

Habakkuk **3:1-19

Yahweh's Judgments and Salvation

***(the prophet's name is abbreviated as "Hab" throughout this manuscript)

What have we seen of this man Hab in our study so far of this OT prophet?
We have seen that this was a man who was in touch with Yahweh God.

He knew Yahweh intimately. He had a deep, interpersonal relationship with him. He understood much of his nature, his character, and he had profound reverence for and fear of God. It could almost be said of him, that like Abraham, he was a friend of God.

We learn also that Hab had a deep understanding of the righteousness and holiness of God. And he knew what sin was. He understood how it was spiritual adultery. He understood that it was rebellion against God's rule. He understood that it was disobedience to the Law of God. And he understood that sin was the neglect of God, the passing him by for something more attractive, more interesting, more pleasurable, more pleasing to our carnal nature. Sin was selfish, sin was cruel, sin was wicked— sin was running in the other direction from God.

And the tragedy was that he saw this kind of behavior all around him – next door in Jerusalem, and across the street. He saw it abounding in his own people and they were heading away from Yahweh as fast as they could with no sign of turning back.

Hab was astounded, he was hurt, he was angry, and he was upset. He knew that God was almighty and all powerful and could do anything he wanted. He understood Prov. 21:11 -

The king's heart is a stream of water in **the** hand of **the** LORD; he **turns** it wherever he will.

The Lord could turn not only the king's heart but the people's hearts too – but he wasn't doing that. The more Hab cried out to him to do something, to put a stop to the Hebrew people's sin, it seemed the more they sinned.

Then finally God answered him. He told him he was going to bring down the Chaldeans, that is, the Babylonians from the northeast to heap judgment on his people by conquering them.

So the way Yahweh revealed to him the way he was going to punish his people, to put a stop to their sin, was by using a pagan, ungodly and brutal nation as his instrument of judgment.

Now this really confused Hab. How could God use such ungodly barbarians to punish his people – who, though evil, were not as cruel and ungodly as the Babylonians.

We saw in chapter 2 that Yahweh told him the only way one could stand firm and be pleasing to God was not to be proudly arrogant but by having faith in him, to put their whole trust in Yahweh as King and Savior: "...the righteous shall live by his faith."

And although plunder and conquering and carry off people in captivity was the boastful pastime of the Babylonians, there would be a new day coming in the which (2:14) "the earth will be filled with the knowledge of ^(B)the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea." There was a time coming in which the evil Babylonians themselves would be judged and be shamed and be overwhelmed by other enemies. Their speechless and motionless idols that they worshipped would be seen as useless. But the living God, Yahweh of all the earth, the one who dwelt in his holy temple – was the one to be revered, to be heeded, to be listened to. He alone is the living and true God. (2:20).

And so Hab is taking all this in – it is overwhelming – it is almost too much for a man to understand and take it all in. But in Chapter 3 we see Hab's prayer – once again in speaks to God. Chapter 3:1 says "

A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, according to Shigionoth. This term Shigionoth is probably a musical term describing how this was to be sung in temple worship.

So Hab begins to pray:

**²O 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.**

What he does is he begins to think. He begins to recall the history of his people. He calls to mind God's dealing with his people in the past.

In v. 2 he says "I've heard about what you've done in the past. And when I recall it I bow in worship and fear you, O Yahweh."

He knows for sure that God has done great things for his Hebrew nation. He has delivered them from oppressors and enemies in the past and so he asks him to "revive it" once again. He asks him "to make it known" – let it be seen, let there be public knowledge of God's mighty delivering hand.

And the in the last phrase of v. 2 he says, "in wrath remember mercy."

This is a key summary of Hab's understanding of God, what he has done in the past, and what he hopes he will do again.

