cover the sea”

(v. 14)

Read: Habakkuk 2:6–20

Paul's expositions of Habakkuk 2:4 in Romans and Galatians unfold the good and necessary consequences of the prophet's words. Habakkuk was told that the righteous are those who, in the days of trouble, believe God and His Word despite what they can see with their limited vision. This kind of belief requires a complete entrusting of oneself into the hands of the Lord alone, a commitment to walking by faith and not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7). Such faith means looking beyond one's present circumstances in confident assurance that our holy Creator will fulfill all of His promises. It means renouncing all of our efforts to secure a right standing before God, for no one can put himself fully in the arms of Christ unless he believes everything He says about us and our salvation, including the fact that His perfection means that even the most godly among us are still sinners and our best works are tainted with sin (Isa. 64:6).

When God answered Habbakuk's confusion over His use of Babylon to chastise Israel, He did not say only that His faithful remnant must trust Him. As we see in today's passage, the Lord revealed to the prophet that He was aware of Babylon's excesses and evil ways. His woes for the Chaldeans convey this basic point: God can use evil men and their sinister intentions to fulfill His plan. The Lord's intent in so doing is always pure, holy, and good, and He does not miss the wickedness of His instruments, nor will He allow it to go unpunished if His instruments remain impenitent (Gen. 50:20; Acts 2:23).

God's woes for Babylon actually begin in Habakkuk 2:5, where He says that wine, a symbol for wealth, is treacherous and that the Chaldeans' greed will never be satiated. Babylon will go too far. The empire will conquer so many peoples and demand so much tribute that these nations will finally revolt (vv. 6–8). Even though Babylon knows that it has enemies and sets its "nest on high"—it fortifies its capital to set it above all its foes and eliminate its vulnerabilities—this protection will go only so far. In fact, this nest will cry out when God finally puts down its pride (vv. 9–11). After Habakkuk's death, the Medes and the Persians will form the Lord's rod to take down Babylon.

Though Babylon conquers many lands and builds cities upon peoples and towns it has destroyed in order to perpetuate its name, this name will be cut off. Babylon will be forgotten, but the whole earth will know the glory of the Lord (vv. 12–14).

Coram Deo

God's answer to Habakkuk reminds us of the limitations of our perspective. To us, it sometimes seems as if the wicked will prosper forever. However, since the Lord uses even the wicked to achieve His purposes, one day they will surely receive what is coming to them from His justice, and we will be vindicated. When we see evil men and women apparently succeeding, let us be reminded that such success is always temporary and that the Lord will set all things right in the end.

20th October 2020

The Coming Knowledge of God's Glory

**"The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD
as the waters cover the sea."**

Read: Habakkuk 2:14

No one will be able to stand before God on the final day and say: "I was never aware of You. You failed to show Yourself to me." Scripture makes it very clear that the Lord has revealed His power and His divine nature, at least partly, in the creation (Rom. 1:18–20). He has even revealed His glory. As David wrote, "The heavens declare the glory of God" (Ps. 19:1).

So, on some level, all human beings know that there is a glorious God in heaven to whom they owe worship and thanksgiving. From the unreached person in the remotest corner of the globe to the person who has heard the gospel many times, everyone has some awareness of the existence and nature of God.

And yet, there is coming a greater revelation of the glory of God throughout the world. In one sense, the glory of God is already known across the globe, but in another, "the knowledge of the glory of the Lord" has not yet covered the world. This is what we learn from Habakkuk 2:14, which predicts a day when the knowledge of God's glory will fill the earth "as the waters cover the sea."

In the original context of today's passage, Habakkuk is referring to the destruction of Babylon and the rescue of the Israelites from the Babylonian exile. The judgment of the enemies of God's people and their redemption from bondage would mark a further revelation of the divine glory—the nations would see the Lord as the all-powerful Savior of His people. But this prophecy must cover more than just the physical return from exile of the old covenant people, for Isaiah 40–66 broadens the rescue from exile to finally include a new heavens and earth, brought about ultimately by the work of the Messiah who atones for the sin of His people. In that work of judgment of sin and salvation of God's children, the world will see an aspect of divine glory that is not revealed in nature—they will see His glory as Savior.

