

Habakkuk's Prayer (part 3)

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[0 : 00] Last week was the second of three lessons in Habakkuk's concluding prayer psalm.

! And in the first 15 verses of the prayer, Habakkuk has recalled how God delivered Israel! His main focus was on how God delivered Israel during the Exodus.

Verse 11, Habakkuk also noted how God made the sun and moon stand still at Gibeon during Joshua's battle with the Amorites. Joshua 10.13 says, And the sun stood still, and the moon stopped, until the nation took vengeance on their enemies.

Is it not written in the book of Jasher? The sun stopped in the midst of heaven, and did not hurry to set for about a whole day. Looking back into Israel's history establishes a foundation of trust and hope for the faithful.

Songs of God's intervention that rescued and brought victory to a helpless people are essential to remembering the past. And that remembrance provides the basis for present and future hope of deliverance.

[1 : 13] Through these songs, we maintain a meaningful connection between God's past actions and the present reality that we live in today. Many of the songs for deliverance were sung in Israel and are found in Scripture.

This one that we're looking at tonight and for the last three weeks is one of those songs. But Jonah 2 is also another one. And of course, Psalms is an entire book of that type of literature.

So these songs have the double function of giving praise to God for what He has done and creating hope for the future. We also talked last week about how God often uses the weapons or methods of His enemies against those enemies.

Remember how Haman was hung on the gallows he built for Mordecai. Daniel's enemies were thrown into the lion's den they had intended to be Daniel's end. And David's enemies would fall into the pit that they had dug for David.

So over the course of his book, Habakkuk is transformed from the questioning and complaining prophet to the hopeful and expectant prophet. The difference, as we discussed last week, is that Habakkuk changed from focusing on himself and his circumstances to focusing on God and God's promises.

[2 : 27] God enters Habakkuk's complaint so thoroughly and with such a powerful vision that Habakkuk is left in a state of exhaustion and stunned awe.

We'll see that he's trembling and yet with a sense of overwhelming joy, he describes the feelings that are produced within him by the coming of the Lord to judge the nations and to rescue his own people.

The result is one of the most moving statements of faith found anywhere in the Bible. And we'll see that as we look at the last few verses tonight. But let's read the entire psalm again that covers all of Habakkuk chapter 3.

Then we'll look at the last four verses. Starting with verse 1 of chapter 3, it says, 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. God came from Teman and the Holy One from Mount Paran, Selah.

[3 : 33] 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. I saw the tents of cushion in affliction. The curtains of the land of Midian did tremble.

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, or on your chariot of salvation? You stripped the sheep from your bow, calling for many arrows, Selah.

You split the earth with rivers. The mountains saw you and writhed. The raging waters swept on. The deep gave forth its voice. It lifted its hands on high.

[4 : 33] The sun and moon stood still in the place, at the light of your arrows as they sped, at the flash of your glittering spear. You marched through the earth in fury. You threshed the nations in anger.

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.

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

And then these next verses are the ones that we will cover tonight. Habakkuk says, 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 wait quietly 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 field yield no food.

[5 : 40] 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 choir master with stringed instruments. So in the final section of his psalm of prayer, Habakkuk again expresses his own thoughts and feelings as he had done at the start.

We saw that at the very beginning of the psalm in verse 2. But now he sets out how he reacted to what was happening around him. And he relates his anxiety at all that is going to occur.

And yet he resolves to take the advice he's been given to wait. We saw that back in 2-3. And to keep silence before the Lord. We saw that in chapter 2, verse 20.

Habakkuk displays a faith by which he can say, I have calmed and quieted my soul, because he focuses on the Lord, on what the Lord has already done, and on what the Lord has committed himself to do.

[6 : 51] As we go through the verses tonight, we'll hear Habakkuk doing three main things. And in verse 16, we find him quietly waiting. So quietly waiting is your first heading.

Here is verse 16 again. Habakkuk says, Habakkuk acknowledged that he had heard what the Lord was communicating to him through his vision and through his word.

Earlier, Habakkuk had been quite willing to protest to the Lord. But as a result of his dialogue with God, Habakkuk is now left speechless. He couldn't respond.

He's been physically traumatized by the reception of the divine revelation. Habakkuk's reference to what he has heard likely points to two things. And the first is God's revelation itself.

Habakkuk's encounter with God has a profound effect upon him physically. We saw that his body trembled, his lips quivered at the thunderous voice of God. He felt that his bones were rotting away within him and his frame did not seem to be strong enough to hold him up.

[8 : 15] And he says his legs were trembling under him. When you think about it, Habakkuk's response fits the biblical model. Think about what happened when Isaiah saw the vision of God in the temple.

