

GOD Promises Salvation

Focal Verses • Habakkuk 3:2-6, 17-19

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will RECOGNIZE that there are times when we may not understand how God is moving, EMPATHIZE with wondering why God allows certain things to happen, and DISCOVER that God's character dictates that unrighteousness will not go forever unpunished, nor charity unrewarded.

IN FOCUS

Cheryl struggled to keep her car on the road as she sped home from the office. After years with the school district, the administrators had decided to eliminate her position. As she drove, Cheryl thought bitterly of the dozens of hours of overtime she had worked and never charged the district for.

Her reports were always well prepared and on time. Her supervisors always praised her for her efforts, and she had been named "Employee of the Year" multiple times.

The worst cut was the coworkers who were remaining. Neither of those women had been with the district more than four years. One rarely reported to work on time and frequently left early. The reports prepared by the other were sloppy and often contained wrong information. Cheryl had to cover for both of these women countless times, yet the district chose to cut her job. It just didn't seem fair!

Cheryl was the sole supporter of her children. How would she make the payments on the house? How soon could she find another job? She began crying and wondering why God would allow her to be in this terrible situation.

How do we respond when God allows difficulties and disasters to happen to His people?

Keep in Mind

"Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation" (Habakkuk 3:18, KJV).

Say It Correctly

Habakkuk – haa-buh-kuhk

Focal Verses

Habakkuk 3:2-6, 17-19

KJV

3:2 O LORD, I have heard thy speech, and was afraid: O LORD, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy.

3 God came from Teman, and the Holy One from mount Paran. Selah. His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise.

4 And his brightness was as the light; he had horns coming out of his hand: and there was the hiding of his power.

5 Before him went the pestilence, and burning coals went forth at his feet.

6 He stood, and measured the earth: he beheld, and drove asunder the nations; and the everlasting mountains were scattered, the perpetual hills did bow: his ways are everlasting.

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17 Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls:

18 Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation.

19 The LORD God is my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds' feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places. To the chief singer on my stringed instruments.

NLT

3:2 I have heard all about you, LORD. I am filled with awe by your amazing works. In this time of our deep need, help us again as you did in years gone by. And in your anger, remember your mercy.

3 I see God moving across the deserts from Edom, the Holy One coming from Mount Paran. His brilliant splendor fills the heavens, and the earth is filled with his praise.

4 His coming is as brilliant as the sunrise. Rays of light flash from his hands, where his awesome power is hidden.

5 Pestilence marches before him; plague follows close behind.

6 When he stops, the earth shakes. When he looks, the nations tremble. He shatters the everlasting mountains and levels the eternal hills. He is the Eternal One!

17 Even though the fig trees have no blossoms, and there are no grapes on the vines; even though the olive crop fails, and the fields lie empty and barren; even though the flocks die in the fields, and the cattle barns are empty,

18 yet I will rejoice in the LORD! I will be joyful in the God of my salvation!

19 The Sovereign LORD is my strength! He makes me as surefooted as a deer, able to tread upon the heights. (For the choir director: This prayer is to be accompanied by stringed instruments.)

The People, Places, and Times

Habakkuk, the prophet. There is little information about the prophet Habakkuk. There is no mention of his father's name or what city he is from. Habbakuk did live in Judah, and his prophecy occurred before Judah fell to the Babylonians. He may have been a contemporary of the prophets Jeremiah and Zephaniah. The Habakkuk book is small, containing only three chapters, but it has two verses often quoted by Christians. "...the just shall live by his faith" (Habakkuk 2:4, KJV), and "...the LORD is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him" (Habakkuk 2:20).

Background

The Prophet Habakkuk was greatly disturbed by Judah's condition. All around, he saw the people living in wickedness and the violence and oppression that permeated the land. The Northern Kingdom of Israel had been invaded and the people were carted away, and Judah is a little better morally. Judah's constant state of debauchery, combined with God's apparent indifference, worries the prophet. Habakkuk knew that God was just, yet there was injustice around him. He struggled to reconcile what he knew about God with what he saw going on around him. Because he was a man of God, Habakkuk took his problem directly to God in prayer. In the first chapter of the book of Habakkuk, the prophet demands to know how long God will allow this sinful condition to go unchallenged. The second chapter is God's response to Habakkuk.

