

A Sunday school teacher decided to have her young class memorize one of the most quoted passages in the Bible: the 23rd Psalm.

She gave the youngsters a month to learn the chapter, and little Rickey was excited about the assignment, but he just couldn't remember the Psalm. After much practice, he could barely get past the first line. On the day that the kids were scheduled to recite the 23rd Psalm in front of the church, little Rickey was very nervous. When it was his turn, he stepped up to the microphone and said proudly, "The Lord is my Shepherd, and that's all I need to know."

The truth from the mouth of babes. *The Lord is my Shepherd – period!* As the psalm of David explains, the Lord is our Shephard who leads us to green pastures and still waters – He takes us to places we want to go, but He also leads us through the valley, the valley of the shadow of death – a place we would just as soon avoid, but we are told, even as we pass through the valley, the Lord is still with us. *"The Lord is my Shepherd, and that's all I need to know."*

We are making our way through the book of Habakkuk and maybe Habakkuk needs to have a little chat with little Rickey about his good Shephard.

If you recall, Habakkuk was complaining *to* God, and complaining *about* God regarding the people of Judah. Habakkuk didn't like what he saw in the nation, for God's people had become wicked and violent and corrupt. The nation had become full of hate and anger and fighting. They appeared to be coming apart at the seams, and as far as Habakkuk could tell – God wasn't doing anything about it. Habakkuk was distressed and frustrated, and he took his complaint to God.

Well, God responded and explained He was aware of the behavior of His people, in fact, God had forewarned His people several times through prophet after prophet about their wickedness and yet they ignored His warnings, and unbeknownst to Habakkuk, God was raising up the dreaded Babylonians to serve as His rod of correction. That stunned Habakkuk because the Babylonians were more wicked than the people of Judah, and he could not understand how a good and holy and righteous God could use evil people for His divine purposes. This whole thing seemed wrong, but God assured Habakkuk it was all part of His divine plan and in due time, the Babylonians would get what's coming to them.

As we finished **Chapter 2**, God is in His holy temple, He's in control, and He told Habakkuk to hush. Habakkuk had been given God's answer – the Babylonians are still coming to punish the people of Judah, so, for a time, it will appear that evil has

triumphed over good – but it’s only for a time – it’s only temporary – God is still in control.

God knew His ways didn’t make sense, but God’s desire was that the righteous live by faith. Habakkuk didn’t need to understand everything – there’s no way he could, instead, he needed live by faith and to be reminded of who his faith is in. Even though Habakkuk was concerned and confused about the ways of God, he found comfort and confidence in the character of God, for God is true and perfect in all of His ways – He makes no mistakes. He is righteous and good, gracious, and kind-hearted, and merciful. God is patient, slow to anger, unfailing in His great love, and He is ever faithful. God is forgiving, but at the same time, He is holy and just, and He hates sin – He cannot ignore it.

So, as we concluded **Chapter 2**, in summary, it was as if God was saying,

*“Habakkuk, hush. I know My ways are confusing and frustrating to you – but you know Me, **so can you trust Me?**”*

This interaction with God appeared to be the turning point for Habakkuk because from this point on, the tone of the book changes – or maybe better yet, Habakkuk changes. His perspective is different and his focus is now on God – who is in His holy temple and in control, rather than the circumstances that seem to be out of control, and that bring us to **Chapter 3**.

So, if you have your Bible, turn to **Habakkuk 3** and we will begin with **verse 1**.

A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, according to Shigionoth.

We are told this is a prayer of Habakkuk “**according to Shigionoth**”. I don’t know the exact meaning of this word, but most sources I found say it is a musical term related to an emotional or passionate song. Now, further down in this chapter, we also find the word “**Selah**” mentioned three times, which is also a musical term meaning to pause.

So, this prayer is to be put to music and sung like a psalm or a hymn. Maybe Larry would be willing to sing **Chapter 3** – but I ain’t doing that, and you can thank me later.

Anyway, Habakkuk continues, and he says in **verse 2**,

LORD, I have heard the report about You and I fear. O LORD, revive Your work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make it known; in wrath remember mercy.

Habakkuk had heard loud and clear God's intention to discipline Judah and to destroy Babylon – he's got the message, and he was awe-struck. And then, here and only here in this entire prayer, does Habakkuk make two requests. The first was, **revive Your work** – in other words, *“God like You have done in the past, after trouble comes, renew Your people.”* Secondly, Habakkuk asks that in **wrath remember mercy**. This request is based on the first request, and it's a plea for mercy. *“God, when trouble comes, do what comes natural to You, and be merciful.”*

Taken in whole, his prayer might sound like this, *“Lord, Your fame proceeds You, and after dealing with You – I hear You – I get it. I know that trouble is coming and it's hard to think about – but You got to do what You got to do. I'm not going to argue about it anymore. But Lord, when the trouble comes, when the ungodly come against Your people, whatever comes this way, help me through it – help Your people through it. In Your wrath, remember Your mercy and when the dust settles, revive Your work in me and in Your people.”*

I think that's what's being expressed here by Habakkuk.

