

## “I HEARD YOUR VOICE AND I WAS AFRAID”

### Habakkuk 3

Let us begin by reviewing what we have learned from the first two chapters of Habakkuk. We have learned that there are similarities in the messengers Jonah and Habakkuk and their messages. Both of them disagreed with the message God had given them. At one point both of them took a seat at some vantage point to witness God's judgment. The difference was that Jonah argued, then tried to run away from God. Habakkuk argued but then waited to hear what God would say. He waited and was willing to be corrected.

In both cases God sent warning that unless the nation repented He would send destruction upon that nation. In recent years God's warnings to our nation have become increasingly severe – 3 Mile Island, Mount St. Helen, 9/11, Hurricane Katrina, more recently our economic woes. Still there is no sign of our nation turning back to God.

Habakkuk had been praying to God to send repentance to Judah. Instead the people became increasingly wicked, worshiped idols, participated in witchcraft, became morally debauched, perverted justice, oppressed and enslaved the poor. Habakkuk cries out to God, “How long?” God tells Habakkuk that He is sending the Chaldeans to conquer Judah, take the people captive, and destroy Jerusalem. Habakkuk is appalled. How can God consider using the Chaldeans who are more sinful than the Jews and furthermore worship a host of idols?

God lets Habakkuk know that as God He knows far more about the wickedness of the Chaldeans than Habakkuk does and He pronounces five woes upon them. Habakkuk is told to get up and start preaching.

1.) A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, **on** Shigionoth. O LORD, I have heard your speech and was afraid; O LORD, revive Your work in the midst of the years! In the midst of the years make it known; In wrath remember mercy. (Habakkuk 3:1-2 NKJV)  
When I heard, my body trembled; My lips quivered at the voice; Rottenness entered my bones; And I trembled in myself, That I might rest in the day of trouble. When he comes up to the people, He will invade them with his troops. (Habakkuk 3:16 NKJV)

Being afraid can motivate us to do what is sinful or it can motivate us to do good. Jacob left his father-in-law, taking a substantial amount of people and animals and goods without telling his father-in-law because he was afraid Laban would take his daughters from him. In the Parable of the Talents one servant hid the talent his master gave him to invest because he feared his master. Fear can also cause us to do good.

Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. (2 Corinthians 7:1 NKJV)

Fear of the Lord can cause us to flee or hide from Him. Adam said to God, "I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, and I hid myself." Habakkuk begins his prayer with confession. He compares His sin to that of Adam and uses the same language: O LORD, I have heard your speech and was afraid;

But the fear of the LORD can cause us to turn to Him and draw near.

"For I was afraid of the anger and hot displeasure with which the LORD was angry with you, to destroy you. But the LORD listened to me at that time also. (Deuteronomy 9:19)

That is what happened with Habakkuk in the end:

When I heard, my body trembled; My lips quivered at the voice; Rottenness entered my bones; And I trembled in myself, That I might rest in the day of trouble. (Habakkuk 3:16)

The first verse of this chapter is A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, **on** Shigionoth. This word is only used one other place so scholars don't agree if it is a musical instrument or a tune. Either translation makes what follows a prayer which is meant to be sung. You can think of prayers which are also sung – "The Lord's Prayer," "Kum-Ba-Yah," "Ave Maria."

2.) God came from Teman, The Holy One from Mount Paran. Selah

His glory covered the heavens, And the earth was full of His praise. His brightness was like the light; He had rays flashing from His hand, And there His power was hidden. Before Him went pestilence, And fever followed at His feet. He stood and measured the earth; He looked and startled the nations. And the everlasting mountains were scattered, The perpetual hills bowed. His ways are everlasting. I saw the tents of Cushan in affliction; The curtains of the land of Midian trembled. O LORD, were You displeased with the rivers, Was Your anger against the rivers, Was Your wrath against the sea, That You rode on Your horses, Your chariots of salvation? Your bow was made quite ready; Oaths were sworn over Your arrows. Selah

You divided the earth with rivers. The mountains saw You and trembled; The overflowing of the water passed by. The deep uttered its voice, And lifted its hands on high. The sun and moon stood still in their habitation; At the light of Your arrows they went, At the shining of Your glittering spear. You marched through the land in indignation; You trampled the nations in anger. You went forth for the salvation of Your people, For salvation with Your Anointed. You struck the head from the house of the wicked, By laying bare from foundation to neck. Selah

You thrust through with his own arrows The head of his villages. They came out like a whirlwind to scatter me; Their rejoicing was like feasting on the poor in secret. You walked through the sea with Your horses, Through the heap of great waters... When he comes up to the people, He will invade them with his troops. (Habakkuk 3:3-15, 16c NKJV)

This long passage in the midsection of this prayer hymn by Habakkuk reviews the glorious deliverance of Israel from Egypt, God leading them through the Wilderness, and the conquest of Canaan with God's assistance. If we would devote the whole sermon to this passage we could identify the plagues on Egypt, the parting of the Red Sea, God coming down on Mount Sinai, rebellious and wicked men consumed by fire from heaven, holding back the waters of the Jordan so Israel could pass over, sun stood still for Joshua so he could complete the battle.

Habakkuk uses this imagery just as we use patriotic images of Valley Forge, Bunker Hill, Fort McHenry when our nation is at war.

When does God come to fight for His people – "in the midst of the years" not at the end of the world but at different times in human

history. Who are God's army? Not human soldiers, but the forces of nature. Why does God come? For the salvation of His people.

Though the fig tree may not blossom, Nor fruit be on the vines; Though the labor of the olive may fail, And the fields yield no food; Though the flock may be cut off from the fold, And there be no herd in the stalls- Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The LORD God is my strength; He will make my feet like deer's feet, And He will make me walk on my high hills. To the Chief Musician. With my stringed instruments. (Habakkuk 3:17-19 NKJV)

The United States has not suffered from a lack of food very often. Generally there has been an abundance of food for most people. In the 1930's various parts of the United States suffered a severe drought. In the midWest the drought caused the Dust Bowl. Clouds of top soil were caught up into the atmosphere and blocked the sun as they passed over. In West Virginia and Kentucky the drought lasted two years. Rivers dried up, no crops would grow, cattle, horses, other livestock died for lack of water and lack of pasture. Pictures from that era are stark images of despair. People were stealing, even killing to get food.

We could see that happen again in this country. Why would it happen? When we were Christian, God-fearing, our laws close to those of the Bible, the majority going to church and loving God, He gave us prosperity, peace, homes with loving parents and obedient children. Our crops are failing and our families falling apart because we turned away from God. We no longer acknowledged Him as our Benefactor.

As these things happen, Christians WILL suffer alongside the wicked. Habakkuk ends his hymn with the anthem of Christians in hard times- Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The LORD God is my strength; He will make my feet like deer's feet, And He will make me walk on my high hills. May God give us such a faith for the days that lie ahead of us.

