The Vision Speaks

"The vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie."
—Habakkuk 2:3

THE CREATOR'S CHARAC- ter is brought into question each time those who serve him suffer, while those who serve Satan prosper. In this "present evil world" (Gal. 1:4), most perceive righteousness merely as an admirable, but ultimately unattainable, aspiration. (Gal. 1:4) Many consider it to be an abstraction, an ideal of little practical value. Some feel it is only a burden. Few choose to pursue righteousness since its advantages are uncertain and its rewards are seldom immediate. Throughout the ages, skeptical mankind has complained that if God does exist, he has been inconsistent in his defense of the righteous. Unbelievers do not understand why any would commit to righteousness since that Divine principle seems to receive so little Divine support.—Luke 12:32

Satan has always characterized God as unable, or unwilling, to save the righteous from abuse and treachery. As a result, all Divine principles and precepts are questioned. To the worldly, God's plans and purposes are shrouded in mystery. That tends to deepen its suspicion of him and his motives. That skepticism fosters the absurd conclusion that, in his own

defense, God should throw open to his suspicious subjects the secrets of his sanctuary that he may prove he harbors no ulterior motives nor hides any weaknesses. Absent such wholesale disclosure of Divine secrets, mankind has formulated numerous systems of religious belief, based on what it has imagined those Divine secrets to be. It continues to press the righteous for an answer to the question, Why do the righteous suffer?

THE SANCTUARY

The psalmist contemplates, "Behold, these are the wicked; . . . always at ease, they have increased in wealth. Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure, And washed my hands in innocence; For I have been stricken all day long, And chastened every morning." (Ps. 73:12-14, *New American Standard Version*) Unlike the cynical world, the psalmist considers the matter humbly and reverently and is brought to a vital truth: None outside the sanctuary of God can understand his ways. The realization of that truth is expressed by the psalmist: "When I pondered to understand this [question of why the righteous suffer], it was troublesome in my sight Until I came into the sanctuary of God; Then I perceived their end." (Ps. 73:16,17, *NASV*) The psalmist realized the answer to his question lay within the 'sanctuary of God.' He understood that admission into the sanctuary required total submission to God's will and ways under all circumstances and conditions, even unto death. Proving he properly understood the matter, the psalmist expressed the spirit of total submission as well as the expectation of its eventual reward. "Thou shalt

guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory." Ps. 73:24

Though the psalmist came to understand that the answer to his question lay inside the sanctuary of God, he was not invited in. Indeed, no one would be until the First Advent of Christ Jesus, and the Gospel Age. Only those who submit and trust utterly in the Lord are admitted into the sanctuary, wherein lay God's sacred secrets. Christ Jesus himself emphasized that fact. "The disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them [the public] in parables? He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. . . . But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear. For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them."—Matt. 13:10,11,16,17

TYPICAL AARON

Christ Jesus is the door into the sanctuary. (John 10:7,9) None can enter, though, unless invited and authorized to do so. "[No one can] come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them to me." (John 6:44, *New Living Translation*) This was typified in Israel's Tabernacle arrangement. Regardless of who had access to the Tabernacle during the year for other ritual purposes, only Aaron, Moses' brother, was permitted access to that sanctuary on Israel's annual Day of Atonement. He, alone, had been initiated and authorized to enter as the high priest of God. (Lev. 8; Lev. 16:17) To become the high priest,

Aaron had to figuratively die to his prior identity as Aaron, the Levite, just an ordinary member of the twelve-tribe camp of Israel. His figurative death was represented by the literal sacrificial deaths and burnt offerings of various animals. Signified by the anointing oil poured upon his head by Moses, Aaron took on a significance that had never existed before: he became Aaron, the typical high priest of God, consecrated, fully authorized to enter alone the typical sanctuary of God once every year thereafter.

