

# Even Though...

## Habakkuk 3:1-19



September 22, 2024, West Valley Presbyterian Church

Last week we heard the second complaint that Habakkuk brought before the Lord: that the Babylonians, whom God had allowed to conquer Judah (along with much of the Middle East), were far worse than the Judahites had ever been. So why was God allowing this even worse destruction and plunder and cruelty? And God told Habakkuk that the Babylonians also will be dealt with, because of their injustice, violence and idolatry. Which they were; they were themselves conquered by the Persians 50 years later. God said that the righteous person would live by faithfulness to God; and that a day would come when all the earth would be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

This third chapter is a prayer that Habakkuk wrote in response to God; and he intended it to be sung. It ends with “For the director in music. On my stringed instruments.” [So, Hardy? Praise band? This Scripture is called out especially for you, as well as for the rest of us.] In this prayer, Habakkuk reflects on God’s glory and power in judgment over all the earth; he mentions how bone-shaking it is to hear God speak; and he speaks of hope even in the midst of devastation. His message to his people, and to us, is to trust in God anyway. I think we can learn a lot about how to pray for our world and our nation, and our own lives, from this prayer of Habakkuk.

Hear now the word of God as it comes to us from Habakkuk, Chapter 3, vv 1-19.

SLIDE 2-16

A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet. On *shigionoth*.<sup>[a]</sup>

<sup>2</sup> LORD, I have heard of your fame;  
I stand in awe of your deeds, LORD.  
Repeat them in our day,  
in our time make them known;  
in wrath remember mercy.

<sup>3</sup> God came from Teman,  
the Holy One from Mount Paran.<sup>(b)</sup>  
His glory covered the heavens  
and his praise filled the earth.

<sup>4</sup> His splendor was like the sunrise;  
rays flashed from his hand,  
where his power was hidden.

<sup>5</sup> Plague went before him;  
pestilence followed his steps.

<sup>6</sup> He stood, and shook the earth;  
he looked, and made the nations tremble.

The ancient mountains crumbled  
and the age-old hills collapsed—  
but he marches on forever.

<sup>7</sup> I saw the tents of Cushan in distress,  
the dwellings of Midian in anguish.

<sup>8</sup> Were you angry with the rivers, LORD?  
Was your wrath against the streams?

Did you rage against the sea  
when you rode your horses  
and your chariots to victory?

<sup>9</sup> You uncovered your bow,  
you called for many arrows.

You split the earth with rivers;

<sup>10</sup> the mountains saw you and writhed.

Torrents of water swept by;  
the deep roared  
and lifted its waves on high.

<sup>11</sup> Sun and moon stood still in the heavens  
at the glint of your flying arrows,  
at the lightning of your flashing spear.

<sup>12</sup> In wrath you strode through the earth  
and in anger you threshed the nations.

<sup>13</sup> 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.

<sup>14</sup> 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.

<sup>15</sup> You trampled the sea with your horses,  
churning the great waters.

<sup>16</sup> 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.

<sup>17</sup> 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,

<sup>18</sup> yet I will rejoice in the LORD,  
I will be joyful in God my Savior.

<sup>19</sup> The Sovereign LORD is my strength;  
he makes my feet like the feet of a deer,  
he enables me to tread on the heights.  
For the director of music. On my stringed instruments.

#### SLIDE 17

Habakkuk begins his prayer in verse 2 by telling God that he stands in awe of what God has done in the past; and he asks that God would make those works known in his time as well. The equivalent for us would be the second line of the Lord's Prayer: "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

#### SLIDE 18

Next, Habakkuk remembers, before God, what he has done in the past. Specifically, he remembers before God the Exodus from Egypt, and the giving of the Law. So for instance, in verse 5, when Habakkuk says, "Plague went before him; pestilence followed his steps," he is referring to the plagues called down upon Egypt; and possibly also referring to the plagues that God called down upon the Israelites when they disobeyed. And in verse 6, where it says, "He stood, and shook the earth; he looked, and made the nations tremble, the ancient mountains crumbled and the age-old hills collapsed," that refers back to God's appearance on Mt. Sinai, with the mountain trembling.

