



Strong Faith for Confusing Times

A Study of the Book of Habakkuk

“IT’S ALWAYS TOO SOON TO QUIT”

Habakkuk 3

Where is God when your world falls apart?

That's a question Habakkuk wrestled with 2500 years ago. Let's join him on his journey as we learn to have faith in God when even life itself makes no sense.

NOTE: The opening words of chapter 3 are quite unusual - normally they would appear at the beginning of a book. We read that Habakkuk is ***"the prophet upon Shigionoth."***

The only other usage of this word is found in Psalm 7 where we read: ***"Shiggaion of David, which he sang unto the LORD, concerning the words of Cush the Benjamite."*** The word has something to do with music

The closing words of this chapter emphasize that this prayer was to be set to music - ***"To the chief singer on my stringed instruments."***

The word ***"prayer"*** is the Hebrew ***tephillah*** which is used 77 times in the Old Testament, 32 of which are found in the Psalms.

This chapter was a prayer hymn sung by the people of Israel in worship of the Lord.

Habakkuk's Prayer

3 A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, according to Shigionoth.

2 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.

3 God came from Teman, and the Holy One from Mount Paran.

Selah *His splendor covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise.*

4 His brightness was like the light; rays flashed from his hand; and there he veiled his power.

5 Before him went pestilence, and plague followed at his heels.

6 He stood and measured the earth; he looked and shook the nations; then the eternal mountains were scattered; the everlasting hills sank low. His were the everlasting ways.

7 I saw the tents of Cushan in affliction; the curtains of the land of Midian did tremble.

8 Was your wrath against the rivers, O Lord?

Was your anger against the rivers, or your indignation against the sea, when you rode on your horses, on your chariot of salvation?

*9 You stripped the sheath from your bow, calling for many arrows. **Selah***

You split the earth with rivers.

10 The mountains saw you and writhed; the raging waters swept on; the deep gave forth its voice; it lifted its hands on high.

11 The sun and moon stood still in their place, at the light of your arrows as they sped, at the flash of your glittering spear.

12 You marched through the earth in fury; you threshed the nations in anger.

*13 You went out for the salvation of your people, for the salvation of your anointed. You crushed the head of the house of the wicked, laying him bare from thigh to neck. **Selah***

14 You pierced with his own arrows the heads of his warriors, who came like a whirlwind to scatter me, rejoicing as if to devour the poor in secret.

15 You trampled the sea with your horses, the surging of mighty waters.

¹⁶ I hear, and my body trembles; my lips quiver at the sound; rottenness enters into my bones; my legs tremble beneath me. Yet I will quietly wait for the day of trouble to come upon people who invade us.

Habakkuk Rejoices in the Lord

¹⁷ 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,

¹⁸ yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will take joy in the God of my salvation.

¹⁹ God, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the deer's; he makes me tread on my high places. To the choirmaster: with stringed instruments.

LET'S PRAY...

Now quick review of what we seen so far.

1. THE REACTION OF THE PROPHET TO THE CORRUPTION OF HIS TIME HABAKKUK 1:2-4
2. THE RESPONSE OF GOD TO THE PROPHET'S REACTION – HABAKKUK 1:5-11
3. THE RECOGNITION OF THE CHARACTER AND PLAN OF GOD - HABAKKUK 1:12-17
4. THE RELUCTANCE OF THE PROPHET TO SPEAK UNTIL HE HEARS FROM THE LORD - HABAKKUK 2:1-4
5. THE REASONS WHY THE JUDGMENT OF GOD WOULD COME - HABAKKUK 2:5-8
6. THE REVENGE THAT WOULD COME UPON THE BABYLONIANS HABAKKUK 2:6-8
7. THE RESULTS WHICH GOD WILL BRING UPON THOSE WHO SIN AGAINST HIM - HAB 2:9-20
8. THE RELIANCE UPON GOD WHICH THE PROPHET DISPLAYED - HABAKKUK 3:1-16

“IT’S ALWAYS TOO SOON TO QUIT”

Habakkuk 3

Most of us recognize the name Anne Graham Lotz. She’s the daughter of Billy and Ruth Graham. Besides being a well-known author and speaker, she is also a keen observer of contemporary events.