God responds to Habakkuk's accusation that He has remained silent by pointing out that Habakkuk does not know how to recognize His answers. God's response has not come in the way that the prophet expected. God tells Habakkuk that He will use the Babylonians to punish Judah. God also tells Habakkuk to wait and see just what He would do. Habakkuk was astonished by God's response. Rather than a revival, the lawlessness of Judah would be dealt with through an invasion. Habakkuk wonders how God could conquer

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Judah with an even more evil nation. God assures Habakkuk that Babylon, too, would be punished. Our lesson focuses on Habakkuk's remarkable prayer when he finally recognizes that God has everything under control. Habakkuk's faith rests in his remembering what God has done in the past and his conviction that God alone can be trusted with the future. Although his book begins in fear, it ends with a marvelous revelation of faith.

At-A-Glance

1. Response in Crisis (Habakkuk 3:2–3)
2. Recognition of Judgment (vv. 4–6)
3. Praise in Destruction (vv. 17–18)
4. Strength in Salvation (v. 19)

In Depth

1. Response in Crisis (Habakkuk 3:2–3)

Habakkuk appeals to God to remember mercy in His wrath. God has revealed His plan to the prophet, and the prophet is pleading on behalf of the people. He seems to ask that in the ensuing 70 years of captivity, God would secure His people and show them some compassion. In prayer, Habakkuk remembers what God has done in the past. God's past performance convinces Habakkuk that he can continue to trust in God.

2. Recognition of Judgment (Habakkuk 3:4–6)

Habakkuk remembers that God hid His awesome power, which flashed out in sudden acts of miraculous interventions, such as the various plagues He leveled against Egypt. When God was leading the people out of Egyptian captivity, He used pestilence and plagues to destroy the land and flock. The text continues describing what happens when God is present: "the earth shakes," "nations tremble," "ancient mountains crumble," and "age-old hills collapse." God's creation is no match for His presence. Further, He is unhindered; the text declares He "marches on forever."

3. Praise in Destruction (Habakkuk 3:17–18)

The prophet laments that there will come a time when there will be no fruit on the trees, and the livestock will be gone. God's people, who had once been blessed with a land of milk and honey, would soon suffer starvation. Despite this, Habakkuk determines that he will remain joyful. His intent to remain joyful likely points to his confidence in God.

4. Strength in Salvation (Habakkuk 3:19)

Habakkuk is no longer worried about the situation because he knows that his salvation lies in the Lord. He declares that God will make his feet like those of a hind. This female deer is a slender, graceful creature, renowned for its swiftness and surefootedness, which enables it to escape from its enemies. Habakkuk uses this allusion to demonstrate how he and all the remaining faithful will endure the impending confrontation with the Babylonians. Nothing has changed Habakkuk's situation. Judah is still sinful, and the Babylonians are still going to invade. The change is in Habakkuk! This book begins with the prophet's declaration of fear and ends with a declaration of faith in the nature and character of God. With God as the source of his strength and comfort, Habakkuk is now confident that he can rise above the challenge that faces him.

Search the Scriptures

1. What was Habakkuk's initial reaction after hearing God's "speech" (v. 2)?
2. What virtue did Habakkuk appeal to God to remember (v. 2)?
3. How does the prophet declare he will respond in the face of these destructions (v. 18)?

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Discuss the Meaning

1. What was Habakkuk's initial reaction after hearing God's "speech" (v. 2)?
2. What virtue did Habakkuk appeal to God to remember (v. 2)?
3. How does the prophet declare he will respond in the face of these destructions (v. 18)?

Liberating Lesson

We often forget that God did not promise the world would be peaceful. He did, however, promise to remain a source of strength and comfort to us. Our inability to understand why God allows things to happen should not hinder us from trusting in His power and plan. God has a divine plan and purpose for each of us—whether we recognize it or not. At the beginning of this book, Habakkuk wants to know why God is allowing such evil to go on in the land. He wants to know why God won't move to stop it. Today, we only need to look at our phones to see the latest account of some horrific event. We may find ourselves asking the same questions: "Why won't God stop these terrible things?" It often appears to us that God is not moving. However, God revealed to Habbakuk that He was indeed moving, but not in the way the prophet expected.

Despite everything happening around us, we must be mindful that God desires us to become more like His Son. Only when we trust in Christ, does He begin to work in us, transforming our hearts and guiding us toward a life that reflects His love and purpose. It does not matter what our problems are because God is always in control. This fact allows us to move from our fear to faithfulness and truly rejoice in the God of our salvation.

