

***Pastor Jeremy M. Thomas***  
***Fredericksburg Bible Church***

*107 East Austin*

*Fredericksburg, Texas 78624*

*830-997-8834    [jthomas@fbgbible.org](mailto:jthomas@fbgbible.org)*

**C1221 – June 20, 2012 – Habakkuk 3:1-3a**  
**The Psalm Of Habakkuk**

Tonight we come to Habakkuk 3 and we want to review what we've seen so far in the dialogue between Habakkuk and God and then we're going to introduce the Psalms because Habakkuk 3 is a Psalm. So a lot of introductory work tonight. It's almost like we're going into a new book.

Let's review first of all the basic flow of dialogue in Habakkuk because the Psalm grows out of this dialogue Habakkuk had with God. Habakkuk lived around 610BCC when his nation was in chaos, they were in rebellion against God, it was on the brink of collapse and you had a tiny remnant of believers in the nation, of which he was a part. At that time he was taken into the divine counsels and made to see just how bad it really was, the wicked injustices of the governing administration in Jerusalem and this caused him great distress. So Habakkuk asked the LORD, "Why don't you save your people from their evil ways? Why aren't you doing anything about this? These are Your People God." And the LORD answered, "I am doing something about it, I'm raising up the Babylonians to discipline them." Well, that didn't make any sense to Habakkuk because the Babylonians were worse than them so he asked, "Why are you disciplining them by those less righteous than we?" The Babylonians are terrible people, worse than us. And what about the godly remnant? Are they going to be caught up along with the ungodly when the Babylonians invade us? And will the Babylonians just go on conquering and conquering in never ending imperial conquest? No God answered, they are arrogant, they will die; Babylon will pass from the scene in two phases. First in a near prophecy that was fulfilled in 539BC when the Medes and Persians diverted the Euphrates River that went through a system of canals into the city while the Babylonian King was drunk with his nobles and yet, in a way Babylon would continue because it would pass on its contribution of the fractional reserve banking system to the next Gentile kingdom of Medo-

Persia who would pass it on to Greece and to Rome. So Babylon stays with us until the end of the times of the Gentiles. But the important point is that the times of the Gentiles comes to an end, Rev 17-18 describe the final Babylon going to destruction. And Habakkuk 2 depicts this final Babylon being destroyed and being replaced with the kingdom of God. So Habakkuk, you have nothing to worry about, I am just and the just will live by faith, whether it's in the near judgment of Babylon when faithful believers like Daniel and his friends survived and went into exile or whether it's in the future judgment of Babylon when faithful Jewish believers will survive, be rescued and go into the kingdom in mortal bodies to re-populate the millennial earth. The righteous shall live by faith. God's plan for Israel will prevail. It may not look like it, it may look bleak for Israel with the whole world turning against Israel, but God made promises to Israel and God is going to dismantle the present evil system entirely at the Second Coming and His promises to Israel will be fulfilled. So the Second Coming will be the main subject of Habakkuk 3.

And with that said, Habakkuk is more than satisfied with God's answers and we come to a very exciting chapter, Hab 3, a Prayer in Psalm depicting the Second Coming. And since we've never worked with the Psalms and they are a very special section of Scripture in the OT, many, many people read the Psalms as devotional literature daily and just interpret them in terms of their own day; unfortunately that's not really the point of the Psalms. So to get some interpretive handle on the Psalms let's introduce the Psalms.

First of all, what is a Psalm? The word Psalm is from the Greek word that translates the Hebrew *Tehillim* which means *praise songs*. So really these are the *Tehillim* and typically these *praise songs were accompanied by stringed instruments* and sometimes dancing or sometimes just instruments and no singing actually. So the definition is quite broad. But when we speak of the Book of Psalms and other Psalms recorded in Scripture, obviously we are talking about a praise song. These songs, most of which are organized in the Book of Psalms, were composed over a period of 900 years beginning with Moses about 1400BC who composed Psalm 90 and ending with Psalms written in post-Exilic times, so about 900 years to compile the Book of Psalms. About a hundred of these Psalms are attributed directly to seven different authors, about fifty others are written by anonymous authors, but

NT authors attribute some of those anonymous Psalms to David who wrote most of the Psalms out of his life experiences.

