

V. Habakkuk in Biblical Perspective
A Prophet and His Conversation with God
“A Psalm of Praise and Prayer”

Habakkuk 3

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We will spend the next two studies looking at Habakkuk 3 as we specifically look at verses 1–16 in this study. Habakkuk the Prophet identifies himself in verse 1 and remember that his name means ‘wrestler’ or ‘grappler.’ He has wrestled with God in this conversation. This is an interesting book of prophecy because it’s not a book of prophecy that was initiated by God telling a Prophet to record a prophecy, but it was initiated by the Prophet Habakkuk bringing to God his laments. He brought forth to God two complaints and God answers those complaints while in the God’s second response instructs Habakkuk to write this down so that we have this prophecy.

We will see two things in Habakkuk 3 and that is Shigionoth and Selah which tells us this is also a song. We will also see that it was written for the stringed instruments. I don’t know exactly what Shigionoth means but what we have here is a psalm that is a prayer with praise and petition. Habakkuk 1 and 2 is written under the vision that God has given to Habakkuk and like most of the other psalms Habakkuk 3 is also used for praise and petition. We know it’s a psalm because it bears those psalm metrics and measurements which in fact is Shigionoth when accompanied the psalms and Selah identified certain psalm endings and declarations. Because it was written for stringed instruments it was also designed to be sung by the people of God.

I want to remind you that the complaint Habakkuk had was that he had seen a downward spiral of the people of God. This is not him observing the sins and the surrounding culture but this was him watching the people of God migrating back to pagan worship even to those idols that called for child sacrifice. There was false teaching, immorality and these other things happening. He was aware of what had happened a century earlier where the ten tribes in the north had committed similar apostasies, come under the judgment of God by the Assyrians and had dispersed throughout the empire. So Habakkuk calls upon God for these two remaining tribes of Benjamin and Judah who had been faithful to temple worship in Jerusalem, to rescue them from the same apostasy.

Habakkuk has been engaged for a lengthy time which is the reason he says to God in Habakkuk 1:6, ‘How long O Lord will You delay?’ He assumed God has delayed because God did not meet his time table. He also assumed that God’s delay must be because of either disinterest or disconnection from His people. God answers Habakkuk’s complaint and tells him to look around to see what He is doing in the nations for He is not delaying. He basically reminds Habakkuk of His sovereignty and that all that is going on is under His authority and judgment. He tells Habakkuk how He used the Assyrians to bring judgment on the ten northern tribes but then brought judgment upon the Assyrians with the Babylonians whom God is raising up to use to discipline His people in Judah and Jerusalem.

This is all happening during the three raids of the Babylonian Captivity where during their third time they will come to destroy the temple and Jerusalem. Habakkuk is written between 609 B.C and 586 B.C. sometime in this 25 year period. So we know that God has told Habakkuk that He has not delayed, is not disconnected but that He is working for all that is

happening is His sovereign hand over all the nations. He also tells Habakkuk that He is going to do something Habakkuk will not understand or believe it and will not want to believe it.

That is that God is raising up these Babylonians who already have this reputation of wickedness, violence and tyranny in the known world and Habakkuk doesn't understand how God can use those who are more wicked than His people to discipline His people. God tells Habakkuk in His sovereignty, while God is never the author of sin, He is the order of all things even as He uses the sinfulness of Babylon to discipline His people, God will raise up another empire who will bring judgment upon Babylon. God pronounces five 'woes' upon the Babylonians that will occur in Habakkuk 2

After both of Habakkuk's complaints and God's responses, Habakkuk has connected a few points. One is that when he made his first complaint God told him to 'look.' So Habakkuk went up on a watch tower to look and then after his second complaint Habakkuk told God that His answer would become Habakkuk's answer. In the last study we saw how Habakkuk took the posture of a learner, took the position and persistence of a learner and because of that God's answer has become his answer and the result is this psalm in Habakkuk 3. This psalm is a psalm of praise and two petitions. So let's look into Habakkuk 3.

Habakkuk 3:1–2 says [1] *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.*

Before we get into this I want to go back to this significant verse in Habakkuk. What does it look like for God's covenant people? Habakkuk 2:4 says [4] *"Behold, his soul (referring to the Chaldeans) is puffed up; it is not upright within him, but the righteous shall live by his faith."* This text is quoted three times in the New Testament. It is in Galatians, Hebrews and probably the most familiar is Romans 1:16–17 which says [16] *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. [17] For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."* Heaven is not for forgiven people, heaven is for righteous people. His forgiveness gets me out of hell but it's His righteousness that gets me into heaven.

