

## **“The Prayer of Habakkuk” (part 2)**

Habakkuk 3:1-19

One of the most influential Christians to have ever lived was John Wesley. Born in 1703 and converted to faith in Jesus Christ in 1738. While on his deathbed in 1791, he reflected back on his life. Wesley had traveled more than 250,000 miles by horseback and had preached more than 40,000 sermons. On his last night on earth, he called his family to his bedside, they all began singing the hymn, “I’ll Praise My Maker While I Have Breath.”

*I’ll praise my Maker while I’ve breath,  
And when my voice is lost in death,  
Praise shall employ my nobler pow’rs;  
My days of praise shall ne’er be past,  
While life and thought and being last,  
Or immortality endures.*

*Why should I make a man my trust?  
Princes must die and turn to dust;  
Vain is the help of flesh and blood:  
Their breath departs, their pomp and pow’r  
And thoughts all vanish in an hour,  
Nor can they make their promise good.*

*How happy they whose hopes rely  
On Israel’s God, Who made the sky  
And earth and seas with all their train:  
His truth forever stands secure;  
He saves th’ oppressed, He feeds the poor,*

*And none shall find His promise vain.*

And despite being in the final moments of his life, those who were gathered around him realized how well John Wesley had learned the lesson of praising God in every circumstance of life. His final words were these:

*“Best of all, God is with us.”*

I want to ask you a question—No matter the season of life you’re in, have you learned to praise God anyway? Or, do your circumstances have to be certain way for you to really worship God? Habakkuk is going to show us how we can worship God, regardless of uncomfortable circumstances. If you have your Bible there with you, take it and turn with me to the third chapter of Habakkuk. This morning, I want to preach one final message from this book. We’ve spent some time together in this little book tucked away in the Old Testament, and we have been considering the subject of faith in a time of crisis. I’ve showed you how Habakkuk’s generation had drifted away from the Lord God. Judah had given itself over to the worship of idols. God’s law was being ignored, sin was rampant, and justice was non-existent. Barring a move of God, the nation was headed for disaster.

Habakkuk is troubled by all that is happening around him. He asks questions about what he perceives as God’s inactivity. How long would it be before He did something? God’s answer comes in chapter 1:

**1:5—“Look among the nations, and see; wonder and be astounded. For I am doing a work in your days that you would not believe if told.”**

The work that God was doing involved raising up Babylon whom He would use as an instrument of judgment against the sin of His people. The Babylonians would

carry Judah away into captivity. Upon hearing it, once more Habakkuk pours out his complaint to God. This time, he wrestles with the fact that God is going to use a pagan nation to chastise His people. His name means to wrestle or to embrace, and that's what we see him doing in these three chapters. We see him wrestling with God in chapter 1 and asking his questions. God reveals His plans to the prophet in chapter 2 and reminds him of His control. In chapter 3, Habakkuk embraces God in humility and surrendered faith. The key verse is:

**2:4—“The righteous shall live by his faith.”**

In chapter 1, Habakkuk's faith is being tested. In chapter 2, faith is taught. And now in chapter 3, we see a picture of faith that's triumphant, the kind of faith that transcends the circumstances of life and looks to God with confident hope.

You will notice that this chapter is a prayer that Habakkuk prays. All told, there are more than 650 prayers found in the pages of Scripture, and the prayer of Habakkuk is one of the greatest. The language is crafted in a similar way to the Psalms. He makes his requests known in the first couple of verses. Then, for most of the chapter, he remembers the ways that God had shown Himself powerful on behalf of His people. The prophet will then end the book by rejoicing in the God of his salvation (Requesting, Remembering, Rejoicing). I've outlined the prayer of Habakkuk under three headings—responding to God's Word, reflecting on God's work, and rejoicing in God's will.

### **1—RESPONDING to God's Word (3:1-2)**

*“A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, according to Shigionoth. 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.”*

We've already considered the first part of chapter 3 where Habakkuk begins his prayer by responding to God's Word. His response to what God had revealed to him is seen here in this third chapter. We noticed his attitude, his approach, and his appeal.

