

Habakkuk 3:1-16

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- [0 : 00] Again, that's Habakkuk chapter 3, verses 1 through 16. Please stand for the reading of God's Word. A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, according to Shigionah.
- O 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.
- God came from Timon, and the Holy One from Mount Paran. His splendor covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise. Selah. His brightness was like the light.
- Rays flashed from his hand, and there he veiled his power. Before him went pestilence and plague, followed at his heels. He stood and measured the earth. He looked and shook the nations.
- Then the eternal mountains were scattered. The everlasting hills sank low. His were the everlasting ways. I saw the tents of Kishan in affliction.
- [1 : 07] The curtains of the land of Midian did tremble. 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 cherry of salvation?
- You stripped the sheath from your bow, calling for many arrows. Selah. You split the earth with rivers. The mountains saw you and writhed. The raging waters swept on.
- The deep gave forth its voice. It lifted its hands on high. The sun and the moon stood still in their place. At the light of your arrows, as they sped.
- At the flash of your glittering spear. You marched through the earth in fury. You threshed the nations in anger. 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. Selah. You pierced with his own arrows the heads of his warriors.
- [2 : 07] Who came like a whirlwind to scatter me. Rejoicing as if to devour the poor in secret. You trampled the sea with your horses. The surging of mighty waters. 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. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 in D minor would be his final and complete symphony.
- It was finished in the year 1824. And for some, it was to be considered among his greatest works. And for others, it was simply the greatest work of all time.
- And no doubt, the four soloists and the attending chorus singing Ode to Joy in the final fourth movement set it apart from almost anything that had been done before.
- [3 : 38] Interestingly, parts of Beethoven's Ninth have sources dating earlier in his career.
- His sketchboards show that bits of the material that ultimately made its way into the symphony were written in the year 1811, some 23, 24 years before he put the ninth together.

And other parts in 1815. In addition, other complete musical pieces were, in total, excerpted from an earlier time in his life and planted in the piece.

Also, there was a theme that was for piano and voice that dates, according to his notes, from 1795 that now finally found its full voice in his Ninth Symphony and another from a fugue that he had written in 1815.

As we come to Habakkuk 3, the first thing we need to know about it is that we come to the prophet's final and complete symphony, a composition.

[5 : 01] We've been given the text, but not the musical score. And we know that because all the markings are in our text that actually set it apart from the previous two chapters of Habakkuk to tell us this is a written prayer that was intended to be set to music.

It's actually, there were parts intended for instruments. I mean, we know that just by the very title in 3.1, it's a prayer of Habakkuk the prophet according to the Shigianoth.

We find that same kind of phrase, although we don't know exactly what it means, in something that attended Psalm 7, for instance. A song. Or as the reading was made today, you'll have heard that simple word, Selah.

You'll find it after verse 3, and again after verse 9, and again after verse 13. All markings that we find in the Psalms, indicating some expression or change of pace or rhythm or instrument or whatever that we're not exactly sure, but it was made for music.

Take a look at the way Habakkuk ends, the very last phrase, which we'll read in its complete sense next week. Literally in the Hebrew, right there, in the Word of God, are these words, to the choir master with stringed instruments.

[6 : 42] So Habakkuk 3, when you come to it, you need to know that you've come to music. Interestingly, it bears some fun similarities to Beethoven's 9th.

I mean, Beethoven's 9th has his own ode to joy in the final fourth movement. Take a look at Habakkuk's fourth movement. We'll get there next week. Verse 18, Yet I will rejoice in the Lord.

I will take joy. His own almost crescendoing finish. His own ode to joy. It also appears, the Hebrew scholars would tell us, that there are parts of chapter 3 that almost look as if they were source material that predate Habakkuk's time, that he could be drawing on parts of a prayer or a song and then planting it in his own composition.

In stylistic form, if I was to differentiate Habakkuk 3 from the first two chapters in English, think of it as the way we speak today and then reading something that would have been constructed in Old English.

Habakkuk 3 has the markings of a stylized form that predates the way in which he would have communicated in his own time.

[8 : 15] And so what you have here is a prayer, a psalm, a song, a symphony that is his response to all that God has said.

Now, what are we to make of this, what I guess I would call a symphonic observation? What difference does it make for you today to know that this prophetic book finishes with a prayer?

Not just a prayer, but a psalm. A song. Not just a song, but while the text is before us, a score that had been written was to be heard almost in four movements of Habakkuk's symphony.

Simply this, there are times in your life and mine when the best response you can make to God's word is not more words, but music.

music. And not merely music of any kind, but perhaps music that opens like a lament and finds its way to joy.

