

Habakkuk's Prayer (Part 2)

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[0 : 00] Last week we started the psalm. That's the prayer of Habakkuk that concludes the book of Habakkuk.

! And in the first seven verses Habakkuk recalled how God had delivered Israel in the past. Those instances provided hope and assurance that God would rescue his people in the future.

The only request came in verse 2 and that's where Habakkuk asked God to work again on behalf of his people to make his works known and most significantly to remember mercy in his judgment of Judah.

Habakkuk never tried to argue that the people had earned God's favor. He simply asked for God's mercy. So we're going to go ahead and read the entire psalm again. It covers all of chapter 3 and then we'll look at verses 8 through 15 tonight.

It says, A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, according to Shigeonoth, 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.

[1 : 10] In wrath, remember mercy. 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, raised fresh 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, on your chariot of salvation? You stripped the sheath from your bow, calling for many arrows. Selah. You split the earth with rivers.

[2 : 07] The mountains saw you and writhed. The raging waters swept on. The deep gave forth its voice. It lifted its hands on high. 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.

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.

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 the 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.

[3 : 21] 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. We'll break tonight's passage down into two sections. Again, we're covering verses 8 through 15 tonight.

And we'll start with verses 8 through 11. And in verses 8 through 11, we see God as the warrior. So God the warrior is what goes into your first blank.

In 3.8, Habakkuk actually sings three rhetorical questions. And these three rhetorical questions are perhaps the most subtle expression of the psalm's theme.

That theme is Habakkuk longing for a more dramatic and obvious display of God's power.

Habakkuk and all of Israel know that God can fight for them through the creation.

[4 : 20] And Habakkuk directly addresses God in these questions. He remembers and longs for this kind of intervention from God again. So let's read verses 8 through 11 one more time.

And then we'll dig deeper into the actual questions. Habakkuk said, 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?

You stripped the sheath 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. 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.

You notice when we read the entire chapter, Habakkuk changes his description here and he changes his presentation from the Lord's coming to directly addressing the Lord.

[5 : 24] But he's still talking about the Lord's coming to Mount Sinai when he does this. The change from third person to second person is not that unusual in Hebrew and it might actually signal that it's the transition from God's coming to God's actually being present.

And the point of verse 8 is that the Lord's coming cannot be understood as anger against the rivers and the sea. But as we'll see when we get to verse 13, the point of the Lord's coming is to save the Lord's people.

In these verses, the prophet recalls the dividing of the Red Sea when God opened the safe passage for the Israelites. He also refers to the parting of the Jordan which occurred 40 years later.

And at these times, God was not angry with the water. He wasn't attacking it like he would an enemy. Both mighty acts were for the sake of delivering his elect. The horses and chariots upon which Habakkuk sees the Lord riding are a figurative description of the Lord's mighty power.

He comes against his enemies like a powerful army. And that's the message of verse 8. So with that, let's move on to verse 9 now. Verse 9 says, You stripped the sheath from your bow, calling for many arrows.

[6 : 41] Selah. You split the earth with rivers. Commentators differ somewhat on what verse 9 means because the Hebrew can be translated different ways. The most logical interpretation is that verse 9 is still extending the picture of God riding to battle on a chariot.

Like ancient charioteers, God is equipped here with bow and arrows, which were the most convenient weapon to fight with from a chariot. The covering that was used to protect them has been removed and that signals that God is ready for action.

There can be no doubt about the determination of God to engage in battle and to pursue his foes until he has defeated them. Some think this verse is a reference to Deuteronomy 32 verses 42 and 43.

So listen to Deuteronomy chapter 32 verses 42 and 43. They say, I will make my arrows drunk with blood and my sword shall deliver flesh with the blood of the slain and the captives from the long-haired heads of the enemy.

Rejoice with him, O heavens! Bow down to him, all gods, for he avenges the blood of his children and takes vengeance on his adversaries. He repays those who hate him and cleanses his people's land.

[8 : 01] Going back to our text in Habakkuk in 3.9, notice that Selah occurs in the middle of the verse and that could be a signal for the hearer or the reader to pause on and meditate on the possibility of the Lord taking his bow in hand ready to deliver the people of Judah.

God's great power demands the consideration and respect of his people and that God works on behalf of sinful people is an astounding truth that we all should stop and think about periodically. The last line of the verse changes the scene from preparation for battle to actually engagement in battle. We see there that the Lord strikes with awesome force.