In early July she called on American Christians to spend seven days in fervent prayer for our nation. This is part of what she wrote in her call to prayer:

"One of the things He has impressed on me is that we are living at the end of human history as we know it. In light of this, He has given me some practical assignments.

One was to be the Honorary Chair for the National Day of Prayer 2014 this past May.

He gave me the message I was to deliver, which was from Joel 1...the Day of the Lord is at hand.

It was a message warning that judgment is coming."

Then she added these words:

"Please be assured there is no other agenda in this initiative. This is not about promoting anything or anyone. This is all about calling God's people together to pray, before it's too late, and judgment falls on our nation."

I agree. We all agree. *America is in trouble.*

Evil is running rampant in our world.

Jesus must be glorified in our lives.

We desperately need the Holy Spirit to fall on us.

One phrase stood out to me: "Before it is too late."

We must pray for God’s mercy while we can. *There is a time when judgment comes.*

We have many phrases for this: When the chickens come home to roost, when skeletons come out of the closet, when it’s time to pay the piper.

Sooner or later we all face the consequences of the choices we have made.

This is true for nations and for individuals.

You cannot mock God forever, you cannot ignore him or pretend he isn't there, you cannot do as you please without inviting judgment from on high. I believe Anne Graham Lotz is right. *We need God to do something "before it's too late."*

That sounds a lot like Habakkuk. God had told him clearly: "Judgment is coming!" Now at last he understands the message.

When we come to Habakkuk 3, we turn a corner in our study.

The whole tone of the book changes. We move from confusion to clarity and from fear to faith. Here is the key observation on which the whole book turns:

Nothing has changed on the outside. Habakkuk has changed on the inside.

We find a lot of bad news in Habakkuk 1-2.

But Habakkuk 3 is full of good news.

The book ends on a note of hope and praise.

How did the prophet move from his initial worry and fear to a place of confidence, joy and praise? How did he get there when nothing around him has changed?

The people are still mocking God, violence still fills the streets, and the Babylonians are still coming to Jerusalem.

Outwardly everything is just as messed up as it was in the beginning.

Yet Habakkuk the man has changed on the inside.

How did that happen? This chapter gives us the answer.

The outline is very simple. Habakkuk 3 contains 3 things:

3 THINGS TO LEARN FROM THE PROPHET'S SPIRITUAL JOURNEY:

A prayer. A vision. A testimony.

1. PRAYER – 1-2

"Lord, I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds, Lord" (1).

"Repeat them in our day, in our time make them known. In wrath remember mercy" (2).

In the face of impending calamity, the prophet prays for a full manifestation of God's power and for mercy in the midst of judgment.

It's as if he is saying, *"Lord, I know bad times are coming. I accept that. I'm not fighting against your plan. But oh Lord, if hard times must come, don't let the Babylonians wipe us out. Remember mercy or we will perish!"*

That's a perfectly biblical prayer.

It's honest.

It's desperate.

It's the kind of prayer God will answer.

Notice that he asks God to do again in his day what he has done in the past.

Twice he says, "Do it now, Lord, in our day, in our time."

This ought to be the prayer of every thoughtful Christian at this critical moment of history.

We ought to read this prayer against that backdrop.

Everywhere I go I hear Christians asking what they can do.

Some people say we are on the brink of a great revival.

Perhaps that is true. I certainly hope so. *But I'm not sure about the timing.*

When I read about the First Great Awakening, the Second Great Awakening, the Layman's Prayer Revival, and the 1904 Welsh Revival that spread around the world, it feels like stories from another planet.

Are such things possible in our day?

It's easy to give in to doubt when you consider the gravity of the world situation.

But that may actually be a good sign because revivals usually come in desperate times.

You generally don't receive a miracle until you desperately need one.

It seems that God often will not move in power until things have fallen into dire straits.

If that is true, then I would say we are in a good place for a mighty move of God. I understand that revival is a sovereign work of God.

