

### Habakkuk's Prayer of Praise

#### Habakkuk 3

Habakkuk 3:1-2: *"A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, on Shigionoth <sup>2</sup> 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."*

#### Background Notes

Both the beginning and the ending of this chapter have musical liturgical notes: *"A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, on Shigionoth" (v1)*, and *"To the Chief Musician. With my stringed instruments" (v19)*. Exactly what the word "Shigionoth" means is hard to say, but in view of the musical directives at the end of the chapter, it probably has something to do with the liturgy of worship in the Temple. We know that a number of the psalms were used for public worship in the Temple courts, and that's why so many of the psalms have musical or liturgical indicators in their titles. Habakkuk 3 was probably used for public worship in the Temple after the Jews returned from captivity in Babylon.

Habakkuk 3 is one of the great doxologies or "praise prayers" of the Bible. It was Habakkuk's response of worship and praise to God, after God had revealed to him some answers to his questions about the problem of evil. Remember, Habakkuk had come to the Lord with questions – first, about the evil ways of Judah, and then about the more evil ways of the Babylonians. And God had answered Habakkuk, just as He will answer us when we come to Him humbly with our hard questions. This is certainly part of the teaching of the book of Habakkuk. Habakkuk's response to the Lord was a prayer of praise and worship, and our response to the Lord's answers should be the same.

Speaking of worship, here's a working definition for "worship" that you may want to write down in your notes: ***Worship is acknowledging who God is, and what God does, to God Himself, with an attitude of praise.***

#### Doctrinal Points

##### 1. Worship is praising God for His holiness and His mercy.

*"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 knew that God was a holy God, and that He must judge sin. God had revealed to Habakkuk how He would use the invading Babylonians to judge the evil ways of Judah. Habakkuk's response was submission to the will of God. "Yes,

Lord, I'm afraid, but let your work of judgment come. Make it known! Thy will be done. But in your wrath - please remember mercy." Habakkuk knew that God's character included mercy as well as wrath against sin.

Aren't you glad for the merciful side of God's character? Worship is praising God for His holiness and His mercy.

## 2. Worship is praising God for His glory and His power.

In verses 3-7, Habakkuk described how he saw God coming from the high mountain regions south and east of Israel. This is what is called a "*theophany*" - a visible manifestation of God.

Verses 3-7: *"God came from Teman, the Holy One from Mount Paran. Selah His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of His praise. <sup>4</sup> His brightness was like the light; He had rays flashing from His hand, and there His power was hidden. <sup>5</sup> Before Him went pestilence, and fever followed at His feet. <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> I saw the tents of Cushan in affliction; the curtains of the land of Midian trembled."*

The great theophany that Habakkuk saw was a visible manifestation of God's glory and power. One commentator said that this description of God's power was like a magnificent and awesome giant striding across the land to rescue His people - mountains quake, nations are startled, all opposition is crushed!

God displayed His glory and power when He delivered His people from Egypt, and God will display His glory and power on behalf of His people when He comes again. Do you praise God for His glory and power? Worship is praising God for His glory and His power.

## 3. Worship is praising God for His acts and "His Anointed."

In verses 8-15, Habakkuk listed a number of God's acts on behalf of His people throughout Israel's history.

Verses 8-15: *"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? <sup>9</sup> Your bow was made quite ready; oaths were sworn over Your arrows. Selah You divided the earth with rivers. <sup>10</sup> The mountains saw You and trembled; the overflowing of the water passed by. The deep uttered its voice, and lifted its hands on high. <sup>11</sup> The sun and moon stood still in their habitation; at the light of Your arrows they went, at the shining of Your glittering spear. <sup>12</sup> You marched through the land in indignation; You trampled the nations in anger. <sup>13</sup> 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 <sup>14</sup> 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.* <sup>15</sup> *You walked through the sea with Your horses, through the heap of great waters."*

Just mentioning God's acts in history is a prayer of worship. Remember, worship is acknowledging who God is, and what God does, to God Himself, with an attitude of praise. In verses 8-9 & 15, Habakkuk mentioned the cutting off of the Jordan River and the dividing of the Red Sea at the time of the Exodus. Verses 9-10 refer to God's act of creation and torrents of water in the global Flood. Verse 11 mentioned the great act of God of making the sun and the moon stand still for Joshua's army, as recorded in Joshua 10. Verses 12-14 extol any of the many times in Israel's history when God fought for His people.

