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In these last verses, we get to see inside the prophet, to the stirring of his soul. **:16 I heard and my inward parts trembled, at the sound my lips quivered. Decay enters my bones, and in my place I tremble. Because I must wait quietly for the day of distress, for the people to arise who will invade us.** His innermost parts trembled like a leaf, even his lips were quivering. His bones seemed to have dissolved; he's ready to collapse. That sinking feeling in the pit of your stomach, a revelation so profound that you feel physically weak.

You can't speak, you have to hold on to something; your insides are shaking, your outsides are shaking! Have you ever felt this way because of what you *know*? How can Habakkuk find joy, strength, deliverance, when all these things are impending? To tremble physically does not necessarily mean that you have no faith. You may understand perfectly, you may trust fully, yet tremble like a leaf. It's okay! The imminence of God's judgment on Judah and the uncertainty of any time-frame, with both the Judeans and with the Chaldeans. God's word was carried out exactly as He said. Habakkuk went to the Lord with his problem. But God didn't take the problem away from him. He just told him that He could be trusted to do what was best, in the right way, at the right time, and that's the place to which Habakkuk had come.

:17 Though the fig tree should not blossom and there be no fruit on the vines, though the yield of the olive should fail and the fields produce no food, though the flock should be cut off from the fold and there be no cattle in the stalls. Though there be a complete failure of crops—figs, grapes, olives, grain—and no sheep and cattle left, things on which the nation depended for food. Not only the prosperity, but the very life of the nation may fail and be cut off. Habakkuk stood to lose all that he had and to see his country ravaged by the attacking Chaldeans. But as we see in **:18-19**, inner joy and strength do not depend on outward prosperity. These times of crisis, perplexity, trouble, are tests for our faith in God. Will we trust Him regardless? Habakkuk did!

Look at his words in **:18-19a**. **:18 Yet I will exult in Yahweh, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation. :19a The Lord Yahweh is my strength.** Habakkuk was able to look beyond his present frustrations to God alone. What was there to sustain him—when the Chaldeans arrived and began to kill or enslave people, when they began to destroy the city of Jerusalem, when his circumstances didn't change? It's not what or why but Who! The Biblical God is the answer to our problems. The Biblical God is the answer to our questions. The Biblical God, who never changes, who is everlasting, the personal God, the sovereign Lord, the Holy One, the faithful One, who appoints and establishes. Yahweh who is in His holy temple, who has worked with His people in the past, who goes forth for the salvation of His people, who judges the nations; HE is the answer. HE would sustain him!

It doesn't matter who you are or what you're going through, you too can exult in Yahweh. You too can rejoice in your saving God. You too can trust the strengthening Yahweh God. Joy is available to everyone, even to those stripped of everything, for joy is to be found in a Person, not a situation. So when all is gone, our God is not gone. Regardless of our circumstances, regardless of our feelings, we can trust Yahweh, the all-sufficient One, the One who is everything we need, always there, the personal One who is(!), and whose character and words and actions we know. Again, the basis of Habakkuk's faith was the revealed word of God (**Rom. 10:17**) because no action had yet taken place by God. The circumstances hadn't changed but he had changed! Habakkuk rejoiced in God Himself and in His intervention as Savior. Deliverance wasn't found in being removed from the situation or changed circumstances. Deliverance was found in GOD alone!

:19a Notice it's not salvation that he rejoices in or even how strong God is. He rejoices and exults in God Himself. His longing is for God Himself. "Lord" here is Adonai, master, ruler. God is Yahweh. Strength—that was what he needed and that's who God was. It could be *our* need is peace, love, patience, life, kindness, self-control; God is all those things, and will be those in our lives if that's our need. Only the indwelling Holy Spirit can produce these things. Stop! Think! Present! Remember! Practice! We can trust Him—in a troubled marriage, in a tough relationship, in an unfair situation, in a baffling time. What a great expression of faith, one of the greatest in the Bible!

:19b And He has made my feet like hinds' feet, and makes me walk on my high places. Sure-footed confidence, like a deer on the heights, strong, beautiful, steady, without slipping, even on the heights—narrow, rough, tough going. This Yahweh, this saving God, this Ruler God gives triumph in the midst of the circumstances to those who trust Him.

There is nothing more expressive of true spiritual maturity than when we come to this point in our walk with the Lord. Habakkuk began his book with complaints and questions. He ends his book with praise and joy. He realized God would in His own way deliver those who trust Him (remember **2:4**, the righteous will LIVE by faith). The prophet understood that all sin would be punished, whether it was in God's own people or those not belonging to Him. And, he came to the place of complete confidence that the sovereign LORD was ruling the proceedings of nations and individuals. With this kind of God, shouldn't we all trust Him fully?

