

Beauties of the Truth

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Thought to be Harmonious with God's Plan of the Ages
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Remembering Israel's Six-Day War

Fulfilling Prophecy

June 5-10, 2017, marked the 50th Anniversary of Israel's momentous victory against a massive Arab attack in the 1967 Six-Day War. What had been the cry of the Jews for centuries, "Next year in Jerusalem," in 1967 became the cry, "Now and forever in Jerusalem!"

The effects of this amazing event in Israel's history still impacts the world today. Under the prompting of Egyptian President Gamal Nasser, Egypt, Jordan, and Syria joined forces to "drive the Jews into the sea." Nasser had received reports from Russian advisors that the time was right to start a war with Israel. The surrounding Arab armies had hoped their victory would be decisive, that they would once and for all rid themselves of the Hebrew nation. But, because of continuous provocation by threatening Arab forces, Israel was prepared. Guided by miraculous overrulings, Israel skillfully out-maneuvered the attacking Arab armies within six days.

Forced into a defense of their country, Israel gained the Golan Heights, the West Bank of the Jordan River, the Sinai Peninsula, the Gaza Strip, and most importantly, East Jerusalem. By international standards, these captured territories became part of the Nation of Israel. Yet, the Israelis immediately made it known to the world that they would trade the newly acquired territories for the sake of peace with their Arab neighbors (aside from East Jerusalem). On the day after the war, Israel's Minister of Defense, Moshe Dayan, famously stated, "I'm waiting at the phone." But no one ever called.

JERUSALEM

The Six-Day War has arguably been the most emotionally proud moment in recent Jewish history. For thousands of years, Jews regarded Jerusalem and the West Bank as their biblical heartland. King David proclaimed Jerusalem as the capital of Israel over 3,000 years ago, and so in 1948, when the Jordanians forced all of the Jewish residents out of Jerusalem, the Hebrew people were devastated. But, by

God's providence, the Six-Day War brought the Jews into possession of their capital once again! What had been the cry of the Jews for centuries, "Next year in Jerusalem," in 1967 became the cry, "Now and forever in Jerusalem!"

While Israelis were jubilant over their victory, the world view was indifferent at best and resentful at worst. Russia broke off any relations with Israel immediately following the war. Jewish communities were systematically shunned or expelled from Arab countries. Arab nations voiced relentless cries of foul-play, which infected other countries of the United Nations. And world opinion of Israel has remained negative due to carefully crafted propaganda which claims that Israel is "occupying Arab territory."

As evidence of the effect of this propaganda, sitting U.S. presidents have treated the status of Jerusalem as "disputed territory," even though the U.S. Congress recognized Jerusalem as Israel's capital in 1995 (Jerusalem Embassy Act of 1995, Public Law 104-45). This attitude has continued despite the Trump campaign promise in late 2016 to move the U.S. Embassy to Israel's capital, Jerusalem. The U.S. Embassy continues to be in Tel Aviv. All of these actions perpetuate the notion that Jerusalem is "occupied territory."

Some Christians may question why the Six-Day War should have any bearing on our walk in Christ. The answer is that Israel has been, and will always be, "the apple of God's eye." What God declares as His Land, should be

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Old Jerusalem, retaken by Israel in the Six-Day War

respected by His children (see Zechariah 2:8-13, Leviticus 25:23). Both Old and New Testament prophecies point to Israel as playing a pivotal role in God's Kingdom soon to come when Christians and Jews will work together as the "stars of heaven and the sand which is upon the seashore" to "bless all nations of the earth" (Genesis 22:17,18).

Zechariah 8:23, "Thus saith the LORD of hosts; In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you."

Amos 9:11,14,15, "In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old ... And I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them. And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith the LORD thy God."

The Apostle James spoke of the time when the "tabernacle of David" would be restored. Acts 15:14-17, "Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: That the residue of men might seek after the Lord"

These and many more scriptures answer the question why Christians should value the fulfillment of prophecy in the Land of Israel. The Six-Day War is just one of countless miraculous end-time events bringing the world closer to God's Kingdom, when not only Christians and Jews, but all mankind will be blessed by the promises of God through His Son Jesus. As the Apostle Paul declared, Israel's salvation will mean "life from the dead!"

Romans 11:15, 25-32 "For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead? ... For I would not,

brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion (Zion) the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins."

— Adapted from Associated Bible Students of Central Ohio website

Zephaniah and a Pure Language

"The word of the LORD which came unto Zephaniah the son of Cushi, the son of Gedaliah, the son of Amariah, the son of Hezekiah, in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah" (Zephaniah 1:1).

