

Habakkuk: A Prophet Of Faith (Part Four)

Habakkuk 3

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Given 08-Oct-16; Sermon #1345

Today we will go through the last chapter of Habakkuk and this will end my Habakkuk series. There is so much in this that we can apply to our day—what we see now and what we see that is coming. Although the prophesy was fulfilled back then, it still has a lot of application for us today.

Habakkuk began his book by asking God why he was so slow in answering his prayer for revival in Israel. Then when God did answer, He said He was going to send the Chaldean-Babylonians to punish His people Israel.

This was not the answer Habakkuk wanted, and he asked God how He could do such a thing. How could He use a wicked people to punish those more righteous than themselves? These questions were asked in Habakkuk 1. God's answer came in Habakkuk 2, summarized in verse 4:

Habakkuk 2:4 “Behold the proud, his soul is not upright in him; but the just shall live by his faith.”

Then in the remainder of chapter 2, God describes how the one who is puffed up will be brought low. The Chaldean-Babylonians will themselves be punished for this and many other sins.

In the meantime, the one who knows God will live by faith in God. Times may be bad, the future may become worse, but the righteous will live by faith in Him who alone is worthy of that faith. Habakkuk 2, which contains this revelation, ends in verse 20 by saying:

Habakkuk 2:20 “But the Lord is in His holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before Him.”

In other words, God is on the throne, and everyone must, without complaint, pay homage to Him. It is an appropriate and solemn ending. All that remains

is for Habakkuk to worship this God and lay his requests before Him. Those requests, however, must be according to God's will.

That is critical in all of our prayers. Everything that we ask of God must be according to His will if we expect answered prayers.

Now after identifying the promises and warnings of chapters 1 and 2, the prophet Habakkuk concludes his book with faithful prayer and praise. He recalls past manifestations of God's power and grace.

He prays for the speedy deliverance of God's people and he expresses a firm confidence in God who is unchangeable and absolutely reliable. He comes to this conclusion, although he was faithful at the beginning, with even more and deeper faith at the end.

Habakkuk lays bare his heart at the beginning of each chapter of his prophecy. He was an active spectator of the sad spiritual decline of Judah, much the same as we are today in our nations. He was also an active recipient of the telling solution of God as he patiently waited on his mental watchtower. He remained a vigilant observer, one who was in the world but not of the world, as he watched God carry out His plan.

These revelations stirred him deeply, as they should do for all of us, since we are at a similar time in our history where "the writing is on the wall" and impending tyranny is about to adversely affect this nation and the whole world.

What God revealed in His answer, in Habakkuk 2, of the Chaldean attack on Judah and God's retribution on Chaldea, had disturbed the prophet and filled him with terror and awe.

When we look at the description of the great tribulation, we get a similar feeling, do we not? We have a feeling of terror of what is going to happen, but also a feeling of awe in how God will resolve it all and bring it all to a positive ending.

Habakkuk finds his relief and comfort in prayer and appeals to God to revive His work. God's prophet would like God to manifest His grace to Israel and

judgment upon her enemies by renewing the displays of His mighty power as He did earlier in Israel's history by intervening on behalf of His people.

While the years still run their course and Israel still undergoes suffering, the prophet pleads with God to reenact His deeds of power on behalf of Judah. In God's wrath upon both Judah and the Chaldean's, He is begged to "remember mercy," and he asks that judgment be softened with mercy.

Habakkuk is an open-minded prophet who is not afraid to wrestle with issues that test his faith. He openly and honestly directs his problems to God and waits to see how He will respond to his probing questions.

After two rounds of dialogue with the Eternal, Habakkuk's increased understanding of the person, power, and plan of God cause him to conclude with a psalm of unqualified praise.

Many of us, if not all of us, undervalue the value of this praise. It is an extraordinary praise that he has written down here. The more he knows about the "Planner," the more he can trust His plans. What we can take away from this book is that no matter what God brings to pass, "the just shall live by his faith."

Now in chapter 3, we have before us the theme of the psalm and the heart of the prayer. In short, Habakkuk prays that God will do for His people as He has in the past, and while inflicting punishment He will remember to deliver His people also.

The beginning of the book and the ending stand in stark contrast. In the beginning you have mystery, and in the end certainty; in the beginning you have questioning, and in the end affirmation; in the beginning you have complaining, and in the end confidence. Chapter 3 records the glory of God in past history and in future history, which of course is prophecy.