He knows God is justly wrathful against human sin, but he also knows that Yahweh is the God of mercy. He remembers all the revelation God has given himself which was

written down so he and all the people could come to know this God. No doubt he remembers Exod 34:6-7, when God made his nature known to Moses:

The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, ^(A)“The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and ^(B)gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast ^(C)love and faithfulness, ⁷ ^(D)keeping steadfast love for thousands,^[a] ^(E)forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but ^(E)who will by no means clear the guilty...

Hab knew that God was angry for the sin of both his own people and the sin of the Babylonians. He was actually more than angry – his white-hot wrath burned in indignation at the sin of all these people.

But God was also a God of rich compassion and tender mercy and steadfast love and faithfulness. And so he pleads for mercy for his people. Mercy to turn them from their sinful ways and mercy to forgive and cleanse them from their sin.

And so what Hab begins to do in verses 3-15 is rehearse God’s actions in the past of delivering his people from Egyptian bondage, of enabling them to cross the Jordan river some 40 years later, and then confront and conquer many of the pagan nations who occupied Canaan – the Promised Land.

Verse 3 says that God came from “Teman” – this is a reference to the land of Edom – the traditional enemies of Israel.

Mount Paran is a wilderness on the Sinai Peninsula. This seems to be a reference to Mt. Sinai and the revelation God gave to Moses and the nation from there.

See Psalm 68:7-8:

O God, when you ^(A)went out before your people,
^(B)when you marched through ^(C)the wilderness, *Selah*
⁸ ^(D)the earth quaked, the heavens poured down rain,
 before God, the One of Sinai,
 before God,^[a] the God of Israel.

Deut. 33:2 –

² He said,

^(A)“The LORD came from Sinai
 and dawned from Seir upon us;^[a]
 he shone forth from Mount Paran;
 he came ^(B)from the ten thousands of holy ones,
 with flaming fire^[b] at his right hand.

Verse 5 recalls the 10 plagues that Yahweh sent on the gods and nation of Egypt:

⁵ Before him went pestilence,
and plague followed at his heels.

In verse 8 we read:

⁸ 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?

We see what seems to be a reference to the Hebrews crossing the Red Sea on dry land and then later the Jordan River as they entered the Promised Land. God's anger was not against the seas and rivers but against sinful people, yet he exercises his purpose by mighty miracles of deliverance and rescue of his people.

Notice that God is described as riding on horses, in his chariot of salvation. Yes, Yahweh always has been and remains forever the God of salvation for his people.

God has not changed – Hab knows this. And this is a great comforting truth to him.

In verses 9-13a we read:

⁹ You stripped the sheath from your bow,
calling for many arrows.^[b] *Selah*
You split the earth with rivers.
¹⁰ The mountains saw you and writhed;
the raging waters swept on;
the deep gave forth its voice;
it lifted its hands on high.
¹¹ 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.
¹² You marched through the earth in fury;
you threshed the nations in anger.
¹³ You went out for the salvation of your people,
for the salvation of your anointed.

Here we see the mighty power of Yahweh acting in judgment – described in terms of what happens in nature when God's hand of judgment falls. God's anger against sin is describe here in verse 12 as "fury." He was furious with the sin of the nations – he is said to thresh them – the way a farmer would throw up the stalks of wheat into the wind to have the wind blow away the chaff. Or the way an ox would trample on the wheat stalks to shake loose the grain.

But in the midst of all God's wrath against the sins of the nations we see verse 13:

¹³ You went out for the salvation of your people,
for the salvation of your anointed.

God “**went out**” - he left his throne in heaven. He got up and acted decisively to save his people. We read that he went out for the ‘salvation of your anointed.’ This is a likely reference to the anointed King of the people, first of all to King David, but then more significantly a reference to the anointed descendant of David, Jesus the Messiah, the anointed one, the King of the kingdom of God who would come in the future and deal decisively with the root problem of the Hebrew nation – their sin and idolatry and rejection of Yahweh’s gracious governance of their lives and nation.

Hab is reminded of and clings to the mercy of God. But this mercy is granted in the midst of judgment. Verses 13-16 tell of God’s fierce judgment against the wicked:

¹³ 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. ^[a] *Selah*

¹⁴ 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.