Notice in verse 13 that "Your Anointed" is mentioned: "*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.*"

Is this a reference only to God's anointed people, the Jewish people? Or does it look forward to the Anointed One - the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ? Is the mention of "striking the head from the house of wickedness" just a general reference to wickedness directed against God's people? Or does it include a reference to Satan and to the End Times, when the Lord Himself will conquer the antichrist of the last days? Because Habakkuk was a prophet, and he did look to the End Times (as we've seen), I believe that verse 13 is a reference to the coming of God's Anointed One, the Lord Jesus Christ as Messiah and Savior, and His judgment and termination of evil in the End Times.

Do you praise God for His acts in history, and for the salvation that has come with His Anointed One? Worship is praising God for His acts and His Anointed One.

#### **4. Worship is praising God for His sovereignty and His strength.**

Verses 16-19 are Habakkuk's response to the theophany he had seen, and the truth that had been revealed to him about the coming invasion of the Land. It was a deep moving spiritual experience for Habakkuk.

Verses 16-19: "*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.* <sup>17</sup> *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—* <sup>18</sup> *Yet I will rejoice in the Lord! I will joy in the God of my salvation!* <sup>19</sup> *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."*

In today's terminology, Habakkuk was kind of "shook up" in view of what God had revealed to him. It was a deeply moving spiritual experience - but as a result, he rejoiced in the Lord! He rejoiced in God for His sovereign control of all things (v17-18), and he rejoiced for the strength that God can give, no matter what the circumstances (v19).

Are we worshipers like Habakkuk? There will be hard times ahead for all of us, but *even though* the fig tree may not blossom nor fruit be on the vines, and *even though* the olive harvest fails and the fields yield no food, and *even though* the flock is cut off from the fold and no animals are in the stalls, and *even though* the stock market goes down, and *even though* we're laid off from our jobs, and *even though* our resources fail - ***yet we will rejoice in the Lord - we will joy in the God of our salvation!***

Can you say that? If you're a believer, you can say that, because we know that God is in sovereign control of everything. We know we can submit to His perfect ways, because He does everything right. And we can praise the Lord because He's our strength through times of tragedy and disaster, and difficulty. "*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.*"

If you've ever done any hiking, you can appreciate this wonderful picture. If we look to the Lord, He will give us our needed strength to face steep and difficult terrain in life. He will make us sure-footed, even when we're in dangerous and slippery surroundings. Worship is praising God for His sovereignty and His strength.

## Practical Application

### Don't live life without some "*Selahs*."

What's the only chapter in the Bible, aside from the psalms, to have *selahs*? The answer is Habakkuk 3. The three "*Selahs*" in Habakkuk 3 come after verses 3, 9, and 13. It's an indication that Habakkuk 3 was used in Temple worship.

*Selah* means to pause and reflect on what's been said or revealed. Do you do this when you read the Word of God? That's what biblical meditation is all about! We need to have *selahs* – quiet pauses - in our busy lives, so that we can listen to the Lord and walk more closely with Him.

If I were to ask you if you had a quiet time each day, most of you would raise your hands. And we all intend to have a quiet time each day, but let's admit it – sometimes we don't. Do we have a *selah* each day - at least one?

We need to be more disciplined about our daily *selahs*. And we need to have longer "*selahs*" as well – periodic retreats when we can take some time out and quietly meditate on the Word of God – when we have time to pause and reflect on what God is doing in our lives, or what He needs to do in our lives. Don't live life without some *Selahs*.