Frequently, we might pass over the opening lines of a book in the Bible that list lineages of the prophet. In Zephaniah it is unusual to trace back a prophet's paternal line over four generations, and no equivalent may be found in any other prophet. It is very reasonable to conclude that Zephaniah was a direct descendant of King Hezekiah and that this prophetic book comes from the days of good King Josiah. The suggestion that Zephaniah's warnings may have urged the good Josiah to special zeal seems reasonable.

KING JOSIAH'S REFORMS

King Josiah began to reign when he was eight years old, and he reigned in Jerusalem 31 years (2 Chronicles 34:1-3). King Josiah did that which is right in the sight of the Lord, for he walked in the ways of David his father. Josiah's reforms were one of the brightest periods in Judah's history. Since Josiah reigned 31 years until he was 39 years old, he did not live out a natural life span. He was to die battling an Egyptian army at Megiddo.

In the eighth year of his reign (age 16), King Josiah began to seek after the God of David his father. Of course we cannot emphasize enough the importance of training up a child in the way he should go and its wonderful fruitage (Proverbs 22:6). The problem facing Josiah was that the two-tribe kingdom of Judah and Benjamin that he ruled had continued following in the ways of false gods, even in Jerusalem.

In the twelfth year of his reign (age 20) Josiah purged Judah and Jerusalem from the high places, the groves, the carved images, and the molten images. It seems as though Josiah personally oversaw this purging. The molten images were broken in pieces, and Josiah and his team made dust of them and spread this dust upon the graves of them that sacrificed unto the idols. When this company doing the purging found any of the priests of Baal, it is certain that they were executed, but let us have

no sympathy for these priests, for they were murderers and practiced the most debased and abominable forms of child sacrifice. Until Josiah's reform the altars of Baal lay just outside of the walls of Jerusalem. "And they have built the high places of Tophet, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom (just beneath the walls of Zion on the southwestern corner of Jerusalem), to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire; which I commanded them not, neither came it into my heart" (Jeremiah 7:31).

The purging of Josiah did not stop at the old borders of the ten-tribe kingdom, which now were peopled by the Samaritans (2 Kings 17:24). Josiah continued his purge throughout the cities of Manasseh and Ephraim. He got to the extreme northern border where Naphtali once had lived. What a good king!

Yet, at the same time, the dire prophecies of Zephaniah served as a warning.

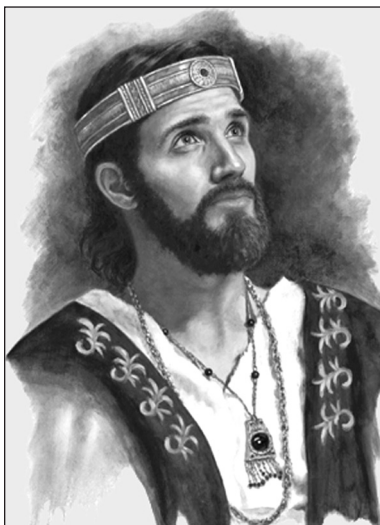
REPAIRING THE TEMPLE OF SOLOMON

Josiah ordered the repair of the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem in year 18 of his reign at age 26. Even more remarkably, "Hilkiah the priest found a book of the law of the LORD given by Moses." Possibly, this was not a copy but might have actually been the original manuscript that Moses had written (2 Chronicles 34:14-16).

We find that in the temple complex there lived a prophetess named Hulda. She had charge of the wardrobe. Like Zephaniah, Hulda foretells a coming disaster. "Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, and upon the inhabitants thereof, even all the curses that are written in the book which they have read before the king of Judah" (2 Chronicles 34:24-25). It is within this framework we need to read the opening of Zephaniah, "and I will cut off man from off the land, saith the LORD. I will also stretch out mine hand upon Judah, and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem" (Zephaniah 1:2-3).

Josiah and his supporters were sincere in their reforms, but the resistance to reform was even stronger, hence Zephaniah records, "and I will cut off the remnant of Baal from this place, and the name of the Chemarims (*idol-priests*) with the priests (*nominal priests of Jehovah*); And them that worship the host of heaven upon the housetops; and them that worship and that swear by the LORD, and that swear by Malcham (an idol named "*the king*"); And them that are turned back from the LORD; and those that have not sought the LORD, nor enquired for him" (Zephaniah 1:4-6).

