

# Habakkuk 3 - Habakkuk Prays for God to Intervene in History; Hymn in Praise

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## II. Habakkuk praises God (Hab 3:1-19)

Having received the revelation that *Yahweh* would destroy Babylon, Habakkuk could understand that He was just in using that wicked nation to discipline Israel. Babylon would not go free but would perish for her sins. Israel's punishment, on the other hand, was only temporary (Cf. 2 Sam 7:16). This insight led Habakkuk to write the prayer of praise that concludes the book. It is one of the most moving statements of faith and trust found in Scripture.

### Habakkuk 3

- (1) His prayer for God to intervene in history in order to accomplish His sovereign purposes (3:1-2)
    - (A) Introduction (3:1)
- 1** A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, according to **Shigionoth**.
- 1** A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, according to Shigionoth.
- 1** A prayer by the prophet Habakkuk, set to music.
- 1** A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet upon Shigionoth.
- "...Shigionoth" - may be the title of the tune that the prophet, and later Israelites, used when they sang this song

- The Hebrew word is the plural form of the same word used in the title of Ps 7, but nowhere else
- Shiggaion evidently means a poem with intense feeling, a song delivered in the greatest excitement or with a rapid change of emotion
- If this meaning is correct, the Israelites were to sing it enthusiastically. The intense feeling, in both contexts where the word occurs, is a strong desire for justice against sin.

(B) Prayer for intervention (3:2a)

(C) Prayer for mercy (3:2b)

**2** LORD, I have heard the report about You, *and* I was afraid. LORD, revive Your work in the midst of the years, In the midst of the years make *it* known. In anger remember mercy.

**2** LORD, I have heard the report about You *and* I fear. O LORD, revive Your work in the midst of the years, In the midst of the years make it known; In wrath remember mercy.

**2** LORD, as I listen to what has been said about you, I am afraid. LORD, revive your work throughout all of our lives— reveal yourself throughout all of our lives— when you are angry, remember compassion.

**2** O LORD, I have heard thy speech, and was afraid: O LORD, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy.

- The prophet acknowledged that he had received the LORD's revelation (Cf. 2:1). It was essentially a revelation of Yahweh: His justice, sovereignty, and power, and it had filled him with awe.

— Reception of divine revelation resulted in the fear of the LORD, as it always should

- Habakkuk called on God to stir up ("revive") the work that He said that He would do in judging Babylon, namely, to bring it to pass

- He asked God to make it known to His people "in the midst of the years," namely, the years between Judah's judgment and Babylon's judgment (cf. 2:6-20)

— God undoubtedly did this in part through the Book of Habakkuk

- While God was preparing Babylon for the outpouring of His wrath, Habakkuk asked Him to remember Israel by extending mercy to her—by shortening the period of her suffering

— This verse contains the only petitions in Habakkuk's prayer: that God would preserve life, provide understanding, and remember mercy

## **The Vision of God**

Habakkuk moved from petition to praise in his prayer. He recalled God's great power and mercy in bringing the Israelites from Egypt, through the wilderness, and into the Promised Land. Since God had done this, Habakkuk was confident that He could and would deliver the Israelites from the Babylonians and reestablish them in the land.

(2) His praise of God (3:3-15)

(A) God's appearance (3:3-7)

**3 God** comes from Teman, And the Holy One from Mount Paran. **Selah** His splendor covers the heavens, And the earth is full of His praise.

**3** God comes from Teman, And the Holy One from Mount Paran. *Selah*. His splendor covers the heavens, And the earth is full of His praise.

3 God comes from Teman— the Holy One from Mount Paran. —Interlude— His glory spreads throughout the heavens, and praises about him fill the earth.

3 God came from Teman, and the Holy One from mount Paran. *Selah*. His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise.

- The prophet pictured Yahweh as rising over His people, like the rising sun appeared to rise over Teman, a large town in Edom, and over Mt. Paran, the mountain opposite Teman (Cf. Deut 33:2-4)

— These locations were to the east of the Israelites as they exited Egypt

— The idea is not that the LORD would rise over these eastern places, but that when He arose over His people, they would see Him like they saw the sun rising in the east from Mount Sinai when He gave them the Law

- "God" - *Eloah*, singular, perhaps stressing the essential unity of God who is "the Holy One"

- "...Selah" - Selah is another musical notation meaning "to lift up" (Cf. v9,13)

— It probably indicates a place where the singers of this song were to pause. This pause may have been to modulate the key upward, to increase the volume, to reflect on what was just said, to exalt the LORD in some other way, or to raise an instrumental fanfare.