John Calvin comments on today's passage, "The power, grace, and truth of God are made known through the world, when he delivers his people and restrains the ungodly." The divine glory will be fully manifest on the final day, but even now the knowledge of the glory of God continues to spread over the earth. As the church serves her calling as the herald of the King, making disciples of all nations, we bring to them the knowledge of God's glory in salvation (Matt. 28:18–20). And all those who receive this knowledge in faith today, trusting in Christ alone for redemption, glorify God as Savior.

Coram Deo

In the time between Christ's first and second advents, the Lord is spreading the knowledge of His glory through the work of the church to disciple all peoples. We are

engaged in the greatest work possible and are used by God to fulfill prophecy when we seek to take the knowledge of God's glory in the gospel to all peoples.

21st October 2020

The Prayer of Habakkuk

“O LORD, I have heard the report of you, and your work, O LORD, do I fear.
In the midst of the years revive it; in the midst of the years make it known;
in wrath remember mercy”
(v. 2)

Read: Habakkuk 3:1–16

When God raises up one instrument to judge another, we should not assume that He blesses everything about the instrument He chooses. The sovereign Lord is free to work in and through creaturely motives to achieve His purposes, so His intent always remains good even if His creatures' intentions are wicked (Gen. 50:20). This is known as the doctrine of concurrence, which is displayed in the visions God gave to Habakkuk. Our Creator raised up Babylon to judge the sin of His people (Hab. 1:5–11); however, Babylon's motives were not pure when it conquered Judah. In fact, the Chaldeans gave no thought to the Lord, being idol worshipers who served gods who could not speak (2:5–19). Yahweh, however, is the living God, and when He speaks from His holy temple, the whole earth must listen in silence (v. 20). He has determined that no one who does evil impenitently can stand forever. We must hear this word in our day. A nation that has experienced great blessing, such as the United States, will not endure if it rejects the Lord of hosts, even if God has used that nation to do good for the world.

God told Habakkuk that those whom He regards as righteous trust in Him alone, resting wholly in His promises that He will accomplish His purposes even when that seems impossible from a human perspective (2:4). So, this righteous prophet unsurprisingly responds in prayer, asking the Lord to revive His past work of deliverance and judgment (3:1–2). Despite Judah's evil, Babylon's success, and the suffering of the faithful remnant, Habakkuk knows that God will surely act to redeem His people, just as He did in the days of old. His prayer is a recitation of God's mighty acts of the past, when He met His people in the desert during the exodus to save them from Egypt and deliver them into His land of blessing. The Lord will approach Judah from the south, from Teman and Mount Paran (v. 3), which were on the route that the Israelites took from Egypt to Canaan (Num. 12:16–13:26). Habakkuk pictures God's deliverance as a new exodus, alluding to events from the first exodus such as plagues (Hab. 3:5; see Ex. 7:1–12:32), mountains shaking (Hab. 3:10; see Ex. 19:18), and the sun and moon standing still (Hab. 3:11; see Josh. 10:1–15). Ultimately, this new exodus was accomplished in Christ, who came up out of Egypt, did many signs and wonders, and died to execute God's judgment on sin and save His people from their enemies (Matt. 2:13–15; 4:23–25; Col. 2:13–15).

Coram Deo

When we are having difficulty trusting the Lord, it can be helpful for us to recount all the ways in which He has been faithful in the past. First, we should remember how God kept His promises to Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Jacob, Ruth, David, Paul, and all of the other saints of ages past. Then, we should remember how the Lord has shown Himself faithful in our own lives. Recalling the blessings of the past can help give us hope for the blessings of the future.

22nd October 2020

Counting It All Joy

“God, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the deer’s;
he makes me tread on my high places” (v. 19).

Read: Habakkuk 3:17–19

Contrary to the way many believers sometimes think and act, Christian joy does not mean that we ignore or deny the pain of suffering and grief. Nevertheless, suffering and grief can lead to joy, for trouble provides an opportunity for us to deepen our relationship with Christ and to learn how to walk more intimately with Him. The apostle James, in fact, tells us to “count it all joy” when we endure trials and tribulations (James 1:2).