Application for Activation

Habbakuk declares, "yet I will rejoice in the Lord! I will be joyful in the God of my salvation!" (v. 18, NLT). This particular verse should speak loudly and boldly to each of us. The God who saved our souls from destruction is the God who can be trusted in all things. Not only will God give His people the ability to face the challenges of life, but He will also give us the power to rise above them. Make a list of the perplexing or troubling things in your life. How can you use Habakkuk's example as a model for expressing your faith in the Lord despite these situations?

More Light on the Text

Habakkuk 3:2–6, 17–19, KJV

The first two chapters of the Book of Habakkuk contain a dialogue between Habakkuk and God. In these chapters, the prophet expresses his concern over the oppression of the poor by the leaders and the deplorable situation in Israel. He asks why God allows the wicked to prosper. Upon receiving an answer from God, the prophet responds with a beautiful psalm of confession, expressing faith in the Lord (Chapter 3).

2 O LORD, I have heard thy speech, and was afraid: O LORD, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy.

Here, the prophet's confidence and assurance that God would answer him is anchored in God's previous acts of deliverance and providence. This confidence is expressed at the opening of this psalm: "O LORD, I have heard thy speech, and was afraid." The Hebrew nouns for "to hear" and the verb "speech" share the same three Hebrew consonants: shin, mem, and heh. This Hebrew poetic tool, called alliteration (repetition of consonants in two or more words), is sometimes used to emphasize a particular theme or event. Consequently, Habbakuk may be drawing attention to the fact that he has certainly heard God's word.

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This report causes the prophet to be “afraid” (Hebrew *yare’*, pronounced yah-**RAY**). The word *yare’* can be translated as “to fear, to revere, to cause astonishment and awe.” The prophet confesses his awe and astonishment when he hears of God’s past deeds in Israel. Such feeling arouses confidence and faith. Hence, he desperately calls out, “O LORD, revive thy work in the midst of the years...” The word “revive” is the Hebrew verb *châyâh* (khaw-yaw’), which can be translated as “to let live,” “restore to life,” or “to cause to grow.” The remainder of the verse is “...in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy.” For this section, the prophet calls on God to intervene in the present situation. The “years” refer to the years of God’s wrath against the house of Israel, as described in Chapters 1 and 2.

The prophet then calls on God to have “mercy” even though God is angry with His people. The word “mercy” comes from the Hebrew verb *racham* (rah-**KHAM**), which can be translated as “to love,” “to love deeply,” “to be compassionate,” “to have tender affection,” or “to have compassion.” The psalmist declares that God’s mercy is eternal (Psalms 103:17; 106:1); it is boundless (Psalms 108:4; 119:64); it does not fail and is renewed daily (Lamentations 3:22–23). Habbakuk knows the people need God’s mercy.

3 God came from Teman, and the Holy One from mount Paran. Selah. His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise.

In the third stanza of this poem, Habakkuk seems to define or expand the thoughts of verse 2 regarding the report that he heard about God’s deeds in the past. Some scholars argue that the prophet (in verses 3–15) relates a theophany (thee-ah-fehnee), or his own experience of the manifestation of Deity. However, it could be that the prophet is speaking of God’s past deliverance of the Israelites out of Egypt, hoping that God will deliver His people once again. Habbakuk’s declaration, “God came from Teman and the Holy One from mount Paran...” reads similarly to a speech from Moses to the Israelites in Deuteronomy 33:2 (NIV), “He said: ‘The LORD came from Sinai and dawned over them from Seir; he shone forth from Mount Paran...’” His glory “covered the heavens” shows the amazing power of God, overshadowing his creation. The declaration that “the earth was filled with His praise” points to His creation glorifying His name. The word “praise” used here is the Hebrew word *tehillah* (pronounced teh-hil-**LAH**), which also means a song or a hymn of praise, adoration, or thanksgiving (paid to God). It also speaks of the act of general or public praise of God’s glory.

4 And his brightness was as the light; he had horns coming out of his hand: and there was the hiding of his power.

Still contemplating the majesty and greatness of God, Habakkuk declares, “His brightness was as the light; he had horns coming out of his hand.” The Hebrew word *qeren* (**KEH**-ren) can be translated as “horn.” The word *qeren* (**KEH**-ren) is figuratively used here to represent power and strength. Since God’s hand(s) is already powerful (Isaiah 59:1), the horns may be used here to emphasize God’s power further.