The message for the most part is understood in the form of a faithful spiritual relationship with God. Chapter 1 dwells on the invasion of the Chaldean's, chapter 2 predicts the judgment of God upon the Chaldean's, and chapter 3

pictures the coming of the Lord and the destruction of the hostile world powers. God will perform all these things without doubt, and through it all “the just shall live by faith!”

Now Habakkuk begins by questioning God, but he concludes his book with a prayer-psalm of praise for the person of God, seen in Habakkuk 3:1-3; the power of God, seen in Habakkuk 3:4-12; and the plan of God, seen in Habakkuk 3:13-19.

Chapter 3 builds to a triumphant climax reached in verses 17-19. In this chapter he acknowledges God’s wisdom in the coming invasion of Judah, and although it terrifies him, he will trust the Eternal. God’s creative and redemptive work in the past gives the prophet confidence in the divine purposes, and hope at a time when he would otherwise despair.

Habakkuk 3:18 Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.

This prayer-song was designed for public worship as is seen from the inscription, subscription, and the musical notation “Selah” in verses 3, 9, and 13. It is thought to be one of the most majestic and inspiring portions of the Word of God.

Chapter 3 is entitled a prayer, which is sometimes used interchangeably for “psalm.”

Habakkuk 3:1-2 A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, on Shigionoth. O Lord, I have heard Your speech and was afraid; O Lord, revive Your work in the midst of the years! In the midst of the years make it known; in wrath remember mercy.

The third chapter of Habakkuk is one of the great prayers of the Bible, to be placed alongside Abraham’s intercession for Sodom; David’s prayer at the dedication of the materials for the Temple, and the Psalms. But it is a prayer in context and cannot be understood properly apart from the entire prophecy.

There is a lot of symbolism in the prayer and it is in fact, as we will see, also a poem. That is why it is so hard to understand when you sit down and read through it by itself, because there is so much symbolism in it.

Basically, prayer is speaking verbally or in thought to God. We must not think that we need a special time, place, or mood to pray in every case. However, having said that, prayer can also be formal. The last chapter of Habakkuk is a formal prayer. It is a carefully structured, formal composition. In fact, as I said, it is a poem.

This suggests that after Habakkuk received the revelation of God's coming judgment on the Babylonians and the instruction to live by faith, he collected his thoughts and composed this chapter as a beautiful and careful expression of what he humbly wanted to say to God. This is very similar to the way David and the other psalmists did in the book of Psalms.

Now if you know that you can come to God at any place and at any time, you can learn something additional from this prayer of Habakkuk. There is also room for composed prayer in which we put down in writing the deepest expression and clearest insights of our hearts and minds.

Habakkuk's prayer can be divided into three parts. The first part is an approach to God, and we find that in verse 2. The second part is the prayer itself, consisting largely of rehearsal of God's mighty acts, which we find in verses 3:3-15. The third and final part is Habakkuk's personal testimony, and we find this in verses 16-19.

Let us focus here on the first part: Habakkuk's approach to God. Habakkuk's prayer begins in this way:

Habakkuk 3:2 O Lord, I have heard Your speech and was afraid;
O Lord, revive Your work in the midst of the years! In the midst of
the years make it known; in wrath [or judgment] remember mercy.

In many ways this is a very simple verse, but still, it contains all the essential elements of an effective approach to God and teaches us how our prayers can be effective.

Now what are the elements of effective prayer that we can extract out of the book of Habakkuk?

The first and most essential is humility. We cannot succeed in prayer if we come into God's presence demanding things because of who we are. We cannot succeed if we think that somehow we deserve to be there or deserve to be heard.

Habakkuk's approach to God is a very humble prayer. Some might say, "How do you get humility from that verse? Is it because the prophet claims to stand in awe of God's deeds?" Well, that is part of it, but the true measure of Habakkuk's humility in this prayer is seen by comparing Habakkuk 3:2 with the prophet's earlier prayers.

Habakkuk 1:2 O Lord, how long shall I cry, and You will not hear? Even cry out to You, "Violence!" and You will not save.

Habakkuk 1:13 You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on wickedness. Why do You look on those who deal treacherously, and hold Your tongue when the wicked devours a person more righteous than he?

Can you hear the difference? The prayers of chapter 1 are complaints. The final prayer assumes a different attitude, one of humility.

The first prayers were not altogether bad, because he was genuinely beseeching God for the answer. If we are free to come to God at any time of the day or night and on any day of the week to voice what is on our hearts and minds, then we are certainly free to ask the kind of questions Habakkuk asks in these verses.

