

November 23

Scriptures: Read Habakkuk 3

Key Verse: “Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.”
(Habakkuk 3:18)

Overview

Chapter three is a prayer of Habakkuk that was sung to the accompaniment of stringed instruments, and it is thought that the metrical structure was called “Shigionoth” (3:1, 19b). Habakkuk expresses his fear after hearing the Lord’s answer that He would use the violent and ruthless Chaldeans to execute His judgment on Judah for her sins. This news brought him to his knees. By that time the Chaldeans were notorious for their cruelty when they conquered a nation. Although Habakkuk realized that God’s judgment would be just, he dreaded the thought of a Babylonian invasion, for he loved his people and his nation. Habakkuk knew that God’s judgment upon Judah would not only mean that many would be killed, but that there would also be a captivity. Therefore, his prayer in verse two could possibly be understood as a request for God to show His mercy and display His mighty power in the midst of their tribulation and exile. Perhaps God would bring their deliverance, as He did when He freed them from bondage in Egypt. Habakkuk also prayed that God’s mighty deeds on behalf of His people would be made known, that the Lord would be honoured and glorified (3:2).

In verses 3 through 15, Habakkuk gives a poetic and vivid description of his vision of God. He saw the Lord arising from the area of the Sinai, where the children of Israel had previously been punished for their rebellion against God. The Lord’s majesty and glory filled the sky and the earth with great brightness (3:3-4). He did not execute His judgment without first stopping to consider His course of action (3:6a). With omnipotent power, His wrath brought plagues (3:5) and changed the earth’s topography. Habakkuk’s description seems to refer to many earthquakes — quakes so severe that they even affected the seas and formed new rivers. His questions about whether God was angry with the rivers and the sea is rhetorical (3:6-9). The writer desires his readers to conclude that God’s wrath was rather upon mankind and that His ultimate purpose in it all was to bring salvation to His people. In verses 10 and 11 Habakkuk may be alluding to the past miracles of deliverance that God performed for His people in drying up the Red Sea and in staying the sun and moon (Ex. 14:22; Josh. 10:12-14). Habakkuk’s point is that if God was able to do such miraculous things for their deliverance in the past, He was surely able to do it again.

In continuing to tell of God’s mighty deeds, such as the way He went before His people, cast out the wicked nations, and gave Israel the Promised Land, Habakkuk would have encouraged the people of Judah and given them hope that God would once again bring salvation to His people. Habakkuk seems to specify that God’s people are those called “anointed”, namely the righteous remnant who have been truly consecrated to God — the true Israel (Rom. 9:6).

Since Habakkuk saw the vision, he speaks of it in the past tense, but it is possible that much of it was yet to be fulfilled. When he said that God “struck the head from the house of the wicked”, he may have been referring to what God would do to the king of Babylon in taking all his power

from him and making his land desolate (3:12-13). The exact meaning of verses 14 and 15 is hard to ascertain, but it is certain that Habakkuk is describing the power of God to deliver the righteous out of the hands of the wicked who seek to do them harm.

Habakkuk admits that his reaction to the news of Babylon's coming is that of fear, which was a natural emotion in light of such circumstances. Yet he was confident that at the time of the Babylonian invasion of Judah, he would have rest in knowing that the will of God was being accomplished and that he was in God's care (3:16). He was aware that when the huge enemy army would trample through his beloved land, it would be devastated and made desolate of both people and goods; yet Habakkuk firmly resolved that through it all, he would continue to rejoice in the Lord (3:17-18), for he knew, as did Paul, that "all things work together for good to those who love God" (Rom. 8:28). In times of trouble, all believers can rise above the circumstances, as did Habakkuk, and stand firm in the promises of God. Habakkuk had come to understand that whether he lived or died at the hands of the Babylonians, he could still trust God for his salvation, and he would be the ultimate victor over the enemy. Since Habakkuk was living by faith, he could say without a doubt: "He will make my feet like deer's feet, and He will make me walk on my high hills [to tread the heights of salvation]"; this may have expressed the victory and joy that Habakkuk was sure to have when he would be with the Lord in glory.

Prayer

We thank You today Lord, for Your Word that says, "all things work together for good to those who love God" (Rom. 8:28). So we will trust in You, even when our circumstances look grim. You are in control!