There were some faithful Levites and people, for there is always a remnant of faithful belief, but the Lord had strong condemnation for those who were nominally serving



King Josiah, Israel's last good king.

in His name, while at the same time worshipping the host of heaven. This sort of mixed worship happens too frequently. It is more the rule than the exception. The Lord is a jealous God, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3). The Lord never says, "You have gone through the right form of worship. If you now practice some other form of worship once you leave the temple, that is your business." No, the Lord wants our hearts fully committed.

THE GREAT PASSOVER

Josiah was faced with these two prophecies of national disaster, for both Zephaniah and Hulda prophesied disaster. Josiah

understood how grievously departed from the covenant the people of Judah were, and in grief Josiah ripped his clothes. Because of his contrition, Josiah was told, "Behold, I will gather thee to thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered to thy grave in peace" (2 Chronicles 34:28).

In Zephaniah there is no allusion to this extension of grace, and this suggests that the visions were written before the varied reform efforts by Josiah.

Recognizing that the Lord is gracious, Josiah not only solemnized the nation's covenant with the Lord, but had the people celebrate a great Passover, "And there was no Passover like to that kept in Israel from the days of Samuel the prophet" (2 Chronicles 35:17-18). Once again there is a suggestion of Grace. Between the great Passover of Josiah (year 18) and the *unnecessary* death of Josiah (year 31) we find $31-18 = 13$ years.

The stern warnings of Zephaniah's prophecy apply, "Seek ye the LORD, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the LORD's anger" (Zephaniah 2:3).

In context, we see that Zephaniah holds a much bigger picture of the closing experiences of this age in the time of trouble. There is also a much bigger picture of the deliverance. One of the messages of the church to those who have a heart set in the right direction is that they need to put into action these words of Zephaniah and to seek righteousness, and to seek meekness, that they might be hid in the day of the Lord's anger.

The church today is in a covenant by sacrifice, and we are promised that we are enfolded and protected by the Lord's wings (Psalm 91:4). We have a special privilege, and we want to encourage even those who have not given their lives in a covenant by sacrifice to recognize that these words are instructions to all the earth. We are told in the second Psalm that the kings should "kiss the son" (Psalm 2:12); that is, seek closer communion and receive instruction.

JUDGMENT EAST AND WEST

The punishment promised in Zephaniah was not to fall solely on Judah. First, looking to the West from Jerusalem, Zephaniah announces judgment against Philistia. “Gaza shall be forsaken, and Ashkelon a desolation” (Zephaniah 2:4-6). Next, turning and looking to the East, Zephaniah announces judgment against Ammon and Moab. “Therefore as I live, saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, Surely Moab shall be as Sodom, and the children of Ammon as Gomorrah” (Zephaniah 2:9).

JUDGMENT SOUTH

Turning to the South, Zephaniah announces judgment against Egypt. “Ye Ethiopians also, ye shall be slain by my sword” (Zephaniah 2:12). But there seems to be a problem here. Why speak of the “Ethiopians” and not the “Egyptians?” Why did Zephaniah not report the Lord’s words as, “You Egyptians also, shall be slain with my sword?”

The Greek historian Herodotus writing ~440 BC records that in Egypt’s very long history, “there were eighteen Ethiopian kings” (*Histories*, Book 2:100.1). Current scholarship, in support, places this 25th dynasty in power for over a century¹. The Biblical record shows that one of the “Ethiopian” kings, already was projecting military power sufficient to challenge Assyria in the days of Hezekiah and Isaiah (2 Kings 19:8-9, Isaiah 37:8-9). During the siege of Jerusalem by the Assyrian king Sennacherib, Tirhaka (Taharqa), brother of the Nubian Pharaoh of Egypt (and later to come to the throne himself), marched in support of their ally Hezekiah. During this invasion, we know from the record of the prophet Isaiah and Kings that the Lord wrought a great deliverance. The angel of the Lord smote the host of the Assyrians, and in one night the slain were “one hundred eighty five thousand men.” The Pharaoh identified as “So” in 2 Kings 17:4 (possibly Osorkon), to whom the 10-tribe kingdom appealed for aid a few years earlier, may have been from the rival Western Egyptian region trying to regain power.²

Four generations later, during the time of Zephaniah’s prophecy, the portion of Egypt to the south of the Nile delta (Upper Egypt) still was under the control of the Nubians who held Thebes³. By the end of the reign of Josiah the Nubian control of Memphis and Thebes came to an end, fulfilling the words of the prophecy and the judgment on the South.