He can move from heaven any time he wants.

Fire comes down from above. It is not "worked up" from below.

But if revival fire must come down from heaven, we can at least put the kindling in place.

At the end of my ruminations on revival, I come back to an old Chinese prayer that goes like this:

“O Lord, change the world. Begin, I pray thee, with me.”

Or in the words of the old spiritual,

“It’s me, it’s me, O Lord, standing in the need of prayer.

Not my brother, not my sister, but it’s me, O Lord,

Standing in the need of prayer.”

My greatest challenge is the man in the mirror. That’s where revival must begin.

8. THE RELIANCE UPON GOD WHICH THE PROPHET DISPLAYED - HABAKKUK 3:1-16

9. THE REJOICING OF THE PROPHET IN THE LORD AND HIS SALVATION HABAKKUK- 3:17-19

- **His ATTITUDE was a clear reminder of the greatness of our God-2a**

"O LORD, I have heard Thy speech, and was afraid"

To "fear the LORD" is the beginning of wisdom and knowledge Proverbs 1:7

Proverbs 9:10 reminds us also that "the knowledge of the Holy (One) is understanding" -Proverbs 16:6 adds: "by the fear of the LORD men depart from evil'

- **His APPEAL to the LORD was based on his confidence in Who God is and what God can do - 2b**

He realized that God was going to judgment for the sins of His people, but he also appealed to the mercy of God in executing that judgment!

This prayer of Habakkuk centered on the possibility of deliverance and on mercy that would temper the judgment that he saw God must bring.

NOTE: The words "revive Thy work" remind us of God's active participation in our lives - it is HIS work!

Revival is a theme in Psalm 119:

v. 25 - "quicken Thou me according to Thy word"

v. 40 - "quicken me in Thy righteousness"

v. 50- "Thy word hath quickened me"

v. 88- "Quicken me after Thy lovingkindness" (also in v. 159)

v. 93 - "I will never forget Thy precepts: for with them Thou hast quickened me"

v. 107-"quicken me,O LORD, according unto Thy word"

v. 149-"quicken me according to Thy judgment" (also in v. 156)

Let's take them one at a time and see what we can learn from the prophet's spiritual journey.

2. VISION – 3-15

After his prayer Habakkuk has a vision of God. Theologians call this a theophany.

That's a fancy term for an appearance of God on the earth.

In this case, God revealed himself to Habakkuk in something like a dream or a vision.

The prophet recorded his experience in verses 3-15.

These verses are highly poetic, which is what you would expect when a man has a vision of God.

But the point is very clear.

Knowing that his nation faces imminent judgment, Habakkuk prays, "Lord, do something!"

This vision is God's answer.

It's as if God says, "Habakkuk, you've forgotten who I am. You're talking as if I can't hear you. As if I don't have any power. Let me show you who I am because if you understand who I am, you'll be able to sleep at night."

His Adoration Focused On The Acts Of God In The Past - 3-7

- The Place from which God came - 3a

"from Teman, and the Holy One from Mount Paran (another name for Mount Sinai)."

It emphasizes the holiness of God and the giving of His commands on the Mount to Moses -

Exodus 19:10, 22, 23

NOTE: The word "Selah" only appears in this chapter - outside of its usage in the Psalms. It would seem that it is somewhat of a musical break - like a pause of reflection.

- The Presence of God was overwhelming - 3b

"His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of His praise"

Exodus 19:18; 20:18

- The Power of God was emphasized in a graphic display – 4
- The Plagues of Egypt were a simple show of His mighty power – 5
- The Picture of His power is rooted in His creation and control of the planet- 6
- The People who saw and heard all He did were filled with fear – 7

"I saw the tents of Cushan in affliction: and the curtains of the land of Millian did tremble.,,

NOTE: The "tents of Cushan" remind us of "Cush" - or "Ethiopia" - and of the wife of Moses, a Cushite woman-Numbers 12:1.