Now, in **verses 3-15**, we have what many describe as a *theophany*, which literally means an “appearance of God.” It seems that Habakkuk has had some type of “close encounter” with God – maybe something like a vision of God – and in this vision, he sees this image of God and he's reminded of what God has done in the past – focusing on the Exodus, the time in the wilderness, and the crossing into the Promised Land, and after this vision of God, Habakkuk breaks out in this song, very similar to *“How Great Thou Art”* – a song about seeing God from the rear-view mirror.

I have said to you on a few occasions, sometimes it's difficult to look forward to see God at work in our lives because it's easy to get distracted with our troubles and lose sight of God, so sometimes it's easier to look back to the past to see God's work, and that's what Habakkuk is doing here.

So, let's work our way through this theophany reflected in song, starting with **verses 3-4**. We are told,

³ God comes from Teman, and the Holy One from Mount Paran. Selah. His splendor covers the heavens, and the earth is full of His praise. ⁴ His radiance is like the sunlight; He has rays flashing from His hand, and there is the hiding of His power.

In this passage, Habakkuk described God as coming from **Teman**, which means “*territory in the south*” and it likely represents the region of Edom or the area south of the Dead Sea. In regard to **Mount Paran**, according to most sources, this describes the wilderness area south of Judah, and north of Mount Sinai, but it could also be another name for Mount Sinai where Moses received the Ten Commandments. Whatever the case may be, taken together, Habakkuk is using these geographical references to describe God’s movement and His presence with His people in bringing them out of Egypt, wandering with them through the wilderness, and entering into the Promised Land. This is consistent with God’s character. Although God will punish His people like a father punishes his children, God does not abandon His people. God moves with them for He is in their midst.

We are also told that God’s splendor, His glory, and His power light up the sky, covering the heavens and the earth. Rays of lightning flash from His hands and, yet the full extent of God’s power still remains hidden from us. We can’t comprehend His glory and power, and yet we should never forget that He is our Father who is with us. No matter what, He will never leave us nor forsake us.

The 1989 Armenian earthquake needed only four minutes to flatten the country and kill thirty thousand people. Right after the quake stopped, a father raced to an elementary school to save his son. When he got there, he saw the building had been flattened. Looking at all the stones and rubble, he remembered a promise he had made to his son: “No matter what happens, I’ll always be there for you.”

Driven, he found the area closest to his son’s room and began to pull back the rocks. Other parents started arriving and began weeping for their children. “It’s too late,” they told the man. “You know they’re dead. You can’t help.” Even a police officer urged him to give up. But the dad refused.

For eight hours, sixteen hours, thirty-two hours, then thirty-six hours he dug. His hands were raw – his energy gone, but he refused to quit. Finally, after thirty-eight wrenching hours, he pulled back a boulder and heard his son’s voice. He called his son’s name, “Arman! Arman!” A voice answered him, “Dad, it’s me!” Then the boy said these priceless words, “I told the other kids not to worry. I told them if

you were alive, you'd save me, and when you saved me, they'd be saved, too because you promised, 'No matter what, I'll always be there for you.'”

Even though trouble is coming, God is still with His people, and after His purposes are fulfilled, He will come to their rescue just as He had promised.

Let's continue with **verses 5-6**,

⁵ Before Him goes pestilence, and plague comes after Him. ⁶ He stood and surveyed the earth; He looked and startled the nations. Yes, the perpetual mountains were shattered, the ancient hills collapsed. His ways are everlasting.

Here, Habakkuk pictures God's holiness and justice as He moves through the land. Looking backwards in the past, this appears to be a reference to the pestilence and the plagues that came upon Egypt before the Exodus, but it's also a warning to those who try to resist God.

Just as God delivered His people in the past from Egypt and led them through the wilderness giving them victories over other nations – nations mightier than they were, God will continue to trample those who come against Him and His people. These nations, like the people of Jericho, thought they were unmovable like ancient mountains and hills, but like the ancient mountains and hills, they are merely the work of God's hands – for He is eternal. God's ways are everlasting – so everything will fall down before Him. Nothing can stand against God.

Then in **verses 7-10**, Habakkuk tell us,

⁷ I saw the tents of Cushan under distress, the tent curtains of the land of Midian were trembling. ⁸ Did the LORD rage against the rivers, or was Your anger against the rivers, or was Your wrath against the sea, that You rode on Your horses, on Your chariots of salvation? ⁹ Your bow was made bare, the rods of chastisement were sworn. Selah. You cleaved the earth with rivers. ¹⁰ The mountains saw You and quaked; the downpour of waters swept by. The deep uttered forth its voice, it lifted high its hands.

The two nations mentioned here, **Cushan** and **Midian** were selected to represent how nations that opposed God, feared for their lives. They heard about God and they were terrified. Here, God is portrayed as a warrior who delivers His people, and the question is asked, **“Did the Lord rage against the rivers, or was Your**

anger against the rivers, or was Your wrath against sea?” The purpose of God’s power over the elements was the salvation of His people. God wasn’t angry with the streams or the rivers or the seas – He wasn’t mad at them, but like a warrior with his bow out of its sheath and ready to fire an arrow, God rolled in like a violent thunderstorm and He used the streams and the rivers and the seas to express His wrath and power, and to deliver His people.