Isaiah felt his own worthlessness and recognized his sin. And modern day experiences with God should produce the same feelings of reverence and unworthiness.

Culture and custom have changed since the days of Habakkuk, but neither God nor human nature has changed. So we should expect the same response to genuine revelation of God as that experienced by the prophet.

And that's just one way you can use to evaluate people who say they've encountered God. If they don't have a feeling like that, then that is a sure sign among others that they are not telling the truth.

The second thing that Habakkuk heard is the content of the revelation itself. And that revelation revealed that God would judge his sinful people. The revelation also revealed who would carry out

that judgment.

[9 : 23] You'll remember that God's choice of the Chaldeans perplexed Habakkuk even more. Habakkuk probably would have been okay if God had chosen a more godly nation to judge Israel, but he was really struggling with the notion of why God would use a less godly nation to judge Israel.

Remember that Habakkuk heard the description of the ruthless and impetuous Babylonians and their invasion of Judah. You can look back at chapter 1, verses 5 through 11 and see that. At the prospect of this judgment, Habakkuk's whole being is shaken emotionally, mentally, and physically. He finally acknowledges that he's gotten the message, though, about Babylon's coming triumph.

He's just afraid because he believes the words concerning Judah to be true. The second half of the verse, though, gives a different kind of reaction to the revelation. And it's as though the prophet's physical fear passes and he sees the implication of God's ability and willingness to help his people, just like he did during the Exodus.

The implication is that God's people don't need to worry about the political situation, however bad it may seem, because God will never abandon them. And when the realization of this has penetrated Habakkuk's fear, he can say that, I will quietly wait for the day of trouble to come upon the people who invade us.

[10 : 49] So here's an answer to the question that Habakkuk asked in 113. Even though God may punish his own people's sins by using other nations whose sins are even worse, God still will not overlook the sins of those other nations, but will eventually bring trouble upon them as well.

Habakkuk was deeply anguished that he must wait for the day of adversity. He knew that the enemy was coming. He referred to it as the day of trouble when the Chaldeans would invade the land.

But Habakkuk was resigned to the invasion which God announced way back in chapter 1. The knowledge, however, that God would ultimately crush Satan and all of his hosts enabled Habakkuk and the other believers who were with Habakkuk to maintain their faith even in the face of temporary triumphs of the enemy.

The deliverance was certain but it would come only after judgment. And Habakkuk sees beyond Israel's judgment to the destruction of Babylon and we know that the destruction of Babylon happened in 539 B.C.

at the hands of the Medes and the Persians. So we see overwhelming evidence throughout this book and subsequent events that God sets things right.

[12 : 04] We just need to trust God and his timetable. In verses 17 and 18 we hear the second thing that Habakkuk was doing. In addition to quietly waiting Habakkuk was also intentionally rejoicing.

Intentionally rejoicing is the second heading. Verse 17 and verse 18 really serve as fitting climaxes to the psalm of Habakkuk and really to the entire book.

Habakkuk there accepts God's program and he resolves his contention with God that he expressed so strongly in chapters 1 and 2. Even with all the punishment imagery the fact that the book concludes with the prophet rejoicing in the saving power and strength of God indicates that Habakkuk felt that the Lord's judgment in no way dismisses the Lord's loving nature.

And that's an important thing to keep in mind. Even when the Lord judges that in no way dismisses the Lord's loving nature. Listen to verses 17 and 18 again.

Habakkuk says, Though the fig tree should not blossom nor fruit beyond 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.

[13 : 32] Terrible devastation is going to come upon Judah as a result of the Chaldean invasion. Habakkuk is not contemplating hypothetical possibilities here.

He recognizes that the ravages of war on Judah would be dreadful. The fig trees, the vineyards, the olive groves, the grain fields, none of them would yield their crops.

Flocks and herds were going to be cut off. So we see that neither luxuries nor necessities of life were going to be available. Habakkuk saw that the worst possible scenario was coming.

The verse is speaking of complete economic disaster, but it does so in terms of the economy of Palestine of that day. There are six clauses in verse 17 and those six clauses seem to be in

ascending order of severity with the loss of figs ranking as the least significant and the loss of the herd in the stalls causing the greatest economic damage.

Figs were a delicacy in Israel so their loss didn't produce severe hardship. Grapes provided the daily drink but the loss of the grapes would only produce inconvenience.

[14 : 46] The olive crop though produced oil for cooking and lighting and grain provided the staple diet of the Palestinians. The failure of the fields to produce food might mean starvation for large segments of the population.