How can we best wrap this up? Habakkuk began by criticizing God; he ends by praising Him! He opened with a question mark; he ends with an exclamation point! Habakkuk came to the point of rejoicing in God and exulting in Him not because of what He did or didn't do, but simply because He was God! Habakkuk came to understand that joy is not found in circumstances or in God doing what we want, but joy is found in God alone. And we too can learn to be content in any circumstance if we know this personal God through the Lord Jesus, if we know the God of our salvation, if we know the Lord God who is our strength. God has not promised outward peace and prosperity in these days, but He has promised Himself. *He* is more than enough! Let's again finish by reading **3:16-19**. Also read **Is. 46:9-11**.

Let's look at what history and the Bible tell us happened to Judah.

Human sorrow! Many of us experienced it this year, and probably will during this next year. I know few who didn't experience grief of some sort this past year. These times of brokenness, pain, pressure, confusion, tragedy—Christians aren't exempt! Lamentations was written by a broken man who hadn't done anything wrong; in fact, he had been doing everything right! Lamentations was written by this broken man who was either sitting in the smoldering ruins of the city of Jerusalem or walking through the devastated city. As we follow this man through the empty streets of Jerusalem, there was loneliness, groaning, anger, emptiness, desperate pleadings, deep hurt. The city was in ruins and the people were gone—either through being starved or slaughtered or through being dragged away into captivity. The traditional

writer is Jeremiah, and he is lamenting, which means to wail, cry out in grief, mourn aloud; what you might hear at an emotional funeral service. **Lam. 2:11-12** says, "**My eyes fail because of tears, my spirit is greatly troubled; my heart is poured out on the earth because of the destruction of the daughter of my people, when little ones and infants faint in the streets of the city. :12 They say to their mothers, 'Where is grain and wine?' as they faint like a wounded man in the streets of the city, as their life is poured out on their mothers' bosom.**" Charles Swindoll writes, "Most of us have never been involved in a mop-up scene after a battle or after a calamity of one kind or another. But those who have been involved testify that it is one of the most painful and pathetic experiences a human being can endure." For us it's any situation where people feel distressed, abandoned, lonely, facing great adversity, grieving not only for ourselves but also for others. Where is that place for you? Yes, grief, great and crushing, is an unavoidable part of human life. To one passing through such an experience, **Lamentations** may speak its word of comfort in ways that no one else can. Why? Because at the peak or high point of the book, the writer remembers God and His character. And, although the circumstances don't change, the writer does! In our pain and grief, let us remember God—who He is, what He's done, what He's said.

THE HISTORY In 605 B.C., the Babylonians (or Chaldeans) began controlling the nation of Judah. Nebuchadnezzar (who would soon become king of Babylon) entered the city of Jerusalem, received tribute, a promise of obedience, and took some of her best young men (including the prophet Daniel). But, Judah rebelled again in 601 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar returned in 598-597 B.C. He took Jerusalem again, this time taking the Temple vessels and thousands of the skilled men (including the prophet Ezekiel) back to Babylon. Zedekiah was made king by Nebuchadnezzar. In 589-588 Judah rebelled once more. Nebuchadnezzar came a third time. It took about two years for total victory. The last one and a half years was a terrible siege of Jerusalem. "Within the city the ever-tightening siege by Babylon's armies began unraveling the fabric of society. Starving mothers ate their own children (**Lam. 2:20, 4:10**). Idolatry flourished as the people cried out to any and every god for deliverance. Paranoia gripped the people until they were willing to kill God's prophet as a traitor/spy just because he spoke the truth. The long siege ended abruptly on July 18, 586 B.C. The walls were then breached and the Babylonian army began entering the city." So horrifying was Jerusalem's destruction that the facts are recorded in four OT chapters: **2 Kings 25, Jer. 39:1-11, Jer. 52, and 2 Chron. 36:11-21**. The siege of Jerusalem; the famine in the city; the breaching of the city walls; the flight of the army and the king (he was eventually captured, his children were brought before him and then killed; he was then blinded and taken captive to Babylon); the execution of the leaders; the looting of the temple; the burning of the temple, palace, and city; the Babylonians so broke down the walls and terraces that restoration was impossible; the collapse of the expected foreign help; the exile of the populace. **Lamentations** mourns the fall of the city. Someone said that even to this day the book is read by Jews on the anniversary of the temple's destruction. Next time we'll look in detail at **Lamentations 3:21-28**.

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