Habakkuk 3 is strange because it's a Psalm yet it's not organized in the Book of Psalms. It's placed right in the historic situation in which it was written, right after Hab 2. Most Psalms aren't like that even though they do grow out of a historic situation. For example, the Psalms of David grew out of historic situations in his life and sometimes you'll read a notation in the title of the Psalm, "when David was in the cave" or "when David fled from Absalom," and to get the full impact of the Psalm you have to go back to that place in 1 or 2 Samuel and think through what David was going through that prompted him to write the Psalm. But with Habakkuk 3, it's already placed in the historic situation so it's easier to connect this Psalm with what Habakkuk was thinking when he composed it.

Now people have recognized that the Book of Psalms is the only inspired hymnbook. It's the only hymnbook God ever wrote and because of that some churches, especially since the Reformation, insist on only singing Psalms in their worship services. And if you're interested there are a few hymnbooks you can still get today that have put the Psalms to music. However, because they are originally written in Hebrew poetry, the meter and rhythm are lost in translation and so to put them to music in English you have to be very skilled in music and you have to translate portions of the Psalms fairly loosely so that it actually sounds like a song.

So when you come to Hebrew poetry you're not reading English poetry, they don't use rhyme like we do, they use other things that get lost in translation, the content doesn't get lost but the poetic power does get lost. So I want to go through the four different types of Hebrew poetry you can observe in the text because these help you interpret the Psalms. You'll notice first of all, if you have a study Bible, anytime there is Hebrew poetry the font is indented. That goes for the Psalms, that goes for portions of narrative books like Genesis, that goes even for NT books; when a Greek hymn is cited the font will be offset to alert you that this is poetic. And most of the Twelve Minor Prophets we've been studying you'll notice are poetic in form, lots of figures of speech, lots of drama, rich in content. This makes them very difficult to study, there's an added workload when you come to the Psalms which is probably why not many teachers work the Psalms.

Let's look at the four types of poetry you want to be able to identify when you read a Psalm. These are all parallelism; parallelism is the dominant characteristic of Hebrew poetry. Parallelism in math means two lines are running parallel to one another, parallelism in poetry means two thoughts are running parallel to each other. The first type of parallelism and probably the most common is *comparison parallelism*. In *comparison parallelism the second line repeats the thoughts of the first line using synonyms*. Some call this synonymous parallelism because of the synonyms used. For example, Hab 3:12,

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

“Anger” is a synonym of “indignation,” “trampled” is a synonym of “marched,” and “the nations” are those who inhabit “the earth.” This is called comparison parallelism because the second line repeats the thought of the first line by synonyms.

The second type of Hebrew poetry common to the Psalms is *contrast parallelism*. In contrast parallelism the second line often starts with “But” to signal the contrast. *The second line contrasts with the first line*. There are no examples of contrast parallelism in the Psalm of Habakkuk 3 so I'll give you one from Psalm 1:6.

For the LORD knows the way of the righteous,  
But the way of the wicked will perish.

Obviously it's a contrast, the first line is the righteous, the second line is the wicked, the hint is always the word “But,” that tips you off to contrast parallelism.

The third type of Hebrew poetry common to the Psalms is *completion parallelism*. In these parallelisms, the *second line completes the thought of the first line or vice versa*. But left to itself a line is incomplete. For example, verse 11, notice the last phrase is an incomplete thought,

Sun and moon stood in their places;

They went away at the light of Your arrows,  
At the radiance of Your gleaming spear. (incomplete thought)

That's just a fragment of a thought, but if we go to the previous thoughts, they complete the fragment. That's an example of completion parallelism, where the thought of one line is incomplete without the other line.

Finally, the fourth type of Hebrew poetry common to the Psalms is *figurative parallelism*. In figurative parallelism *the second line uses a figure of speech to make the first line more colorful or vice versa*. Of course, there are a lot of figures of speech in Hebrew poetry. An example of *figurative parallelism* is verse 19,

And He has made my feet like hinds feet, (figurative)  
And makes me walk on my high places.

In this case the first line is the figurative language, the second line is the ordinary language, the first line makes the second line more colorful. That's all figures of speech do, they are colorful ways of depicting literal things and you've got to admit that if everything was written in just ordinary literal language it would be quite dry, but if you throw figurative literal language into the piece it becomes very interesting.

So those are the four types of Hebrew poetry most common to the Psalms and you'll find them quite easily as you read carefully; there are a few other less common types we won't go into but as you can see, three of the four are found in this Psalm and so they are very helpful to identify when you go to interpret; one line can help you interpret the other line if you identify what kind of parallelism is being used you understand the relationship between the two phrases. And as we go through Hab 3 we'll point out the kind of parallelism and hopefully this will aid our reading and interpreting Psalms on our own.