Sheep and cattle made up much of the wealth of that region and sheep and goats provided wool and the occasional meat for the Israelite diet. The Hebrews didn't eat cattle very often but they were used for preparing the soil for planting and for other heavy work.

It would be like farmers today having their tractors and their combines destroyed when the cattle was destroyed back in Habakkuk's day. One commentator put it this way he said despite the calamities that devastate both the land and economy of Israel the prophet will fix his eyes on God the only true object of faith and trust God to accomplish God's purpose.

He will see not only the works of God but also God himself. Habakkuk will find his salvation not in material prosperity but in the giver and sustainer of life.

God will be Habakkuk's inexhaustible source and infinite sphere of joy. By the grace of God the complainer becomes the rejoicer. Listen to that last sentence again by the grace of God the complainer becomes the rejoicer.

[16 : 13] Let's think about that a minute. Why is God's grace necessary to help us see beyond our present circumstances? It's pretty easy to get bogged down in what's going on isn't it as we try to get through the challenges of life?

And we can see that Habakkuk is realizing what he needs to focus on. Look at verse 18 now. We see Habakkuk focus on God. He says yet I will rejoice in the Lord.

I will take joy in the God of my salvation. Habakkuk's joy springs from his close relationship with God and from his personal knowledge of and faith in God's unchangeable word.

Habakkuk is going to rejoice in the Lord not in victories over the enemy. He's going to rejoice in the Lord not in outward prosperity or comforts and blessings.

Instead he's going to rejoice in the person and promises of his Savior. The wording of verse 18 underscores Habakkuk's personal relationship with God.

[17 : 16] Habakkuk could have said that he would take joy in the God of salvation. Instead he said he will take joy in the God of my salvation. So it's very personal to him.

We can learn from Habakkuk. I put this quote from Matthew Henry in your notes. Matthew Henry said this is the principal ground of our joy in God that he is the God of our salvation our eternal salvation the salvation of the soul and if he be so we may rejoice in him as such in our greatest distresses since by them our salvation cannot be hindered but may be furthered.

That's hard to remember isn't it when we're going through struggles that it's not really hindering our salvation but may be furthering it. Then Matthew Henry continued on and said note joy in God is never out of season nay it is in a special manner seasonable when we meet with losses and crosses in the world that it may then appear that our hearts are not set upon these things nor our happiness bound up in them.

See how the prophet triumphs in God. more than toughing it out or hanging in there Habakkuk would be joyful in the God of his salvation.

He exhibited the kind of relationship with God which enjoined the divine person more than the things that God could do for him. Habakkuk put God above the fray of life rejoicing in him and worshipping him regardless of his circumstances.

[18 : 49] So think about the scenario here. the nation was facing the worst economic disasters possible but Habakkuk vowed to remain faithful to the God of his salvation. He proclaimed his desire to serve the Lord and to honor the Lord with his life.

He knows he might lose everything in the world which normally brings joy but he vowed to rejoice in the Lord and to take joy in God. In Habakkuk 1 verses 14 and 15 Habakkuk used the same words for rejoicing when he described how the Chaldeans rejoiced over the spoils of war.

His choice of the same words here underscores his repentant heart and triumphant faith. Back in chapter 1 he thought those words applied to the Chaldeans. Now he realizes those words apply to him even though his circumstances haven't really changed.

Habakkuk's words express his resolve not merely to rest in the Lord's will through everything that would come to pass but to rejoice fully in his saving God. He knew that Israel's covenant Lord was yet on the throne and that meant eventual blessedness for the prophet and the prophet's people alike.

Habakkuk didn't say that he would merely endure in the hour of distress. He said that he would rejoice in the Lord and be joyful. He finally realized that God is the inexhaustible source and supply of joy.

[20 : 16] Too many people keep trying to buy joy but happiness is not found in circumstances. Joy is available to everyone even to those who are stripped of every material possession because joy is to be found in a person.

It comes through an intimate personal relationship with the Lord. Here's another quote in your handout and it's from John Calvin. He said, Whenever signs of God's wrath meet us in outward things, this remedy remains to us to consider what God is to us inwardly for the inward joy which faith brings to us can overcome all fears, terrors, sorrows, and anxieties.

So far in the last section of the psalm and of the book, we've seen Habakkuk quietly waiting and intentionally rejoicing. In the final verse, we see Habakkuk confidently praising.

Confidently praising is your last heading. We see that in verse 19 and here is verse 19 again.

Habakkuk says, God, the Lord, is my strength.

He makes my feet like the deer's. He makes me tread on my high places. To the choir master with stringed instruments. Habakkuk's words here are similar to Psalm 18 verses 32 and 33.