Be clear that James is not asserting that suffering is a good thing in itself. On its own, pain does not make us joyful; rather, we “count” it as joy when we face difficulties in this life. This is because God uses it to make us mature as He empowers us to endure by faith (vv. 3–4). Hardship considered in isolation is not good, but when we remember that our Lord uses tribulation to sanctify us, we can rejoice that He is refining us and making us holy through permitting pain to enter our lives. Our Father is working everything together for good in the lives of His children, even tragedy; thus, we may courageously look for opportunities to grow as we suffer (Rom. 8:28).

It is often the case that we become more holy only when we meet suffering (Heb. 12:3–17), though this idea is hard to accept because we hear from the culture, and often the church, that God owes us a life altogether free of emotional and physical pain. Yet our Creator’s promise is that He will be with us in our troubles and lead us through dark valleys — not that our life will be easy (Ps. 23:4). So we rejoice in His comforting presence and guidance, and not in the pain itself.

Counting our suffering as joy is certainly easier said than done. Still, one fundamental biblical truth can help us find joy in our pain, namely, that all of our difficulties are limited in duration. For the believer, pain is not forever, as there is a new heaven and earth coming (Rev. 21). God will one day right all wrongs and thus wipe away every tear from our eyes.

The prophet Habakkuk reminds us that the Lord will make us as sure-footed as the deer who traverses high and dangerous mountain paths with ease (Hab. 3:19). As we trust in Him to impart strength and confidence to us, He will work in our hearts to lead us to rejoice even when times are lean and painful (vv. 17–18).

Coram Deo

Dr. R.C. Sproul has often said that while anyone can believe in God, it takes real faith to believe God. Trusting in His goodness during a severe illness, times when others sin heinously against us, the death of a loved one, and a host of other circumstances is a test for us, for it is in these occasions that the Lord may seem absent. But He is truly with His sons and daughters at all times (Ps. 139:7–8), and we can hope in Him to bring us safely to glory.

23rd October 2020

Counting It All Joy

“Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines,
the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food,
the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls,
yet I will rejoice in the Lord;
I will take joy in the God of my salvation”
(Hab. 3:17–18)

Read: Habakkuk 3:17–19

Christian joy does not deny the reality or pain of suffering and grief. Such tragedies can actually produce joy, in that through them we might learn to walk more closely with the Lord. Indeed, we are told to “count it all joy” when we endure various trials (James 1:2).

James is not teaching us that suffering is good in itself. We are not to say that our pain by itself makes us joyful; we are to “count” or “regard” it as joy when we encounter trials. And we do this because trials give us the opportunity to endure and thereby be made mature and complete (James 1:3–4). By itself, a hardship is not a good thing. But since God will use it to make me holy, I can rejoice in the sanctifying work He accomplishes through times of personal pain. Knowing that our Father is working everything together for good in my life (Rom. 8:28), I can face my trials with courage and look for opportunities to grow spiritually during such times.

Sometimes, we grow more holy only when trouble comes into our lives. This notion is foreign to most people because of the widespread belief that God owes us a life free of emotional and physical pain. Yet, the Lord never promises us an easy life, though He does promise to be with us in our difficulties and lead us through the valley of the shadow of death (Ps. 23:4). Therefore, we rejoice in His presence to guide and purify us.

To be sure, it is easier to say we must count our suffering as joy. It is much harder actually to do such a thing. However, remembering that the Christian life anticipates the future

will help us find joy in our pain. God does not promise us a life free of trouble, but He does say our difficulties are limited by time. Pain will not last forever; there will be one day a new heavens and earth (Rev. 21). The life of joy is not one in which we simply believe *in* God; it is one in which we *believe* God will one day right all wrongs.

Today's passage looks to God to make us as sure-footed as the deer who traverses high and dangerous mountain paths with ease (Hab. 3:19). Trusting Him to impart strength and confidence to us even in the midst of hunger and poverty will bring us joy (vv. 17–18).

Coram Deo

Our future hope, rightly understood, does not make us callous to the needs and importance of this present life. Instead, it makes us live today with confidence, sure of the Lord's presence as we courageously face the unknown. "This slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison" (2 Cor. 4:17). If you find it hard to be joyful, consider whether you are too attached to this life and not enough to the life to come.