[9 : 53] There are times, and you may be going through one now, when your heart requires a work that is composed by somebody else.

But you can't do it on your own. Somebody who knows the cost of what it is to sit alone and write a symphony.

To hear it. Whether or not they ever hear it performed. the long waiting upon God so that in your hour of need they might minister to you with a depth that goes beyond word.

A musical genius. There are times where you and I need someone who has an intuitive sense of knowing what it is that will give hope.

reassurance for those of us who cannot write and will not and are not able to compose. The church has a long history of waiting upon people who can write and set it to instruments so that we might enter and be at rest.

[11 : 26] I thought that a bit today and come Lord Jesus come there are many here today who are in deep sorrow or sense of indifference may Habakkuk 3 minister to your soul.

It would appear that this is what Habakkuk set out to do after chapter 2 closed with this almost overwhelming weight.

Did you feel it last week? I felt it even in the preaching. I mean look at the way chapter 2 closed. After the judgments of God would come forth upon the world and its five fold woes it finished but the Lord is in his holy temple let all the earth keep silence before him and Habakkuk walked out of the courtroom of chapter 2 and it would appear that what he did was told himself he was to question no more that the response of his heart cry in the tumult of life was simply to continue on in faith he was left with a word from God that said you are to trust me even though all the world should seemingly give way and so he leaves and with chapter 3 it appears that he left the courtroom in silence he seated himself in the choral director's study behind the chancel nave and suddenly and in time and in quietude a score began to emerge some of the material new some borrowed from fragments long ago written down and not able to speak in the presence of God he writes and he pours himself out onto the page with parts for instruments that would one day be used to minister to the people of God who must wait and not speak who must trust in the most difficult of times he's not able to preach so he sets it to music and in doing so he preaches knowing that

God is in his temple he composes what I think must be one of the most intimate symphonies of soul I would love to have heard it just as he intended it and there's a paradigm for you here there's a time for you to quiet yourself before God to stop the questioning to trust to pray to wait and to sing a lament that might turn to an ode of joy that is my prayer for you that you would take this chapter home and read it until you hear it in all of its glory it seems to me that it comes to us in four movements the first

I will break at verse two and while we have the text of Habakkuk to read we don't have the music that attends it but it would seem to me that coming out of verse 20 the opening line of verse 2 would have been incredibly quiet I mean it's coming out of let all the earth keep silence you know that moment when you can see the conductor raise his hand and begin the piece but barely a sound is heard and underneath a cello or a viola begins to find voice breaking the silence with reverence oh lord i have heard the report of you and your word oh 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 you can almost start to hear it i can three observations on the first movement he he's calling upon the lord and that's a paradigm for you the report of verse two was most likely referring to the responses that were given to him in chapters one and two that god was doing something against his own people and that god promised to do something against all people that he would be god of all the earth that it would be filled with the knowledge of who he is and he's heard of this report the response to the report is right there in verse two oh lord do i fear this is the posture of soul that comes to habakkuk more readily than it does come to us we want to continue to talk to god about all the things that are stirring rightly so in our life finally he says i fear you following the report and the response is the request and isn't this the most wonderful request a request for mercy that might be about all you can say tonight to god before you go to bed lord it's in the liturgical construct of the worship of the church in the english language through the centuries lord have mercy it might be about all you do tonight what he did here and that's fine the word wrath isn't quite right for me in english i think the word would be better translated something like in your in all this disturbance and all this tumult in all this life that we are waiting for justice and waiting for things to be right and they are never right in all of this upheaval that evidently you are comfortable with not only comfortable with but working in in all

[19 : 28] of this stuff oh god have mercy there are a number of words he could have used if it was this sense of wrath but there's a word that he uses here he actually uses this word twice more in the chapter at verse seven where the curtains of the land of midian did tremble that's a better word or his own soul in verse sixteen my legs tremble beneath me there's this trembling that's taking place in his life he says oh lord in all the trembling and the tumult of what you call history have mercy he pours it out before god may you do the same it's the cry of the christian lord have mercy the second movement begins in verse three really runs you could break it in a lot of places i'm just going to run it through nine it's not that he's calling upon the lord but in the second movement the lord came isn't that the way it opens there in verse three god came unlike the first movement this one must have come out of the blocks i mean from all i can tell in the hebrew the selah that you see at the end of verse three actually is positioned at the end of the first phrase in verse three so it's god came from teman and the holy one from mount paran selah some break something happened there right there this almost comes with just the sound of big drums it's a major movement in his peace god came from the heart cry of verse two to this what looks like this dynamic confession of verse three although his life and that of god's people is going through tumultuous discipline he speaks of god coming of god arriving think of that think of what that should do for you you know i'm a dylan fan but i was thinking of dylan on this that song he has every grain of sand at the time of my confession the hour of my deepest need the pool of tears beneath my feet that flood every newborn seed there's a dying voice within me reaching out someplace toiling in the danger the morals of despair i don't have the inclination to look back on every mistake he goes on behold this chain of events that i must break but in the fury of the moment i can see the master's hand in every leaf that trembles in every grain of sand there's something there for me lyrically musically that when the pool of tears is beneath your feet it finds resolution in that the master's hand is nonetheless in play god came um the septuagint is a book that we call it's the greek language translation of the hebrew scriptures that translates it god

