

7) REVERENCE, REVIVAL, AND MAJESTY
(SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 27, 2020)

Scripture reading – Rev. 1:12-20; Habakkuk 3:1-7

INTRODUCTION

True doctrine does not magically, mystically, or mysteriously solve all your problems.

It is not, if you just believe the way you should, and life becomes easy.

True doctrine is not secrets for living.

But what is more important than understanding God and His truth?

We do this not to boast, not to think we are special, but because our chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.

We want to live in terms of the truth.

We want to pray according to the truth.

We want to praise God according to His truth.

When R. C. Sproul was asked one time about the most important thing he could teach non-Christians that they don't know. Sproul answered, "They don't know who God is."

And then when he was asked about the most important Christians don't know that they need to know, Sproul gave the same answer. "They don't know who God is."

Here in Habakkuk 3, we have challenging language, and unfamiliar geography, but what we are directed to consider is God's incredible power and majesty.

This is a subject we likely do not consider sufficiently.

We miss it because so easily we are focused on just our own needs and wishes.

It is very easy to be just focused on things of the earth.

The end of Habakkuk 2 prepares the way very well for what we have in chapter 3.

"But the LORD is in His holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before Him."

Never lose sight of God's majesty and power and the proper response of awe and humility before Him.

We will look at Habakkuk 3:1-7 in two parts.

[1] Introduction and Petition, vv. 1-2

[2] The Revelation of God's Majesty, vv. 3-7

1) INTRODUCTION AND PETITION, HAB. 3:1-2

It is possible that verse 1 might indicate that this chapter was used somehow apart from the first two chapters of the book.

Why would we say that?

The reason is because verse 1 repeats some of the same information that you see at the start of the book.

Habakkuk is again identified as a prophet.

This is also the first time in this short book that the word prayer is used, but we know that this is not the first prayer of the book.

We should also consider that although this part of the book is Habakkuk's prayer, it is no less part of God's revelation than the other parts of the book.

Habakkuk's prayer is God's revelation to us.

At the end of verse 1 is the word Shigionoth.

What does it mean?

The Geneva Bible and other older versions translated the word as ignorances.

The same Hebrew word is used in the **singular** in the heading of Psalm 7, where in the NKJV it is translated as meditation.

Even though we don't know the exact meaning of the word, the fact that it is used here and in Psalm 7 helps us understand that Habakkuk 3 is very much like one of the Psalms.

The end of chapter 3 shows this to be the case.

Look at the end of Hab. 3:19.

To the Chief Musician. With my stringed instruments.

While we read and study this chapter, and it is not wrong to do so, this chapter is given to God's people to sing and to use in the worship of our great God.

MacArthur writes:

The argumentative tone of the previous chapters, in which he cried for divine interference, is transformed into a plea for God's mercy (v. 2), a review of God's power (vv. 3–15), and a chorus of praise for God's sustaining grace and sufficiency (vv. 16–19). But while the tone changes, a strong, thematic connection remains. Having been informed of God's plan of judgment, Habakkuk returns to the matter of Judah's judgment, pleading for mercy.¹

Let's consider verse 2 and the plea of Habakkuk for mercy.

The first thing we see from verse 2 is Habakkuk's testimony of hearing God's speech or report and being afraid.

(There is a play on words that is difficult to translate.)

¹ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible*, Accordance electronic ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2013), paragraph 16500.

Where do you think the first response of fear is found?

The first time we see this response of fear is in Gen. 3:10.

Gen. 3:10 So he said, "I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself."

There are a lot of people who claim that they want to hear God speak to them.

Do you really want the sovereign God of all heaven and earth to directly give you a word?

Habakkuk was a prophet.

He was given a calling in a special way of hearing God's Word and then communicating God's Word.

For Habakkuk, hearing God's speech was truly an awesome experience.

Although we are not given private revelations and messages from God, we have the blessing of God's voice to us in His word.

And the proper response is always great reverence and even fear.

Is. 66:1 Thus says the LORD:

"Heaven *is* My throne,

And earth *is* My footstool.