Habakkuk was grieved by Israel's sin and he was disturbed that renewal had not come. The prophet was not wrong to ask God why there was no renewal and what God was going to do about the situation. But something happened in the interval between the prayers of the first chapter and the prayer of the third chapter, and it changed Habakkuk. Quite simply, he had taken his mind off himself, the Israelite's, and the Chaldean's, and he focused on God.

As long as he was operating merely on the human level, the difference between the relative goodness of Israel and the relative “badness” of the Babylonians seemed great. He could ask, “Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?”

But once he had looked to God, once he saw the righteousness of God and reminded himself of the eternal and sovereign God he worshipped, these differences faded into insignificance and the relative goodness of Israel seemed unimportant. Habakkuk saw that all, including himself, fall short of God’s standards and require God’s mercy to be saved.

Habakkuk was brought to such a position when he stopped thinking of his own nation, and of the Chaldean's, and contemplated only the holiness and justice of God against the dark background of the sin of the world.

Our problems can nearly all be traced to our persistence in looking at the immediate problems themselves instead of looking at them in the light of God. As long as Habakkuk was looking at Israel and the Chaldean's, he was troubled.

But now he has forgotten Israel as such, and the Chaldean's, and his eyes are were on God. He had returned to the realm of spiritual truth, the holiness of God, sin in man and in the world, and so he is able to see things in an entirely new light. He is now concerned for the glory of God and for nothing else, so to speak. He was still concerned for his country and his people, but his focus was not entirely on that, it was on the glory of God.

He had to stop thinking in terms of the fact that the Chaldean's were worse sinners than the Jews and that God would eventually use them, perplexing though this problem was. That attitude made him forget the sin of his own nation through concentrating on the sin of others, which happened to be greater. So he was, as Paul puts it, “comparing himself among himself,” which was not a right thing to do.

As long as he remained in this attitude he remained in perplexity, unhappy in heart and mind. But the prophet came to the place where he was lifted entirely out of that state, to see only the wonderful vision of God in His holy temple, with sinful mankind and the universe beneath Him.

The distinction between the Israelites and the Chaldean's became relatively unimportant when things were seen like that. It was no longer possible to be exalted either as an individual or as a nation. He could no longer put the nation of Judah above the Babylonians because he realized that all sin comes short of the glory of God.

When things are seen from a spiritual viewpoint, there can only be an acknowledgment that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and that the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one.

If we are to learn to pray effectively, the attitude that is needed as we come into God's presence is that it is only by the grace of God that we are able to pray to Him. We do not deserve anything from Him. He owes us nothing. We need to accept what He has promised to give us, and He only owes us that because He made a promise.

However, the Jews in Habakkuk's day were taking God for granted, and in doing so they neglected to uphold God's way. They did what seemed right in their own eyes, so any prayers they may have offered up were useless, except for Habakkuk's prayers.

As long as we approach God feeling that we are owed something because we are better or more faithful than someone else, we are making this mistake too. It is only when we abandon all thoughts of being better that we begin to approach God with a genuine and proper humility.

The only way we may approach God is humbly, and the only way we can rightly present our requests is with the yielding attitude of: "God be merciful to me, a sinner."

We may be relatively better than flagrant sinners in the world, but that is for God to judge and acknowledge, but also we are relatively worse than other generations.

We may not have the convictions of the martyred church, nor the sensitivity to sin of the church of Ephesus who could “not bear those who are evil.” It is only when the people of God humble themselves and pray and seek God’s face and turn from their wicked ways that He hears from heaven, forgives their sins, and heals their land.

II Chronicles 7:12-15 Then the Lord appeared to Solomon by night, and said to him: “I have heard your prayer, and have chosen this place for Myself as a house of sacrifice. When I shut up heaven and there is no rain, or command the locusts to devour the land, or send pestilence among My people, if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land. Now My eyes will be open and My ears attentive to prayer made in this place. [speaking of the Temple]

Humility and repentance are necessary for answered prayer.

The second element of effective prayer in Habakkuk’s approach to God is worship or adoration. This is seen in the first half of Habakkuk 3:2.

Habakkuk 3:2 O Lord, I have heard Your speech and was afraid; .
..

In other words, Habakkuk is saying, “Lord, I have heard of your wisdom; I stand in awe of your deeds.”

Now worship is acknowledging God’s true worth. It is rehearsing His attributes so that we might have a true recognition of Him. Habakkuk does precisely that in the central part of his prayer.

Most of us have a problem at this point, because often our prayers have very little worship or adoration in them. There is an acrostic for prayer based on the word ACTS. This stands for: A for adoration; C for confession of sin; T for thanksgiving; and S for supplications or requests.