The connection with the thunderstorm that's mentioned in verses 4-6 continues as the prophet describes the torrential downpour that changes the landscape by rushing waters and those waters isolated one portion of the earth from another.

So it changes the landscape and in a dry mountainous area large amounts of water did wreak havoc on the countryside. The mention of rivers also reminded the readers of the way that God had provided water in the wilderness.

[9 : 16] All of this section of the psalm alludes to God's leading the people from Egypt. It represents all the times that God changed the course of history for his people by fighting for them against the odds and he did that sometimes with storms.

Because their warring and delivering God is also the creator we know that anything is possible for God. Check out verse 10 now it says the mountain saw you and writhed the raging water swept on the deep gave forth its voice it lifted its hands on high.

The mountain saw you and writhe resumes the picture of the earthquake that's found in verse 6 of chapter 3 but it likely also refers to the changes caused in the mountains by the raging waters. Writhe there the word translated writhe means to turn and twist in fright or to be in anguish and it can also mean to be in pain. And here Habakkuk again uses images from the past to describe the future judgment of God.

The mountains there are personified and represent either the whole of nature or perhaps just the most secure part of creation but we see even the mountains writhe when they became sensible of the avengers approach and presence.

[10 : 33] Flooding waters moved in recognition of God's power and underground waters of the deep were also personified as speaking. The high waves were personified as having hands and there it shows that God's power can cause tremendous upheaval in nature.

The Red Sea and the Jordan River had both responded to God's command in the past. The point is that God removed all obstacles so that neither mountains nor waters nor sea nor rivers intercepted the passage of his people.

Habakkuk writes this so that the faithful might know that although the whole world seems to be resisting them their salvation would still be certain. He's showing that the Lord can surmount whatever impediments there may be in front of his people.

Verse 11 has another example of when God changed the usual course of nature to help his people and here is verse 11 again. It says 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.

Verse 11 likely refers to Joshua 10 12 through 14 when the sun and moon stood still during Joshua's battle. Here are Joshua 10 12 through 14.

[11 : 51] It says at that time Joshua spoke to the Lord in the day when the Lord gave the Amorites over to the sons of Israel and he said in the sight of Israel sun stand still at Gibeon and moon in the valley of Agilon and the sun stood still and the moon stopped until the nation took vengeance on their enemies.

Is this 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. There has been no day like it before or since when the Lord heeded the voice of a man for the Lord fought for Israel.

Habakkuk's readers would recall that verse in Joshua 12 14 and here it is one more time. It said there has been no day like it before or since when the Lord heeded the voice of a man for the Lord fought for Israel.

The Lord who does not change is sovereign over history not only in the past but also in the present and future as he works for his own glory and the salvation of his people.

Habakkuk saw the work of God in the past and he knew that God would also work in the future. Of course the good news for us is that our faithful God who does not change is a subject that's preached throughout the Old Testament so that's nothing new it goes all the way back through the entire Bible.

[13 : 16] Lines 2 and 3 are parallel to one another and they say essentially the same thing in slightly different words. The sun and the moon stood still as in awe before the Lord's power.

The glint of the flying arrows and the lightning of the Lord's flashing spear produced a sight to stand entranced in front of. And the verse pictures the sun and the moon as hiding from the power of the Lord.

So the weapons of God the warrior flashed menacingly as he appeared in awesome glory and revealed his power and dominion so that nothing in the created realm was able to compete with him.

So we've seen how the first verses of tonight's passage have shown us God the warrior but God is more than just a warrior and we see that in the second section of the passage. In the second section God is portrayed as God the winner.

So God the winner is what goes in your second verse. His display of divine power was not just to terrify the world but as we've talked about that power was to deliver his people.

[14:23] The following verses bring this out clearly and God comes as the warrior Lord to do battle on behalf of his own and this provides the answer to the questions of verse 8.

His anger is not directed at things like the rivers or the waters but his anger is directed at people who have rebelled against his sovereign rule. Let's read verses 12 through 15 again.

Habakkuk says 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.

From the description of the natural world Habakkuk moved to the description of the inhabitants of the world and the prophet described God as moving across the earth and anger.

[15:33] God marches in fury to save his people and to lead them through enemy territory toward the promised land. And the message is this. If the presence of God that spread across the sky sent the earth into upheaval so much the more will God's power moving through the area bring down ungodly nations.

So once again Habakkuk is relying on an example of the past to reassure people that God can do the same things in the future. And just as God did at the Exodus and during the conquest of Canaan he will thresh the heathen nations that oppose Israel.