24th October 2020

Taking Joy in the God of Salvation

"Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines,
the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food,
the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls,
yet I will rejoice in the Lord;
I will take joy in the God of my salvation"
(vv. 17–18)

Read: Habakkuk 3:17–19

Persevering faith that trusts in God to keep His promises even in the darkest times marks the one whom the Lord regards as righteous (Hab. 2:4). Habakkuk had such faith, believing that his Creator would answer him when he could not understand how the Lord could use evil Babylon to work out His will. This faith was vindicated in God's promise that He would finally punish His instrument of judgment for its wanton wickedness (vv. 5–20). Moreover, Habakkuk believed the Lord's words to Him, trusting also that God's servants would be vindicated and asking his Creator to act as He did in the days of the exodus to deliver His people with His mighty hand (3:1–15).

The prophet's trust in the Lord is exemplified most clearly in the closing verses of his book. Having recalled the mighty acts of God, Habakkuk resolves to wait quietly "for the day of trouble to come upon people who invade us" (v. 16). No longer will he ask questions of his Maker. God has answered His prayer, and the revelation He gave is sufficient. All that remains is for Habakkuk to rest completely in this revelation, to abide by its guidance and trust the Lord to keep His Word. We have a similar task. The Lord has given us revelation that is sufficient to guide our understanding of His great acts of salvation and what He will do to consummate His plan (2 Tim. 3:16–17). Our job as His

people is to trust fully in His holy Word, to believe what He has promised in the Bible and not look for special revelation elsewhere, whether in church tradition, dreams, additional writings, or anything else beyond the canon of Scripture.

Authentic faith abides even when we have nothing tangible to show for it. Habakkuk proclaims that even though he has little to sustain him, having lost even the means of basic sustenance to the Babylonians and the Lord's curse on nature, he will not stop trusting his God. The prophet will continue to "take joy in the God of [his] salvation" (Hab. 3:17–18). It is easy to rejoice and be glad in the Lord when things are going splendidly, and such joy is appropriate. But when things are disastrous for us, as F. F. Bruce comments, "to rejoice in God for his own sake is evidence of pure faith" (MP, p. 893). By such faith, God makes us steady in life's most difficult circumstances, just as He keeps the deer's feet steady on the narrowest, most terrifying mountain paths, guiding it to security. This is the kind of faith possessed by people who are just before the Lord.

Coram Deo

Believing God when "the chips are down" is one of the most difficult things that we will ever be called to do. Yet if we trust the Lord only when things are going well, then we do not really trust Him at all. When things are good, let us thank God for His blessings, but also ask Him to sustain our faith if we face real hardship. As we walk through dark times, let us ask Him to help us rejoice in Him and remember that He is our exceedingly great reward (Gen. 15:1).

25th October 2020

The Word of God through Haggai

"In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month, the word of the LORD came by the hand of Haggai the prophet to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest."

Read: Haggai 1:1

The book of Daniel closes with the offspring of Jacob still exiled from their homeland but knowing that God would one day deliver the faithful from captivity and bless them (Dan. 12). These exiled Jews also clung tightly to the promise that upon the return from exile, the Davidic king would be restored to his throne in Jerusalem (Amos 9:11–15). We can imagine, then, the joy the old covenant community felt when Cyrus conquered the people's Babylonian captors and sent the Jews back to their land to rebuild their temple (Ezra 1:1–4).

In this decree to return we see the doctrine of concurrence in action. Concurrence tells us that both God and human beings can be thoroughly and concurrently active in every human activity without necessarily having the same motivations and intent. When Cyrus told the Jews to go back to the Promised Land in 538 BC, he was not out to advance the interests of God's kingdom or to show true, undivided worship to Yahweh, the one Lord of

all. Instead, he was just following wise domestic policy. After the Medo-Persian Empire conquered the Babylonians, they controlled the territory that Babylon once ruled, including the land of Canaan. The Persians wisely saw that keeping the peoples they ruled out of their homelands was not likely to win them any friends and might encourage unrest. So, they allowed the Jews and the other peoples whom Babylon had taken into exile to go back to their lands of origin. Those of faith, however, saw God's hand working in this policy for a different end. After all, Isaiah had promised that when Cyrus came to power, God would use him to bring His people home, all for the sake of his glory (Isa. 45).