The phrase “there was the hiding of his power” suggests that God manifests His power over His people but hides His power from the rest of the world. King David says, “He hath not dealt so with any nation: and as for his judgments, they have not known them. Praise ye the LORD” (Psalm 147:20, KJV).

5 Before him went the pestilence, and burning coals went forth at his feet. 6 He stood, and measured the earth: he beheld, and drove asunder the nations; and the everlasting mountains were scattered, the perpetual hills did bow: his ways are everlasting.

In verses 5 and 6, the prophet, reminiscing on God’s power and majesty, recalls God’s exhibition of His might in executing punishment on His enemies. He states, “Before him went the pestilence, and burning coals went forth at his feet,” signifying God’s command over all instruments of wrath. This passage seems

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to allude to the various plagues God sent against the Egyptians to cause Pharaoh to let the Israelites go. To measure “the earth,” (Heb. *‘erets*, **EH**-rets) means that God mapped out the land and shared it among the people (see Deuteronomy 32:8).

Not only were the nations driven out, but no part of creation could withstand God’s power, “the everlasting mountains were scattered, the perpetual hills did bow.” The word “scattered” (Heb. *puwts*, poots) means to dash in pieces or to disperse; the word “bow” (Heb. *shachach*, shah-**KHAKH**) means to prostrate or be cast down. These speak expressly of God’s omnipotence, control, and authority over His creation. Contemplating the greatness and might of God, Isaiah declares, “Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance?” (Isaiah 40:12, KJV). The phrase “his ways are everlasting” reinforces that God is sovereign and that He is eternal. The psalmist says, “As for God, his way is perfect: the word of the LORD is tried: he is a buckler to all those that trust in him” (Psalm 18:30, KJV), and “The LORD is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works” (Psalm 145:17, KJV).

17 Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: 18 Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation.

Despite the circumstances and difficulties (v. 16), Habakkuk expresses his confidence and faith in the Lord and declares his resolve to praise and worship the God of his fathers. Using the agricultural motif (vv. 17–18), the prophet strongly affirms his faith in the Lord. The mention of the fig tree, the vine, the olive, farm produce, and the flocks and herds of animals covers the whole scope of agricultural produce, which formed the principal occupation of the people and upon which Israel depended. Such disaster, rather than driving the prophet to despair (see Joel 1:10–12), drives him to faith and trust. This faith is expressed in celebrating the Lord in triumph and rejoicing in the Lord his Savior. Similarly, Job is so confident and committed to trusting and worshiping the Lord that he declares: “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him: but I will maintain mine own ways before him” (Job 13:15, KJV). Even when everything fails, the prophet is confident that the Lord will not fail him. Why does the prophet express such confidence and faith?

19 The LORD God is my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds’ feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places. To the chief singer on my stringed instruments.

Habakkuk’s confidence is based on his knowledge of and relationship with the Lord. The Lord is his “strength” on whom his faith is anchored even in the midst of troubles—an expression of security. This security is further expressed figuratively as “he will make my feet like hinds’ feet.” The Hebrew *‘ayalah* (ah-yah-**LAH**) is translated as “hind,” “deer,” or “doe.” The feet of a deer are known for their strength and swiftness, having the ability to escape their pursuers. The Lord will also make him “to walk upon high places.” In other words, he is so confident in the Lord that he feels as if he is “walking on air,” and so surefooted that no height or trial will be able to daunt his faith in the Lord his Savior (see 2 Samuel 22:34; Psalm 18:33).

The psalmist says in Psalm 46:1–3 (NIV): “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging.”

The closing remark: “To the chief singer on my stringed instruments,” signifies the type of music and its use in the community’s worship. It is believed that this prayer was intended to be used by the Levitical choirs,

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though the psalm, unlike some others which are found outside the collection, e.g., 2 Samuel 22:2ff., 1 Chronicles 16:8ff., was never put in the Book of Psalms. (From *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, Electronic Database. Copyright 1962 by Moody Press.)

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Jeremiah 35–37

Psalm 73:1–9

TUESDAY

Jeremiah 38–41

Psalm 73:10–14

WEDNESDAY

Jeremiah 42–45

Psalm 73:15–28

THURSDAY

Jeremiah 46–48

Psalm 74:1–8

FRIDAY

Jeremiah 49–50

Psalm 74:9–17

SATURDAY

Jeremiah 51–52

Psalm 74:18–23

SUNDAY

Lamentations 1–3

Psalm 75:1–5