Where *is* the house that you will build Me?

And where *is* the place of My rest?

2 For all those *things* My hand has made,

And all those *things* exist,"

Says the LORD.

“But on this *one* will I look:
On *him who is poor* and of a contrite spirit,
And who trembles at My word.

Two times as Habakkuk continues to pray, he uses the phrase, “in the midst of years.”

There is some question about the meaning of this phrase, but I don’t think we have to ponder very deeply.

Habakkuk understood that God’s judgment was going to come upon Judah and other nations.

It was going to be a very difficult time of suffering under God’s judgment.

The terrorizing raids by Babylon, the destruction, and captivity of Judah are all part of this “in the midst of years.”²

In the midst of judgment and God’s wrath, Habakkuk prays still for mercy.

The word translated as **work** is used 25 times in the OT used both for God and for man.

Deut. 32:4 *He is the Rock, His work is perfect;*
For all His ways are justice,
A God of truth and without injustice;
Righteous and upright is He.

Psa. 90:16 *Let Your work appear to Your servants,*
And Your glory to their children.

What is God’s work?

I think we can define it this way:

² Chantry, 70.

It is all that He does in showing His glory, advancing His purposes, and saving His people.

Much of the rest of Habakkuk 3 is a description of God's work and the demonstration of God's mighty power.

What we have been given here is a beautiful pattern that should direct us also in prayer.

We pray that God would show forth His mighty power, advance His purposes, and bring salvation to all of His elect.

And as God does this, we recognize that we are not promised ease.

And so, we pray for mercy especially in the face of God's fearsome judgments.

Q. 191. What do we pray for in the second petition?

*A. In the second petition (which is, *Thy kingdom come*), acknowledging ourselves and all mankind to be by nature under the dominion of sin and Satan, we pray, that the kingdom of sin and Satan may be destroyed, the gospel propagated throughout the world, the Jews called, the fullness of the Gentiles brought in; the church furnished with all gospel officers and ordinances, purged from corruption, countenanced and maintained by the civil magistrate; that the ordinances of Christ may be purely dispensed, and made effectual to the converting of those that are yet in their sins, and the confirming, comforting, and building up of those that are already converted: that Christ would rule in our hearts here, and hasten the time of his second coming, and our reigning with him forever: and that he would be pleased so to exercise the kingdom of his power in all the world, as may best conduce to these ends.*

2) THE REVELATION OF GOD'S MAJESTY, vv. 3-7

Much of the language in the remainder of this chapter is quite challenging.

Starting with verse 3 through the end of the chapter, we can see three main parts.

1) Theophany or Revelation of God's Majesty, vv. 3-7

2) The Battle, vv. 8-15

3) The Response of Faith, vv. 16-19

We focus in verses 3-7 on what is called a theophany, a description of the revelation of God's majesty.

The language here sounds very strange to us, but to God's people of old it would have been very familiar.

If I listed a number of events from World War 2, anyone older would certainly know them. Those who are younger might not recognize them – Pearl Harbor, Iwo Jima, Battle of the Bulge, Battle of Midway, and D-Day.³

What we have described starting with verse 3 is a reflection on God's mighty presence that was made known at Mt. Sinai and other descriptions of God's power in conjunction with the Exodus and the time of the Judges.

Another challenge to consider is the grammar of the verbs starting with verse 3.

Some versions translate in the past tense – God came...

Other versions translate with the present tense – God comes...

What is the difference?

While the past tense is the correct grammatical translation, Habakkuk is expressing something for the future in terms of God's work. **The past tense expresses that what God has determined to do will be done.**

The NET Bible states:

³ <https://www.popularmechanics.com/military/g2652/most-important-battles-world-war-ii/>

Habakkuk here describes, in terms reminiscent of past theophanies, his prophetic vision of a future theophany (see v. 7, "I saw"). From the prophet's visionary standpoint the theophany is "as good as done."

God is going to act powerfully, showing His power and delivering His people that can be compared to other mighty expressions of God's glory and power.