His ANALYSIS Of The Coming Judgment Of God Upon Judah Was Based On What He Understood To Be The Anger Of God - 8-15

- The Target was not the rivers, and the sea – 8

NOTE: The word "chariots" are referring to the thunderclouds as the verses following describe the earth being flooded.

Psalms 104:3 says: "Who layeth the beams of His chambers in the waters: Who maketh the clouds His chariot" Who walketh upon the wings of the wind."

There could also be a subtle reference to the false god of Baal who is described in pagan literature as the "Rider of the clouds" and considered to be the "lord of the rain and storms."

- The Terror of a mighty warrior is described - 9a

NOTE: The words "oaths of the tribes" in Hebrew is literally "curses of the shafts" and probably connects with the word "bow" and refers to a great warrior Whose word is like the arrows shot by a mighty warrior.

Walter Kaiser in his book "Mastering the Old Testament" says of this verse: "The warrior described in this text certainly is no ordinary soldier. His weapons and the scope of His battle are cosmic. No mortal or earthly power will be able to withstand his assaults."

- The Trembling of all nature reveals the impact of His anger - 9b-11

- The Threshing of God's anger directed toward the "heathen" - 12
- The Triumph of the Lord and His Messiah brings salvation to the people of God - 13
- The Trampling of a world leader reveals that no one can stand before the Lord's anger - 14-15

Revelation 6:15-17; 19:17-21

v. 13 - "the head out of the house of the wicked"

v. 14 - "the head of his villages"

In these verses Habakkuk recounts God's activity in the past.

He especially focuses on the Exodus, the time in the wilderness, and the crossing of the Jordan River.

That was a period in which God repeatedly worked spectacular miracles.

By recounting all of this, God is saying, "Have you forgotten what I did for you in the past?"

If he did it before, he can do it again.

Sometimes we read the Bible and secretly wonder if God can do it again in the 21st-century.

Here is the answer. He's God! He can intervene any time he wants.

We can get a flavor of this theophany in verses 13-15 which focus on the defeat of Pharaoh at the Red Sea:

¹³ *You went out for the salvation of your people, for the salvation of your anointed. You crushed the head of the house of the wicked, laying him bare from thigh to neck. **Selah***

¹⁴ *You pierced with his own arrows the heads of his warriors, who came like a whirlwind to scatter me, rejoicing as if to devour the poor in secret.*

¹⁵ *You trampled the sea with your horses, the surging of mighty waters.*

Look at the verbs: You went out . . . You crushed . . . You laid bare/stripped . . . You pierced . . .

You trampled. This is what God did. He gets all the credit.

We can see two things very clearly here:

1. The utter defeat of those who oppose God.

2. The divine determination to do whatever it takes to deliver God's people.

Why is this here? Because many people have not found a God big enough for modern problems.

If you had a bigger God, you wouldn't worry as much.

If you had a bigger God, you would be stronger in the moment of crisis.

If you had a bigger God, you would be less tempted to compromise.

His ABILITY To Fathom The Power And Greatness Of God Left Him In A Weakened Condition - 16

“my body trembles”; “ my lips quiver”; “rottenness enters into my bones”; “my legs tremble beneath me.”

9. THE REJOICING OF THE PROPHET IN THE LORD AND HIS SALVATION HABAKKUK- 3:17-19

First there is acceptance:

¹⁶ *...Yet I will quietly wait for the day of trouble to come upon people who invade us. (v. 16).*

This is Habakkuk's way of saying, “I get it, Lord. The Babylonians will attack us and then you will judge them. I will wait for that day to come.”

As it turns out, Habakkuk most likely didn't live long enough because Babylon would not fall for almost 70 years. It doesn't matter.

Habakkuk's words mean, “Message received.”

Second, there is commitment.

Verses 17-18 show us what faith looks like when life tumbles in around us:

¹⁷ *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,*

¹⁸ *yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will take joy in the God of my salvation.*

The word “rejoice” literally means to jump for joy. We might even say it means to dance for joy.

But how is this possible?

Habakkuk has described a total economic meltdown. Ancient Israel was an agricultural society.