One more point about the structure of the Psalms, since they are music there are musical notations and if you glance down to verses 3, 9 and 13 you see a strange Hebrew word in the margin, *selah*, that's not part of the Psalm, that's probably a musical notation, people argue about what it means. The word itself means "lift up," which has given some the idea that it's a crescendo, lift

up your voice, get louder, others say it means to pause, others think it means this is a “division” in the Psalm, like a stanza. You’ll find that throughout the Psalm and when you do a public reading of the Psalm you’re not supposed to read, “Selah.” That would be like saying, treble cleff, it’s a musical notation, not a word in the song.

So we’ve looked at the four types of Hebrew poetry most common to the psalms, comparison parallelism, contrast parallelism, completion parallelism and figurative parallelism. We’ve looked at “selah,” the musical notation. Now we want to mention several kinds of Psalms, these have been grouped, we won’t go into detail about each one, but it is helpful to identify what group of Psalm you are reading and then we’ll identify Habakkuk’s Psalm. There are:

1. Wisdom psalms (give instruction for skill in living)
2. Confidence psalms (express assurance that God will save),
3. Lament psalms (cries to God asking for help),
4. Pilgrimage psalms (songs sung on pilgrimages up to Jerusalem)
5. Thanksgiving psalms (giving thanks to God for blessing or deliverance)
6. Praise psalms (declaring or describing the greatness of God)
7. Imprecatory psalms (calling on God to curse His enemies)
8. Messianic psalms (sing of God’s coming King Messiah)
9. Enthronement psalms (songs describing the Messiah’s reign over all creation).

These aren’t perfect categories, some Psalms are blends of these but basically these are the kinds of Psalms we find. The Psalms are traditionally divided into five books and that’s fine but I think its more helpful to identify and study the Psalms in these groups.

We come to Habakkuk 3 and this chapter is a Psalm for two known reasons. First of all, verse 19 closes with the words, “For the choir director, on my stringed instruments.” This shows that Habakkuk was a member of the Levitical choir, so he was of the tribe of Levi and he was a priest since the tribe of Levi was the priestly tribe. So the first reason we know this is a Psalm is verse 19 says it was composed for the choir director, on Habakkuk’s stringed instruments. He apparently was a musician and played multiple

stringed instruments. The second reason we know this is a Psalm is verse 1 says, “A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, according to Shigionoth.” The term Shigionoth indicates some manner of playing music. We aren’t sure what “Shigionoth” means. The only other place it’s used is Ps 7 in the singular, a Psalm of David according to Shiggaion. Here we find the plural form of the word. The root word basically means “to reel” like a drunk “or “to wander, to go astray.” So apparently it’s a very irregular pattern of beats like a drunk man walking, called dithyrambic rhythm. It doesn’t mean Habakkuk was drunk when he wrote it, it means that it was wildly irregular, rhythm would change rapidly, the beats would vary significantly, and it’s possible it was to be accompanied by dancing. The interesting thing about Ps 7 and Hab 3 is they share the same theme, they both are wildly passionate songs about God’s justice; God judging the wicked and saving the righteous.

Now while this Psalm is highly emotional, which shows you prayer can be quite active, quite emotional, it nevertheless follows on the heels of what? Truth. God has just revealed what truth? The truth that Babylon and the pagan system of Babylonialism would not endure forever, but the kingdom of God would come to replace it upon the earth. So the emotions are proper here, they are responding to truth, they’re not responding to error, emotions that are responding to error are improper emotions because they have no ground in truth, they are grounded in deception. So while the song is wildly passionate, there’s no problem with it because it’s a response to the truth of God’s word about where history is going.

Another conclusion we can draw, combining verse 19 with verse 1 is that not only is this a Psalm and a Prayer, but also the Jews must have put some of their prayers to music. Their prayers are music and writing music takes thought, it takes skill in musical theory, skill in the elements of music, rhythm, meter, etc...it takes skill in poetry, in writing, and what it shows you is that they actually sat down and thought about their prayers. They didn’t just open their mouth and start flapping their tongues, they took time to compose and structure prayers and set them to music. I’m not saying go write a prayer book or we need to adopt a liturgical book of prayer and read prayers, but I am saying it is a good practice to compose prayers because it has precedence in Scripture and it forces you to think through what you are praying and to organize it according to Scripture.