Foreigners again will feel God's presence in anger as he stamps on them trampling them underfoot. And thresh there denotes the violent shaking and crushing that smash the nations into pieces.

Threshing the nations reminded the people of a common everyday occurrence. Remember what happens when things get threshed. Oxen moved about in a circular pit filled with wheat or barley to separate the ears of grain from the stalk by trampling on the grain.

And sometimes the farmer attached a sledge behind the animal to speed up the threshing. Amos pronounced judgment against Damascus for threshing Gilead with threshing sledges of iron.

[16:54] You can find that in Amos 1.3. And the Bible often used threshing as a symbol of judgment. Micah spoke of God's judgment in terms of horns of iron and hooves of bronze.

Habakkuk saw God as the master farmer threshing the nations, throwing them away as useless chaff in order to preserve his chosen people. And in verse 13, Habakkuk says to God why God threshed the nations.

He says, 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. In the first line, Habakkuk describes the future by referring again to the past. The Lord as a divine warrior marched out to war.

He came out in order to save his chosen people. He fought on their behalf. Flip backward a few pages to what we looked at several weeks ago in Habakkuk chapter 1 verses 12 through 17.

[17:56] In Habakkuk 1 verses 12 through 17, these verses have one of Habakkuk's complaints. 12 through 17 of chapter 1 are where Habakkuk said, Are you not from everlasting, O Lord my God, my Holy One?

We shall not die. O Lord, you have ordained them as a judgment, and you, O Rock, have established them for reproof. You who are of pure eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong, why do you idly look at traitors and remain silent when the wicked swallows up the man more righteous than he?

You make mankind like the fish of the sea, like crawling things that have no ruler. He brings all of them up with the hook. He drags them out with his net. He gathers them in his dragnet, so he rejoices and is glad.

Therefore he sacrifices to his net and makes offering to his dragnet, for by him or by them he lives in luxury and his food is rich. Is he then to keep on emptying his net and mercilessly killing nations forever?

Consider how pointed some of Habakkuk's questions were, particularly the ones in verse 13 and 17. Habakkuk asked God why God idly looked at wrong and why he remained silent when the wicked swallowed up the righteous.

[19 : 17] The first part of Habakkuk chapter 3 verse 13 directly refutes those pointed questions from Habakkuk. Think about the change in Habakkuk's perspective.

Habakkuk has gone from essentially accusing God of being idle while the righteous are swallowed up to realizing and remembering that God fights for the salvation of his people.

The first part of 313 assures Habakkuk that Israel's salvation which started with the exodus and continued through the wilderness into the promised land will be completed.

And the second part of verse 13 tells us that God also went out for the salvation of his anointed and it could also be translated as he went out for salvation with his anointed one.

Anointed means chosen of God for a particular purpose and the term anointed one was used of the high priest or the king as a member of the Davidic line but it also could indicate another divinely selected individual such as Cyrus in Isaiah 45.1 In this context the term has multiple meanings in reference to the exodus it would most likely point to Moses but in Habakkuk's day it referred to God's anointed people in general and the hoped for king deliverer in particular in the context of sacred scripture it looks forward to the Messiah fulfilled in the life sufferings death resurrection and salvation of Jesus of Nazareth and this reminds us that Habakkuk is not just looking at past history he's seeing there a divinely established pattern that links the fortunes of the people of God with those of their leader

[21 : 07] Habakkuk expects that pattern to be repeated and it ultimately is realized in the messianic deliverance that's achieved by Christ Habakkuk understood the message of Psalm 28 8 and Psalm 28 8 says the Lord is the strength of his people he is the saving refuge of his anointed we spend some time on the first two lines of verse 13 but the next two lines also are significant they say you crushed the head of the house of the wicked laying him bare from thigh to neck Selah the phrase head of a house is used consistently in the Old Testament of the leader of the household or family and in this context it must refer to the one opposing God's people and from whom the Lord would deliver his people the verse refers to a wicked people opposing the Lord and those people of the Lord are referred to as the Lord's anointed the historical context here would suggest the Egyptian