ANTITYPICAL AARON

That typical illustration was fulfilled by our Lord at his First Advent. The man Jesus, born a Jew, member of the tribe of Judah, citizen of Nazareth, came to the Jordan River in an attitude of complete submission and devotion to God. He [Jesus] was immersed in those waters by John the Baptist, thereby signifying the death of the man Jesus. (Heb. 10:7,9) Emerging from the water, our Lord was anointed with the Holy Spirit by his Heavenly Father. Thus it was signified that Jesus' identity as the antitypical High Priest of God had begun. As antitypical Aaron, he alone was fully authorized to enter into the secrets of God's Divine plan of salvation for mankind during the antitypical Atonement Day. (Matt. 3:13; Heb. 10:5-7; John 1:32) Any who would subsequently follow the Lord into those mysteries within the antitypical sanctuary during the Gospel Age, must be invited to do so. (Acts 2:39) In addition, they must, as did their Master, die to their own will, wholly submit to the will of God, and receive the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Ever after, they must patiently accept and trust whatever experiences God's

wise council deems necessary. "In your patience [with those experiences] possess ye your [lives]."—Luke 21:19

Those called and chosen during this Gospel Age thus form the figurative spiritual body of the antitypical High Priest, the various members of which are collectively covered by his personal righteousness likened unto a robe. (Eph. 1:22,23; I Cor. 12:18-27; Isa. 61:10) The body of the antitypical High Priest, through no merit of its own, thus follows the head into the sanctuary and unto those great mysteries. It is there they learn the wisdom of suffering.

THE HIGH TOWER

Long before the Gospel Age, the prophet Habakkuk questioned why the righteous suffer, saying, "O Jehovah, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear? I cry out unto thee of violence, and thou wilt not save. Why dost thou show me iniquity, and look upon perverseness? for destruction and violence are before me; and there is strife, and contention riseth up. Therefore the law is slacked, and justice doth never go forth; for the wicked doth compass about the righteous; therefore justice goeth forth perverted. Thou that art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and that canst not look on perverseness, wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy peace when the wicked swalloweth up the man that is more righteous than he."—Hab. 1:2-4,13, *American Standard Version*

Essentially, Habakkuk asks the same question as the psalmist—How can the suffering of the righteous be explained to unbelievers? As did the psalmist, Habakkuk determines to humbly and reverently

await the answer to his query. "I will climb my watchtower now and wait to see what answer God will give to my complaint." (Hab. 2:1, *The Living Bible*) That God is the tower is made clear, "Thou [God] hast been a shelter for me, and a strong tower from the enemy." (Ps. 61:3) As he waited upon the Lord for the answer to his question, Habakkuk figuratively climbed his watchtower: he set aside his own view and adopted God's Divine perspective of the matter.

THE VISION WRITTEN

Having gained the necessary elevated perspective, a vision came to Habakkuk. With it came a twofold commission. "The Lord answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it." (Hab. 2:2) According to *Strong's Bible Concordance*, 'write' means, 'to describe or record.' Habakkuk did that literally in his prophecy, thereby satisfying the first part of his commission.

However, the prophet did not satisfy the second part of his commission to 'make it plain.' *Strong's Bible Concordance* defines the word plain as 'explain.' The second part of Habakkuk's commission could thus be properly stated, to explain the vision by putting in a name.

Absent that name, Habakkuk could only refer to the vision as 'it.' He does so five times in verse 3. "The vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry." Very similar language is found in Hebrews, chapter 10; language where the Apostle Paul clearly refers

to our Lord Jesus, saying, "Yet a little while [for an appointed time], and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry." (vs. 37) The similarities between these verses force the conclusion that Habakkuk and the Apostle Paul speak of the same vision. That the vision had a name is evident from Paul's earlier reference to Christ Jesus as the "heavenly vision." "Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision." (Acts 26:19) Paul was referring to Jesus of Nazareth whom he met on the road to Damascus after his resurrection. The vision Habakkuk experienced, therefore, was a name he was not then permitted to know—Christ Jesus.

