

Sermon #17 — Habakkuk Series

Title: **A TERRIFIED PROPHET**

Text: Habakkuk 3:1-2

Subject: *Habakkuk's Prayer*

Date: Tuesday Evening—December 21, 2010

Tape # *Habakkuk #17*

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Introduction:

Have you ever been terrified, so suddenly frightened, so very fearful that you literally trembled and quaked with fear? Have you ever seen, or heard something that made you literally shake with fear? — I wonder what you are thinking about, as you consider that.

- Some Horror Movie?
- Some Nightmare You had as a Child?
- Some Terrible Scare by a Campfire?
- Some Very Bad Experience You Wish You Could Forget?

Hear the Word of God, and I will show you some men who were terrified by something that might surprise you. — They were terrified by the Word of God, shaken by that which God revealed to them.

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Their souls were made to quake by that which they heard the Lord God himself speak.

- The man after God's own heart, **David** said, "*My flesh trembleth for fear of thee; and I am afraid of thy judgments.*" (Psalms 119:120)
- **Jeremiah**, the weeping prophet of Israel, wrote of his experience of hearing "*the words of his holiness,*" like this: — "*Mine heart within me is broken because of the prophets; all my bones shake; I am like a drunken man, and like a man whom wine hath overcome, because of the LORD, and because of the words of his holiness.*" (Jeremiah 23:9)
- **Daniel**, God's faithful man in the courts of wickedness, the prophet by whom the Lord God revealed great things to come, when he heard God's word, described its effect upon him in these words: — "*Therefore I was left alone, and saw this great vision, and there remained no strength in me: for my comeliness was turned in me into corruption, and I retained no strength.*" (Daniel 10:8)

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Let me show you one more man, another prophet, who was terrified by the Word of God, terrified by the very Word God gave him to declare to his people. The prophet's name was Habakkuk. Turn with me to the 3rd chapter of Habakkuk. Our text tonight will be verses 1 and 2. The title of my message is **A TERRIFIED PROPHET**. In these two verses we have before us the prayer of a terrified prophet.

(Habakkuk 3:1-2) “A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet upon Shigionoth. 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.”

Read verse 16, and you will see that this is the prayer of a terrified man. **Habakkuk was terrified by the very thing he heard the Lord God speak, by the very Word of God he was required to declare to his people.**

(Habakkuk 3:16) “When I heard, my belly trembled; my lips quivered at the voice:

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rottenness entered into my bones, and I trembled in myself, that I might rest in the day of trouble: when he cometh up unto the people, he will invade them with his troops.”

SHIGIONOTH

I remind you again that the word “Shigionoth” refers to a musical tune or meter. It refers to an erratic or irregular meter. So, at the outset, Habakkuk tells us that his prayer here, given in the form of a song to be sung or chanted by God’s people, is **a song and prayer that appears to be filled with conflicts and contradictions.**

- So it is with God’s providence.
- So it is with our experiences of his grace.
- So it is with our lives in this world.

Now, let’s look at this second verse of Habakkuk 3 line by line. Hold your Bibles open at Habakkuk 2:3. This entire 3rd chapter of Habakkuk is the prophet’s prayer song; but in verse 2 the song opens with a confessed fear and three great requests.

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- Here is Habakkuk's confessed fear. — “*O LORD, I have heard thy speech, and was afraid.*”
- Here are his three great request. — “*O LORD, revive thy work in the midst of the years.*” — “*In the midst of the years make known.*” — “*In wrath remember mercy.*”

CONFESSED FEAR

Habakkuk's prayer begins with a confession of fear, a fear caused by that which the Lord God had spoken to him. — “*O LORD, I have heard thy speech, and was afraid.*” What did the Lord reveal to Habakkuk that made him afraid, that made him shake and tremble with fear?

Perhaps it was the revelation of the righteous judgment of God upon his nation and people that made the faithful prophet tremble. Habakkuk had been told by God that judgment was coming; and that “*judgment must begin at the house of God*” (1 Peter 4:17).

“For the time is come that judgment must begin

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at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?” (1 Peter 4:17)

- The judgment that begins at the house of God our heavenly Father are loving and gracious, beneficial and corrective, and often very painful afflictions and chastisements in this world.
- For God’s saints all pain and sorrow, all afflictions begin and end here, in this world!
- But what shall the end of the ungodly be? — Eternal ruin! — Everlasting fire! — Endless death! — Darkness, blackness, desertion, abandonment, confusion, hatred, wrath, guilt, damning, damning guilt forever!

DIVINE JUDGMENT — Perhaps Habakkuk’s fear was caused by the judgments of God upon Israel. As the author of Hebrews avows, “*it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*” (Hebrews 10:31).