JUDGMENT NORTH

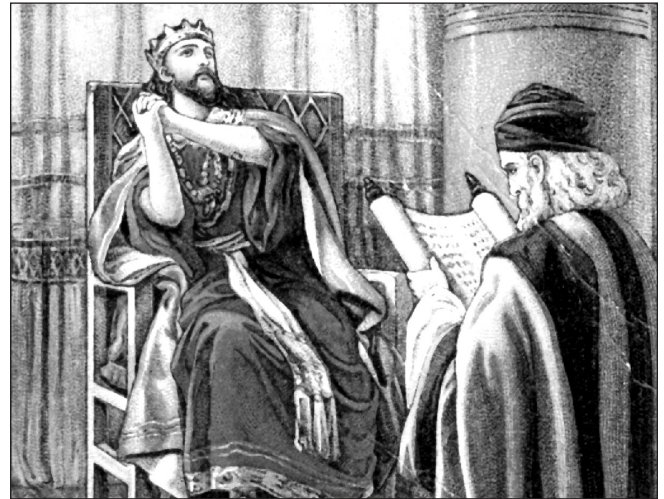
Lastly, turning North, Zephaniah announced judgment against Assyria itself. That abominable nation was faltering and was soon to fall to the emerging world power of Babylon.

“And he will stretch out his hand against the north, and destroy Assyria; and will make Nineveh a desolation, and dry like a wilderness” (Zephaniah 2:13).

The ruins of Nineveh lay on the edge of modern Mosul, Iraq, and continue to be in the news. Once again, the forces of power have turned the city into a desolation.

DEVASTATION OF ASSYRIA AND JOSIAH’S DEATH

This judgment on the North — Assyria — came when the Assyrian army, or rather, the Assyrians with their wild and unreliable allies from the north known as the Scythians (Saka-Ta, Great Russians) gathered to make a stand at Carchemish. Marching against Assyria from the East were the Babylonians and the Medes. The Nubian Egyptian allies of Judah had been driven out, and a native Egyptian monarchy under Pharaoh Necho II now held nearly all of Egypt.



Josiah, at the reading of the lost Book of the Law

“In his [Josiah’s] days Pharaoh Necho king of Egypt went up *against* the king of Assyria to the river Euphrates; and King Josiah went *against* him; and he [Necho] slew him [Josiah] at Megiddo, when he had seen him” (2 Kings 23:28-29).

Both the tragic action by Josiah, bringing his untimely death, along with questions of why he would intervene at Megiddo, so far from the territory of Judah, have proven puzzling. Part of the confusion is linked to translating two *different* Hebrew words in the passage quoted as “against.” Some have suggested that Necho II was marching not to fight “against” Assyria, but to assist the Assyrians. To quote from the conclusion of one scholar: “Josiah’s motive becomes crystal-clear if we assume that he was fully aware of the vital importance of delaying the Egyptian advance.”

In that case he proceeded to Megiddo knowing only too well the risk involved but in the hope that, by forcing Necho to deploy his forces, he would have effectively sealed the doom of the Assyrian king. Thus, it seems very probable that the last of the great Jewish kings laid down his life in a truly heroic and entirely successful bid to avenge the dreadful wrongs his nation had suffered at the hands of Assyria.”⁴

Did Josiah do the right thing, laying down his life in a heroic action? There is no record of Josiah enquiring of the Lord as to His will in taking this military action. 2 Chronicles 35:20-27 gives an account of Josiah's death, giving Pharaoh Necho the last word (verses 21-22) and faulting Josiah for not heeding these words:

“But he [Necho] sent ambassadors to him [Josiah], saying, What have I to do with thee, thou king of Judah? *I come not against thee this day, but against the house wherewith I have war: for God commanded me to make haste: forbear thee from meddling with God, who is with me, that he destroy thee not. Nevertheless Josiah would not turn his face from him, but disguised himself, that he might fight with him, and hearkened not unto the words of Necho from the mouth of God, and came to fight in the valley of Megiddo*” (2 Chronicles 35:21-22).

Josiah may well have known that these reassuring words from Egypt were not the whole truth. Josiah disguised himself, and came to fight in the valley of Megiddo, but “the archers shot at king Josiah; and the king said to his servants, Have me away; for I am sore wounded. His servants therefore took him out of that chariot, and put him in the second chariot that he had; and they brought him to Jerusalem, and he died” (2 Chronicles 35:22-24).