Pharaoh as the head of the house of the wicked because he's been talking about what God did during the Exodus but the timeless nature of the passage encompasses all the victories that the Lord gave to Israel as well as application to the Babylonians that would still be in the future in Habakkuk's time and the end time forces who also will oppose the Lord when the end times arrive laying him bare from thigh to neck references the undercutting of all supportive strength so in essence he took his legs out from under the head of the house and the extension of this assault to the neck indicates the thoroughness of the destruction one commentator applies this verse to Christ's victory over Satan when you think about it the warfare between these two adversaries culminated in the great battle at Calvary which ended in Satan's complete and everlasting defeat and in the full and eternal salvation of God's elect there the head of the house of the wicked received his mortal wound whether or not

Habakkuk had in mind ultimate future deliverance done by Christ we certainly can tell that Habakkuk understood that God follows a pattern of delivering his people and that plan continued into and through the New Testament let's look at verse 14 now Habakkuk continues talking to God when he says 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 so Habakkuk here continued the description of the defeat of God's enemies he noted that God would defeat the enemy with the enemy's own arrows and that's a way again of making the punishment fit the crime think back to when we looked at the taunts in chapter 2 verses 6 through 20 in all of those cases the punishment that the Babylonians received would fit the crime that they did and here's another case of that happening the description of the defeat is rather graphic because it says that

God will use their own arrows to pierce the heads of the warriors the point here is that whatever weapons or abilities are possessed by those who use those weapons to oppose God God instead will find those weapons and will turn those weapons against his enemies and we see examples of that throughout the Old Testament think about Haman in Esther he was hanged on the gallows he built to hang Mordecai with and Daniel's enemies were thrown into the!

den that they thought would be the end of Daniel and David's enemies fell into the same pit that they dug for him so rather than being terrified at the strength of their enemies this should encourage God's people to rest confidently in assurance that the strength of their enemies power only displays the enemies capacity to destroy themselves because God will use the enemy to set their own traps and we see the same pattern in the New Testament think about what happened with Jesus the Sanhedrin thought they were ending a threat when they crucified Jesus yet that crucifixion and subsequent resurrection showed that Jesus really is the God he claimed to be so sin and death were tools of the devil but by becoming sin for sinful man and dying on the cross and then rising victoriously from the grave Jesus pierced Satan with Satan's own tools because in Jesus' resurrection Satan was forever crushed the meaning of the last part of verse 14 is debated somewhat that's where

[25 : 56] Habakkuk talks about the warriors who came like a whirlwind to scatter him Habakkuk says the warriors rejoiced as if to devour the poor in secret most likely Habakkuk in spite of his visionary state still sees himself as experiencing the trouble from the enemy the enemy's fiendishness he says is portrayed by the image of a wild animal who lurks and drags and devours its prey!

in secret the wicked sought to destroy the people of God and even gloated over the prospects poor or wretched could refer to those in physical need but it often referred to godly people suffering at the hands of the arrogant foe to devour there is to take violent possession of someone's life and all that he has and this fiendish attitude seems to have characterized the Egyptians as they pursued the Israelites. And we see some of that same behavior exhibited from the Babylonians as they're coming to judge Israel. So once again here, Habakkuk uses the exodus in the past to demonstrate what he expected God to do in the future. Verse 15 resumes the picture of verse 8. Returning to that picture signals that this section is coming to an end.

We see there again that the power of the Lord's armies is irresistible. He tramples or treads them as the victor who has totally overthrown his enemies. And it reminds us again that God's enemies are powerless to resist God. Listen to verse 15 again. That's where Habakkuk says to God, you trample the sea with your horses, the surging of mighty waters. This is very similar to verse 8 that we looked at to start the lesson. It again alludes to the crossing of the Red Sea.

And it describes the kind of power that enables God to save the righteous and destroy the wicked. With his horses harnessed to chariots, God trampled or walked on or through the sea.

So just as God passed through the sea to complete the Israelites' escape from Egypt, so he's going to come again to rescue his people from Babylon. This is just another reminder that no obstacle will hinder God's progress and no army can thwart his purpose. Babylon's destruction was brought about by the enemy's entrance along the dried up riverbed of the Euphrates. So God used symbolism of a dried up river to show that Babylon would be dried up.

[28 : 48] The Lord rode through the Red Sea for the deliverance of his people, and so Habakkuk was confident that the Lord would ride through with his chariots to end all opposition and persecution. So God is ultimately victorious and his people will finally be rescued. This is just another case like we've seen throughout this passage where past deliverances bolster Habakkuk's faith in the final victory of the righteous.

Israel's victorious Redeemer in the past can be counted on to save once more a repentant and submissive people. So Habakkuk had received his answer.