### His attitude

Verse 1 begins by saying, "A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, according to Shigionoth." The term 'shigionoth' may refer to a musical arrangement because the chapter is a hymn or an anthem of praise. It signifies a loud cry of praise in a time of pain. The tone of Habakkuk in this third chapter is most definitely different than his tone in chapter 1. As far as his outward circumstances, nothing had changed. Up until now, he's been looking at Judah, at the Chaldeans, at himself and his own troubles. God had been blurred in the background. But now, things are reversed. God is foremost in his heart, and everything else has shifted into the background. After having been confronted with a vision and a promise, he is now in a humble position of trust. He's learning some things. The knowledge that he has come to receive is now feeding his faith.

### His approach

Notice the way that Habakkuk begins his prayer in verse 2 as he humbly approaches God in response to His Word. He says, "O Lord, I have heard the report of You, and Your work, O Lord, do I fear." The word 'report' is the Hebrew word 'shema' that comes from a word that means to hear or perceive. He is saying, "I've learned something about You from Your Word, and I bow before You in worship. I have witnessed Your work, and I submit my life to You in reverential awe." He is saying, "In You, O Lord, I place all of my trust. Your will be done!"

This is the way that Jesus taught His disciples to pray. In the model prayer, He said:

**Matthew 6:9-10—“Pray then like this: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”**

His appeal

He says in verse 2, I've heard Your report, 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.”

**“Revive”** — *to renew and rekindle*

Think about what he is not asking for. He's not asking God to spare Judah from the Babylonians. Neither is he asking for an easy road. He's not asking for personal escape from what was coming. There's none of that. Instead, he asks God to use it all for His glory and to bring about a revival of His work among His people.

Can you pray that way? Faith is coming to God on His terms, in obedience to His Word, with concern for His agenda above anything and everything else.

That's what Habakkuk does here.

I want you to notice a second heading in the chapter:

## **2—REFLECTING on God's work (3:3-16)**

*“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. His brightness was like the light; rays flashed from His hand; and there He veiled His*

*power. Before Him went pestilence, and plague followed at His heels. 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.”*

Faced with the fear of an invading nation, the prophet now reminds himself of what he knows. He knows that God is mighty, and he reflects upon the powerful activity of God in the past. Remembering who the Lord is and what He has done is going to restore Habakkuk’s joy and bring him confidence over fear of the future.

Let me tell you, that is why knowledge is so important. There are some situations in life in which knowledge alone will help see us through. Emotion will not save us. Reason will not save us. The only thing that can come to our aid is knowledge of what we know to be true.

**Daniel 11:32—“...the people who know their God shall stand firm and take action.”**

In other words, it is the knowledge of God and His truth that gives us strength to confront the issues of life. How?

- Confidence for the unknowns of life

The knowledge of God gives us the ability to make the right response to the circumstances of life. Those who know God have the confidence and ability to do the right thing. They are simply acting on what they know is true.

- Security in the difficult seasons of life

Knowing God in His Word is what serves as the basis of our security in life.

Listen to what the psalmist says:

**Psalm 46:1-3—“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea.”**

Even when the ground shakes beneath our feet, it is the knowledge of God that gives us security.

- Wisdom for the hard decisions of life

Paul prays in Ephesians 1:17, “that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him.” It is the ability to know what God wants and how to apply it where you live.

**Proverbs 9:10—“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.”**

That verse is saying that the knowledge of God will show you how to live a wise life. You can have a lot of education but no real wisdom. God gives His people an uncommon sense, wisdom from another world.

- Order in the chaos of life

The apostle Peter says the knowledge of God can give you a well-ordered life. He says:

**2 Peter 1:2-3—“Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us.”**

It is the knowledge of God that brings order to the chaos of life. Does life ever seem chaotic to you? It does to me! Peter says the knowledge of God gives a

person grace, peace, and power. It helps us 'see' that His divine power has granted to us everything for life and godliness.