Persia divided its empire into provinces known as "satrapies." Yehud, or Judah, was a sub-province of the satrapy Abar Nahara, which means "beyond the river." The initial territory of Judah was very small, including only Jerusalem and the area extending out from the city for about fifteen miles in every direction. This inauspicious beginning and Persia's control over Judean affairs fulfill Daniel's vision that the exile was being extended because the people, as a corporate body, did not truly repent while they were in Babylon.

We see this lack of repentance and obedience in the failure of the returned exiles to make rebuilding the Jerusalem temple a priority (Hag. 1:1–6). This brings us to our next book in our chronological study of the Old Testament prophets. Haggai, along with Zechariah, was raised up to call the people to rebuild God's house in Jerusalem (Ezra 5:1–2).

Coram Deo

Only if God is thoroughly active in everything that ever happens can we be confident that He has an actual purpose for everything that occurs. From the acts of the greatest generals in history to the seemingly inconsequential casting of a stone into the sea, all that we see and experience occurs according to God's perfect plan and wise governance. The little details of life really do matter. Why? Because they matter enough to the Lord for Him to work in and through them.

26th October 2020

Foolish Priorities

"Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Consider your ways. Go up to the hills and bring wood and build the house, that I may take pleasure in it and that I may be glorified, says the LORD'"
(vv. 7–8).

Read: Haggai 1:2-11

Sheshbazzar, "the prince of Judah," was the first governor Cyrus appointed over Judah when he allowed the Jewish exiles to go home in 538 BC (Ezra 1:8–11). We know nothing about him other than that he was of the tribe of Judah. On the other hand, Scripture tells us more about Zerubbabel, who succeeded Sheshbazzar as Judah's governor. The grandson of Jeconiah—Jehoiachin—the last legitimately appointed king of pre-exilic Judah (1 Chron. 3:17–19; 2 Chron. 36:9–10), Zerubbabel was among the first Jews who returned with Sheshbazzar (Ezra 2). Since Zerubbabel was David's descendant, he became

a focus of messianic hope (Zech. 4:1–10). Notably, Zerubbabel, a prominent figure in the biblical accounts of post-exilic life (Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah), disappears without comment from the scriptural narrative. Some scholars speculate that the Persians eventually deposed him from his governorship for fear that the Jews' messianic hopes might lead finally to rebellion.

Zerubbabel, along with Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, led the rebuilding of an altar to God on Mount Zion and the reinstitution of the sacrifices. He and Joshua also commissioned the rebuilding of the temple itself. This all happened in about 536 BC. When the foundation was laid, however, the people did not see the spectacular new beginning they had hoped for but a building so pitiful in comparison to Solomon's temple that it made those who had seen the former temple mourn bitterly (Ezra 3). Doubtless this discouraged Zerubbabel and Joshua, but even worse were their enemies, who convinced Judah's Persian overlords to stop work on the temple (chap. 4). For sixteen years, the temple remained little more than a foundation. Then, God called Haggai in 520 BC to wake His people from their slumber.

Haggai criticized the people for their complacency. They showed little care for rebuilding God's house. Even though the rebuilding was illegal, they apparently did not even try to get Persia to lift its ban. On the other hand, they did not fail to improve their own properties. They lived in paneled houses, dwellings that were rich enough to resemble Solomon's temple and its panels (Hag. 1:1–4; see 1 Kings 7:1–5). Still, they were not satisfied. While they were somewhat well off, their success did not match their efforts (Hag. 1:5–6).

Dissatisfaction, not poverty, is the picture we see—people who were not getting what they really wanted. Haggai said they were not being blessed because they had not made God's house a priority. Worship according to the Mosaic law was not really their consideration.

Coram Deo

The Bible warns us not to make a one-to-one correlation between God's favour and our success. However, that does not mean that we should not be alert to disobedience being a potential reason for why we might find ourselves in trouble. Failure is an opportunity to reflect on faithfulness. When we are struggling, we must not automatically assume that it is because the Lord is displeased with us, but neither must we immediately discount it as a possibility.