In this acrostic, adoration rightly comes first and should dominate any normal prayer, with each of the other items, particularly the last, taking progressively less time. But what often happens is quite different. We often rush through the first part of our prayer (“Heavenly Father, we thank you that you are a wonderful God and that you sent Jesus to die for us. . .”) but then we settle down on the requests (“Father, here are 16 things I want from you”). This is how Habakkuk prayed at the beginning and it is not very effective that way.

Our requests will not be God’s will for us and most will go unanswered if it is done in that way. On the other hand, if we focus first on God’s great characteristics and His acts in past and present history, then our requests will change, and they will be more in line with God’s will and we will receive what we are properly praying for now.

This leads to the third and final element of effective prayer; namely, requests that are in accord with God’s will. After Habakkuk had approached God humbly and had recognized His true worth and great deeds, he was ready to make his requests. But now in the third chapter of Habakkuk, they are different from what he was saying a chapter or two earlier.

There are two requests. First, that God would renew His deeds in Habakkuk’s day and, second, that God would remember mercy in the midst of the anticipated outpouring of His wrath.

The first request shows how Habakkuk prays that God’s deeds, not his own deeds or desires, might be revived or renewed. This is what “Your” in the phrase “revive Your work” refers to. We will read the second half of verse 2 here.

Habakkuk 3:2“O Lord, revive [or, renew] Your work in the midst of the years! In the midst of the years make it known.

Usually, when we pray to God for some specific project, we are asking God to renew our work.

Our interest is really on what we are building or doing and not on what God may desire.

We need to learn that God may not be interested in our “little projects,” but rather He is concerned with the bigger picture of His work. We need to come to the point where we say, “Renew Your deeds; revive Your work; Your will be done!”

We notice too that Habakkuk prays for revival. That is what the word renew or renewal means. To renew is not merely to refurbish something, like refinishing an antique. It has to do with a new work. It is to make a new creation in Christ out of one who was an old sinner. Revival means to make alive. Formerly the people were spiritually dead, and now they are being made alive through God’s Spirit.

Earlier Habakkuk might have prayed for God to change His mind regarding the Babylonian invasion. Since the Babylonian invasion threatened the work that he knew, he would have wanted God to turn the invasion aside because he did not see God’s view of it. So we have to ask ourselves here, are we looking at it through God’s perspective or our own perspective, out of fear of danger?

However, he got his mind off his own work and desires the establishment of God’s work instead. He knows that if God is sending the Babylonian invasion, He will build a new work out of the disaster of that invasion.

At this point he is ready to write off the relative goodness of Israel and anticipate nothing less than a whole new beginning. In a sense we should look at our nation this way. As we see it going down into moral decline, we should focus and know that God will bring judgment upon the Israelitish nations in the world and realize that He will bring a new beginning and resolve everything in a far greater way than we could ever imagine.

Notice that the prayer is for God to renew His work “in our day, in our time.” What day is that? What time is he referring to? Clearly, it is the day of the invasion. Habakkuk is asking for renewal in the midst of bad times.

So Habakkuk was in line with God’s normal way of acting when he prayed for renewal in the time of invasion and destruction soon to come upon Israel. Are our times bad? If so, it is now especially, that we can cry out for renewal and be heard, for the same reason that Habakkuk was.

The last of Habakkuk’s requests is a simple one, but it goes to the heart of all we have been saying. Continuing on in the last part of verse 2.

Habakkuk 3:2 “In wrath [or you could say judgment] remember mercy.”

What a great request to leave with God. What an effective request. God is the God of mercy. So to pray for mercy, even in the day of God’s wrath, is to plead for that which is central to His character, which is mercy.

If we would see a mighty working of the Spirit of God in our time, we must get to the point where we desire and earnestly pray for His mercy. We must pray for His mercy on us as a nation and as individuals. On one occasion Jesus Christ told a story about a Pharisee and a tax collector and we will read the story here in Luke 18.

Luke 18:9-12 Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. [The Pharisee was proud of his spiritual achievements.] The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.’

But the tax collector was aware of his failures and notice his comment here in verse 13.

Luke 18:13-14 And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner!’ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

This is precisely what the second and third chapters of Habakkuk are all about. The Pharisee is the man who is puffed up and whose desires are not upright. The tax collector is the righteous man who lives by his faith. He prays, “In wrath remember mercy.” and it is this man who, Jesus Christ says, goes home justified. Judgment is softened with mercy!

Habakkuk is one of the shortest of the Minor Prophets, surpassed in brevity only by Obadiah, Nahum, and Haggai. But in spite of its brevity, it deals with profound issues.