- The Lord God sent the Assyrians to destroy the Northern Kingdom Samaria in 722 B.C.

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- He told Habakkuk that he was about to send the Babylonians to destroy Jerusalem and Judah (587 B.C.).

Habakkuk stood between those two terrible acts of Divine judgment. The first had already come. And he was the messenger of God sent to announce the second. Perhaps that is why he says: “*O LORD, I have heard thy speech and was afraid.*” **The judgment the Lord sent him to announce was God’s just judgment against his own people and his own city** (Habakkuk 1:6-10).

“6 For, lo, I raise up the Chaldeans, [that] bitter and hasty nation, which shall march through the breadth of the land, to possess the dwellingplaces [that are] not theirs. 7 They [are] terrible and dreadful: their judgment and their dignity shall proceed of themselves. 8 Their horses also are swifter than the leopards, and are more fierce than the evening wolves: and their horsemen shall spread themselves, and their horsemen shall come from far; they shall fly as the eagle [that] hasteth to eat. 9 They shall come all for violence:

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their faces shall sup up [as] the east wind, and they shall gather the captivity as the sand. 10 And they shall scoff at the kings, and the princes shall be a scorn unto them: they shall deride every strong hold; for they shall heap dust, and take it.” (Habakkuk 1:6-10)

Here is a man to whom God has revealed that he will raise up a wicked, idolatrous people as a rod in his hand to chasten his chosen, because **God’s chosen people had “gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam.”** They chose wickedness to their shame and turned the worship of God into idolatry, mixing the religions of the world with the worship of Jehovah. Therefore God established the Chaldeans, that bitter and ungodly nation for the correction of his chosen.

The Lord God said the very same thing by his prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 10:5: — “O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation.” Without question, Habakkuk’s fear for his people is my fear, and the fear of every faithful soul, for this generation in general and for

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our nation in particular. No nation in the world is more fully deserving of God's wrath and judgment than our nation! — I'm not a politician; and I'm not running for office. I'm here to tell you the truth. No nation in the world is more fully deserving of God's wrath and judgment than our nation!

- What nation has been more **blessed** than the United States of America? — What nation has been more **blasphemous** than the United States of America?
- What nation has been more **prosperous** than the United States of America? What nation has been more **profane** than the United States of America?

PERSONAL SIN — Perhaps it was the wickedness around him and the sure judgment of God upon that wickedness that made Habakkuk afraid; but there may have been something else that terrified him. — **Perhaps it was the revelation of himself, the revelation of his own heart's corruption and sin that made the prophet tremble and shake before God** (Habakkuk 1:3; 3:16; Romans 7:9).

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Illustration: *Whitefield's Counsel to the Maid*

Habakkuk cried, “*Why dost thou show me iniquity?*” Do you know anything about that? Do you know anything about Holy Spirit conviction? Have you ever been slain by the Spirit of God? Paul was; and Habakkuk was.

“For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.” (Romans 7:9)

“When I heard, my belly trembled; my lips quivered at the voice: rottenness entered into my bones, and I trembled in myself, that I might rest in the day of trouble: when he cometh up unto the people, he will invade them with his troops.” (Habakkuk 3:16)

RIGHTEOUS REDEMPTION — Perhaps there was a something else revealed to Habakkuk that was even more shocking and terrible than the sins of his nation, the judgment of God upon the nation, and the

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horrible evil of his own heart. Do you ask, “What could that be? What could be more terrible than these things?” **The Lord God showed his prophet Habakkuk that the only way he could or would redeem and save his people must be by a righteous redemption.** Grace must reign; but grace must reign through righteousness unto eternal life! — “*By mercy and truth iniquity is purged*” (Proverbs 16:6). Remember, **this is the wondrous thing the Lord declared in Habakkuk 1:5.**

“Behold ye among the heathen, and regard, and wonder marvellously: for I will work a work in your days, which ye will not believe, though it be told you.” (Habakkuk 1:5)

Paul tells us in Romans 3 that we have been...

“justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: 25 Whom God hath set forth [to be] a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; 26 To declare, [I say], at

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this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.” (Romans 3:24-26)

When Habakkuk said, “O Lord, I have heard thy speech,” the word “speech” is the same as what we read in Isaiah 53, where the prophet cried, “Who hath believed our report?” He is talking about God’s revelation, God’s report to him, of the doing and dying of the Lord Jesus Christ as the sinner’s Substitute, his sufferings and death, in order obtain redemption and salvation for his people.

Truly this is the most joyful report in the world. — The Lord Jesus Christ died for sinners and obtained eternal redemption for us by the sacrifice of himself! **Yet, this is the most shocking, most astonishing, most amazing report the world ever heard.** — The Son of God could not redeem and save his people except he satisfy all the demands of God’s holy law and strict justice as our Substitute.