However reasonable Josiah's motives may have appeared to human reasoning, by not enquiring of the Lord, and by not fighting openly, this good king met his end. Subsequently, history was to prove that the Babylonians were even more powerful and determined to conquer Judah than the Assyrians.

Following Josiah, Jehoiakim and Zedekiah were both weak vassal kings, each with an undistinguished rule of 11 years. As the kingship of the house of David closed, Jerusalem itself would lay charred and broken with the temple of Solomon looted and destroyed.

PLUNDERING THE PHILISTINES

As Babylon consolidated power, the fearsome Scythian cavalry — barely under any control in the best of times — made a lightning raid looting and plundering along the entire Mediterranean coast from Phoenicia to Egypt. This was during the reign of Pharaoh Necho II's son Psammeticus. This devastation is not recorded in the Bible, because it touched no portion of Judah; however it is found in Herodotus (*Histories*, Book 1:105).⁴ At this time, the most celebrated Philistine temple in Ashkelon, honoring Astarte the “Queen of Heaven,” was plundered.

What of the judgment on Ammon and Moab? This judgment took hundreds of years to be accomplished, but these great trading centers have not been rebuilt unto this day.



Pharaoh Necho II

A PICTURE OF THE KINGDOM

“Therefore wait ye upon me, saith the LORD, until the day that I rise up to the prey: for my determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them mine indignation, even all my fierce anger: for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy” (Zephaniah 3:8).

This is not simply for the purpose of bringing down these nations. If we close the Bible at this point we miss the beauty and the grace of our great Heavenly Father. For the Lord promises

that He will turn to the people a “pure language” that they may call upon his name to serve him with one consent (Zephaniah 3:9). The footnote in Rotherham's translation explains the Hebrew is literally “one shoulder.” This is as a group pushing against a cart to move it.

While the special promises of the closing chapter focus on the restoration of Israel, Zephaniah adds that suppliants would come from beyond the rivers of Ethiopia (Zephaniah 3:10). This depicts how widespread the blessings of the kingdom will be, for only the truth really answers to the needs of man's heart.

Pride, arrogance, wrongdoing, and lies shall be taken away in the Kingdom (Zephaniah 3:11-13). As precious as the joyful singing of Zion and Jerusalem shall be in that day (Zephaniah 3:14), we have the assurance that the voice of Jehovah God himself shall be raised in joyful song (Zephaniah 3:17). The prophecy closes with the promise that the very names of Zion and Jerusalem will then be praise throughout the earth. What wisdom and comprehensiveness in God's great Divine Plan of the Ages for all mankind!

— Br. Richard Doctor

(1) Bennett, Robert A., “Africa and the Biblical Period,” *The Harvard Theological Review*, Volume 64, No. 4 (1971), pages 483-500. The father of Zephaniah (1:1) is “Cushi” (H3570), a word usually translated “Ethiopian” (H3569) as in Zephaniah 2:12; someone from the land of “Cush” (H3568), “Ethiopia” Zephaniah 3:10, or any of the lands of Cush's heritage; portions of Iraq, South India, or sub-Saharan Africa. The suggestion is that Zephaniah's grandmother may have had Nubian heritage.

(2) Christensen, Duane L., “The Identity of ‘King So’ in Egypt (2 Kings XVII 4),” *Vetus Testamentum*, Volume 39, fasc. 2 (April 1989), pages 140-153 (“the complex political situation in Egypt has made it difficult to achieve any scholarly consensus ... [and] four remaining options [are possible].”)

(3) Baer, Klaus, “The Libyan and Nubian Kings of Egypt: Notes on the Chronology of Dynasties XXII to XXVI,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, Volume 32, No. 1/2 (January - April 1973), pages 24ff.

(4) Edwin Yamauchi, “The Scythians: Invading Hordes from the Russian Steppes,” *The Biblical Archaeologist*, Volume 46, No. 2 (Spring 1983), pages 90-99. (Comment: Saka-Ta = Scythians. Ma-Saka-Ta = Massagetae = From (having left) the land of the Saka hordes.)

A King's Desire for His Young Son

"Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding" (Proverbs 3:13).

As King David approached the end of his life, he was to give a final admonition to his people and to his son Solomon, the designated heir to the throne of Israel. Having called all the princes, officers, and valiant men to Jerusalem, David spoke his last official words to the thousands assembled there.