In chapter 1 Habakkuk is concerned with sin in Israel. He is troubled by God’s apparent inactivity in history, a problem linked to what we would call “unanswered prayer.” Later in the same chapter, when God does answer, the prophet is perplexed by the moral dimensions of God’s proposed action.

In chapter 3 still another problem emerges: fear. God has revealed what is to happen. He has told Habakkuk to live by faith in the coming troubled times and Habakkuk will do it, but still he is afraid as he contemplates these judgments.

Habakkuk 3:16 When I heard, my body trembled; my lips quivered at the voice; rottenness entered my bones; and I trembled in myself, that I might rest in the day of trouble. When he comes up to the people, he will invade them with his troops.

He was terrified, as we would be if our nation was suddenly attacked. This is a brilliant description of intense, bone-shattering fear, and Habakkuk is honest enough to say that this is how he felt when God spoke to him about the Babylonian invasion. So between the power of God when He spoke to him and the fear of what was going to happen, it had Habakkuk shaking in his boots, to say the least.

Is fear common enough to demand this degree of attention? It probably is, though we usually try not to admit it. David was a man of great strength and faith, yet he speaks of fear as he faced his enemies.

Paul also possessed great courage. He held up wonderfully in hardships, beatings, riots, and imprisonments. But he confesses that at times he was afraid of losing his life. In II Corinthians 1, he said:

II Corinthians 1:8 For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life. [He was afraid.]

Strong faith is not incompatible with fleshly weakness, even that intense weakness that expresses itself in great anxiety. But how can we deal with it? How can we make sure that fear does not make a disaster of our lives?

The third chapter of Habakkuk is not only a confession of weakness and fear on the part of this embattled prophet. Habakkuk did fear as he anticipated the violence that would occur at the time of the Babylonian invasion, but he did something else too. He turned to God, and turning to God gave him victory over this weakness.

It is significant that the book does not end on the note of fear. Fear is mentioned, but it is surpassed by faith as Habakkuk comes to rejoice in the God of salvation.

The word salvation from the Hebrew word *yesha*, appears twice in Habakkuk 3:13 and once in Habakkuk 3:18. This root word *yesha*, from which the name Jesus is derived, means: liberty, deliverance, or salvation.

Habakkuk 3:13 You went forth for the salvation of Your people, for salvation with Your Anointed. You struck the head from the house of the wicked, by laying bare from foundation to neck. Selah

Habakkuk 3:17-18 [This is part of the “hymn of faith.”] Though the fig tree may not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines; though the labor of the olive may fail, and the fields yield no food; though the flock may be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stalls—yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.

Now this victory is available to all of God’s people, whatever they are called upon to go through. Sometimes it is a process or a separation. In precisely these situations it is possible to rejoice in God, and in joy in Him, bring victory.

This is entirely different from the world’s approaches to fear, because, of course, the world faces fearful things too. One of the world’s reactions is resignation. A person might say, “If this is going to happen to me, I suppose there’s just nothing that can be done about it. Everybody suffers. Everybody dies. I might as well be resigned to it.” What a hopeless life for that person.

This may be better than screaming in the face of adversity, but it is not the Christian way. At best it is a grim stoicism or indifference.

A second reaction of the world is detachment. A person might say “I don’t want to think about such things. Every time I think about them I get depressed. I get depressed when I think about my own personal future or when I think about the future of the country. International news depresses me. I don’t want to hear bad news, so I’m not going to think about these things at all.”

A person who reacts this way may try to fill his life with amusements or even work hard to keep his mind occupied. But this view refuses to face reality, and reality, whether we like it or not, is here to stay. Regrettably, it usually leaves its impact anyway. We try to detach ourselves from our problems, but they remain with us subconsciously and inevitably disturb the activities we are using to escape them.

A third reaction is sheer bravado. People will tell us, “Pull yourselves together and face this with your chin up. Don’t let the future depress you. Don’t let anything get you down.” Now how much help does that give to a person who has been sick for a long time?

The chin up approach might be all right if we were calling on God in humility and repentance asking for His help. But in the situations I am talking about their knees are already knocking together and their lips are quivering and yet, they are determined to conquer the problem on their own. Nobody would be in this state if they could help it and when you are terrified, all the pep talks in the world avail little.

The Christian way of dealing with fear is to rejoice in the God of salvation. Someone might wonder if this is not also impossible. True, it is often impossible to overcome fear by mere courage. But does that mean that in the same situation it is also impossible to rejoice in God? No, it is not impossible, because God gives us the strength to be able to rejoice in Him, if we go to Him in the right attitude, humbly and repentant.

