

Habakkuk

Chapter 3

Habakkuk's Prayer

A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet. On *shigionoth*. ² LORD, I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds, O LORD. Renew them in our day, in our time make them known; in wrath remember mercy. ³ God came from Teman, the Holy One from Mount Paran. *Selah* His glory covered the heavens and his praise filled the earth. ⁴ His splendor was like the sunrise; rays flashed from his hand, where his power was hidden. ⁵ Plague went before him; pestilence followed his steps. ⁶ He stood, and shook the earth; he looked, and made the nations tremble. The ancient mountains crumbled and the age-old hills collapsed. His ways are eternal. ⁷ I saw the tents of Cushan in distress, the dwellings of Midian in anguish. ⁸ Were you angry with the rivers, O LORD? Was your wrath against the streams? Did you rage against the sea when you rode with your horses and your victorious chariots? ⁹ You uncovered your bow, you called for many arrows. *Selah* You split the earth with rivers; ¹⁰ the mountains saw you and writhed. Torrents of water swept by; the deep roared and lifted its waves on high. and lifted its waves on high. ¹¹ Sun and moon stood still in the heavens at the glint of your flying arrows, at the lightning of your flashing spear. ¹² In wrath you strode through the earth and in anger you threshed the nations. ¹³ You came out to deliver your people, to save your anointed one. You crushed the leader of the land of wickedness, you stripped him from head to foot. *Selah* ¹⁴ With his own spear you pierced his head when his warriors stormed out to scatter us, gloating as though about to devour the wretched who were in hiding. ¹⁵ You trampled the sea with your horses, churning the great waters. ¹⁶ I heard and my heart pounded, my lips quivered at the sound; decay crept into my bones, and my legs trembled. Yet I will wait patiently for the day of calamity to come on the nation invading us. ¹⁷ Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, ¹⁸ yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior. ¹⁹ The Sovereign LORD is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights. For the director of music. On my stringed instruments.

3:1 In the strict sense, petition is found in this prayer only in v. 2 but, as with many of the psalms, it is set in a larger context of recollection (vv. 3–15) and expression of confidence and trust (vv. 16–19). In fact, Habakkuk's prayer appears to have been used as a psalm; note the psalm-like heading (v. 1) and the musical and/or literary notations (vv. 1, 3, 9, 13, 19). (CSB)

The Hebrew word *tephillah* occurs in the heading of five psalms (17; 86; 90; 102; 142). This is an intercessory prayer in the form of a psalm. In view of the reference to the

Lord's presence in His holy temple in the preceding verse (2:20), Habakkuk's prayer was likely used in temple worship. (TLSB)

SHIGIONOTH – The meaning of this musical term is uncertain. Some commentators suggest it refers to rapid changes of rhythm; others think it is a kind of lament. (TLSB)

3:2 *heard of your fame.* In vv. 3–15 Habakkuk recalls a poetic celebration of God's mighty saving acts of old—perhaps one he had heard at the temple (see v. 16). (CSB)

These would be the accounts of God's saving actions in Israel's past history, especially the exodus. (TLSB)

IN OUR DAY – This means in the present time, as the Lord chastises His people, Habakkuk prays that he will again bring to life His salvation and punish the oppressor. (TLSB)

in wrath remember mercy. Prophet asks God to temper His fierce wrath with His abundant mercy. (TLSB)

wrath. Hbr carries the nuance of “agitation” or “excitement.” (TLSB)

3:3 *God came.* When celebrating the exodus, the OT poets (and poet-prophets) combined recollections of the mighty acts of God with conventional images of a fearsome manifestation of the Lord. He came down with his heavenly host and rode on the mighty thunderstorm as his chariot, with his arrows flying in all directions, a cloudburst of rain descending on the earth and the mountains quaking before him (see Dt 33:2; Jdg 5:4–5; Ps 18:7–15; 68:4–10, 32–35; 77:16–19; Mic 1:3–4). Such figures characterize many of the references in the following verses. (CSB)

Teman. Means “southland.” God is pictured as coming from the area south of Judah during the exodus. (CSB)

This was Edomite territory, the home of Esau, south of the Salt Sea (cf Gn 36:9-11; Am 1:12; Ob 9). (TLSB)

Holy One. By this name, God reveals Himself and is present as the transcendent God, who rules over all creation, separate from all that is sinful and impure. (TLSB)

Mount Paran. See Dt 33:2; probably northwest of the Gulf of Aqaba and south of Kadesh Barnea, between Edom and Sinai. (CSB)

SELAH – The Hebrew is untranslatable. It is used mainly in the first two books of the Psalms. It probably refers to the accompaniment of the harps, during the psalm. (TLSB)

Occurring here for the first time in the psalms, may be a musical notation. It could also be a point where a pause is desirable for the singer or reader of the psalm in order that the statement last made or the thought as a whole just developed may be reflected upon before the next turn of the thought appears. (Luther)

filled the earth. See **note** on 2:14. (CSB)