Beginning in verse 3 going all the way through verse 15, Habakkuk describes what he knows about the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He is reminding himself of what God has done. He has focused his mind on the facts of history. He praises God for what is past, which will then free him trust God for what is to come. He is recalling the faithfulness of God that has been seen in several ways:

#### The splendor of His person (v. 3-5)

In verse 3, Habakkuk goes back in redemptive history and reflects upon the way that God had revealed His glory to His people. He traces Israel's steps from Mt. Sinai to the Promised Land. Teman and Paran are mountain ranges on the Sinai peninsula. It is Habakkuk's way of remembering how God appeared at Mt. Sinai and revealed His glory to Moses. Verse 5 refers to pestilence and plague, taking us back to Egypt where God poured out His judgment on the pride of Pharaoh and his armies.

#### The scope of His power (v. 6-9)

Verse 6 says that God stood and measured the earth, a sign that it is in His possession. To measure something is an indication that it is yours, and you can do with it what you please. It is symbolic way of saying that God holds the nations accountable.

#### The salvation of His people (v. 10-16)

Habakkuk uses poetic imagery to describe Israel's march through the wilderness as they followed the Lord to the Promised Land and laid claim to their

inheritance. God split the Red Sea to lead His people out of Egypt, and He split the Jordan River to lead His people into Canaan. The chariots of Egypt were destroyed, but God's chariot was the chariot of salvation. The idea is that God had fought the battles that were necessary and had secured salvation for His own. Habakkuk is going back through history and rehearses the works of God as He has gone out with the purpose of achieving the salvation of His people.

In the midst of a crisis, Habakkuk is reflecting on God's work in history as He has acted on His people's behalf. Let me tell you, biblical faith is not a series of hypotheticals. It is not merely untested ideas. The Christian faith is rooted in history, in a God who has broken into time and space to achieve the salvation of those who trust in His Son. It is an understanding of this that delivers you and me from fear and supplies us with the strength we need when times get tough. It is faith in the revealed Word of God.

In something I was reading this week, I came across the testimony of Joseph Ton, a Romanian pastor who became the director of the Romanian Missionary Society based here in the U.S. He became a Christian in Romania during the dark days of Soviet communism. During his college years, he grew in his faith despite the attempts of others who tried to indoctrinate him with the Marxist worldview. Sensing a call to the pastorate, he enrolled in the Baptist seminary in Bucharest.

One day, a friend gave him a book by a liberal theologian who attacked the doctrine of the atonement by making the claim that it was all metaphor. Greatly troubled, he went to his professor who simply said, "This man is a great theologian. If he says something is so, then it must be so." Ton later wrote:

*“At that moment I saw my faith, like scaffolding in my insides, going down in pieces. Everything in me was demolished. I went to my room and said, ‘It is risky to preach the gospel here. I was ready to risk my life for the truth, but for metaphors I will risk nothing.’”*

Metaphors won't do a thing for a man who finds himself between a rock and a hard place in life. Are we to assume that the biblical writers were simply misguided, misinformed or delusional? No one risks his life for a book full that's full of nothing but fantasy and myth. That's not what we find in the Bible, my friend. This book tells the story of what God has done in the past to secure my salvation in the present and give me hope for my tomorrows.

In these verses, Habakkuk has reminded himself of what God has done. He has focused on the facts of history. He praises God for what is past, which then allows him to trust God for what is yet to come.

In his prayer, Habakkuk goes back through Israel's history and traces God's hand of omnipotence. Prayer is our response to what God has revealed about Himself in His Word. Our prayer lives must be grounded in the truth of Scripture. The promises of God must become the fountainhead of all our hope. Prayer is asking God to act according to His Word. That's the kind of praying that moves heaven and earth. It is prayer that is Scripture-fed, and Spirit-led. It remembers what God has done.

This is why it is important for us to keep our eyes on God's purpose in the world rather than the circumstances we find ourselves in. No matter our circumstances, God's purpose will prevail. He has gone out for the salvation of His people and will continue to until the day Christ appears.

### **3—REJOICING in God's will (3:16-19)**

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

We find in these verses one of the greatest confessions of faith anywhere in the Bible. Habakkuk has been faced with the uncomfortable truth that his nation will soon be invaded by the ruthless Babylonians. The will of God involved pain. He was about to lose everything that he had held near and dear—his home, his land, his livelihood. He says in verse 16 that he trembles, yet he also trusts.

#### The situation from which he rejoices

He says in verse 17, “Though the fig tree may 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, yet I will rejoice in the Lord.” In other words, when my livelihood is gone, when my paycheck runs out, when the weatherman says that rain is in the forecast, I’m going to rejoice anyhow.