- "...splendor" - *hod*, describes primarily kingly authority (Cf. Num 27:20; 1 Chr 29:25; et al.), and here it has particular reference to Yahweh's sovereignty over creation and history

— The self-manifestation of His glory filled the earth with His praise

— This is evidently a description of the LORD's appearance on Mt. Sinai to the Israelites' forefathers. Moses used similar terms to describe His coming then (Cf. Deut 33:2).

4 *His* radiance is like the sunlight; He has rays *flashing* from His hand, And the hiding of His might is there.

4 *His* radiance is like the sunlight; He has rays *flashing* from His hand, And there is the hiding of His power.

4 His radiance is like sunlight; beams of light shine from his hand, where his strength lays hidden.

4 And his brightness was as the light; he had horns coming out of his hand: and there was the hiding of his power.

- The radiance of the Holy One's glory was like the sunlight

— Power seemed to flash from His fingertips like rays (lit. horns) of light stretch from the rising sun (Cf. Ex 34:29-30,35)

— In spite of this, most of His power remained concealed

5 Before Him goes plague, And plague comes forth after Him.

5 Before Him goes pestilence, And plague comes after Him.

5 Before him pestilence walks, and disease follows behind him.

5 Before him went the pestilence, and burning coals went forth at his feet.

- As God moves through the earth, like the sun, He burns up what is in front of Him and chars what He leaves behind

— Pestilence (lit. burning heat) and plague (i.e., devastation) are the accompaniments, the results and evidences of His searing holiness

— The NASB translators rendered two different Hebrew words as "plague"

6 He stood and caused the earth to shudder; He looked and caused the nations to jump. Yes, the everlasting mountains were shattered, The ancient hills collapsed. His paths are everlasting.

6 He stood and surveyed the earth; He looked and startled the nations. Yes, the perpetual mountains were shattered, The ancient hills collapsed. His ways are everlasting.

6 He stood up and shook the land; with his stare he startled the nations. The age-old mountains were shattered, and the ancient hilltops bowed down. His ways are eternal.

6 He stood, and measured the earth: he beheld, and drove asunder the nations; and the everlasting mountains were scattered, the perpetual hills did bow: his ways are everlasting.

- Standing like the sun at its zenith, God surveyed the whole earth. His downward look, like sunrays, caused the nations to tremble.

— His glance was enough to make the permanent mountains shatter and the ancient hills collapse

— He always causes these repercussions since His ways are eternal. What a contrast to lifeless idols (Cf. 2:18-19)!

7 I saw the tents of Cushan under distress, The tent curtains of the land of Midian were trembling.

7 I saw the tents of Cushan under distress, The tent curtains of the land of Midian were trembling.

7 I saw the tents of Cushan in distress, and the tent curtains of the land of Midian in anguish.

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

- Habakkuk saw the semi-nomadic Ethiopians and Midianites, who lived on both sides of Mt. Sinai, trembling with fear, because they witnessed something of Yahweh's power
- The terms Midianite and Cushite both described Moses' wife (Ex 2:16-22; 18:1-5; Num 12:1), so they may be synonymous here as well
- Perhaps this is a reference to *Yahweh* parting the Red Sea

(B) God's actions (3:8-15)

**8** Did the LORD rage against the rivers, Or *was* Your anger against the rivers, Or *was* Your rage against the sea, That You rode on Your horses, On Your chariots of salvation?

**8** Did the LORD rage against the rivers, Or *was* Your anger against the rivers, Or *was* Your wrath against the sea, That You rode on Your horses, On Your chariots of salvation?

**8** Was the LORD displeased with the rivers? Was your anger directed against the watercourses or your wrath against the sea? Indeed, you rode upon your horses, upon your chariots of deliverance.

**8** Was the LORD displeased against the rivers? was thine anger against the rivers? was thy wrath against the sea, that thou didst ride upon thine horses and thy chariots of salvation?

- Habakkuk now changed from describing the revelation of God in Israel's earlier history, and various reactions to it, to a description of His acts on the earth

**9** You removed Your bow *from its holder*, The arrows of *Your* word were sworn. Selah You divided the earth with rivers.

**9** Your bow was made bare, The rods of chastisement were sworn. *Selah*. You cleaved the earth with rivers.

**9** Your bow was exposed, and your arrows targeted by command. —Interlude— You split the earth with rivers.

**9** Thy bow was made quite naked, according to the oaths of the tribes, even thy word. Selah. Thou didst cleave the earth with rivers.

- *Yahweh* pulled His powerful bow out and prepared to use it. He summoned many arrows to shoot at His enemies (Cf. Deut 32:40-42). This is a notoriously difficult phrase to translate.

**10** The mountains saw You *and* quaked; The downpour of waters swept by. The deep raised its voice, It lifted high its hands.

**10** The mountains saw You *and* quaked; The downpour of waters swept by. The deep uttered forth its voice, It lifted high its hands.