He began by saying it was in his heart to build a temple where the Ark of the Covenant could rest. However, being a man of war, he was not allowed to do so. It would fall to Solomon to build the house of Jehovah. He then turned to his son and gave his parting advice:

"Now Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father; and serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind: for the LORD searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts: if thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off forever. Take heed now; for the LORD hath chosen thee to build an house for the sanctuary: be strong and do it" (1 Chronicles 28:9-12).

David went on to give Solomon the detailed plans for building the temple. This passage describes one of the most precious scenes in the recorded history of Israel. The beloved king, now an old man, conveyed a message to his son that summarized a life of learning. It described the core values that could help Solomon become a faithful king and servant of the Lord.

David's own wisdom emanated from of a lifetime of experience, through victories and failures alike. He learned that the personal conduct of a king should be pure and above reproach. His dominion should be subservient to the rules and principles of God's higher dominion. He should be open minded and willing to listen to God's directions. A vital sentiment conveyed to his son was, "Have a pure heart and a willing mind." It was simple advice from a knowledgeable king trying to help his young son do right in the eyes of the Lord, and therefore to the people he led.

Psalm 72 is David's final prayer for Solomon, and it paints a picture of great expectations and hope for every citizen:

"(1) A Psalm for Solomon. God, help the king be like you and make fair decisions. Help the king's son know what justice is. (2) Help the king judge your people fairly. Help him make wise decisions for your poor people. (3) Let there be peace and justice

throughout the land, known on every mountain and hill. (4) May the king be fair to the poor. May he help the helpless and punish those who hurt them.

"(6) Help the king be like rain falling on the fields, like showers falling on the land. (7) Let goodness grow everywhere while he is king. Let peace continue as long as there is a moon. (8) Let his kingdom grow from sea to sea, from the Euphrates ... to the faraway places on earth.

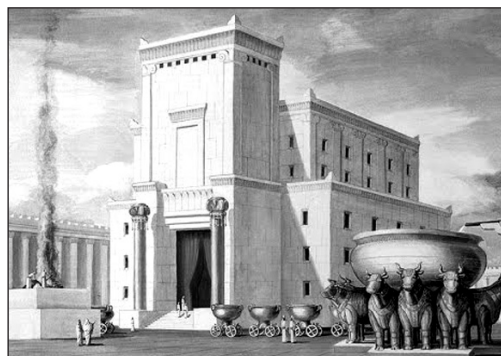
"(11) May all kings bow down to our king. May all nations serve him. (12) Our king helps the poor who cry out to him — those in need who have no one to help them. (13) He feels sorry for all who are weak and poor. He protects their lives. (14) He saves them from the cruel people who try to hurt them. Their lives are important to him. (15) Long live the king! Let him receive gold from Sheba. Always pray for the king. Ask God to bless him every day. (16) May the fields grow plenty of grain and the hills be covered with crops. May the fields be as fertile as Lebanon, and may people fill the cities as grass covers a field.

"(17) May the king be famous forever. May people remember his name as long as the sun shines. May all nations be blessed through him, and may they all bless him. (18) Praise the LORD God, the God of Israel! Only he can do such amazing things. (19) Praise his glorious name forever! Let his glory fill the whole world. Amen and Amen! (20) (This ends the prayers of David son of Jesse.) — Psalm 72:1-4, 6-8, 11-20 (Easy-to-Read Version).

These are magnificent words which lifted a standard so high that Solomon was never able to reach them. Such power as Solomon possessed tends to corrupt, and Solomon was not immune to its influence. But as prophetic words, they convey the true grandeur of our Lord who does, and will continue to, live up to them. They speak of the purity of a righteous ruler who cares for every individual under his care. Only through his kingdom rule will lasting peace and universal justice be achieved. Only in his wisdom will all the helpless be helped and the poor raised up. He will be like rain, bringing refreshment upon the field of every open heart and those fertile fields will blossom under his reign. That is our hope. That is our prayer. That is our expectation.

To be associated with our Lord in such a glorious work would be inconceivable if not for such clear promises from God to that effect (2 Timothy 2:12, Revelation 5:10, 20:4, 21:2-6). This should inspire us to seek the wisdom that eluded Solomon.

The qualities David desired for his son are now attainable through the assistance and guidance of the holy Spirit. With such amazing prospects before us, let us bend every effort in preparing for the reign of the antitypical Solomon.



Solomon's Temple

— Bro. Tom Ruggirello

The Faith of Habakkuk

“Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: Yet I will rejoice in Jehovah, I will joy in the God of my salvation” (Habakkuk 3:17,18).