How do I get that righteousness and forgiveness? You get it by faith in Him for the righteous shall live by faith. This also can be translated the righteous shall live by His faith. The Hebrew language is given more toward the passion of language than to the precision of language, where the Greek is given more toward the precision than the passion. When you believe in Jesus you receive His righteousness so the righteous shall live by faith, in the promises of God in the Old Testament and the Promised One in whom all the promises are 'yes' and 'amen' as we arrive in the New Testament, who is Jesus Christ. As you believe in Him you receive His righteousness that is imputed to you and your sin is reckoned to His account as He bore your sins on the cross and paid for them which gave you forgiveness. His righteousness makes you accepted in the beloved. You gain this by the glorious truth that you receive Him by faith which comes with all His blessings and benefits.

But a saving faith is a living faith and this is something that Habakkuk is now finally learning. You are not only accounted positionally as righteous but you then begin to live by faith. So you not only believe in Him so your status is changed but you believe in Him so that

your life is changed. Hebrews 11 tells us that everybody you died in faith are the same as those who lived by faith. Habakkuk has also found out that a living faith is a learning faith and a learning faith is a lasting faith. It is not a perfect faith but a persistent faith, a persevering faith. Now Habakkuk's whole prayer life has not changed to prayer and petition based upon the One in whom he believes.

When the Apostle Paul is dying the last thing he writes includes a testimonial statement that says 'I *suffer* these things..' for he had that calling and he was not ashamed so his saving faith was a learning faith. We see this in the life of Paul when he says in II Timothy 1:12, *[12] which is why I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that day what has been entrusted to me.* A saving faith has an object and that object is not the benefits of salvation but is the Savior Himself. I know not when I believe, what I believe, that I believe but Whom I believe. He is able! When you believe in Him it is because you have a learning faith – I know. Then you have a living faith – I have entrusted myself to Him.

When all of this has worked in your life it changes everything. Now instead of the complaining prayer something happens. No longer is Habakkuk the grappling Prophet but he becomes the trusting Prophet. He is no longer the complaining Prophet but the committed Prophet. He is no longer the searching Prophet but the singing Prophet. He is no longer a careless Prophet but a Prophet whose cares have been met in the One who he now trusts. He has looked, listened and learned. God's answer has become his answer. The result is he comes to God with a psalm of prayer and praise with two declarations and two requests.

We see the declarations in Habakkuk 3:2 with the first declaration being that he has heard the report and he has learned this which is now affecting the way he is living. He has learned the report of You. You are the sovereign, sufficient God of glory and grace who is gracious, merciful, holy and righteous. You are never off time but on time, at the right time and working all the time. He has not only heard the report of who God is but what God does. The result of what he has heard is that Habakkuk fears – I fear.

How many sermons do we hear on the doctrine of hell today? Have you heard many of us praying for revival or have you prayed for revival? Have you prayed for God to raise up revival preaching? I would suggest you go read the history of revivals. When you read of the preachers of the revivals and the Great Awakening with preachers like the Tennent brothers or Howell Harris or Daniel Rowland or George Whitefield or John Wesley or Charles Wesley or Jonathan Edwards, their sermons are saturated with the warnings of hell. So when were the last sermons from televangelists that dealt with thoughtfully, humbly, compassionately, brokenheartedly but clearly the doctrine of hell or when it was preached was it done obnoxiously or boisterously in its deliverance? Habakkuk ends verse 2 saying 'in wrath remember mercy.'

Secondly, how many sermons are on the fear of God? I will confess that both of those subjects are tough to deal with in your desire to be clear, compassionate and in the depth of conviction but the fear of the Lord and the call to the fear of the Lord has disappeared. I think it shows up in the way we assemble for worship and in the way we view worship. When I speak of this I'm speaking of what Habakkuk knows. He knows God is merciful and gracious but that has not diminished his awe of God but it has only heightened his awe of God, to know this God is at work. As Habakkuk 3:2 says, I have heard of your work, O Lord, and I fear.

This is not the fear of men or the fear of death. It is not the fear of circumstances or the phobias of the world or the phobias attached to sin. It is that sanctifying, wisdom begetting, carefulness of life that comes with the fear of the Lord. John Owens says the fear of the Lord in

the life of a believer is when the smile of God upon our obedience to Christ is our greatest desire and the frown of God upon our carelessness in life, our greatest dread.

I don't really hear sermons about the Gospel of grace that declare a real, true, personal relationship with God. I hear things like God died for your sins and none of your sins can separate you from Him because of the blood of Jesus and the result is that if you believe in grace shows up in a cavalier and careless way as you lead your Christian life under the eye of God. With this stupid statements are made like 'it's always easier to get forgiveness than permission.' When someone starts off by saying 'with all due respect' usually what is coming next is not with due respect so I want to be careful on that.

Do you know what it took for you to get forgiveness? It was the suffering and blood of Jesus. So would I not hate the sin in my life that was the cause? It was not the motivation but it was the cause of His atoning death. The motivation was His love, grace and mercy. Why would I be cavalier about those things? Habakkuk has become fully aware that God by His grace is at work and will be working and his first notion is not cavalier but that He sees that this is the God who is holy. This is one of the reasons I was always deeply appreciative of R.C. Sproul's ministry because the driving impetus of everything he did was that the church would recapture in its Gospel life the sense and manifestation of the holiness of God, that there is none like Him. It is the attribute of all attributes. Therefore we fear, we reverence Him.