Earlier, when Habakkuk was puzzled about the reason for God’s sending the Babylonians to invade Israel, Habakkuk used the process of 1) stopping to think; 2) restating basic principles; and 3) applying basic principles to the problem. When that did not work, he left the problem with God.

In this case, he reminded himself of God’s attributes, that God was everlasting, holy, sovereign, and faithful. And he concluded that if God was sending the Babylonians to invade Israel, it would be for the ultimate good of His people and not for their harm.

Here in Habakkuk 3, he does the same thing. Faced with fear, he reminds himself of what he knows. He knows that he worships an almighty God, and he remembers the powerful acts of God in past days. A God like that is a joy forever. Remembering God restores his joy and brings him victory over fear of the future.

It is important to emphasize knowledge, because there are situations in life in which only knowledge will help us. Emotion will not save us. Reason will

not save us. The only thing that can help us is the knowledge of what we know to be true.

Proverbs 9:10 “The [reverential] fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.”

Why was there fear and terror among the Israelites in Habakkuk’s mind? What was missing? Hosea 4:1, 6 reveals the answer.

Hosea 4:1 Hear the word of the Lord, you children of Israel, for the Lord brings a charge against the inhabitants of the land: “There is no truth or mercy or knowledge of God in the land.”

Hosea 4:6 “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being priest for Me; because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children.”

Now imagine a situation in which a Christian young man goes away to college and falls in love with a girl who is not a Christian. He is wondering if he should marry her. The Word of God is very clear about this. We are not to be unequally yoked together with unbelievers.

II Corinthians 6:14-17 Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you [baptized members of God’s church] are the temple of the living God. As God has said: “I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people.” Therefore “Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you.”

Even dating non-Christians breaks the spirit of the covenant which you have made with God at baptism. And even more seriously, Christian marriage

must be between two Christians only. When it is not, most of the time, it does not work out, and the result is misery for everyone involved, including the extended families.

But that young college student, that Christian man or woman is wrestling with this matter, and it is a big problem for him. What will save him in this situation?

Reason will not save him. Every time he thinks of a good reason why he should not marry the girl, ten more lame reasons occur to him why he should. The human mind is quite subtle, and it has a marvelous ability to select only those facts we want to hear.

What will save the young man or woman in this situation? Only one thing: knowledge of what the Word of God says and what God desires. If he is to have victory, he must know God's teaching. Only knowledge of God's way of life will make the right decision clear to him.

This is precisely the path Habakkuk took to overcome his fears of the coming invasion. Noticing what Habakkuk knew were important characteristics to keep in mind. The first characteristic was that Habakkuk had knowledge of God's mighty acts.

This whole chapter in Habakkuk is a rehearsal of them, beginning with Habakkuk 3:3.

These verses are a bit hard to understand, because they are poetic, not written in the most obvious terms that Habakkuk could have used. It is not the way the authors of I and II Chronicles or I and II Kings would have told the story. Still, the verses are clear enough.

They deal with God's defense of the Israelites when He led them out of Egypt, through the wilderness, and into the Promised Land.

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

Teman and Paran are mountain ranges in southern Israel bordering on Sinai. So Habakkuk is saying that God came out of Sinai, where He had met with Moses, in order to deliver the people from Egypt. Habakkuk is looking back to that great deliverance that God performed at that time.

Habakkuk 3:4 His brightness was like the light; He had rays flashing from His hand, and there His power was hidden.

So everything about verses 3 and 4 reveals the glory of God. He is called “the Holy One,” a name used in Isaiah at least 30 times.

“His glory covered the heavens” is an anticipation of the time when His glory will cover all the earth. God's appearance was like the lightning that plays across the heavens before the storm breaks. All of creation joined in praising Him as the earth was full of His praise. God's brightness was like the sunrise only to a greater degree.

“Rays flashed from His hand and there His power was hidden.” This is probably speaking of the Shekinah glory, the cloud by which God manifested His presence. That cloud stood between the people of Israel and the Egyptians on the night of their deliverance to give them time to cross the Red Sea, and later it led them during the years of their desert wandering.

Habakkuk is jumping around in the story of the exodus from Egypt, but he is making a point, in a poetic way. Now continuing on in verse 5, he is speaking of the plagues on Egypt at this point.

Habakkuk 3:5 Before Him went pestilence, and fever followed at His feet.

Pestilence and plague are often used as pictures of divine judgment. The meaning of fever is probably something like burning heat or something of that sort.