Alright, we've looked at the Psalms in general; we've concluded Hab 3 is a Psalm, what kind of Psalm is Habakkuk 3? We had nine categories of Psalms. If this Psalm is a prayer, just by looking at the nine, which category of Psalm do you think it might be? Without even looking at the content of the prayer? What are the four elements of prayer? Praise, Requests, Thanksgiving and Confession. So it's probably either a Thanksgiving Psalm or it's a Praise Psalm. And guess which one it is? It's a Praise Psalm. It might also be classified as a Messianic Psalm since it depicts the Kings Coming. But the majority of this prayer is praise to God for the King's Coming.

So let's look at praise. Let's define praise. What is praise? Well it's not singing "Praise Him, praise Him, praise Him, all the saints adore Him." That's not praising God; that's telling you to praise God. And some of the Psalms do the same thing, they say, "ascribe honor to God, ascribe majesty to God," they're just telling you to praise God. So praise basically means to honor God by extolling the character of God. God has certain attributes; God is sovereign, righteous, just, loving, omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent, immutable and eternal. To praise God means to make mention of His attributes, to call attention to His essence, so praise is theocentric, it's emphasis is on God, it's not about man, it's not about how I feel about God, it's not about what God has done for me, it's not about my walk with God, it's about who God is, about His mighty acts in history!

Now this can be done in one of two ways, either by what we call Descriptive Praise or by what we call Declarative praise. In other words, one way you can praise God is by simply declaring God's attributes, God, you are sovereign, God you are loving, God you are righteous, you're just citing the attributes, pointing to His character. That's Declarative Praise because you're just declaring who He is. The other kind of praise is Descriptive Praise and this is when you describe God by what He has done, God, you moved the mountains, God you led us through the wilderness, God You delight in Your Law, some act of justice. So do you see the difference between declarative and descriptive praise? Both are praising God but one is simply declaring who God is, citing attributes, the other is describing who God is by what He has done. I think both are important and more often than not the praise is descriptive, it calls to mind who God is by way of things God has done. Habakkuk is primarily a Descriptive Praise Psalm.



So we're going into a prayer here, a prayer that Habakkuk wanted sung by the Levitical choir. And it's my guess, this is a guess, but I think I have one or two reasons to back up why this is a good guess, my guess is that he wanted this prayer sung by the choir because a number of the choir members are part of the godly remnant. And he's offering this prayer as an intercessor, on their behalf, it's his prayer, but it becomes the prayer of all the godly remnant in that Levitical choir.

So let's look at this Descriptive Praise Psalm. Habakkuk 3:1, and you can see from the title here that the Jews kept this book separate from the first two chapters. **A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, according to Shigionith.** Because why would you need to tell us this is a prayer of Habakkuk and that Habakkuk is a prophet when we already knew that from chapter 1? Clearly someone in the school of the prophets took this song and put it in with other songs and to identify the song this title was added, under inspiration of course.

So **A prayer of Habakkuk.** The word for **prayer** here is the most common word for prayer although the Hebrew language has at least a dozen words for prayer. Usually this word is used of intercessory prayer and that's why I suspect that Habakkuk is writing this prayer on behalf of the godly remnant, many of which are in the Levitical choir. His prayer becomes their prayer, he's interceding on their behalf.

**According to Shigionith,** and you already know sort of what that is, a very emotional prayer. He's excited. Why is he excited? Because verse 20 of the prior chapter concluded with "the LORD in His holy temple" and the whole earth silent before His awesome majesty. So yeah, he's excited; God has judged evil Babylon, brought an end to the times of the Gentiles and restored the Kingdom of God, installing His King Messiah on Mt Zion. Doctrine precedes emotion and this doctrine should evoke very strong emotion.

One of the greatest teachings of the Bible is that good and evil will not go on forever, mixed eternally, God will one day judge evil and separate it from the good. And for those who love righteousness there is something tremendously exciting about the coming judgment of evil. And that's what issues forth this very emotional song. He's excited about what God is going to do and he's going to describe what God is going to do by picking up language used earlier

in history when God did great things and apply that language to the future things God is going to do in destroying Babylon. So He's connecting what God is going to do with what God has already done.

