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# Living with Joy in Troubles

Habakkuk 3:1-19<sup>5</sup>

*Russ Kennedy*

How long will we have to wait for deliverance? (v. 14)

For the earth will be filled  
with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord  
as the waters cover the sea.

Where is God in our troubles? (v. 20)

But the LORD is in his holy temple;  
let all the earth keep silence before him.”

The whole poem is a prayer by Habakkuk in response to God's declaration of judgment.

It draws much of its language and imagery from the Psalms.

Its imagery is very apocalyptic and eschatological.

## The Response to God in Prayer

**(v. 1-2)**

A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, according to Shigionoth.

<sup>2</sup>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.

### In What He Hears

**(v. 2)**

Habakkuk has heard from God. He has the Word of God. This is what will shape his prayer and focus his request. The sure from God now fills him with his own words back to God.

### In What He Asks

**(v. 2)**

He also considers the work of God. He is concerned for God's working in His people and in the world. In his day, the work are God's covenant people the nation of Israel. For us,

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Jesus is the work of God – He is the one who is doing the work of God. But now, we, the church are God’s work. So Habakkuk has three simple petitions.

Revive your work through bringing it to life again. It is a prayer for spiritual regeneration so that God’s physical people, the Jews, will truly become God’s spiritual people. This prayer was begun to be answered in a small way through Old Testament history. It is being brought to a wondrous fulfillment in the world today.

Reveal your work through teaching. He asks God to make what He is doing known. It is a request for an ever increasing unfolding of the work of God in history.

Remember your work in mercy. There will be times when the work will be small and appear to languish. It will be suffering because of the hatred of the world and the judgments upon the wicked. So the request is that God will grant mercy and thus relief.

## The Salvation of God in Wrath

(v. 3-13)

We must be very careful over-interpreting this beautiful imagery. It is the grievous wrath and glorious salvation of God flashing in Technicolor® poetry.

### In His Glorious Presence

(v. 3-4)

<sup>3</sup>God came from Teman,  
and the Holy One from Mount Paran.  
His splendor covered the heavens,  
and the earth was full of his praise. *Selah*

<sup>4</sup>His brightness was like the light;  
rays flashed from his hand;  
and there he veiled his power.

Quote from Tozer on “God came from nowhere...”

Here is a glorious vision of the coming of God.

It is seen as a glorious arrival. God comes in or comes down. When He comes it will be with brightness and splendor.

It is spoken of in terms of finality. When this arrival happens there is a sense of the closing of history.

It is full of the hope of the universal acclaim of God with praise. Since there will be the universal knowledge of God’s glory, then there will be lifted the universal praise of God’s greatness.

In all this glorious arrival with bright splendor and kingly praise, that is but the veiling of His power. I think that this is a reference to Christ, whose brightness, power and glory were veiled in His humanity. He was the bright treasure in an earthen vessel, just as his followers are said to be as well.

### With His Destroying Power

(v. 5-9)

There will be judgment and destruction in His coming. The Divine warrior is on the move.

<sup>5</sup> Before him went pestilence,  
and plague followed at his heels.

<sup>6</sup> 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.  
<sup>7</sup> I saw the tents of Cushan in affliction;  
 the curtains of the land of Midian did tremble.  
<sup>8</sup> 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?  
<sup>9</sup> You stripped the sheath from your bow,  
 calling for many arrows. *Selah*

God's glorious arrival also comes with a kind of destruction that reminds us of the plagues in Egypt. God's wrath sweeps the earth and shakes the mountains and sinks the hills. He shakes the nations and afflicts the Cushite's and Mediates. This looks back to Israel's sweeping through on its way to the Promised Land. His wrath flows across the land, the hills and the tents of the wicked. He measures the earth to mark out what and who will be judged. He does so because He is its creator and owner. He had given the measured Land to Israel so now it is their possession. But they are going to lose it to Babylon because they have failed to keep the Law and obey God. Habakkuk's prayer poem then uses the history of the departure from Egypt and the conquering of the Promised Land as a lens to look forward to the coming judgment by and upon Babylon.

But is God angry with the earth? Is His wrath against the rivers and the seas? No The Lord's coming is on the chariot of salvation. That chariot probably points back to the chariot of the Lord that separated Elijah and Elisha so that Elijah could be taken up to heaven. Using these two images, Habakkuk looks forward to the Last Days, the time between the resurrection of Jesus and His final return. This is what we call the eschatological age. It is the age in which we live.

### For His Chosen People

(v. 10-13)

Judgment will be used to bring salvation to His chosen people.

You split the earth with rivers.  
<sup>10</sup> The mountains saw you and writhed;  
 the raging waters swept on;  
 the deep gave forth its voice;  
 it lifted its hands on high.  
<sup>11</sup> 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.  
<sup>12</sup> You marched through the earth in fury;  
 you threshed the nations in anger.  
<sup>13</sup> 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*

This stanza is picked up in 2 Peter and Revelation. It anticipates the day of the Lord. There will come a day when God will enter into the threshing floor and tread the wicked. His Holy and Righteous anger will bring sin and sinners to a just end. It will be a day in which the Lord delivers and vindicates His people. He has arrived in the chariot of salvation (v. 8) and brought the salvation of His people (v. 13).