27th October 2020

The Latter Glory of the Lord's House

"The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former, says the LORD of hosts.
And in this place I will give peace, declares the LORD of hosts"
(2:9)

Read: Haggai 1:12-2:9

Zerubbabel and Joshua, upon hearing the word of God through Haggai, began gathering the citizens of Judah right away to recommit to the work of rebuilding the temple. At once, the people got started on constructing a suitable house for the Lord because He stirred up their spirits (Hag. 1:12–15). John Calvin comments on Haggai 1:14 that “we should never be attentive to [God’s] word, were he not to open our ears; and there would be no inclination to obey, were he not to turn our hearts; in a word, both will and effort would immediately fail in us, were he not to add his gift of perseverance . . . Haggai’s labours produced fruits, because the Lord effectually touched the hearts of the people; for we indeed know that it is his special gift, that the elect are made disciples.” When the Word of God is preached, only those in whom the Holy Spirit is working will trust that Word.

About a month into the reconstruction of the temple, it became clear that what the returned exiles were building was not all that special from a human perspective. Those in the community who had actually seen Solomon’s temple before the exile saw that the Lord’s new house was as “nothing” in comparison (Hag. 2:1–3). Here we see yet again that although the people were back in the Promised Land, the conditions of exile persisted. The glorious restoration that the prophets anticipated had not yet materialized (Ezek. 40–48; Mic. 4:1–2). Daniel’s vision of the extended exile was coming true (Dan. 9).

Nevertheless, although the restoration was getting off to what seemed to be a slow start, God was with His people, and that was what really mattered. Thus, Haggai spoke to the people again, reminding them not to look at their immediate circumstances but to trust that the Lord would bring their glorious restoration in His time. In short, the prophet issued a call to persevering faith, to believe in the promises of God even when tangible proof of His activity is not clearly evident. Our Creator was not slow in fulfilling His promises but would shake the earth to bring the world’s treasures to His people and to show forth the fullness of His glory in His time (Hag. 2:3–9). Given the corporate requirement of repentance for full restoration from exile (Deut. 30:1–10; Dan. 9) and what the New Testament says about the preaching of the gospel to all creation (Matt. 28:18–20), we understand that God will not consummate the restoration until all of His elect people have heard and believed the gospel.

Coram Deo

In one form or another, God’s people will suffer under the exilic conditions of pain and difficulty until Christ returns. The exile of the Jews from the Promised Land is ultimately a picture of the exile of all humanity from the garden, and as with full restoration to the Promised Land, full restoration to the garden and face-to-face fellowship with the Lord will not occur until corporate repentance occurs—until all of the elect come to faith. Let us pray daily that this would happen.

28th October 2020

Zerubbabel, the Lord's Signet Ring

“On that day, declares the LORD of hosts, I will take you, O Zerubbabel my servant, the son of Shealtiel, declares the LORD, and make you like a signet ring, for I have chosen you, declares the LORD of hosts”
(v. 23)

Read: Haggai 2:10-23

We saw that Haggai spoke to Judah to encourage the work of rebuilding the temple after it began anew under Zerubbabel and Joshua (Hag. 1:12–2:9). This happened one month into the renewed work, and Haggai said the final glory of this second temple would be great if the people would trust the Lord. But that was not the last word from God through Haggai about the temple. Then, Haggai encouraged the people again during the rebuilding process two months later (2:10–19). He gave four oracles in total: one so that Judah would resume the rebuilding; a second to keep the work going; a third to prompt the Jews to press on; and a fourth to encourage Zerubbabel (vv. 20–23).

This third oracle states the consequences of leaving the work half finished. Under the old covenant, an unclean object polluted whatever touched it (Lev. 5:2; 11; 15). As Haggai states, this pollution could be passed to a third object: a person becomes unclean when he touches a dead body, which is unclean; then, the unclean person makes unclean anything he touches (Hag. 2:13). An unfinished, neglected temple was unclean because it had been touched by unclean people, who revealed their uncleanness—their lack of faith—by disobeying God's instruction to finish the temple. While the temple remained unclean, it polluted the land, resulting in natural disasters and reduced agricultural production (vv. 14–17). One commentator likens the unfinished temple to a decaying body that contaminates everything around it as long as its decay—its “half-finishedness”—remains.