And it might be significant as you see in verse 3 that God is not coming from Jerusalem or the temple.

God is coming from the south.

Teman is part of southern Edom; maybe about 100 miles south and a bit east of Jerusalem.

We don't know the precise location of Mount Paran, but it is also somewhere southeast of Israel.

A very important cross reference is Deut. 33:2.

Deut. 33:2 And he said:

"The LORD came from Sinai,
And dawned on them from Seir;
He shone forth from Mount Paran,
And He came with ten thousands of saints;
From His right hand
Came a fiery law for them.

The remainder of verse 3 then speaks of how God's glory is made known to all the heavens and the earth.

Here is an important point of theology.

We cannot fully know or define God in that He is eternal and infinite, perfectly holy.

This does not mean that we know nothing about God.

Our knowledge is always limited, but because God has revealed Himself we are not left totally ignorant.

So what we have starting in verse 4 is a description of the infinite, eternal, unchanging God in language that we can understand.

The description is given in terms of light or lightning.

The temperature of lightning is 54,000 °F.

This is many times hotter than the actual surface sun temperature.

It is of course only momentary, but this is a powerful description.

We might think today of an explosion, some sort of bomb being an expression of power. Obviously, that was not a description that could be used thousands of years ago.

Correctly the Bible describes God's power in terms of light - the shining of lightning or the brightness and power of the sun.

It is estimated that the power of a lightning bolt would be something like 10 billion watts.

And yet the end of verse 4 says that this brightness like lightning is actually a covering of God's true power.

There His power was hidden.

We read of something very similar in Job.

Job 36:32 He covers *His* hands with lightning,
And commands it to strike.

We cannot fully appreciate or understand God's power, but this does not mean we know nothing of it.

Verse 5 speaks of pestilence and fever, again echoing the display of God's power in bringing judgment on Egypt.

In false religions like in Babylon, the word translated as **fever** in our version was connected with a false god that was worshipped, a god of the underworld, plagues, and war.⁴

Now we do know that satan and his demons also seek to exercise power and control.

⁴ HALOT, s.v. "רִשְׁעָה" 3:1297.

And God in His sovereignty does grant them some power, which of course they seek to use for evil.

But here we are reminded that God justly and perfectly brings fearsome judgment to execute His will and show forth His saving work.

Verse 6 then expresses God's power in terms of the shaking and trembling of the earth.

As God takes His stand, His position for battle, the earth is measured or what could be translated as shakes.

The nations are startled.

The things that look so secure, mighty mountains are scattered and humbled.

God's ways are everlasting.

There could be in this description a looking back to the time of Deborah in the book of Judges.

Judg. 5:4 "LORD, when You went out from Seir,
When You marched from the field of Edom,
The earth trembled and the heavens poured,
The clouds also poured water;

Finally then in verse 7 we have reference to tents in Cushan and curtains in Midian.

The word Cushan as used here is only used this one time in Scripture.

Midian is a more familiar term.

Cushan might be an ancient name for the Midianites.⁵

Here we likely may have a reflection back to one of the most famous Bible stories of Gideon and his 300 men triumphing by God's power over a vast host of Midianites.

We read earlier from Rev. 1 which gives us a powerful description of the full majesty of our Lord.

We need these descriptions because without them we do not understand God's majesty as we should.

We see God's power in creation, of course, but we need also the clear direction of God's Word, lest we rely on our own ignorance or thoughts.

⁵ NBD, s.v. "Cushan-rishathaim," 249.

Never lose sight of God's majesty and power and the proper response of awe and humility before Him.

A few final points of reflection and application.

1] We must pray for God's sovereign and saving work. We also must seek to understand that God is at work in ways we don't always see or recognize.

Answer of this prayer in terms of God preserving His people through the times of judgment such that His work did continue.

It is never in vain to pray for God's work and the advancement of His kingdom.

2] We must always seek to live in awe of His majesty and glory.

Colossians 3:1 If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. **2** Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. **3** For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. **4** When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

Prayer

Closing Hymn: 253

BENEDICTION - EPH. 3:20-21

Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.