[21 : 41] That's the psalm of David and in Psalm 18 32 and 33, David wrote these words. He said, The God who equipped me with strength and made my way blameless.

He made my feet like the feet of a deer and set me secure on the heights. Like David's words, Habakkuk's final words express his faith.

The Lord would carry him through life. Habakkuk didn't trust in the power of nature or in his own ability to make money. He trusted in the Lord who is the Lord of nature.

Habakkuk 3.19 is the only place outside the Psalms where the phrase Yahweh Adonai occurs and that expresses the divine personal name of God preceded by his title.

The names emphasize the power and majesty of God so Habakkuk used the strongest names for God available. The Hebrew is Yahweh my Lord which links the traditions of covenant assurance with personal dedication and commitment.

[22 : 46] Verse 19 summarizes why Habakkuk will rejoice in the times of tribulation. All might and confidence come from God alone and it's God who sustains the prophet by his power and upholds Habakkuk in the storms of life.

God's response to Habakkuk's confusion promised divine wrath but also provided assurance of divine favor and hope. Habakkuk learned that security and hope weren't based on temporal blessings but on the Lord himself and this is the essence of verse 2 4 when Habakkuk learned that the just shall live by his faith.

And we see here that as the sure footed deer scaled the dangerous mountain heights without slipping, Habakkuk's faith in the Lord enabled him to endure the hardships of the imminent invasion and all of its perplexing questions.

So in a land filled with places to stumble Habakkuk emphasized the faithfulness of God. The deer was noted for its sure-footedness in high places and so with this analogy Habakkuk acknowledged the protection of God in every experience of life.

The book ends with a note common in the Psalms concerning the use of the Psalms. The Psalms were set to music and used in the temple and the note to the choir master gave guidance concerning the use of the Psalm.

[24 : 10] We're not the only one who has a choir master with stringed instruments. They even had one back then too. So the phrase is found 55 times in the titles of the Psalms and it's the second most often phrase that's used in the title of the Psalms.

But here Habakkuk uses it for his own Psalm. And his Psalm of submission was to be celebrated in the congregation throughout the generations. It was not merely a personal resolution of faith achieved by Habakkuk for himself alone.

He meant it to be used for other people and to help them through difficulties and of course it's still being used by other people and us today. So God answered Habakkuk's questions.

Habakkuk had asked how God could use a wicked people such as the Chaldeans to punish a nation more righteous than itself. God's answer was that he might use Babylon to punish Judah's sins but he would also punish Babylon for its sins.

The day of calamity would come upon Babylon. Because the prophet had been honest with God and took his genuine questions to a caring God, Habakkuk began to look at the world from a different perspective.

[25 : 24] Think about how much Habakkuk has changed. All the way back in the second verse of chapter 1 Habakkuk had asked how long and now tonight in the last verses of chapter 3 we see Habakkuk saying he will quietly wait.

So that's a huge difference. So even though the immediate prospect was one of hardship, Habakkuk has such a relationship with God and such a trust in God's provision that he's able to rise above his fearfulness.

Knowing God and relying on God provided the secret to Habakkuk's strength, the challenge that faces each of us is to grow in faith so that we too can share Habakkuk's joy and strength as we wait for final deliverance from God.

So let's consider what we can learn from these verses particularly. The first thing we can learn is that God will never abandon his people. God will never abandon his people.

God stood ready to aid Judah in Habakkuk's day as he did the people of Israel in ancient times. The implication is that God's people do not need to worry about the political situation, however bad it may seem, because God will never abandon them.

[26 : 44] I thought it was interesting given the current situation that we are in that multiple commentaries said the lesson is that God will never abandon his people and they don't need to worry about the political situation, however bad it may seem.

So we weren't the only ones that sometimes get riled up over the political situation. It was going on way back then, too. Second thing we can learn is that we should rejoice in the Lord regardless of the circumstances.

So we should rejoice in the Lord regardless of the circumstances. I look back at my records and I purchased one of the commentaries that I used in these studies back on December 27th of last year.

None of us could have predicted then that the final lesson would be delayed into our last Wednesday Bible study before Thanksgiving. If you think about it, we had no inkling then of the pandemic-related cancellations that we would have, all the national turmoil or even the more personal difficulties that would occur this year.

But God in his providence knew when we would reach this passage and what the circumstances would be. And when you look at these verses, they really are a perfect passage to look at before Thanksgiving because we see a recipe for being thankful despite our circumstances.