¹⁵ You trampled the sea with your horses,
the surging of mighty waters.

¹⁶ 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 quietly wait for the day of trouble
to come upon people who invade us.

So Hab understands that though the judgment on his own people will be horrendous, those who abuse and slaughter his own people will have a day of reckoning when they will be paid for their harsh treatment of the Israelites.

The Day of Trouble was not long in coming. - a couple of generations later Cyrus the Persian entered Babylon and brought it down completely.

So Hab’s attitude has changed. At first he was appalled at the thought of the wicked Babylonians being used by God to punish his people, but having put his consternation about this before God he has learned that God’s ways are indeed just and higher than man’s ways. It seems Hab. was content the way things were to be worked out and he rested and waited for judgment to fall on the invading Babylonian king and his army.

As Hab. considers all these tumultuous and difficult events – the coming devastation on his own nation and then the subsequent judgment that was to fall on the Babylonians, the instrument of judgment, Hab comes to the conclusion here in v. 17-19:

17 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,
 18 yet I will rejoice in the Lord;
 I will take joy in the God of my salvation.
 19 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^[d] instruments.

Hab is saying that if worse comes to worse, if we the fruit trees and olive trees and grape vines and all the wheat fields fail and do not produce anything – if there are no sheep or cattle – in other words, if we are all starving to death, if life is desperate, if we are just barely hanging on by a thread to life itself – there is one thing I will do:

I will rejoice in Yahweh; I will be joyful in my God.

This is really a very strong confession of faith from a pious Jew who saw Jerusalem as the center of all the earth, the very focus of Hebrew worship where God dwelt in the center of the Temple, in the Holy of Holies, and to know that this temple would be destroyed, and the holy city sacked, and its people carried off into exile – what was about to happen was something that the chosen people did not believe was possible. The destruction of their Temple and their holy city meant that their whole world, their whole culture, their whole religion, was destroyed. Famine and death were coming. Exile was coming. Yahweh's righteous hand of judgment was about to fall.

No sequence of events could have been worse for a loyal Jew, a descendent of Abe, Isaac, and Jacob. But it was coming and Hab knew it.

But he did not despair. He rested on what he knew of God. His faith was built on his confession that we see in 1:12:

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.

And he determined to do what the Lord told him in 2:4

“Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him,
but the righteous shall live by his faith.

And he had confidence that the violence and sin would one day end and
2:14

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

And in his prayer he stated in 3:13:

¹³ You went out for the salvation of your people,
for the salvation of ***your anointed***.

And v. 16:

Yet I will quietly wait for the day of trouble
to come upon people who invade us.

v. 19 ¹⁸ yet I will rejoice in the Lord;
I will take joy in the God of my salvation.

¹⁹ 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^[d] instruments.

So today let us follow the example of Habakkuk. When our world comes crashing down, when things happen that confuse and perplex us, let us look to Yahweh God, knowing that he is the eternal God – he knows the end from the beginning. He is the Holy One – high and exalted above humanity – whose wisdom and righteousness enable him to govern the affairs of the created order in perfect step with his plan to redeem a people for himself and bring them into the presence of his everlasting glory.

All our present troubles are working to conform us into Christ's image and are nothing in comparison to the glory that shall be revealed to us.

Let us put our faith in God, the altogether righteous One who will bring his judgment on the wicked but will extend his mercy to his beloved ones.

No matter how dark the hour may become, when our world is falling apart – God remains unchanged. He can be trusted. We can rest in him and his sovereign plan of the ages, We can rejoice because he is working out all things in accordance with his divine plan. He will be glorified; we will be conformed into Christ's image. We are safe in Christ' hands; therefore, we can always rejoice. Nothing can disrupt our security in God – so our joy is unquenchable because God's presence and grace faithfully abides with us all our days. As the Apostle Paul said, “Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say

rejoice!" (Phil. 4:4) We can do that; let us always do that, all the days of our lives, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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