Habakkuk lived during the time that the Babylonian Empire was threatening Judea. Habakkuk 1:15 speaks of the Babylonians as gathering the people of various nations in their “net,” verse 16 as sacrificing unto their gods, and verse 17 of Babylon’s campaign “to slay the nations.”

This perplexed Habakkuk, for it was apparent that Babylon was not more just than other nations, and they did not recognize the one true God, Jehovah. How, then, did God allow them to be the punishing agent for others, including Judea, where at least some of the people continued to worship God? “Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil ... wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he? (verse 13).

CHAPTER TWO

Having expressed his concerns, Habakkuk then says, in the first verse of the second chapter, “I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer” (Habakkuk 2:1). Habakkuk thus stands in a watch tower to receive whatever response Jehovah might be pleased to give the prophet about this apparent conundrum.

We often consider Babylon to be a picture of Christendom, because it is clearly so used in Revelation, extensively. But in this case it is different. Here Babylon is the instrument of God’s judgment, and Judea, the

wayward people of God, represents Christendom during the harvest of the Gospel Age. This is not the only case of this. For example, the words of judgment against Christendom expressed in Revelation 18:22,23, compare closely with God’s judgment against Judea expressed in Jeremiah 25:10 (and also Jeremiah 7:34 and 16:9).

The fact that Habakkuk stands upon “my watch” and sets himself upon a “tower” suggests the term “watchtower” such as appears in Isaiah 21:5,6, “Prepare the table, watch in the watchtower, eat, drink: arise, ye princes, and anoint the shield. For thus hath the Lord said unto me, Go, set a watchman, let him declare what he seeth.” Both this passage and the one in Habakkuk thus use the same symbolic concept of watching in a tower for an answer from God to explain the judgments that are at hand.

In the latter case, Isaiah 21:5,6, this is followed by an announcement that is well known to brethren as the one used in Revelation against Christendom. “Babylon is fallen, is fallen” (verse 9, compare Revelation 14:8, 18:2). That is the prophetic meaning both of Habakkuk and Isaiah. They apply to our day in history, that is, to the harvest of the Gospel Age, a time when strong judgments are due against Christendom.

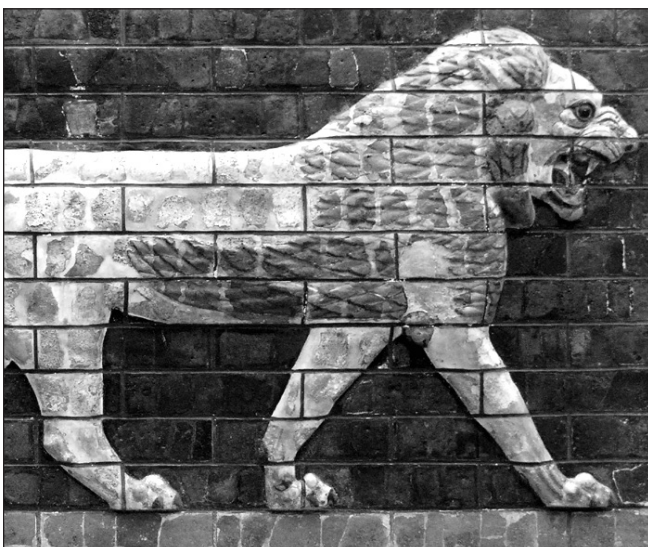
These are depicted in Revelation chapters 15 and 16 as seven plagues the finally bring ruin to the great system. “The great city was divided in three parts [probably the coalition of dragon, beast, and false prophet that formed in plague six], and the city [singular, Sinaitic manuscript] of the nations fell: and great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath” (Revelation 16:19).

Apparently from the term “watchtower” in Isaiah 21:5 came the title of Br. Russell’s periodical, now affectionately termed the Reprints. Isaiah 21:10 says, “O my threshing, and the corn of my floor: that which I have heard of Jehovah of hosts, the God of Israel, have I declared unto,” and the Watchtower journal for 37 years sought to provide the best observations, and spiritual counsel, to the “corn of my floor,” as Br. Russell was able by God’s grace to provide.

Sometimes brethren pick up on specific opinions expressed in those pages, while not as careful to adopt and practice what really was the bulk of the testimony, namely, sweet Christian counsel. It would be unfortunate to insist upon favored opinions, which might be variable, with a spirit unlike the spirit of Christ that is reflected in 37 years of devoted exhortation. It would mean losing sight of the true values.