This was so that His splendor covered its whole expanse. “The flaming glory of Jehovah filling everything is a vision of such excessive sublimity that one scarcely dares to follow the prophet in spirit to meditate upon it.” (Lange.) (Kretzmann)

3:4 HIS SPLENDOR – In a vision, the prophet experiences a theophany, a visible manifestation of God’s glory and power. The God who “dwells in unapproachable light” (1 Tim 6:16), whom no one can look at and live (Ex 33:20), reveals His radiant presence in bright and flashing rays (Hebrew “horns”) of light coming from His hand. (TLSB)

POWER WAS HIDDEN – Cyprian says, “In the passion and the sign of the cross is all virtue and power.” (TLSB)

3:5 Plague ... pestilence. Means of divine punishment (cf. Ex 7:14–12:30; Lev 26:25; Ps 91:3, 6). (CSB)

This is a reminder of the 10 plagues that revealed God’s glory in death and destruction (cf Ex 7:14-12:30). Pestilence is associated with a burning fever. Plague was a Hebrew word which is also the name of a Canaanite god of disease and healing. (TLSB)

3:6 God’s presence was frequently marked by earthquakes (see Ex 19:18; Ps 18:7; Jer 4:24–26; 10:10). Landslides may also be alluded to here. (CSB)

God is calmly standing, amidst the general commotion, as the Judge of the world, measuring the countries and their doings, or causing them to shake in terror, in order to execute judgment. (Kretzmann)

HIS WAYS ARE ETERNAL – In contrast to the mountains and the hills, which only appear to be eternal, the Lord’s ways are truly everlasting. (TLSB)

Or it could be, “the paths of olden time, He follows them.” As He once came in earthquakes and terrible manifestations of His majesty in order to make Israel His covenant nation, so He may once more be expected to come to Judgment. (Kretzmann)

3:7 Cushan ... Midian. Arab tribes living near Edom. (CSB)

Occurs only here in the Bible; meaning uncertain. Commentators suggest two possibilities: Ethiopia (usually called Cush; Zep 3:10) or a Midianite tribe of the Sinai peninsula. (TLSB)

A seminomadic people whose central location was probably east of the Gulf of Aqaba in northwest Arabia. Moses lived in Midian for many years (Ex 2:15–22). (TLSB)

distress ... anguish. When Israel was delivered from Egypt under Moses, neighboring peoples were filled with fear (see Ex 15:14–16; Jos 2:9–10). (CSB)

3:8 Poetic allusions to the plague on the Nile (Ex 7:20–24) and/or the stopping of the Jordan (Jos 3:15–17), and to the parting of the Red Sea (Ex 14:15–31). But see **note** on v. 3. (CSB)

Luther suggests that the questions could be answered either positively (thus a reference to God’s wrath against His enemies) or negatively (God’s grace by which He saved His people). Luther preferred the negative answer, since the end of the verse points to God’s salvation (AE 19:141). (TLSB)

You rode on Your horses, on Your chariot of salvation? God is a mighty warrior who conquers the enemies of His people and brings them salvation. (TLSB)

salvation? Hbr *yeshu ‘ah*, derived from the same root word as the name given to Jesus, the Savior (Mt 1:21).(TLSB)

3:9 *stripped the sheath.* The picture of the warrior taking his bow from its case on the chariot. (TLSB)

arrows. Probably thunderbolts unleashed by the heavenly archer. (CSB)

SELAH – Hebrew; untranslatable. Mainly in the first two books of Psalms. Probably refers to the accompaniment of the harps during the psalm. (TLSB p. 993)

This often occurs in the middle of a psalm and which apparently signals an interlude. “The Sela indicates that one must be still and quickly think through the words of the psalm; for they demand a quiet and restful soul, which can grasp and hold to that which the Holy Spirit there presents and offers” (Luther). (Psalms – The Prayer Book of the Bible – Dietrich Bonhoeffer p. 23)

Selah may be a musical notation. It could also be a point where a pause is desirable for the singer or reader of the psalm in order that the statement last made or the thought as a whole just developed may be reflected upon before the next turn of the thought appears. (Leupold)

split the earth with rivers. Caused by the accompanying thunderstorms. (CSB)

This was as when masses of water rush from the mountains, or when tidal waves cut deep gullies into the earth. (Kretzmann)

3:10 The creation (personified) watches with fear and awe as God acts to punish and to save. (TLSB)

3:11 *Sun and moon stood still.* Probably an allusion to the victory at Gibeon (Jos 10:12–13), indicating that God’s triumph over his enemies would be just as complete as on that occasion. (CSB)

light of Your arrows. Apparently lightning (Zec 9:14). (TLSB)

3:12 *threshed.* See **note** on Am 1:3. (CSB)

Trod or trampled upon. (TLSB)

3:13 *deliver your people.* God fought against the nations of Canaan (v. 12) but delivered his people. (CSB)