#### SLIDE 19 - 20

Then in verses 8-15 Habakkuk says that God's power and majesty extends to everything on earth, not just in the past and not just in one area. He speaks of God controlling the sun and the moon; all the waters on the earth, from oceans to brooks; and he also speaks of God ruling over everyone on earth. For instance, vv 13 and 14, Habakkuk says, "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. 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." All that remembering strengthened Habakkuk's faith, so he could praise God.

#### SLIDE 21

Habakkuk is praising God for establishing HIS kingdom, setting everything right. It's a little like how Paul describes God as setting everything right through Jesus in Philippians 2:10-11: "that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

#### SLIDE 22

And since Habakkuk knows that God is at work in the world – God himself told him so – he can wait patiently for everything to be set right. Verse 16 says, "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." Habakkuk will not live to see Babylon's day of calamity; but he can wait for it, knowing that it will happen. He can be sure of that because he has felt God's power. The power of God's words shook his bones and made him tremble. God's words are alive and active and powerful! God speaks, and the whole universe comes into being, as Genesis 1 tells us. God speaks about the affairs of nations; and the affairs of nations were in fact settled as God said they would be.

#### SLIDE 23

So even though Judah has been devastated, Habakkuk can still praise God. Even though the invading army has plundered the land. Even though there are no figs on the trees and no grapes on the vines, Habakkuk can still rejoice in the Lord. Even though there are no olives on the trees and no grain in the field, Habakkuk can still be joyful in God our Savior. Even though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, even though there is no food in the land, Habakkuk can still say, "The sovereign Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to treat on the heights." He remembers; his faith is strengthened; and he can praise God even in the midst of hardship because he knows that God was, and is, indeed with them.

#### SLIDE 24

We have learned in Chapter 1 that when we enter a covenant that God makes with us – for Christians, that would be through baptism – he takes that seriously. He does expect us to live as Jesus taught us to do, and we are to remember that. We learned in Chapter 2 that God is the God of everyone and the God of all nations; and that God can and sometimes does work through what other nations are doing; and that one day the whole earth – all the nations – will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord; and we are to remember that. And we have learned today, in

Chapter 3, that remembering helps make it possible to trust God and praise him anyway, even when circumstances look bleak.

## TURN OFF SLIDES

We can trust God and praise him anyway, even when we read through the news feeds about the horrors in the Ukraine and in the Middle East. Or about the civil war going on in Sudan. Or about the civil war that's been going on in Myanmar (aka Burma) since 1948. The God who created galaxies from nothing - can he not also intervene in the wars on one planet, if he so chooses? I don't know what God's purpose might be in allowing the suffering of all these wars. But from his word to us through Habakkuk, I know that God can and does work within and among nations, including America. From God's word through Habakkuk, I know that it helps to remember what God has done in the past, when we are wondering what God might be doing in the present. Therefore we can – and we should – pray that those wars would end, and that his will would be done on earth, as it is in heaven.

We can trust God and praise him anyway, even when we read about lockdowns in our local schools due to threats on social media. And, we can and we should pray for our fellow citizens, that we might all calm down and do our best to listen to one another.

We can trust God and praise him anyway, even when our parents, or our siblings, or our spouses grow old and become frail, and are no longer the people they once were. And we can thank him for who they once were; for who they are now; and for who they will be when they are with Jesus.

We can trust God and praise him anyway, even if the bills are piling up and finances are tight; even if the car needs repair and our joints hurt; even if we are anxious about the future, or worried about tomorrow. We can thank God for the gift of life on this earth, and the greater gift of life with Jesus beyond this earth. We can rejoice in the Lord, and be joyful in God our Savior.

Is there anything that you are worried about? Remember, God holds the future; and somehow or another, something will work out. We can trust him in world events; we can trust him in local events; and we can trust him with the personal events of our lives. God is beyond anything we can even imagine; but we can trust him, and we can rejoice in him, always.

Let's once again pray together the prayer Jesus taught us, because it is a prayer of praise and of trust. And as we pray it together, let's entrust ourselves to whatever the future holds, knowing that God wants what is best for us. Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come! Your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For yours in the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

Song – Halleluia Anyway