- He had to assume our nature.
- He had to bring in perfect righteousness.
- He had to be made sin.

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- He had to endure and satisfy all the wrath of God, by one great act of atonement in his death.
- He had to become all that we are to make us all that he is, thereby overturning all that Satan has done in the world (Habakkuk 3:13).

“Thou wentest forth for the salvation of thy people, even for salvation with thine anointed; thou woundedst the head out of the house of the wicked, by discovering the foundation unto the neck. Selah.” (Habakkuk 3:13)

REVIVAL SOUGHT

“O LORD, revive thy work in the midst of the years!”
— Now, be sure you do not miss the context. Habakkuk’s prayer here, *“O Lord, revive thy work in the midst of the years”* cannot possibly imply that he was asking God to revive (restore) his people in the midst of their Babylonian Captivity. The Lord had made it plain that Israel would be held in Babylon for 70 years. Habakkuk would not have been inspired of God to make and record for us a prayer that defied God’s purpose and sought to have God himself

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overturn his own revealed will. If Habakkuk was not praying that God would prevent, or at least cut short, the Babylonian Captivity, what was he asking?

PRESERVE — If you will look at the alternate, perhaps better, translation given in the margin of your Bible, you will find that this word “*revive*” might better be translated “preserve alive.” Perhaps, Habakkuk was simply praying for God to preserve alive his church and people in the midst of those 70 dark, dark years of adversity, affliction, and apostasy.

Well might we pray like that today. “O LORD God, blessed Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in the midst of these dark, dark years, preserve alive your work!”

- Preserve your chosen, blood-bought remnant!
- Preserve your truth, the gospel of your grace!
- Preserve your witness, men to feed your people with knowledge and understanding!

RESURRECT — But let us not limit the prophet’s words. Rather, we should stretch them. Certainly, he was asking God to keep alive his people, his church, his worship, and his witness in this world. Yet, I am

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sure there is more than that couched in his prayer. This word “*revive*” primarily means “to resurrect, raise from the dead, make alive.” Habakkuk is here praying for the Lord God to perform the work he had promised. He was praying, — “In due time, Lord Jesus, come and redeem your chosen.”

Habakkuk’s prayer here might be accurately paraphrased, “O Lord, thy work is life in the midst of the years!” — Being redeemed by his blood, dying with him upon the cursed tree, we were quickened together with Christ, raised up to heaven with him, and seated with him in glory.

REGENERATE — Stretch the prophet’s words a little further. He was asking the Lord God to preserve his work in trouble, to redeem his chosen by the sacrifice of his dear Son, and he was asking the Lord to further accomplish his covenant promises by sending his Holy Spirit to regenerate chosen, redeemed sinners in the midst of the years. Redemption and regeneration always go together (Revelation 20:1-6). All the redeemed shall be

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regenerated. None shall perish for whom the Savior died!

REVIVE — And these words of God’s prophet certainly must and should be understood as a prayer for the revival of God’s people in this world. — “*O LORD, revive thy work in the midst of the years!*”

The prophet aim is the reviving of the Lord’s work and not the work of the flesh. His request is for the cause of God: “*revive thy work!*” And our prayer should be for the Lord to revive his church (that is the work of God’s own hand, formed by him, formed for him). **The Psalmist** said, — “*Though I walk in the midst of trouble, thou wilt revive me: thou shalt stretch forth thine hand against the wrath of mine enemies, and thy right hand shall save me*” (Psalm 138:7). He prayed like Habakkuk, — “*Wilt Thou not revive us again: that Thy people may rejoice in Thee*” (Psalm 85:6)? **Ezra implored** “*that our God may lighten our eyes, and give us a little reviving in our bondage ... For we are bondmen; yet our God hath not forsaken us in our bondage, but hath extended mercy unto us in the sight of the kings*

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of Persia (or in Habakkuk's case the king of Babylon), to give us a reviving. To set up the house of our God, and to repair the desolations thereof, and to give us a wall in Judah and in Jerusalem" (Ezra 9:8-9).

- **Revival is a church word.** It refers to God's people, not the world.
- **Revival is a normal thing.** It is that which we must seek, and that which we ought to expect. Habakkuk did not pray, "O Lord revive your work at the end of the years." He did not pray, "O Lord revive your work at the beginning of the years." His prayer is, — "*O LORD revive your work in the midst of the years!*"
- **Revival is a grace work.** It is something that only God can perform, and a thing he will perform in the midst of the years. — He will revive the fallen. — He will refresh the faint. — He will awaken the languishing. — He will sweetly turn his beloved and cause us to run after him (Song of Solomon 5:2-16).