UNFULFILLED COMMISSION

No Old Testament prophet, including John the Baptist—designated the greatest prophet ever born of woman—was afforded the blessing of understanding the mysteries of the sanctuary. Not even the angels, who also desire to look into those things, are privileged to know them. Yet, the least admitted unto the sanctuary of God are afforded that wonderful privilege. (Luke 7:28; I Pet. 1:10-12; Matt. 13:11) Habakkuk did all he could do; he recorded what was spoken to him. But he could not explain it and, therefore, could not make it plain.

A heavenly commission only partially fulfilled is very unusual. Habakkuk's is not unique. A similar circumstance of a partially fulfilled commission from God features the prophet Elijah. "The LORD said unto him [Elijah], Go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus: and when thou comest, anoint Hazael to be king over Syria: And Jehu the son of Nimshi shalt thou anoint to be king over Israel: and

Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meho-lah shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room." (I Kings 19:15,16) The word 'anoint' in this context is used in the sense of authorizing. It does not necessarily mean to literally cover with oil, though that is not excluded from the definition as this narrative demonstrates.

Of the three he was commissioned to anoint, Elijah was allowed proximity only to Elisha. Therefore, Elijah did what he could do; he anointed or authorized Elisha by casting his mantle, the emblem of his authority, over Elisha's shoulders. (I Kings 19:19) Subsequently, we find that not even Elisha anointed the remaining two, Hazael and Jehu, directly. He authorized only one. This he did with his tears as he told Hazael that God wanted him to be king over Syria. (II Kings 8:7-15) Jehu was the only one of the three anointed with oil. Not, however, by Elijah, nor Elisha, nor even by another prophet, but by one of the followers of the prophets. (II Kings 9:1-10) The point being that the word of the Lord was fully accomplished. The three individuals he wanted authorized were indeed authorized. Each authorization was accomplished by quite different means, but all by the power and will of God. Elijah would have fulfilled his commission and accomplished all three authorizations had he been allowed the opportunity, but he was allowed the opportunity only with Elisha.

So with Habakkuk. Had God provided him the knowledge and the opportunity, Habakkuk would have certainly explained the vision by putting in the name of Christ Jesus. He could not, however, for, as it says in Habakkuk 2:3, the knowledge

related to the name of that vision was not due to be known for an 'appointed time'—a time far into the future of Habakkuk's day. Therefore, just as Elijah did what he could do and left that which was undone to others, so did Habakkuk. He recorded the vision and left it to others to later explain it by putting in that name.

A DIVINE PLEDGE

He had been sufficiently encouraged by his experience. From it, he understood righteousness would be vindicated by God in his due time. "Thou didst march through the land in indignation, thou didst thresh the heathen in anger." (Hab. 3:12) Encouraged by the certainty of that Divine pledge, Habakkuk likewise pledged that he would continue to praise God, trusting the outworking of his Divine purposes to the destruction of all evil and the exaltation of all righteousness in due time. "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 the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation." (Hab. 3:17,18) Habakkuk had learned that one could, indeed, suffer all things joyfully if that joyful suffering glorified God. During this present Gospel Age, Christ and his disciples have personified that which Habakkuk learned. Suffering in the defense of the holy name of God is to them more valuable than their very lives.

THE MESSAGE

Christ Jesus was the vision whom the prophet Habakkuk was allowed to experience but not understand,

because the understanding was yet for an appointed time. This Gospel Age has been the appointed time of waiting for the vision. The church understands that the harvest has begun, that the harvest is the end of the age and that the time of waiting is, therefore, past. (Matt. 13:30,39) Christ Jesus, the vision, is present and now speaks. He proclaims the principle by which 'this present evil world' will be ended, and by which the world that is to come will be governed. That message and that principle are precisely what God told Habakkuk the vision would speak when it came. "This [will be] the mes-sage: Those who are evil will not survive, but those who are righteous will live because they are faith-ful to God."—Hab. 2:4, *Today's English Version*

In the forthcoming Millennial Age, all will under-stand that Christ Jesus is the vision and that all must look to him for life. Mankind will then com-prehend the infinite truth—"Where there is no vision, the people perish." (Prov. 29:18) A thankful world will thereafter praise Almighty God for his farseeing wisdom which, through suffering, provided that wonderful vision without which the people would have perished. ■