shall come which is a little different when you think of time sequence god came we think of past tense god shall come we think of future and this bit within chapter three is a bit tricky to sort out because it rises from i guess you could only call it an ambiguity in hebrew grammar biblical hebrew doesn't have tenses in the strict sense of the term it governs its tense by the action taking place so in a very real way the context or you have to make a decision on is it god came is he asking us now to look back upon all the things that god did in israel's history or is he writing in a way that asking you to look forward for what god will do when he comes or is it ambiguous enough that he intends both i don't know but it's there for us to consider in other words it's a place where hebrew is very unlike greek you know with all of its fixed tenses but god came god shall come the point is the point is that god arrives do you need god to arrive in academic terms they would call this a theophany a god god is manifested a god appearance god came means that's a theophany that's an appearance of god that's what habakkuk is saying so in an interesting sense the whole book of habakkuk deals with another big academic term called theodicy or the fact the knowledge that if god is all knowing and all loving and all powerful then why all this stuff that doesn't square and the answer to the theodicy of habakkuk is the theophany in habakkuk god came god will come you can trust god he will make it right i don't know how he makes all things right and if you know somebody who does don't believe them a theophany occurs there's an appearance of god in the score this is how god has and will rescue his people god comes this is how god will minister to your need god comes and there are many hints here that would bring the reader back to how god rescued his people from egypt when he came to their rescue let me give you just a couple of examples notice how it says there in verse 3 that he came from timon that the holy one came from mount paran timon is the southern way it's the way along which god led them out of egypt mount paran it speaks in numbers of paran being that kind of wilderness space after they left mount sinai so that god was the one who was bringing them into the land he could be referring or or recalling the reader to this in listening to the peace that they would begin to be comforted in god's saving activity in history that he really has done things great things for us he has done i love the phrase

there on the plague and look at verse five before him went pestilence and plague followed at his heels i mean this this really evokes the imagery of being released out of egypt i love what ff bruce says about it pestilence and plague are personified as two members of his divine entourage one acting as forerunner of the theophany and the other bringing up the rear i mean god came and he's got his entourage with him and it's the kind of entourage that delivers his people and wreaks havoc on his enemies verse seven look at what happens to the neighboring the neighboring countries as god is coming look at the imagery i saw the tents of kushan in affliction and the curtains of the land of midian did tremble it's this image of god is coming and even the neighboring countries themselves are are rolling in his wake indeed that happened as israel left the promise left egypt all the other countries turned and then verse eight look it talks about him riding when you rode on your horses on your chariot of salvation you strip the sheath from your bow calling for many arials i mean it's this image of god as a divine warrior you can almost see him in the chariot with the horses moving that's what habakkuk wants you to know god is on the move what a contrast to chapter one you remember where it was the babylonian horses that were wreaking havoc on god's people now god's coming he got his own horses he said i got some horses i got some horses and i got some arrows the third movement seems to have the same intensity of the second although it moves not merely from that god came or god appeared but that the lord himself conquered it begins to show what he accomplishes look at the results of god's appearance upon the world in verses 10 to 15 verse 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 i mean it's the imagery i don't know that it's historically meant to draw your mind back to the day of joshua where the sun literally stood still i think the imagery is more that when god came what happened to the created order it surrenders it it's where it talks about lifting up its hands on high do you see that in verse 10 it's almost as if the whole created order when god comes what he accomplishes the whole created order either goes like this praise god or you could almost envision these verses the whole created order saying i surrender you have all authority coming from heaven all authority on earth and then look what happens to the political establishments of verse 12 you march through the earth and fury you thresh the nations in anger the word there for nations really is a term that talks about the world in its political entities it's talking here about political entities that when god

came what he accomplished was authority over all nations god as king of the earth and of all countries and indeed the purpose for his coming verse 13 the deliverance of evil the deliverance of israel 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 then the irony of it 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 you trampled the sea with your horses the surging of mighty warriors God goes out for the deliverance of his own people and his anointed that's what you want to hear today if you come and you don't need words you need music this is the music this is the symphony of the soul that