With renewed and joyous strength, Habakkuk was in awe of the Eternal's sovereignty, power, and glory. Continuing on in verse 6,

Habakkuk 3:6 He stood and measured the earth; He looked and startled the nations. And the everlasting mountains were scattered, the perpetual hills bowed. His ways are everlasting.

Invading army generals either push forward to gain ground or they fall back in retreat, but the Lord simply stood and faced the enemy unafraid. In fact, He calmly measured the earth as a sign that He possessed it.

To measure something is an indication that it is yours and you can do with it what you please. It is also a preliminary step to action, as though God were surveying the situation and estimating how much power it would take to execute His wrath on the nations.

Mountains were considered part of the foundation of the earth, and thus their quaking was a sign of divine judgment. Earthquakes are frequently associated with God's power. Continuing on in verse 7,

Habakkuk 3:7 I saw the tents of Cushan in affliction; the curtains of the land of Midian trembled.

Tents and curtains are emblems of what shall pass away, under which the wicked shelter themselves from the troubles of this present life, as from heat and rain, but which in themselves decay, and are consumed by fire. They are temporary dwellings.

Midian was the last enemy who, at the very entrance of the Promised Land, seduced God's people into idolatry and foul sin and lusts. Midian became then the object of the wrath of God. These Arab tribes living near Edom, see God's power and are stricken with fear.

Habakkuk 3:8 O Lord, were You displeased with the rivers, was Your anger against the rivers, was Your wrath against the sea, that You rode on Your horses, Your chariots of salvation?

This refers to the parting of the Red Sea and later the Jordan River. The chariot of salvation is a picture of God bringing deliverance to His people.

Verse 9 pictures the various battles that the Israelites fought in route to Canaan, battles that God won for them as they trusted Him and obeyed His commands.

Habakkuk 3:9 Your bow was made quite ready; oaths were sworn over Your arrows. Selah You divided the earth with rivers.

In verse 10, we move into the Promised Land and see Israel conquering the enemy. God was in complete control of land and water and used His creation to defeat the Canaanites.

Habakkuk 3:10 The mountains saw You and trembled; the overflowing of the water passed by. The deep uttered its voice, and lifted its hands on high.

This describes the victory of Deborah and Barak over Sisera, when a sudden rainstorm turned their battlefield into a swamp and left the enemy's chariots completely useless.

The thing that lifted Habakkuk up out of his fear was his understanding of the greatness of God. It dwarfed the Babylonian's strength.

Psalms 118:6 The Lord is on my side, I will not fear. What can man do to me?"

Nothing, unless God allows it!

Habakkuk 3:11-12 The sun and moon stood still in their habitation; at the light of Your arrows they went, at the shining of Your glittering spear. You marched through the land in indignation; you trampled the nations in anger.

This is in reference to the incident related in Joshua 10. The armies of Israel had fallen on the forces of the Amorite kings before the walls of Gibeon and had routed them. As the Amorites fled, the Lord struck many of the soldiers

with large hailstones, and when Joshua prayed for the sun and moon to stand still while he and the army pursued and completely destroyed the Amorite armies, the Lord obliged by answering his prayer.

Joshua 10:14 And there has been no day like that, before it or after it, that the Lord heeded the voice of a man; for the Lord fought for Israel.

We acknowledge that this intervention was an extreme, supernatural event. But it is a great example of God's acts on His people's behalf. The religion of the Old and New Testaments is not only a religion of great essential ideas, but it is also a religion of great essential acts, God's mighty acts!

These provide the kind of deliverance from fear and imbue us with spiritual fortitude we need in bad times. These things are true and we have a great God in whom we can indeed rejoice. We can rejoice in even the worst of times, as Habakkuk did.

The second characteristic that Habakkuk reminds himself of, and which he finds to be a help in his distress over the impending Babylonian invasion, is God's faithfulness. This is expressed in verse 13.

Habakkuk 3:13 You went forth for the salvation of Your people, for salvation with Your Anointed.

This verse is in the train of the earlier verses that recount God's mighty acts in history, but it adds another dimension. The phrase "Your Anointed" should not be capitalized like it is in the NKJV. Most translations rightly translate "anointed" with a small 'a,' which does not refer to Christ.

The underlying root of "Your anointed" almost invariably refers to an individual. Most commonly it designates a king, but it may also indicate other individuals appointed to leadership, such as the high priests or the patriarchs. But whatever the specific reference, the central point is clear. It is God's faithfulness to His people, to His anointed, which guarantees salvation.