"2 ¶ I sleep, but my heart waketh: [it is] the voice of my beloved that knocketh, [saying], Open to

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me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled: for my head is filled with dew, [and] my locks with the drops of the night. 3 I have put off my coat; how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet; how shall I defile them? 4 My beloved put in his hand by the hole [of the door], and my bowels were moved for him. 5 I rose up to open to my beloved; and my hands dropped [with] myrrh, and my fingers [with] sweet smelling myrrh, upon the handles of the lock. 6 I opened to my beloved; but my beloved had withdrawn himself, [and] was gone: my soul failed when he spake: I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but he gave me no answer. 7 The watchmen that went about the city found me, they smote me, they wounded me; the keepers of the walls took away my veil from me. 8 I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if ye find my beloved, that ye tell him, that I [am] sick of love.”

“9 ¶ What [is] thy beloved more than [another] beloved, O thou fairest among women? what [is] thy beloved more than [another] beloved, that

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thou dost so charge us? 10 My beloved [is] white and ruddy, the chiefest among ten thousand. 11 His head [is as] the most fine gold, his locks [are] bushy, [and] black as a raven. 12 His eyes [are] as [the eyes] of doves by the rivers of waters, washed with milk, [and] fitly set. 13 His cheeks [are] as a bed of spices, [as] sweet flowers: his lips [like] lilies, dropping sweet smelling myrrh. 14 His hands [are as] gold rings set with the beryl: his belly [is as] bright ivory overlaid [with] sapphires. 15 His legs [are as] pillars of marble, set upon sockets of fine gold: his countenance [is] as Lebanon, excellent as the cedars. 16 His mouth [is] most sweet: yea, he [is] altogether lovely. This [is] my beloved, and this [is] my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem.” (Song of Solomon 5:2-16)

Revive Thy work, O Lord,
Thy mighty arm make bare;
Speak with the voice that wakes the dead,
And make Thy people hear.

Revive Thy work, O Lord,

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Disturb this sleep of death;
Quicken the smoldering embers now
By Thine almighty breath.

Revive Thy work, O Lord,
Create soul thirst for Thee;
And hungering for the Bread of Life
O may our spirits be.

Revive Thy work, O Lord,
Exalt Thy precious Name;
And by the Holy Ghost, our love
For Thee and Thine inflame.

Revive Thy work, O Lord,
Give showers of grace — sweet showers!
The glory shall be all Thine own,
The blessings, Lord, be ours.

REVELATION NEEDED

Look at our text again. — “*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*”

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make known” (Habakkuk 3:2). Here the prophet reveals the method by which God the Holy Spirit revives his people. **Here is the means by which...**

- God awakens the dead.
- Revives his chosen.
- Preserves his church in life.
- Revives his church.

He does all these wonders of grace by the revelation of himself, by making himself known in the sweet experience of his mercy, love, and grace. — **“In the midst of the years make known...”**

- Thy Person.
- Thy Propitiation!
- Thy Power!
- Thy Pity!
- Thy Promises!
- Thy Providence!
- Thy Presence!

Though we be buried in obscurity, yet, Lord, make yourself known. Whatever becomes of Israel, let not the God of Israel be forgotten in the world, but may discover yourself even in the midst of the dark years.

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When “*in the midst of the years*” of the captivity God miraculously owned the three children in the fiery furnace and humbled Nebuchadnezzar. Yes this prayer was answered, “*In the midst of the years make known.*” And it shall yet be answered. — “*For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea*” (Habakkuk 2:14).

MERCY SOUGHT

“1 ¶ A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet upon Shigionoth. 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.” (Habakkuk 3:1-2)

Habakkuk’s final plea in this verse is that the Lord “*in wrath remember mercy.*” With our great God mercy regards our misery. **Richard Sibbes** wrote, “The depths of our misery can never fall below the depths of mercy.”

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The word “*wrath*” in this place refers to a state of agitation, rage or anger. — “*God is angry with the wicked every day*” (Psalm 7:11). The Lord hates the workers of iniquity (Psalm 5:5). He who is our God is a jealous God and a furious avenger (Nahum 1:2). And he is, blessed be his name forever, “*the God of mercies*” (2 Corinthians 1:3)! We deserve the wrath of God to be poured out upon us, but our plea is that he will remember mercy. In mercy grace is bestowed upon poor, guilty sinners like us (Lamentations 3:22-23)!

“22 [It is of] the LORD’S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not.
23 [They are] new every morning: great [is] thy faithfulness.” (Lamentations 3:22-23)

Depth of mercy, can there be,
Mercy still reserved for me?
Can my God His wrath forbear,
Me the chief of sinners spare?

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Yes, he can and will remember mercy for poor sinners, because he gave no mercy to the sinner's Surety, our blessed Savior, his darling Son!

“A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet upon Shigionoth. 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.”

Amen.