Habakkuk would write for you this opening in quietude Lord I fear you have mercy the rising movement of his appearing and his coming and his conquering and his accomplishments and one of the very unique things about this this symphony is the sense of light that appears in both his coming and in his conquering look back at verse 4 his brightness was like the light rays flashed from his hand and there he veiled his power and you have the same kind of imagery in verse 11 where they have the flash of your glittering spear you know whenever God would come in the Old Testament this idea of light was attached to it i think of Exodus 24 when Moses is on the mountain he was going to eat in the presence of

[33 : 46] God with the 70 elders it actually speaks of this light almost coming forth from the feet of the mountain which is very similar to the language here in chapter 4 where he's veiling his power you have the light of God emanating from his presence or in Exodus 34 you have Moses himself he veils his power after being in the presence of the Lord that when you're in the presence of the Lord you're in the presence of this light that is transforming in every respect that when God comes he comes in that way and when he conquers he conquers with that which is why metaphorically or poetically so much of the language in redemption today speaks about light overcoming darkness in the Hebrew scriptures that's the way it really was when God came he came in the power of light and so we ask when is this fulfilled so my heart wants to know when do we get this the end of the

Babylonian reign how's that possible I mean Darius delivers the Israelites from the Babylonian reign but all it really is a transference of the Israel like people under the reign of Babylon to being under the reign of the Medo Persians and then that moves forward into Cyrus well yes he's called and anointed and he does deliver God's people but they return to the land in the weakness of this temple building that never really gets reconstructed in any way and indeed all the way until the time of Rome Israel is still under the foot of another!

when does this happen? Jesus? Do we have the right to say that when Habakkuk speaks of the physical deliverance of Israel from her human enemies that it really means the rightful fulfillment in the spiritual deliverance of all peoples from spiritual enemies?

I mean one of the hardest critics of reading the Bible in this way of you know the Christians are just prone to find Jesus up every tree in the Old Testament like a squirrel running up every oak oh there he is again oh I see him behind that one oh disappeared oh look there he is Jesus Jesus Jesus Jesus the answer Jesus I could go for half an hour on this question I'll go for one minute if it's Jesus it cannot violate the historical fulfillment of the text or we just read Old Testament texts and spiritualize them away if it's Jesus then the Old Testament text is more than simply the objectivity of history but it's the objectivity of history front and loaded with a theological reading which in this case one could make the argument because we're reading poetry here you don't write poetry if all you're concerned about is historical objectivity and fulfillment poetry by nature is asking you to deal with deep themes that transcend time and indeed one level of fulfillment

I offer you this is there perhaps an ironic fulfillment of the things in Habakkuk completed in the work of Jesus in Jesus do we have a theophany I think of the transfiguration where he is emblazoned in light could there be a connection between those gospel writers and these Hebrew scriptures that speak of God manifesting himself in like manner I think of the triumphal entry what an ironic fulfillment that would be here we have God coming on his horses Jesus coming for the deliverance of his people on a colt but then again it was

[38 : 31] Zechariah who wrote rejoice greatly O daughters of Zion shout aloud O daughter of Jerusalem behold your king is coming to you righteous and having salvation as he humble and mounted on a donkey on a colt the full of a donkey I think of the cross is the cross where justice and mercy meet could this be the ironic fulfillment of you pierced with his own arrows the heads of his warriors for indeed the Christian teaching is that Jesus submits himself to death which is the greatest arrow of the enemy his own arrow and with that arrow defeats his very power I think of the apocalyptic writers who move beyond transfiguration and triumphal entry and crucifixion but to apocalyptic conclusion where Jesus does come for final ultimate judgment and poetically riding on that horse

I do know this that I believe Jesus Christ Jesus of Nazareth and his death and resurrection to be the interpretive center not only of the bible but for everything that we call human history that all promises are yes in him and I do know this experientially that if you will trust him he will keep you safe and so we'll come back next week because we really get to the fourth movement his own trust in the Lord his own ode to joy joy joy that beautiful spark of the gods joyful joyful we adore thee

God of glory God of love hearts unfold like flowers before thee hail thee to the sun above
in the clouds of sin and sadness drive the dark of doubt away giver of immortal gladness
fill us with the light of day!

Oh to have heard it with the nuance with which he composed it but in your trembling soul
today hold to the truth that in Christ God came in Christ God conquers in Christ I shall sing
my ode to joy our heavenly father we commit the reading of this word and our
understanding of it to you and I ask lord that you would minister to our hearts on a day
when for many only music will suffice we give it to you in Jesus name amen■