I imagine that Habakkuk thought about how God used the Nile River, the Red Sea and the Jordan River for this purpose. God is in control, for even the streams and rivers, the seas, and the mountains like Mount Sinai quake and submit to Him.

Now, this next verse might jog your memory. Look at **verse 11**.

Sun and moon stood in their places; they went away at the light of Your arrows, at the radiance of Your gleaming spear.

If you really want to consider the power of God, this reference is something to think about. I believe this refers to the experience that is found in **Joshua 10:12-14**, where we are told,

*¹² Then Joshua spoke to the Lord in the day when the Lord delivered up the Amorites before the sons of Israel, and he said in the sight of Israel, “O sun, stand still at Gibeon, and O moon in the valley of Aijalon.” ¹³ So the sun stood still, and the moon stopped, until the nation avenged themselves of their enemies. **Is it not written in the book of Jashar?** And the sun stopped in the middle of the sky and did not hasten to go down for about a whole day. ¹⁴ There was no day like that before it or after it, when the Lord listened to the voice of a man; for the Lord fought for Israel.*

Even the sun and the moon are under God’s control. All the forces of nature: the mountains, the rivers and streams, the sea, the sun and the moon all acknowledge the sovereign God and yield to Him.

Then beginning with **verse 12** we read,

¹² In indignation You marched through the earth; in anger You trampled the nations. ¹³ You went forth for the salvation of Your people, for the salvation of Your anointed. You struck the head of the house of the evil to lay him open from thigh to neck. Selah. ¹⁴ You pierced with his own spears the head of his throngs. They stormed in to scatter us; their exultation was like those

who devour the oppressed in secret. ¹⁵ You trampled on the sea with Your horses, on the surge of many waters.

In these last few verses, Habakkuk lists the many ways that God has defeated His foes to deliver His people, and notice the phrases that Habakkuk uses when speaking about God, **“You marched through the earth,” “You trampled the nations,” “You went forth,” “You struck the head,” “You pierced,”** and **“You trampled on the sea.”** This is what God did on behalf of His people. Justice is certain, judgment is coming, and God’s plans will be fulfilled, even plans for our salvation.

So, let me summarize what we have covered this morning. In this song, Habakkuk is reminded of the mighty acts of God in the past. He’s reminded of the long story of Israel’s history. He’s reminded of the captivity in Egypt. He’s reminded of the Red Sea. He’s reminded of the wilderness experience and the defeat of many nations as God’s people wandered. He’s reminded how God led them and brought them to the Promised Land. He’s reminded of the faithfulness of God.

Why would Habakkuk be reminded of all these things? Because it helped him to cope with the uncertainties and the trouble that’s on the horizon.

You see, Habakkuk stopped struggling with what he didn’t know and started remembering what he did know. And, instead of worrying about why things were happening, and why God was doing this, and why God was allowing that, Habakkuk remembered how God had worked in the past. And, even though Habakkuk did not understand God’s ways, and even though he was not overjoyed about the Babylonians, he could not doubt God’s wisdom, and love, and power, and faithfulness to His people. It was true for Habakkuk and it is just as true for you and me as well.

When you don’t know where God is or what He’s doing in your life, when your circumstances seem to be crashing down on you, when you have lost sight of God, do what Habakkuk did – look in your rear-view mirror to see what God has done for you in the past. If God has worked in your past, then He is working in your present, and He is also working toward your future – **so, where does that leave you in the meantime?** The righteous will live by faith in God.

I would like to close this morning by reading the hymn “How Great Thou Art.”

*Oh Lord, my God, when I in awesome wonder
Consider all the worlds Thy hands have made
I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder
Thy power throughout the universe displayed
Then sings my soul, my Savior God to Thee
How great Thou art, how great Thou art
Then sings my soul, my Savior God to Thee
How great Thou art, how great Thou art*

*When through the woods, and forest glades I wander
And hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees
When I look down from lofty mountain grandeur
And hear the brook, and feel the gentle breeze*

*Then sings my soul, my Savior God to Thee
How great Thou art, how great Thou art
Then sings my soul, my Savior God to Thee
How great Thou art, how great Thou art*

*And when I think that God, His Son not sparing
Sent Him to die, I scarce can take it in
That on the cross, my burden gladly bearing
He bled and died to take away my sin*

*Then sings my soul, my Savior God to Thee
How great Thou art, how great Thou art
Then sings my soul, my Savior God to Thee
How great Thou art, how great Thou art*

*When Christ shall come with shout of acclamation
And take me home, what joy shall fill my heart
Then I shall bow in humble adoration
And there proclaim, "My God, how great Thou art"*

*Then sings my soul, my Savior God to Thee
How great Thou art, how great Thou art
Then sings my soul, my Savior God to Thee
How great Thou art, how great Thou art
How great Thou art, how great Thou art*

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