If you ran out of figs, olives, grapes, grain, sheep, and cattle, you were in big trouble. This isn't just a random list.

This is a portfolio!

What do you do when you are wiped out?

What if your investments disappear?

Recently the stock market hit an all-time high. Let me pose the question this way:

What would you do if tomorrow the stock market imploded? What if it totally tanked and went from 17,000 all the way to zero? What would you do then?

Investments gone.

Pension destroyed.

401(k) wiped out.

What then?

How do you face that?

What if you lose your job?

What if the safety net fails?

What if you run out of food?

What if you can't pay your bills?

What if your children end up in jail?

What if your loved ones never come to Christ?

What if the doctor says, "It's terminal"?

What if your spouse has a heart attack and you are left alone?

What if America falls to a foreign power?

What if you lose your job because you are a Christian?

What if you end up in jail for your faith?

What then?

Could you say, "Yes, Lord," when the dearest thing in life was taken from you?

Too many Christians have a God of the good times.

They serve God and love him and praise him when all is going well.

But what will you do when hard times come?

If all you have is a God of the good times, you don't have the God of the Bible.

Sometimes the fig tree does not bud.

Sometimes there are no grapes on the vine.

Sometimes the olive crop fails.

Sometimes the fields produce no food.

Sometimes there are no sheep in the pen.

Sometimes there are no cattle in the stalls.

What do you do then? You can get angry with God or you can give up on God altogether.

Or you can choose to believe in God anyway.

Often we mistake faith and our feelings.

Faith isn't about my feelings, much less about my circumstances.

Faith chooses to believe when it would be easier to stop believing.

Habakkuk said, "I will wait patiently" and "I will rejoice."

He found new strength in the midst of desolation.

3. Testimony – 17-19

Now we come to the end of the book.

His DEPENDENCY upon the Lord would not change even if the circumstances of life deteriorated – 16

His DELIGHT was in the Lord alone – 18

His DECISION was based on what the LORD could and would do - 19

The last verse of Habakkuk is often overlooked:

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

The phrase “my feet” speaks of our journey through life.

If you have ever traveled to the Holy Land, then you probably saw deer scampering on the barren hills near the west side of the Dead Sea.

The deer are sure-footed where the rest of us would slip and slide and eventually fall.

If you know the Lord, he will give you stability in the slippery moments of life.

He will give you grace to stand when otherwise you would fall apart.

It reminds me of Ephesians 6:13 which says that when we put on the armor of God and “having done all,” we will stand safe and secure when the battle is over.

That’s where the book ends, and that’s where we will end our journey.

Let me repeat once again the single most important observation from Habakkuk.

As the book ends, nothing has changed on the outside.

The people of Judah have still forgotten God. Violence still reigns in Jerusalem.

The wicked still oppress the righteous.

And the Babylonians are still God’s appointed instrument for judgment.

Hard times are coming and there is nothing anyone can do about it.

Nothing has changed!

Except this.

Habakkuk has changed on the inside.

We all come from different situations.

Some are happy, some are sad.

Some are healthy, some are sick.

Some are excited about the future, some face dark clouds of uncertainty.

But if we know the Lord, if God is our Savior, we can still have feet to tread on the heights in the worst moments of life. We can stand when others fall around us.

When V. Raymond Edman was president of Wheaton College, he used to tell the students, *“It’s always too soon to quit.”*

That’s a good motto for us as we wrap up our study of Habakkuk.

I told you in the first message that Habakkuk is “Strong Faith for Confusing Times.”

Everyone reading my words is in one of three places:

You’re coming out of confusing times.

You’re in confusing times.

Or you're about to go into confusing times and you just don't know it yet.

So take this series and put it in your back pocket.

If you don't need it today, you'll need it tomorrow or the day after tomorrow.

I leave you with one final thought.

You'll never know that Jesus is all you need until Jesus is all you have.

And when Jesus is you have, then and only then will you discover that Jesus is all you need.

That's the real message of the little book of Habakkuk.

As the book ends, nothing has changed on the outside.

But Habakkuk has changed on the inside.