Verse 2, **LORD, I have heard the report about You and I fear.** What's this report he says he heard? Well if you go back to 2:1, you remember he said, "I will stand on my guard post And station myself on the rampart; And I will keep watch to see what He will speak to me, and how I may reply when I am reproved." Well now he's seen what God said to him. So verse 2 starts off with the confirmation that I got the report, I got the message you gave in 2:2-20. And you remember, that report was to be written down and taken by a messenger to the rest of the godly remnant. So the report has been received by Habakkuk, it's been written down and sent out by a messenger to the godly remnant. After thinking about God's report he now composes this prayer. So you'll notice his prayer is prompted by in depth Bible study. You see this over and over in Scripture, the person praying has clearly been involved in in depth Bible study and out of that there is prayer, it may be a prayer of confession like Daniel's, it may be a prayer of praise like Habakkuk's, but the point is prayer is a response to the word of God. Because fundamentally the word of God is what? God speaking to man. And what is prayer? Man speaking to God. Relationships are a two way street. Both people have to talk and both people have to listen. God has spoken, Habakkuk has listened, now he's responding, a marvelous picture of the intimate relationship we have with God. We hear His voice in the Scriptures and He hears our voice in Prayer.

**LORD, I have heard the report about You and I fear.** He says, I am in awe of you, I have thought through what you are going to do to Babylon and **I fear**, it's not the bogey man fear, although it is in some contexts, in this one it's the reverential fear, it's the idea that God is awesome, it's like a little boy looking up at his father who stands over him with such great stature and the little boy says, yes sir because He knows His dad is an awesome man. And Habakkuk has just got the report of what God is going to do with the Babylon and He's in awe. Woe, Woe, Woe, Woe, Woe said God to Babylon for her sins, she is going to die. God is going to judge evil, permanently remove it and establish His kingdom and His king. So obviously Habakkuk has been meditating on God's justice, God judges all evil no matter who might be involved and establishes justice and righteousness in the earth, God's

sovereignty, God controls whatsoever comes to pass in history, history is going to a conclusion where He reigns, God's omnipotence, God's unlimited power to take history exactly where He wants to, God's love, His giving of Himself to His people in their kingdom, God's omniscience, His ability to declare the future with exact certainty. All this is on Habakkuk's mind, he says, I got the report, and I fear, you are awesome.

Then he starts in with some prayer requests, three to be exact and you ought to make requests to God. If you don't make requests then you're acting self-sufficient and independent and so if you're a do-it-myselfer you're going to be a failure because God doesn't let anyone make themselves great. People who try to make themselves great God brings down; on the other hand, those who humble themselves under God's mighty hand God makes great, he lifts them up. And one way to show humility is to make your requests known to God. **O LORD**, he says, **revive Your work in the midst of the years**. Alright, he's looking at the time when they go into Exile to Babylon until Babylon is judged, so let's say, 605BC all the way till the end of the times of the Gentiles, so a period of more than 2600 years, in the midst of those years, **revive your work**. What do you mean **revive your work**? What **work**? The work of God on behalf of the nation Israel earlier in history to preserve them from harm by Gentile enemies. **Revive** what you did for us in earlier times, preserving us from harm as you did for us in Egypt, as you did for us in the wilderness, as you did for us in the times of the judges, preserve the nation Israel while we are in the midst of captivity. **Revive your work!** That's prayer request one. Do for us now what you did for us in ancient times.

Prayer request two, **In the midst of the years make it known**; make what **known**? Make your works **known**, *yada*, meaning intimate knowledge of your ways. Give us close understanding of what you are doing with our nation, give us intimate understanding through the discipline that we have to endure under Gentile powers so we learn the lesson precisely. Make your work known to us. Why? Because that's the only way the nation is going to confess and get restored to fellowship so the Messiah returns.

Prayer request three, **In wrath remember mercy**. In the wrath that would come upon the Gentile nations **remember mercy** toward us Jews in captivity. The word mercy used here is not really related to graciousness but refers to a deep compassion for those who are inferiors, for those who are

helpless. They will be helpless under the Gentile nations and this is a call for God to show pity toward them when God judges Gentile nations.

In verse 3 he moves to praise, **God comes from Teman, And the Holy One from Mount Paran**. What kind of parallelism do you see here? Is this figurative, is it comparison, is it contrast, is it completion? It's comparison. The second line, **the Holy One from Mount Paran** is synonymous with the first line, **God comes from Teman**. Teman is a city in southern Edom and Mount Paran is over in the Wilderness of Paran, they are both in the same vicinity. And this is the general area in which the Second Coming will occur. The believing remnant of Israel will be protected in Petra and when they call on the LORD to be saved He will return to this area to rescue them from the Antichrist and His armies.

We'll stop here but it seems that the remainder of the chapter centers on the Second Coming. Certainly verse 3 refers to the location of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, so we, as the bride of Christ will come back with Him to this exact location too.

[Back To The Top](#)

Copyright (c) Fredericksburg Bible Church 2012