When you understand who God is and what He has done, you are then free to rejoice no matter what you may be up against. That’s what Habakkuk does. Now, that does not mean he is not afraid. He is pretty clear in verse 16 as far as his feelings are concerned. The Chaldeans were on the move and Judah was in their sights. He basically says, “I know God is in control, I know He has a plan in mind, but I’m scared.” He is not scared because he has a lack of faith. He is

scared because he is human. It shook him to the core to think of what was just over the horizon. The difference in his life, however, is this—he's not going to let what he feels dictate what he believes. His faith is not subservient to his feelings. His feelings are subservient to his faith.

**Warren Wiersbe** —*“If Habakkuk had depended on his feelings, he would never have made this great confession of faith. If Habakkuk looked ahead, he saw a nation heading for destruction, and that frightened him. When he looked within, he saw himself trembling with fear, and when he looked around, he saw everything in the economy about to fall apart. But when he looked up by faith, he saw God, and all his fears vanished.”*

You might have the worst circumstances possible, and you might be an emotional basket case. But let me tell you that it doesn't affect your relationship to God in the least bit. I can feel overwhelmed by my circumstances at times, but as someone who has faith in Jesus Christ, I can rejoice in the fact that I am secure. My circumstances on the outside cannot touch my relationship to God on the inside. That's why you should never confuse your standing with your state. My standing never changes, while my state can be in flux.

This is why Habakkuk can rejoice here at the close of the chapter. Even though the way was about to get rough and bumpy as far as his state was concerned, he knew that his standing before God was secure.

#### The source in whom he rejoices

The source of his joy is not outward, but inward. It is not found in his circumstances. Rather, the source of his joy is God Himself. He says in verse 18, “I will rejoice in the Lord; I will take joy in the God of my salvation.” Like the psalmist before him, Habakkuk could say:

**Psalm 121:1-8—“I will lift up my eyes to the hills—from whence comes my help? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth. He will not allow your foot to be moved; He who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, He who keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade at your right hand. The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord shall preserve you from all evil; He shall preserve your soul. The Lord shall preserve your going out and your coming in from this time forth, and even forevermore.”**

The world around him would soon fall apart, but Habakkuk could rejoice in the Lord. Paul says the same thing:

**1 Thessalonians 5:16-18—“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”**

Confidence in the Christian life is not about you and me mustering up courage. It does not mean we psych ourselves up and refuse to take an honest look at the difficulty in front of us. The arm of flesh will fail us every time, but the joy of the Lord is our strength. It is His joy that is being supernaturally produced in me.

The salvation for which he rejoices

Habakkuk says, “I will take joy in the God of my salvation. God, the Lord, is my strength; He makes my feet like the deer’s; He makes me tread on my high places.”

That’s an interesting illustration, isn’t it? What exactly does he mean when he says that the Lord makes his feet like a deer’s? We’ve got a bunch of deer in the woods around our house. Most mornings, I can watch several of them in our

backyard just before sunrise. I've watched them clear a fence like it was nothing. Deer are swift and nimble on their feet. It is a picture of liberation.

David used this same word picture. He had been pursued by Saul and oppressed on every side. But he wrote:

**Psalm 18:32-33—“It is God who arms me with strength, and makes my way perfect. He makes my feet like the feet of deer, and sets me on my high places.”**

Do you ever feel like you're weighed down in life by the pressure of your circumstances? Sometimes it can even be hard to pick up one foot and put it in front of the other. Your steps are heavy. Habakkuk was there in chapter 1. He felt his world was spinning out of control. But when he took his eyes off the stuff that was happening and put them instead on the One who reigned supremely, it put a spring in his step. Outwardly, things remained the same. But inwardly, he could rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

**G. Campbell Morgan** — *“Our joy is in proportion to our trust and our trust is in proportion to our knowledge of God.”*

The joy of the Lord is our strength! But to have His joy, you must have His life. Do you know Him personally? To be a Christian is to be someone who is in possession of the life of God inwardly. It is a life of exchange. The One who had no sin became your sin on the cross so that you could have His righteousness, His life, and His joy.