**10** When the mountains looked upon you, they trembled; the overflowing water passed by, the ocean shouted, and its waves surged upward.

10 The mountains saw thee, and they trembled: the overflowing of the water passed by: the deep uttered his voice, and lifted up his hands on high.

- Habakkuk personified the mountains and described them as shaking when they saw the LORD

- Torrential rainstorms that resulted in flooding swept by Him (Cf. Gen 7:11,19-20)

- The sea lifted up its waves, like hands, in response to His command (Cf. Ps 77:15-17,19)

11 Sun *and* moon stood in their lofty places; They went away at the light of Your arrows, At the radiance of Your flashing spear.

11 Sun *and* moon stood in their places; They went away at the light of Your arrows, At the radiance of Your gleaming spear.

11 The sun and moon stand still in their orbits; at the glint of your arrows they speed along, even at the gleam of your flashing spear.

11 The sun and moon stood still in their habitation: at the light of thine arrows they went, and at the shining of thy glittering spear.

- The sun and moon stood still at His word (Cf. Joshua 10:12-13), and they paled when He sent forth flashes of lightning like arrows and shining spears (Cf. Deut 32:23,42)

12 In indignation You marched through the earth; In anger You trampled the nations.

12 In indignation You marched through the earth; In anger You trampled the nations.

12 You march through the land in righteous indignation; you tread down the nations in anger.

12 Thou didst march through the land in indignation, thou didst thresh the heathen in anger.

- The LORD had marched throughout the earth like a cosmic Warrior subduing Israel's enemies

— He trampled hostile nations like an ox does when it treads grain

— Verses 12-15 view God's power as seen by the enemies of His people

13 You went forth for the salvation of Your people, For the salvation of Your anointed. You smashed the head of the house of evil To uncover *him from***foot to neck**. *Selah*

13 You went forth for the salvation of Your people, For the salvation of Your anointed. You struck the head of the house of the evil To lay him open from thigh to neck. *Selah*.

13 You marched out to deliver your people, to deliver with your anointed. You struck the head of the house of the wicked; you stripped him naked from head to foot. —Interlude—

13 Thou wentest forth for the salvation of thy people, even for salvation with thine anointed; thou woundedst the head out of the house of the wicked, by discovering the foundation unto the neck. *Selah*.

- Yahweh had gone forth like a Warrior to save His people and to deliver His anointed one. This may refer to Moses in his battles with Israel's enemies, or it may refer to a coming anointed one: Cyrus (Cf. Is 45:1), or Messiah (Cf. Ps 2:2; Dan 9:26), or the Davidic kings generally, or more than one of these.

— The LORD had also destroyed the leaders ("smashed the head") of many evil nations ("the house of evil") that opposed the Israelites, beginning with Pharaoh

— He had disabled their nations as thoroughly as if someone had slit a body open from bottom to top, or tore a building off its foundation

- "...foot to neck" - literally "foundation"

14 You pierced with his own arrows The head of his leaders. They stormed in to scatter us; Their arrogance *was* like those Who devour the oppressed in secret.

14 You pierced with his own spears The head of his throngs. They stormed in to scatter us; Their exultation *was* like those Who devour the oppressed in secret.

14 With his own lances you pierced the heads of his warriors, who came out like a windstorm to scatter us— their joy is to devour the afflicted who are in hiding.

14 Thou didst strike through with his staves the head of his villages: they came out as a whirlwind to scatter me: their rejoicing was as to devour the poor secretly.

- The LORD used His enemies' own weapons to kill their leaders in retribution (Cf. Judges 5:26)

— Israel's enemies had stormed into the Promised Land with great enthusiasm in order to scatter God's people, like those who devour oppressed people in secret

15 You trampled on the sea with Your horses, On the foam of many waters.

15 You trampled on the sea with Your horses, On the surge of many waters.

15 You rode on the sea with your horses, even riding the crested waves of mighty waters.

15 Thou didst walk through the sea with thine horses, through the heap of great waters.

- *Yahweh* had trodden down the Red Sea, as though He rode through it on cosmic horses, causing it to surge away and leave a dry road for His people to travel out of Egypt (Cf. v8)

- This section closes with the motif with which it opened (3:8), namely, the crossing of the Red Sea

***Review what God has done for you in the past; anticipate what He will do for you in the future...and you will have peace in the present.***

(3) His decision to wait upon God and trust in Him despite coming difficulties (3:16-19)

(A) Rest despite scarcity (3:16-17)

**16** I heard, and my inner parts trembled; At the sound, my lips quivered. Decay enters my bones, And in my place I tremble; Because I must wait quietly for the day of distress, For the people to arise *who* will attack us.

**16** I heard and my inward parts trembled, At the sound my lips quivered. Decay enters my bones, And in my place I tremble. Because I must wait quietly for the day of distress, For the people to arise *who* will invade us.