GOD’S ANSWER TO HABAKKUK

God acknowledged to Habakkuk that the avenger of his day was not a just institution. “Behold, his soul [of Babylon, the instrument of God’s judgment] which is lifted up is not upright in him. ... Yea also, because he



Babylon, like a ravaging lion, was the agent of God’s punishment.

transgresseth by wine, he is a proud man [perhaps the king of Babylon], neither keepeth at home, who enlargeth his desire as hell, and is as death, and cannot be satisfied, but gathereth unto him all nations, and heapeth unto him all people” (Habakkuk 2:4,5).

Verse six refers to this avenger, Babylon, as “him that ladeth himself with thick clay,” apparently referring to building enterprises in the city of Babylon. (Compare Daniel 4:30, “The king spake, and said, Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?”).

In verse seven God affirms that Babylon also would be judged. “Shall they not rise up suddenly that shall bite thee ... because thou hast spoiled many nations, all the remnant of the people shall spoil thee; because of men’s blood and for the violence of the land, of the city, and of all that dwell therein ... woe to him that buildeth a town with blood, and stablisheth a city by iniquity!” (Habakkuk 2:7-12). Babylon was allowed by God to avenge the sins of Judea and others. But Babylon was not more righteous than others, and would itself meet their judgment at a later time.

God sometimes allows very bad instruments to bring judgment upon better, but blameworthy, people representing God. Thus Rome was allowed to bring judgment on Judea, and during the French Revolution infidels brought judgment upon France, who was allied with Papacy. Today also, some of the attacks upon establishments of Christendom are very far from righteous. They will be held to account later. But they are allowed to bring calamities upon old institutions whose judgment has been long predicted — and long due.

CHAPTER THREE

The punishment of Judea, brought by the Babylonian Empire, endured for decades. During this time, “in the midst of the years ... in wrath remember[ing] mercy” (Habakkuk 3:2), God gave Ezekiel a vision of restoration of nine chapters, Ezekiel 40-48. This vision no doubt was received by the Israelites as hope for restoration after their punishment. On a broader scale, it refers to the hope of restoration for Israel and the world in the Kingdom. The judgments referred to in Habakkuk 3:5-16 are filled with phrases that apply to one or another of the judgments poured out through the Harvest, in preparation for the establishment of God’s Kingdom on earth.

Verse 6 — “He stood ... and drove asunder the nation; and the everlasting mountains were scattered.” The winds of two world wars have broken up the “everlasting mountains” of Christendom’s European mainstays, the former governments that ruled that continent.

Verse 8 asks “was thine anger against the rivers?” The reminds us that the sixth plague in Revelation 16 is the drying of the river Euphrates, perhaps associated with a



Habakkuk the prophet, concerned about his people.

withering of economic strength in the western nations. We may have seen opening billows of this trouble already, but the brunt of it is yet ahead.

Verse 11 says, “The sun and moon stood still in their habitation,” which seems to mean they refrained for their customary shining (in the same sense that the sun “stood” in Joshua 10:13). In other words, the sun and moon are darkened, which in Matthew 24:29 refers to the final traumas ending the harvest.

“When I heard, my belly trembled; my lips quivered at the voice; rottenness entered into my bones, and I trembled in myself, that I might rest in the day of trouble” (Habakkuk 3:16). The troubles have been intense. But they have been distributed over time, with intervening periods of peace between the tempests. Nevertheless, many brethren have suffered the ravages of war, some the poverty of economic blight, and some the terror of Islam. Other intensities still loom.

Verse 17 describes our time, and forward, while these troubles bring low the old order, at the same time elevating Israel in preparation for the Kingdom. “Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vine; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; Yet I will rejoice in Jehovah, I will joy in the God of my salvation.”

Israel is not yet blossoming with spiritual fruit for the nations. The Church is not yet yielding the wine of refreshment and atonement for the world. The work of the holy Spirit is not yet prospering among mankind. The fields, the world, do not yet yield the fruit of praise to God. The saints are not yet gathered beyond the veil, though that work progresses. The Ancient Worthies have not yet been installed in authority, leading the world to better things.

We still wait for all of those blessings. The years have stretched out more than brethren supposed they would. But the trend of events proceeds and the eye of faith can see in them progress toward the fulfillment of our hopes. We have every reason to “rejoice in Jehovah ... and he will make [us] to walk upon ... high places” (Habakkuk 3:18,19). Every wonderful thing approaches.

— Br. David Rice