But that salvation is also for His *anointed*. The word often refers to the Lord Jesus. The anointed One is the Christ, the Messiah. Here though, the word may be referring to God's anointed people. They were chosen by God before the foundation of the world and granted their salvation through the outpouring of God's wrath on their Redeemer. Then they received their salvation in the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost and then at each one's regeneration.

One has helpfully written:

In this hymn, Habakkuk describes his God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the God of glory who reveals His glory in creation and in history. He is the living God who makes the dead idols of the nations look ridiculous. He is the God of power who can command land and sea, heaven, and earth, and therefore, He is the God of victory who leads His people in triumph. (Wiersbe, 133)

## The Deliverance by God in Judgment

(v. 14-15)

Habakkuk restates what God has said and what Habakkuk is hoping for in judgment.

<sup>14</sup> 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.  
<sup>15</sup> You trampled the sea with your horses,  
the surging of mighty waters

This stanza speaks of both the near and the far horizons of fulfillment. The deliverance by God will come in judgment:

### On the Rising Babylon

(v. 14)

Note the return to "his" as earlier in this chapter. His refers to Nebuchadnezzar and through him to the Chaldeans, the Babylonians. God has unsheathed His Divine bow and now is unleashing His divine arrows. Babylon swept across the land the nations of the world and devoured Israel. But God is unleashing a torrent of divine thunderbolts that will pierce them through and bring them to naught.

### On the Surging Nations

(v. 15)

In prophetic symbols, the raging waters of the sea refers to the wicked people groups and nations. In the new heavens and new earth, "there will be no more sea" does not mean there will be no more oceans, but no more raging and roiling of wicked peoples and nations. So here, God will not only judge Babylon but He will also judge all the nations. He will bring to an end the seething tumult of the ocean of pagan peoples.

Because<sup>4</sup> in the New Heavens and New Earth, righteousness will cover the earth *like the ocean covers the earth*.

## The Waiting for God in Trust

(v. 16-19)

Habakkuk's reaction rings so true to us. If this is the message and means of God's deliverance then will wait on God in faith.

<sup>16</sup> I hear, and my body trembles;  
my lips quiver at the sound;  
rotteness enters into my bones;  
my legs tremble beneath me.  
Yet I will quietly wait for the day of trouble  
to come upon people who invade us.

<sup>17</sup> 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,

<sup>18</sup> yet I will rejoice in the LORD;  
I will take joy in the God of my salvation.

<sup>19</sup> GOD, the Lord, is my strength;  
he makes my feet like the deer's;  
he makes me tread on my high places.

To the choirmaster: with stringed instruments.

All of us have waited and rested in God...

### With Personal Trembling

(v. 16a)

This is the natural reaction to this kind of news. The awesome majesty of the Divine Warrior ought to cause us to tremble. The fearsome and frightful judgments the Lord will bring may cause us to tremble. As we have contemplated this over the last two Sundays, many of us are trembling at the thought that we may suffer as God moves against the wicked.

### With Quiet Patience

v16b)

But we will also wait in quietness. This is trust. It may be hard. IT may be dreadful. But it is our God who is moving to bring to judgment all who have rejected Him. Habakkuk can wait quietly for God to deal with those who invade. We will wait quietly through whatever trials and tests God chooses to put us through.

### With Joyous Acceptance

(v.17-18)

What a doxology. The title of this could be, *Faith Triumphant in Song*. Habakkuk shifts his eyes from his situation to his savior and sovereign. This is how the righteous live by faith. They believe God's Word in such a way that they rejoice in God at all times.

We may not have all we want. We may not even have all we think we need in the moment. Life may have become hard and barren and empty. But we will rejoice in our God regardless of our situations.

These are easy words but hard living. We are often more rejoicing in and clinging to the things that God is removing. He may cause hardness and barrenness. He may allow enemies to attack and difficulties to increase. Our sinful tendency to want those things more

than we want God's good purposes and providences for us. So we question and challenge God. We seek sinfully to improve our situation.

The end result is that we are not submitted to the Lord. We are not bowing to Him. We do not want what God has chosen to do in our lives. But if we will rejoice in Him in all our situations then we will bow to Him. We will accept with joy what He brings us. We will not be angry, bitter or discontent. We will be able to speak of the peace and joy that flows from our faith, love and hope.

### **With Strengthened Expectation**

**(v.19)**

What a beautiful image. With God's strength we will be enabled to walk the high and dangerous mountains where most will not go. The path of believing and bowing leads into the high mountains of grace and goodness and gladness. God will strengthen us. God will meet us there. So we rise up in hope and leave the darkness of the valley of our hardships. We feel grace flowing in our souls. We move up the dangerous paths of obedience and joy that wind their way up God's great mountain. Hope floods our souls for this high place is also called... heaven.

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## Thinking it through...

God's judgment of the wicked is meant to bring comfort and consolation to God's suffering people.

It is a fearsome time; it should not be a fearful time.

It is a time of great trouble; it should be a time of great trust.

Do we have a vision of the greatness and grandeur of God? May we bow in worship and trust to such a gloriously great God. Then our hearts may rest quietly in many troubles and trials.

Where is God when everything is falling apart?

He is in control.

He is going to deal with sin in justice.

He is going to deliver His people.

He has purposes whose design will glorify Him.

What do we do when everything is falling apart?

Believe all that God has taught us.

Trust God to do what is best for us *in the long run*.

Accept with joy suffering and loss because you have something better and lasting.

Turn away from your own resources and draw from all the resources of your Sovereign Lord.