16 I heard and I trembled within. My lips quivered at the noise. My legs gave way beneath me, and I trembled. Nevertheless, I await the day of distress that will dawn on our invaders.

16 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: when he cometh up unto the people, he will invade them with his troops.

- Habakkuk trembled as he waited for Babylon's invasion of Judah: the day of her distress. He could do nothing but wait patiently for the Babylonians to grow stronger and for judgment to come on Israel. It is a terrible feeling to know that calamity is coming and that one can do nothing to prevent it.

— But Habakkuk could endure this prospect because he remembered that the omnipotent God of Israel had consistently defended His chosen people in the past—and had promised to do so in the future

— Earlier when the prophet heard about the powerful Babylonians, he wanted to talk with God (2:1). But now, having been reminded of Yahweh's power and faithfulness, he had nothing more to say (Cf. Job 42:1-6). God would handle the Babylonians. All Habakkuk had to do was wait and trust.

17 Even if the fig tree does not blossom, And there is no fruit on the vines, *If* the yield of the olive fails, And the fields produce no food, *Even if* the flock disappears from the fold, And there are no cattle in the stalls,

17 Though the fig tree should not blossom And there be no fruit on the vines, *Though* the yield of the olive should fail And the fields produce no food, Though the flock should be cut off from the fold And there be no cattle in the stalls,

17 Even though the fig tree does not blossom, and there are no grapes on the vines; even if the olive harvest fails, and the fields produce nothing edible; even if the flock is snatched from the sheepfold, and there is no herd in the stalls—

17 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:

- ...even though my country will be devastated, the markets will crash, my house will be burned and looted, and there will be blood in the streets...



(B) Rejoicing because of his salvation (3:18-19)

18 Yet I will triumph in the LORD, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.

18 Yet I will exult in the LORD, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.

18 as for me, I will rejoice in the LORD. I will find my joy in the God who delivers me.

18 Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation.

- Even though everything would get worse in Judah, Habakkuk determined to praise *Yahweh* and to rejoice in the God who would save him (Cf. Ps 18:46; 25:5; Phil 4:4,10-19)

19 **The Lord GOD** is my strength, And He has made my feet like deer's *feet*, And has me walk on my high places. **For the choir director, on my stringed instruments.**

19 The LORD God is my strength, And He has made my feet like hinds' *feet*, And makes me walk on my high places. For the choir director, on my stringed instruments.

19 The LORD God is my strength—he will make my feet like those of a deer, equipping me to tread on my mountain heights. For the choir director: On my stringed instruments.

19 The LORD God is my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds' feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places. To the chief singer on my stringed instruments.

- "The Lord GOD" - sovereign *Yahweh*, Habakkuk's master and God, was the source of his strength, even though the prophet's legs shook (v16)

— He enabled His servant to walk through the perilous valley he faced—as sure-footedly as the hoofs of a deer enabled it to navigate precipices (Cf. Deut 32:13; 33:29; 2 Sam 22:34; Ps 18:32-33,39)

— This statement of strong confidence sharply contrasts with the prophet's doubts and fears from which he spoke at the beginning of this book (1:2-4). **A revelation from God, and Habakkuk's decision to believe what God revealed, turned his attitude around.**

- "...For the choir director, on my stringed instruments" - a final footnote to this book gives direction to the choir director, who used this chapter as part of Israel's formal worship. Habakkuk specified the use of stringed instruments to accompany the singing, undoubtedly because they set the proper mood.

The book opened with a dialogue between Habakkuk and *Yahweh*, in which the prophet vented his fears and the LORD responded in love (Hab 1). Then it proceeded to a dirge, in which the LORD explained the wickedness of the instrument that He would use to judge Judah: the Babylonians, He and promised their ultimate destruction (Hab 2). It closes with a doxology, in which Habakkuk praised God and recommitted himself to faith in, and faithfulness to, *Yahweh*—as he anticipated hard times to come (Hab 3).

This book can be a great help to people who are discouraged about their present circumstances, and/or can see nothing good coming in the future. It helps us adjust our attitude from one of pessimism, and even despair, to optimism and rejoicing. The crucial

issue is whether we will listen to God and believe Him, namely, whether we will exercise faith.

### **Contrast between Jonah & Habakkuk**

- Jonah ministered to the Assyrians — Habakkuk to the Babylonians
- Jonah ran *from* God when he heard what God was going to do — Habakkuk ran *to* God wondering what God would do
- Jonah saw the salvation of God to the Gentiles — Habakkuk saw the sovereignty of God through the Gentiles
- Jonah's story ends in foolishness as he worries about the gourd — Habakkuk's story ends in faith as he trusts God
- Jonah had to learn inside a fish — Habakkuk learned in the high tower