

FROM FEAR TO FAITH

Habakkuk 3

Introduction:

The prophet Habakkuk was living in desperate days. He found himself surrounded by wickedness and evil. He cried out to the Lord in despair. In ch. 1, we saw him **wrestling** with God over his own people's wickedness, and over God's plan to use Babylon, an even more evil and barbaric nation to punish His people.

In ch. 2, the prophet moves from wrestling with God to **waiting** on God for His answer to this seeming dilemma. In v. 1, he said, "I'm going to stop talking, be quiet and listen for God's response. And God gives him an answer—at least as much as he needs to know. He points out to Habakkuk that even though He intends to use a wicked nation like Babylon to carry out His purpose for Judah, yet the wickedness of the Babylonians will ultimately bring about their demise as well. And nothing the wicked do can tarnish the glory of God, because when all is said and done, God is still in control - 2:20.

Now, in ch. 3 - we have a prayer, in which we see our writer, the prophet move from the fear he felt to faith. In this chapter he moves:

- from worry to worship
- from despair to devotion
- from gloom to glorification
- from perplexity to praise

This chapter actually appears to be a song – see v. 1. **Shigionoth** - the precise meaning is unknown (its singular form occurs in the heading to Ps. 7). In light of the musical notation at the end of Hab. 3, it is thought that it has a musical-liturgical significance, and that this chapter was sung. This song is really an acknowledgement of God's power, a hymn of surrender, as he realizes that the best thing he can do is to simply trust God.

Let us look at this journey from fear to faith.

I. A Plea for Mercy v. 2

The answer God gave Habakkuk in ch. 2 satisfied the prophet. He now realized that the wicked of every age make choices which ultimately guarantee their downfall. They may appear to be winning, but they will never be satisfied. And eventually the course he takes will somehow trip him up and bring him down with a crash. Satisfied with that reality, Habakkuk was now ready to welcome the coming invasion by Babylon.

Read 3:2 - He pleads for mercy in the midst of the judgement He is afraid of what is coming. He knows it will be awful. Undoubtedly he will suffer too. Maybe personally, but at least through witnessing the death and destruction of those around him.

II. A Review God's Majesty and Power vv. 3-15

God gave the prophet a stunning experience. He took Habakkuk back through time to show him some of the past judgments of God from a divine view point. In this the prophet gets a fresh view of God's majesty and power. My explanation of these verses comes primarily from the ESV Study Bible notes.

The first view is of God coming up from Mt. Sinai - vv. 3-6. Here we are presented with the awesome power of God as he led his people toward Canaan.

Read v. 3 - Teman means "south"; with the reference to Mount Paran, it most likely suggests the time following Israel's exodus from Egypt. When the biblical authors refer to God's mighty acts in the exodus, they often use images to evoke the fear or awe of God.

Read vv. 4-5 - Habakkuk likens God's presence at Mount Sinai to that of a thunderstorm with darkness and flashes of lightning (often-used images of God's presence and pronouncements). Pestilence and plague are often used as pictures of divine judgment.

Read v. 6 - Mountains were considered part of the foundation of the earth, and thus their quaking was a sign of divine judgment. Earthquakes are frequently associated with God's power. You find these kind of images expressed by the psalmist as he describes God's powerful presence in Psalm 18. Turn there and read verses 7-14.

Back to Habakkuk. After giving the prophet a reminder of God's power as demonstrated at Mount Sinai, the scene changes. In the following verses we have a picture of God's judgment on Egypt and He delivered his people from slavery.

Read vv. 7-9 – there is some disagreement among commentators as to the identity of these nations. We are familiar with Midian – the area where Moses herded sheep for his father-in-law. But Cushan may refer to people in the same area, or more likely it is a reference to Cush, which is usually associated with Egypt, as indicated by the next verse.

v. 8 - God used his power over the Nile (Ex. 7:14–24) and Jordan Rivers (Josh. 3:14–17), as well as the Red Sea (Ex. 14:2–15:5), to demonstrate his greatness in the exodus. The chariot of salvation is a picture of God bringing deliverance to this people.

The real question is, was it the rivers God was angry with? Not at all, it was the people. It was Egypt who rebelled and God poured out his judgment on them because of it.

v. 9 - **many arrows** - Probably an image of thunderbolts sent by God. **split the earth** - An image of thunderstorms and floods cutting through the desert landscape.