In the present context of the Exodus, it appears to refer to Moses, who, like King David, combined in himself the messianic functions of shepherd, prophet, servant of God, and priest.

Verses 14 and 15 are another reference to the destruction that God brought on the Egyptians, who had set out to defeat the Israelites.

Habakkuk 3:14-16 You thrust through with his own arrows the head of his villages. They came out like a whirlwind to scatter me; their rejoicing was like feasting on the poor in secret. You walked through the sea with Your horses, through the heap of great waters. When I heard, my body trembled; my lips quivered at the voice; rottenness entered my bones; and I trembled in myself, that I might rest in the day of trouble. When he comes up to the people, he will invade them with his troops.

God's mighty past acts in history amply demonstrate that He is able to save those who look to Him in faith. But He has also promised to save His people and therefore will save them. The God who makes promises stands by His promises. The God who makes oaths keeps them!

Let me remind you of some of the promises Jesus Christ has given for living in hard times, with a series of well-known scriptures here.

Matthew 6:30-33 Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? "Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things the Gentiles [meaning the world] seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

John 14:1-3 "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.

And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.”

John 14:26-27 “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you. Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”

So God’s faithfulness is emphasized throughout the entire Bible. His promises are everywhere and they are always positive.

Now the last section of Habakkuk 3 contains some of the most moving verses in all the Bible. On one occasion, while serving as U. S. Ambassador to France, Benjamin Franklin, who was not a Christian, used this scripture to confound some of the sophisticated, cultured despisers of the Bible whom he met in Paris. It was an organization of men who would sit around and talk about the different writings of men of worldly wisdom.

The skeptics were mocking him for his admiration of the Bible. So he decided to find out how well they knew the book they professed to scorn. One evening he entered their company with a manuscript that contained an ancient poem he said he had been reading. He said that he had been impressed with its stately beauty, and so they asked to hear it. He held it out and read this great third chapter of Habakkuk ending with verses 17-19.

Habakkuk 3:17-19 (KJV) 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: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation. 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.

The reading was received with exclamations of extravagant admiration. “What a magnificent piece of verse!” they cried. Where had Franklin found it? How could they get copies? They were astonished when he informed them that it was the third chapter of Habakkuk’s prophecy.

What is it that makes this chapter, and particularly the final verses, so forceful? Maybe it is the courageous way in which Habakkuk embraces all the calamities he can imagine and nevertheless triumphs over them in the knowledge and love of his Savior.

The name Habakkuk gives a hint to the purpose of this book. Habakkuk is an unusual Hebrew name derived from the verb *habaq*, meaning embrace. So his name suggests one who embraces or clings. At the end of this book this name becomes appropriate because Habakkuk chooses to cling firmly to God regardless of what happens to his nation.

A cycle of thought is completed in verse 16 which reverts to the subject of chapter 2. He is still filled with fear and dread at the coming anguish for his people. He knows his homeland is to be overrun by the Chaldean invaders, and he feels this deeply.

It is hard to stand by and see the inevitable stroke fall upon God’s people. But his communion and meditation upon God and His ways, as well as His promises, have produced in him faithfulness as well as reverence.

It has not been a fruitless spiritual exercise, looking to God for His answer to the complex problems of life, that Habakkuk was taken through. Out of it has come unwavering trust in spite of the coming trouble.

Though the enemy comes in and destroys the fig tree, the vines, and the olive trees; and though they mar the fields, and carry off the flock from the fold and the herd from the stalls, yet Habakkuk will rejoice in the Lord, the God of His salvation.

Note what a contrast the conclusion of this prophecy is to the perplexity that overwhelmed the prophet at the beginning of the book. He finds the all-sufficient answer to all his problems in God Himself. He will trust God

though all blessings fail. Habakkuk is a perfectly taught message from God for the times we live in now, as we see the imminent destruction of the Israelitish nations forming today.

This book is so full of meaning for us. It summarizes God's purpose in His dealings with physical Israel and on a spiritual level, His church.

The Lord God Himself is our strength and sustaining power, enabling us to overcome all obstacles with abundance of vitality as we freely move about in our own spiritual lives.

No matter what devastation Satan and the world were to carry out, God grants consolation to us to carry us through.

Not only will we have calm in the hour of trial, but joy in spite of all devastation of the land, and of the disintegration of the greater physical church organizations. However, the gates of hell will not prevail against the spiritual church of God.

With renewed and joyous strength through faith in God, we must be in awe of the Eternal's sovereignty, power, glory, and all His attributes as Habakkuk was.

May God help us firmly embrace and cling to our God and Father, and our Savior Jesus Christ!