God refuses to stand above the fray and idly watch human injustice run amok. Habakkuk originally thought that was the case, but now he knows and he remembers that God crosses time and space to enter the sinful messiness of our existence and save those who are most victimized by the world's ways. So let's think about what we can learn from tonight's passage and how we can apply it to our own lives.

The first thing is that God can and does overcome any obstacle to save his people. God can and does overcome any obstacle to save his people.

We talked about several cases where God reversed situations so that things meant to destroy people of God actually save those people instead. We need to realize that because of God's sovereignty, things that look like obstacles to us are really designed by God to display his power and to remind us of our dependence on him.

[30 : 27] The second thing we can get from this passage is that God finishes what he starts. God finishes what he starts.

God remains faithful to carry out his plan no matter what happens. And we've seen here in Habakkuk that God never idly watches as his people suffer. Instead, God is working to bring his people to the end that God has designed for them.

For believers today, the obvious New Testament example of this comes from Paul's words in Philippians 1.6. Philippians 1.6, of course, says, And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

So that verse and the truth of that verse should comfort Christians. And the truth of that verse should also motivate us to stand firm in our beliefs, even when circumstances seem bleak.

A third thing we can learn from this passage is that God uses Old Testament deliverances to point to the ultimate deliverer. God uses Old Testament deliverances to point to the ultimate deliverer.

[31 : 39] Just when the situation seemed to be at its worst for Habakkuk, we've seen him change from being disillusioned to being hopeful. Think about Habakkuk's situation for a minute.

His circumstances haven't changed a bit. He's still looking ahead to what's going to happen. It hasn't happened yet. But what has changed is Habakkuk knows that those circumstances are going to get worse before they get better because God's warned him that Babylon is coming to judge Israel.

But what really has changed instead is Habakkuk's perspective. And that perspective changed when God began to focus on more about what he knew about God instead of what Habakkuk knew about his own circumstances.

So think about that again. And his perspective changed when he began to focus on what he knew about God rather than what he knew about his own circumstances. The people of Habakkuk's day had done nothing to earn God's deliverances or his salvation.

And believers today can say the same thing. We've done and can do nothing to earn God's salvation. But we have seen God delivering his people in such a way that Habakkuk could never have imagined back then.

[32 : 54] Remember Romans 5, 6-9 where Paul documented what God and Christ have done for believers. Here are Romans 5, 6-9. Those verses say, So we know of a greater deliverance than God.

Habakkuk could possibly have envisioned at the time. Yet Habakkuk's deliverance is pointed forward to the great deliverance we know about now. The fourth thing is that God uses Old Testament judgments to point to the final judgment.

God uses Old Testament judgments to point to the final judgment. God has executed impressive judgments in the past. Habakkuk focused on the Exodus.

But other examples include what happened at Sodom and Gomorrah and what happened during the flood. All of those, though, pale in comparison to what is to come. Because when the great day of the wrath of God and of the Lamb comes, the question will be asked, Who can stand?

And that question, of course, is found in Revelation 6, 17. There is no possibility of anyone successfully resisting the unrestrained power of God. He'll crush kings on the day of his wrath.

[34 : 33] And he has given his anointed one the nations as his inheritance. And he's given Jesus the authority to break those nations with an iron scepter. By looking back at the display of God's power at the Exodus, Habakkuk was encouraged as to what divine intermission would mean during his own day and circumstances.

And by looking back now to the further display of God's power in the death and resurrection of Christ, we can be encouraged to await the renewed display of God's power at his second coming when all opposing powers are put under his feet.

So I have a couple of questions for you to think about as we go through the rest of the week. The first one is, how does Jesus care for his people today? How does Jesus care for his people today? And you'll see some scripture references there if you want to check those out later. The second thing is, how often do we see the wicked caught in their own devices? How often do we see the wicked caught in their own devices?

We need to remember that the same God who led the people of Israel from Egyptian bondage and worked on behalf of the people of Judah will lead believers from the bondage of sin.

[35 : 44] And though times sometimes appear to be the worst imaginable, God will lead his people and he will save his people just as he's promised. Remember Psalm 28.8.

That verse says again, The Lord is the strength of his people. He is the saving refuge of his anointed. Let's close in prayer. Father, we thank you for the reminder that even when times seem bleak, you are still working behind the scenes to follow your plan and to ultimately rescue your people.

Let us use the examples we've looked at tonight and other examples throughout the Bible to give us assurance of your working as we wait on that deliverance. And let us use those examples to give us more boldness to share your gospel with others.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.