

Comments on Habakkuk 3

After the Lord's response in ch. 2, Habakkuk response with a prayer-song to the Lord, confessing He is in the right.

Modern translations typically present this chapter in a verse format to display the poetical elements. The KJV is arranged below in that format for the same purpose.

¹ A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet upon Shigionoth.

v1 Habakkuk responds to the Lord's comments in the preceding chapter with some kind of song. It is unclear to us today what "shigionoth" is, but it is plan from the final line in the chapter that it was meant to be delivered as a song or hymn.

² O LORD,
I have heard thy speech, and
was afraid:
O LORD,
revive thy work
in the midst of the years,
in the midst of the years
make known;
in wrath remember mercy.

v2 Habakkuk formally replies to the Lord's statement in ch. 2, acknowledging the truth of His indictment against both the king of Babylon and of Judah. Habakkuk says he hears the Lord's words and reveres His work. Habakkuk pleads with the Lord to make His work known among His people during this time of trial, and to have mercy for His people among the anger poured out on the wicked.

³ God came from Teman, and
the Holy One from mount Paran.

Selah.

His glory covered the heavens, and
the earth was full of his praise.

⁴ And his brightness was as the light;
he had horns coming out of his hand: and
there was the hiding of his power.

⁵ Before him went the pestilence, and
burning coals went forth at his feet.

⁶ He stood, and measured the earth:
he beheld, and drove asunder the nations; and
the everlasting mountains were scattered, the
perpetual hills did bow:

his ways are everlasting.

⁷ I saw the tents of Cushan in affliction: and the curtains of the land of Midian did tremble.

⁸ Was the LORD displeased against the rivers? was thine anger against the rivers?

was thy wrath against the sea, that thou didst ride upon thine horses and thy chariots of salvation?

⁹ Thy bow was made quite naked, according to the oaths of the tribes, even thy word.

Selah.

Thou didst cleave the earth with rivers.

¹⁰ The mountains saw thee, and they trembled:

the overflowing of the water passed by: the deep uttered his voice, and lifted up his hands on high.

¹¹ The sun and moon stood still in their habitation: at the light of thine arrows they went, and at the shining of thy glittering spear.

¹² Thou didst march through the land in indignation, thou didst thresh the heathen in anger.

¹³ Thou wentest forth for the salvation of thy people, even for salvation with thine anointed; thou woundedst the head out of the house of the wicked, by discovering the foundation unto the neck.

Selah.

¹⁴ Thou didst strike through with his staves the head of his villages:

they came out as a whirlwind to scatter me: their rejoicing was as to devour the poor secretly.

¹⁵ Thou didst walk through the sea with thine horses, through the heap of great waters.

V3-15 These verses form a brief stylized synopsis of the mighty works the Lord has shown to Israel through her history: His appearance at Sinai (v. 3-4, cf. Exod. 19-34), the plagues in the wilderness (v. 5, cf. Num. 16, Num. 21), and the Lord's conquering of the Gentiles (v. 6-15, cf. Joshua 6-12), with particular mention of the sun standing still (v. 11, cf. Joshua 10).

The Lord has previously shown His power in both establishing and punishing Israel, so there is no question as to Him showing both Justice and Mercy to Israel, as both are manifestly embedded into her history.

v3 "Selah", some kind of musical direction that is unknown at present. It might mean pause, rest or louder, it is unclear.

v13 This verse summarizes the point of this section of text: the Lord delivers His chosen, and punishes the wicked.

¹⁶ when I heard, my belly trembled;
my lips quivered at the voice:
rotteness entered into my bones, and
I trembled in myself,
that I might rest in the day of trouble:
when he cometh up unto the people,
he will invade them with his troops.
¹⁷ Although the fig tree shall not blossom,
neither shall fruit be in the vines;
the labour of the olive shall fail, and
the fields shall yield no meat;
the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and
there shall be no herd in the stalls:
¹⁸ Yet I will rejoice in the LORD,
I will joy in the God of my salvation.
¹⁹ The LORD God is my strength, and
he will make my feet like hinds' feet, and
he will make me to walk upon mine high places.

v16-19 When hearing the Judgement of the Lord upon Israel in the preceding chapter, Habakkuk is gutted because he knows it is fair and true (v. 16). Despite the covenant curses leveled on Judah (v. 17), still Habakkuk will worship the Lord as the God of his salvation (v. 18), because He is his strength, and will exalt him (v. 19).

v17 A paraphrase of standard covenant curses, cf. Lev. 26:20, Deut. 28:51.

v18 Even though what he knows is about to happen is terrible, he also knows it is necessary and will be for the long-term salvation of Israel.

v19 A quotation of 2 Sam. 22:33-34, which is the same as Ps. 18:32-33. This is a psalm of David where he praises the Lord for delivering him from his enemy Saul, who was trying to kill him. See also Isa. 52:7 for related imagery. Habakkuk knows the Lord will fulfil His words concerning the gathering and restoration of Israel and the establishment of a future messianic kingdom in the lineage of David.

To the chief singer on my stringed instruments.

v19d The final line of the poem, making it explicitly clear this was intended to be a song.

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