Once again the scene changes as Habakkuk is shown a great panoramic view of God's judgements over the centuries - vv. 10-15.

Read v. 10 – God's judgment as He destroyed the world in the flood.

Read v. 11 – An apparent reference to Joshua's victory at Gibeah (Josh. 10:12–13) where the sun stood still. God is pictured as a great warrior with his bow and spear.

Read vv. 12-13 – God fought for his people because they were his covenant people, a nation of priests (Ex. 19:6; Ps. 114:2). **The head of the house of the wicked** may refer to the pharaoh of Egypt or the leaders of Canaan; both felt God's displeasure. **laying him bare from thigh to neck**. The Hebrew is obscure, but it suggests a thorough defeat.

Read vv. 14-15 – Another reference to the destruction that God brought on the Egyptians, who had set out to defeat the Israelites.

The vision and the understanding of the terrible power of the almighty God brought a whole new perspective to the prophet of what was coming upon them as a nation. He now understood the terror of an angry Holy God.

III. Praise for God's Sustaining Grace vv. 16-19

Read v. 16a - As a man Habakkuk felt fear. He realized that what was coming was frightening, and he was terrified. Yet he had moved beyond despair. Read v. 16b - he has committed himself to wait and trust in God. Habakkuk realizes that he must wait patiently for the destruction of his people and that God will then unleash his power against the Babylonians.

vv. 17-19 express the pinnacle of faith. As Habakkuk anticipates great destruction at the hands of the Babylonians, he has radically changed. He began by informing God how to run his world, and ended by trusting that God knows best and will bring about justice. Look at what he says - read vv. 17-18.

Verse 17 contains a list of material disasters in which all crops and livestock are lost, and as a result it is unclear how there will be food to eat. Yet even amid suffering and loss, Habakkuk has learned that he can trust God, and with that trust comes great joy, not in circumstances but in God himself. He says, "Yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will take joy in the God of my salvation." Yahweh has become Habakkuk's strength.

What was coming on the prophet and his people was indeed frightening, but he has committed himself to wait and to trust God, no matter what the outcome. How is it that he could do that? Look at v. 19 – read it. Because of God's power and His sustaining grace, Habakkuk has realized that he can have sure-footed confidence in God and can live on the heights even amid extreme circumstances.

Conclusion:

Well, Habakkuk began his dialogue with God by wrestling with some tough questions, and even arguing with God's methods. But we see that his final response is to embrace God and to trust in Him.

So, why have I taken you through all of this? I trust that it can be an encouragement to each of you. I know that life is filled with tough questions for many of you. You may feel at times like Habakkuk did in v. 16 – “I hear, and my body trembles; my lips quiver at the sound; rottenness enters into my bones; my legs tremble beneath me.”

What you are facing in your life may be frightening but I want to assure you that the God of Habakkuk is still the God of today.

I am reminded of a southern gospel song, sung many years ago by the Speer family – “He’s Still in the Fire.”

My mama read a story about the Bible long ago,
About Shadrach, Meshach, and old Abednego;
How the wicked king commanded they be thrown into the flame,
Because they wouldn’t bow and then deny their Father’s name.

My Mama said the king stood high upon a balcony so tall,
When he looked in he was shocked by all the things he saw;
He thought that he would find them lying dead upon the ground,
But instead of three he counted four up walking all around.

Then I said “Mama, wait a minute, there’s one thing that I must know,
If three went in and three came out, then where’d the fourth man go?”
And I never will forget it, as Mama danced across the floor,
These are the words I heard her say as she shouted through the door.

Son, He’s still in the fire and He’s walking in the flame,
And He’ll be there to help you when you call upon His name;
And he can still deliver by His almighty power,
While here below it’s good to know He’s still in the fire.

Now my friends you may be destined to face life’s hottest flame,
But I’m glad that I can tell you thru the power of His name;
Not one flame of fire will touch you, you’ll come thru it and you’ll tell,
Yesterday, today, forever, God is still alive and well.

Daniel and his friends were carried away in the Babylonian captivity that Habakkuk was anticipating coming upon them. God was with them in their deepest time of need and the same God is still with us today. He may not keep us from the fire but He will always be with us through it. When we realize that we can say with Habakkuk, “No matter what happens...” – read vv. 18-19