[28 : 07] Habakkuk's conclusion is as relevant for us today as it was for him and his original hearers. Regardless of our circumstances, every believer should join with Habakkuk in saying, I will rejoice in the Lord.

I will take joy in the God of my salvation. In an unsure world, Habakkuk experienced the joy and peace of serving the sovereign Lord of creation. Habakkuk had questioned God concerning his work and he learned that God really is at work.

Remember, he initially asked God why he was sitting idly by and just watching. He learned that God wasn't just watching, God was working and the Lord is at work accomplishing his purpose over all the earth.

And like Habakkuk, believers who live in unsettled times can find strength in the God who works in history to accomplish his purpose. In a world which sees almost everything in economic terms, we need to consider Habakkuk's faith.

Though the worst things in life happen, believers need a faith which depends on the God of the universe and worships him as the true Lord of life. The Apostle Paul expressed a similar concept in Philippians.

[29 : 24] Remember Philippians 4.4. That verse says, Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say rejoice. The circumstances of Paul's life reminded him of the joy available in the Lord and he wished that joy for the people in Philippi as well.

Paul knew that no situation is beyond the Lord's help. Christians can always rejoice in that even if we have nothing else to rejoice in. Sticking with Paul, we see that he used a similar theme of rejoicing when he wrote to the Romans.

Listen to Romans 5.1-8. It says, Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Through him, we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope. And hope does not put us to shame because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. That's something to be thankful for right there, right?

[30 : 42] Habakkuk didn't have the Holy Spirit living inside of him back then like what we do today. Continuing on with Romans chapter 5 verse 6, Paul said, For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.

For one will scarcely die for a righteous person, though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die. But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. When we're tempted to let the circumstances of life steal our joy, or when we're tempted to think that God could or should do more for us, we need to follow the lead of Habakkuk and Paul and remember the gospel.

Jesus himself summarized the gospel in the familiar verse of John 3.16, and that is that, For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

The third thing we can learn from this passage is that God is worthy of our praise. God is worthy of our praise.

[31 : 49] And we see how Habakkuk had progressed from christening God to praising God. Habakkuk's life reflected God's words in Psalm 50.23, and that's where the psalmist said, the one who offers thanksgiving as his sacrifice glorifies me.

To one who orders his way rightly, I will show the salvation of God. Listen to Psalm 50.23 one more time. The one who offers thanksgiving as his sacrifice glorifies me.

To one who orders his way rightly, I will show the salvation of God. I put some questions for reflection there for you. The first one is what attitude should we have towards our enemies when they encounter adverse circumstances?

So what attitude should we have towards our enemies when they encounter adverse circumstances? Should we be happy that they're suffering or should we pray that God will have mercy on them and perhaps save them?

Second question is how may we acquire the strength that Habakkuk had? And of course, you have other scripture references there, but the entire book of Habakkuk shows you how Habakkuk acquired that strength.

[33 : 10] Habakkuk's circumstances didn't change during the entire time. What did change was his perspective on those circumstances. The third question is what are the sources of true contentment?

What are the sources of true contentment? And you might also ask yourself, how do those sources differ from what the world views as the sources of contentment?

Thinking back to the beginning of Habakkuk, we could easily criticize Habakkuk for questioning God, but remember this as well. The Lord never criticized Habakkuk, he merely corrected him. Habakkuk's faith ultimately bore spiritual fruit. When times of doubt and discouragement come, as they inevitably do, the believer needs to come to God and share his concerns with him.

That goes back to what we talked about in the very first lesson when we talked about whether it's okay to question God. It is okay to question God if you come at it with the attitude that you really want to learn from God and understand what is going on.

[34 : 16] So like Habakkuk, the believer needs to come to God's word and get a fresh glimpse of who and what God is and so come to a place of renewed trust in the one who alone is truly God and therefore sufficient for all of life.

God said in 2-4-B of Habakkuk that the righteous shall live by his faith. Living by his faith, Habakkuk found the answer to his questions and it's the same answer that every believer must find when we're facing difficulties and that answer is I will rejoice in the Lord.

I will take joy in the God of my salvation. Let's close in prayer. Father, we thank you for the reminder not just in this lesson tonight but through the entire book of Habakkuk that you are working and you are working your purpose in our lives to make us more like Christ.

Help us remember that as we go through difficult circumstances and help us remember to come to you and search your word for answers rather than trying to figure things out for ourselves.

Also help us be mindful and merciful toward any enemies that may try to do us harm. Let us pray for them that you will have mercy upon them and save them as well.

[35 : 37] Thank you again for what you have done for us. Let us be truly thankful as we go into this Thanksgiving season. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Thank you.