Tertullian: “Those who shall look up and lift their heads, being redeemed in the time of His kingdom” (ANF 3:416). (TLSB)

save. By giving victory to. (CSB)

anointed one. The covenant nation, the “kingdom of priests” (Ex 19:6), which God came to deliver. He destroyed the enemy, and in this great act of wrath (v. 12) remembered mercy (v. 2). (CSB)

The Hebrew is *mashiach* and refers to the kings of Israel, especially to David (2 Sm 22:51; Ps 84:9). The coming King, the Messiah, God’s Son, is called “His Anointed” in Ps. 2:2. This King not only is saved, but is the Savior. (TLSB)

leader of the land of wickedness. Pharaoh (see Ex 14:5–9). (CSB)

laying him bare. Describes complete and shameful destruction (TLSB)

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3:14–15 Another reference to the destruction of the Egyptians in the Red Sea. God will likewise vanquish present foes. (CSB)

3:14 OWN SPEAR – ESV has “arrows.” God will destroy His enemies with their own weapons. (TLSB)

me. The prophet, as the divine spokesman to the people, had to bear the brunt of the Lord’s punishment inflicted by the Babylonian warriors. (TLSB)

3:15 Reference to how the Lord delivered Israel at the Red Sea and destroyed His enemies (Ex 14–15). (TLSB)

horses. See v. 8 and **note**. (CSB)

CHURNING THE GREAT WATERS – This was upon the billows of great waters, the expression serving to bring out the almighty power of Jehovah in the deliverance of His people. Thus the majesty of the Lord in overcoming all His enemies is set forth in a word-painting of singular beauty and power, with the Messianic background clearly in evidence. (Kretzmann)

3:16 Hearing the hymnic recollection of God’s mighty deeds of old in Israel’s behalf (vv. 3–15) fills the prophet with an awe so profound that he feels physically weak. Alternatively, it is possible that the message from the Lord that Babylon would be sent against Judah (1:5–11) had so devastated him that he felt ill—until he heard the Lord’s further word. (CSB)

rotteness. Habakkuk’s body trembles and his legs dissolve in decay as he feels helpless at the thought of the trouble to come. (TLSB)

wait patiently. See **note** on 2:3. (CSB)

Though he is filled with anxiety, the prophet calmly submits to the inevitable with confidence in God’s final victory over the attackers. (TLSB)

nation invading us. Babylonia. (CSB)

The invading Babylonian conquerors would later suffer their own day of distress. (TLSB)

3:1–16 As Habakkuk reflects on a terrifying manifestation of God’s glory and power, he prays for mercy, quietly confident of God’s ultimate deliverance even in the midst of great distress. Much in our lives brings anguish, fear, and even feelings of helplessness to our hearts (Ps 25:16–18; Ac 14:22). God does humble us under His mighty hand, but He does so in order to exalt us (1Pt 5:6). • Lord Jesus Christ, let not the fear of trouble and death overwhelm me, for I trust continually in Your saving help. Amen. (TLSB)

3:17 Probably anticipates the awful results of the imminent Babylonian invasion and devastation.

War strips the land of the means of sustenance. Deprived of the essentials of human survival, Judah's faith would be severely tested. The prophet's heartfelt conviction that "the righteous shall live by his faith (2:4) enables him to rejoice in spite of the dire circumstances. He does so because he knows God is the salvation of His people. (TLSB)

Cyprian: "There flourishes with us the strength of hope and the firmness of faith. Among these very ruins of a decaying world our soul is lifted up, and our courage unshaken: our patience is never anything but joyous; and the mind is always secure of its God" (*ANF* 5:463). (TLSB)

3:18–19 Habakkuk has learned the lesson of faith (2:4)—to trust in God's providence regardless of circumstances. He declares that even if God should send suffering and loss, he would still rejoice in his Savior-God—one of the strongest affirmations of faith in all Scripture. (CSB)

3:19 MY STRENGTH – The Hebrew *chayll*, has military connotations and in many passages means "army." Since all who trust in God know He is their strength, they are able to surmount life's difficulties and setbacks. (TLSB)

makes my feet like the feet of a deer. Gives me sure-footed confidence. (CSB)

Believers need only to look to the nimble and sure-footed deer and the fortified high places for examples of the kind of security found in God (cf 2 Sm 22:34; Ps 18:33). (TLSB)

director. Probably the conductor of the temple musicians. This chapter may have formed part of the temple prayers that were chanted with the accompaniment of instruments (see 1Ch 16:4–7). (CSB)

stringed instruments. Including harp and lyre (Ps 33:2; 92:3; 144:9). (CSB)

3:17–19 The Book that begins with a complaint now ends with an expression of joyful confidence in the God of salvation. When we look to ourselves and our own strength, we have reason only to despair. But when we are cast down and experience inner turmoil, we say, "Yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will take joy in the God of my salvation" (Hab 3:18). • I will praise You for Your salvation, O Lord, all the days of my life. Amen. (TLSB)