Yet if the people showed true faith by continuing to obey the Lord and rebuilt the temple, there would be no uncleanness to pollute the land and God would bless them (vv. 18–19). Since faithlessness is the ultimate impurity, this also meant the people could not be disobedient and trust in a finished temple as a talisman to ward off trouble. That's what the pre-exilic community did, and God sent them into exile because their failure to trust Him polluted the land.

Haggai concludes with a messianic word to Zerubbabel that God would greatly exalt him (vv. 20–23), but the prophet does not mean the person of Zerubbabel himself. The prophets often promise the return of David—the first ruler of Israel appointed by God alone before the exile—but the person in view is actually one of David's sons as prophesied in 2 Samuel 7:1–17. Haggai promises the throne to Zerubbabel—the first ruler of Israel appointed by God alone after the exile—but the person in view is actually one of Zerubbabel's sons.

Coram Deo

God's promise to exalt Zerubbabel, that is, one of Zerubbabel's sons, is fulfilled in Christ Jesus, who is David's descendant through Zerubbabel (Matt. 1:1–17; Luke 3:23–38). Christ has been exalted to the right hand of God the Father Almighty, fulfilling Haggai's word. Because the promise to Zerubbabel has been fulfilled, we can be confident that the Lord will keep all of His promises, namely that our glory as His house will one day be greater than any previous temple.

29th October 2020

The Restoration Stumbles

“On that day, declares the Lord of hosts, I will take you, O Zerubbabel my servant...and make you like a signet ring, for I have chosen you, declares the Lord of hosts”
(v. 23)

Read: Haggai 2:20–23

Restoring vice-regency in His kingdom to a chosen portion of mankind has been our Lord's goal since the fall made us unwilling to exercise righteous dominion over the earth (Gen. 1:28; 3:14–19). Starting with Abraham's family, the nation of Israel, our Creator began working earnestly to this end, promising the patriarch that his children would be the rulers God made humans to be (17:5–6; 22:17–18). Knowing that even Abraham's progeny would break covenant, the Lord chose a king to guide His people in holiness (Deut. 17:14–20). David's line would represent Israel (2 Chron. 33:1–20) as the vehicle through which God would again manifest clearly His kingdom on the earth (Ps. 89).

But even David's line could not exercise the righteous rule that reveals the kingdom of heaven to the whole earth. Due to the unrepentant sin of king and people, God exiled Israel into Assyria (722 BC) and Judah into Babylon (586 BC, see 2 Kings 17:7–23; 25:1–26). Nevertheless, our Lord did not abandon David's throne, so determined was He to restore dominion to His own — first to David, then Israel, and then His elect among the Gentiles. He returned the Israelites to their land around 538 BC, and soon David's descendant Zerubbabel was in charge (Hag. 1:1; Matt. 1:1–17). God promised through Haggai the prophet to make Zerubbabel His signet ring, His crown jewel through whom Israel's restoration would occur (Hag. 2:20–23).

God's promises through His prophets, however, often have implicit conditions that can alter how these promises come to pass (see Jer. 18:1–10). For disobedience the Lord will send curses instead of blessing, and for obedience He will bring life instead of destruction. That such alterations occur do not mean that God has changed His mind like human beings do (Num. 23:19), and He always knows how we are going to respond to His Word before we actually make the response. In fact, the response we make is ultimately governed by His sovereign will (Eph. 1:11).

Clearly, such conditions were part of the promise to Zerubbabel, for Zerubbabel vanished from history without establishing David's throne once and for all. Once more, the Davidic

ruler and the people somehow broke covenant. The restoration promise would have to be kept in one of David's other sons.

Coram Deo

God's promise to restore the vice-regency in His kingdom to human beings is fulfilled finally in Jesus Christ, the holy Son of David who graciously allows His people to share in His reign over the world (2 Tim. 2:11–13). As we anticipate that day in which the restoration will be consummated, we are ambassadors of Christ to a fallen world who are to treat people with the dignity they deserve as being in God's image. Do you strive to treat all people in this way?

30th & 31 October 2020

Catch-Up Days

Take these two days to catch up with whatever outstanding devotionals (above)