We are in awe to know that while we are singing praise to God, the Spirit of God is taking what we have sung into His presence. Am I taking hold of truth and with my heart making melody and with my voice speaking what fills my heart? The Spirit of God is translating it into groanings too deep to be uttered. God, has this brought a smile to You? This gives Him pleasure but this doesn't earn your salvation. You do have a real relationship with Him as He says in His Word 'draw near to God and He will draw near to you.' There is a true reciprocal relationship with Him and He is so holy that the inanimate objects of the thresholds of heaven have the sense to tremble in His presence. This is what Habakkuk declares that in awe and majesty he has heard the report of who God is and what He has done.

Then Habakkuk makes two requests. The first one is when he says in Habakkuk 3:2 'in the midst of the years revive it' and the 'it' is referring to God's work which is His glory by His grace in His covenant people. Notice the careful movement of reverence where Habakkuk is no longer putting God on his timetable. He just says 'God, in the midst of what is going on would you please just revive Your work?' It is because he knows if God is bringing discipline then He is bringing it to revive His people. No longer is Habakkuk have that slight hint of self-righteousness asking God to get onto these people who aren't as serious about God as he is. Now with humility and the fear of the Lord he is asking God to revive His work according to His timetable.

Then Habakkuk gives a second request in Habakkuk 3:2 and that is in Your wrath remember mercy. God has every right to bring judgment out of His wrath but Habakkuk asks for mercy. So in God's wrath of His righteous judgment Habakkuk wants God to bring revival and mercy among His people. Only the Lord can bring revival. God is going to do what Habakkuk has asked. A contemporary of Habakkuk is Jeremiah and Jeremiah will communicate that as God brings the hand of discipline which will be for 70 years and God will then bring them back. And He will rebuild the temple, restore the offerings, raise up a Zerubbabel and a Joshua the High Priest and a governor named Nehemiah to follow. God's mercy and grace will be seen in the midst of His mercy and discipline and there will be revival. God's answer to this prayer of Habakkuk will be made known at the conclusion of this Babylonian captivity.

Habakkuk's saving faith is a learning faith, a living faith and a lasting faith as he rests now in the Lord of glory. Then he records some of the things the Lord has done. Habakkuk 3:3–

16 says, [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.*

This is what God has done in the past. There are references to the flood, the hand of God, when the people came into the Promised Land and many other references but I just want you to notice a couple of things. Notice that God's work is judgment, revival and salvation and He does it for and through His anointed. That's not only a reference immediately to His covenant people, Israel, but that is a reference ultimately to Jesus, who will crush the head of the house of rebellion at the cross. This is ultimately fulfilled in Christ, even as it's immediately fulfilled in the days of Habakkuk. As it is ultimately fulfilled in Christ it will become the benefit for us because God's reviving work to bring the people back from Babylon, to bring judgment upon Babylon and rebuild the temple will not simply be a reclamation and revival after those 70 years, but it will be to set up the progress of His work of redemption so that over 400 years later there would be a greater Temple where the Word becomes flesh and dwells among us.

There will be a greater judgment by an Anointed One and that greater judgment will be the victory of Christ at the cross and His triumphal resurrection from the grave. There will be a greater revival and that is the claiming of God's new covenant people from all the nations into the Promised Land of eternity of a new heavens and a new earth. Don't miss the fact that all of this is being fulfilled in Christ and then ultimately fulfilled when He returns, as surety even as Habakkuk assures you that the report of God's work is an historical fact.

He is quoting what God has done here as historical fact or as Dr. Schaeffer would say 'true truth.' The Bible is not a collection of a wish list of myths built around the notions and ideas of men. The Bible is the gathering of the truths of the facts of who God is and what God has done. Not only do you have a rehearsal of what He has done but you have a prophecy of what He will do. A simple definition of prophecy is prewritten history. The God who tells you what He is going to do is the God who has already recorded for you what He did do and what He did do was fulfilled His promises.

Now that He has prophesied you have more promises and those will be done. I have heard the report of You, God, and I stand in awe. Now revive Your work and in the midst of Your wrath as it falls upon, rightly, humanity, remember mercy. Save Your people and may they cry out in praise to You, let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be in Your Word and thank You so much for the blessings of this absolutely astounding prophecy. Thank You that the grappler has now come to rest in the promises of his God as he has heard the report of who his God is from his God and what his God has done. Now with the Prophet we sing his song of praise and petition—O Lord, revive Thy work in the midst of the years and make it known that Your renown would cover the earth with praise and glories as waters cover the sea. Lord, in wrath remember mercy and may the mercy and grace of the Redeemer, the Anointed One, spread through all the earth, Selah, Amen.